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

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Doctor of Philosophy in Film, Television and Media Studies,
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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, Ordinariness, 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 viscerality 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.

PART ONE: HERE

CHAPTER ONE

Real Life:

Reality, Viscerality and the Body

Real Life in Pictures

The long-running MTV reality show *The Real World* (1992-), a housemates format about young people relocated to a new city, has long drawn sardonic jibes from media critics on account of its bold titular claims to a representation of the real. Objections to the realness of this show, and to many others of the same ilk,³² cite the artifice of such contrived social relationships and the impact of continuous camera surveillance on individual self-representation. The first charge relates to the improbability of enforced intimacy between people who seem to have been selected on the basis of their personal differences. The second engages with cultural anxieties surrounding the very processes of re-presentation. Both concerns are grounded in cultural assumptions which link the real with naturalness, truth-telling and transparency. They are also pre-occupied with context – in terms of both a physical and social environment and/or the processes of production – as an indicator of truth and realism. This chapter begins by considering the cultural currency of notions of ‘real life’ as refracted by the cinema and television screen. It goes on to explore the extent to which bodily responses, both on and in front of the screen, may operate as a testament to real experience.

Various commentaries on film and television in the twentieth century counterpoint a projected real, sometimes designated ‘real life’, with an everyday or ordinary experience of life. However, as this brief overview indicates, while the desire for and pursuit of an experience akin to ‘real life’ has never waned, the imagined locus of this reality has shifted significantly in response to changing cultural dynamics within the domain of mass entertainment. In her article ‘The Spectacularization of Everyday Life’, Denise Mann cites the construct of ‘real life’ as an alternative to lived, everyday experience:

At the turn of the century in America, the burgeoning field of mass amusement institutionalized the promise that ‘real life’ was just around the corner. Hollywood, with its

³² See, for example, Johnson-Woods on the Australian reception of *Big Brother* (Network Ten 2001-), especially 208-217.

charged overpresence of stars, glitter and glamor, went on to institutionalize the idea that 'real life' was to be found in the movie theatre. (41)³³

Mann's inverted commas are instructive. This notion of 'real life' is to be read as a manufactured and highly seductive alternative to actuality. In this context, 'real life' occurs precisely at the moment at which fantasy takes hold - the point at which the tedium and drudgery of workaday life are left behind. And yet the correlation between escapism and reality is not so paradoxical. The notion of a 'real life' which one might run away to, a life which is all pleasure and escapism instead of domesticity and routine, is a familiar and universal daydream. A local variant on this fantasy of 'real life' is manifested in the cultural phenomenon of the young New Zealander's Overseas Experience. As hinted in the Introduction, New Zealand's geographic remoteness fuels national insecurities about being 'left out', and a belief that everything which matters is happening in the big cities of the Northern Hemisphere. This anxiety translates as a determination to overvalue the experience of being outside New Zealand as more 'real' than workaday home life. Like the girl in the Telecom commercial, however, many people who make the pilgrimage to the other side of the world are disappointed to discover that the actuality of day-to-day living accompanies them there. The qualitative difference between the workaday and the fantasy life is not a geographic location but a positively charged intensity of feeling associated with certain emotional extremes. Part of the mythology of 'real life' is the belief that drudgery, domesticity and routine dull the sensory appetite and that, conversely, excitement, adventure and novelty sharpen it. In this dichotomy, the designation 'real' does not indicate actuality. Rather, it indicates a possible realm of experience, one which is brighter, clearer, stronger than anything known before, a realm in which experiences – sensory, emotional and intellectual – are both more intense and more meaningful. This is the 'real life' promised by the Hollywood dream machine – an experiential real determined by intensity of positive feeling and facilitated by the spectacle of cinema.

However, the introduction of television posited an alternative screen life to the one shaped by Hollywood formulae. Clearly different to cinema but also different to daily lived experience, the medium of television, both in form and content, offered a new kind of ordinary off which the extraordinary life of the silver screen could play. In other words, while the binary of difference (ordinary/extraordinary) remained the same, the axis shifted from cinema/lived experience to cinema/television. The discursive function of 'lived experience', as indicative of everything mundane, domestic and ordinary was subsumed by the new technology of domestic entertainment. Mann's article traces this transition in terms of both female stars and their female fans. In the period of transition between 1946 and 1956 defined by a decline in the popularity of cinema as television takes hold in American homes, Mann explores the various ways in which stars of the silver screen

³³ In her use of the phrase 'real life', Mann is citing the epigraph to her article, taken from T.J. Jackson Lears' work on the advertising culture of America in the years 1880-1930. The full quote is as follows: 'Many advertisements took their place alongside other mass diversions – the amusement park, the slick-paper romance, the movies. None demanded to be taken literally or even all that seriously; yet all promised intense 'real life' to their clientele, and all implicitly defined 'real life' as something outside the individual's everyday experience' (qtd in Mann 41).

negotiated their transposition to television, concluding that the process inevitably entailed a 'decay in aura' (42)³⁴ a loss of intensity, a coming 'down to earth' or simply an ordinarification. Female fans were more able to identify with television stars (who were pitched somewhere between housewives and vaudeville performers)³⁵ and with the products they often endorsed. Advertising campaigns and articles in popular women's magazines exploited this shift in focus (Mann 49-51) playing up the social proximity between television stars and their audiences.

Emphasising the perceived difference between cinema and television during this period, Mann cites a movie producer of the time who 'summed up popular assumptions about the differences between Hollywood stars and TV stars' when he said 'TV can give them stories about frustrated butchers and homely aunts [...] but we can take an audience into Vesuvius or plunk them headfirst in to the China Sea' (47). Note that the producer does not compare like with like, as he cites characters from television and locations from the silver screen. The difference lies in the implied level of intensity of experience. Entering the mouth of a volcano and diving into an ocean are experiences which could and would awaken a person, imaginatively, emotionally and bodily, while references to the daily routine of grocery shopping, familial relationships and domestic duties draw a yawn. This formulation locates 'real life' in a realm so exotic and unfamiliar as to be shocking, compelling - even traumatic. It also suggests that 'real life' is less a place or an activity than a sensation of being, a visceral and emotional intensity at the limits of human imaginative experience. It is a formulation which equates the cinematic with the real, and the televisual with the ordinary. Television, affiliated in both form and content with everyday life, domesticity and routine, lacks the *frisson* of cinema and, being less thrilling, less stimulating and less compelling, seems less real.

Mann effectively contrasts the media of cinema and television along the binary extraordinary/ordinary. As will be pursued in Chapter Two, the construct of ordinariness is, via its own particular discursive paths, an affective device in the representation of reality. However, at the point of its post-war commercialisation television's preoccupation with the everyday, the familiar, the 'down to earth' and the domestic, significantly altered the appeal and status of its stars. This alteration did not eliminate or even lessen such appeal - it just shifted the emphasis. All along, proponents of television recognized that the ordinariness of the medium was one of its great and enduring strengths.³⁶ The breakthrough was to come when cultural perceptions shifted to allow television to be both – ordinary and extraordinary.

Citing examples of responses to television in popular culture in the 1980s, Cecelia Tichi outlines what she has called 'a momentous cognitive change' in the perception of reality. In an era in which

³⁴ In her use of the term 'aura', Mann cites Walter Benjamin's conception of 'aura' as defined in his article 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', already discussed in the Introduction.

³⁵ See Lynn Spigel's article 'Installing the Television Set'. 'Typically the representation of the female body was de-feminized and/or de-eroticized. The programs usually featured heroines who were either non-threatening matronly types like Molly Greenberg, middle-aged perfect housewife types like Harriet Nelson, or else zany women like Lucy Ricardo who frequently appeared clown-like, and even grotesque' (32).

³⁶ See, for instance, Rhona Berenstein's review of commentaries on television acting techniques in the 1950s.

the cultural authority of television is undisputed, the quest for 'real life' has left cinema behind. Television has become the standard against which lived experience can be measured. Tichi analyses at length an instance in a work of fiction³⁷ in which an aspirant child actress encounters a boy actor off-screen and refuses to accept his appearance of childhood normality:

The televised boy may resemble an ordinary boy, wear identical clothing and play the same childhood games [...] Simply by virtue of having been televised, however, [...] he is not, and cannot be, a figure from the mundane, quotidian world. He has attained some other, different status, which the observer understands at a glance. Perceptually, she does not focus on the gap between the traditional inversions, simulation and authenticity, or between appearance and reality. She operates, instead, from a division between the ordinary and the televised. (129)

Again, the binary (extraordinary/ordinary) prevails, even as the locus of realness shifts. The girl in the novel articulates the human longing for a life less ordinary. She feels jealousy, bitterness and frustration at the sight of the 'televised' boy casually occupying the realm of the ordinary. Her meanings with reference to ordinariness and its other are specific. She means 'ordinary' as dull, forgettable, unremarkable, like everyone else and thus invisible. In contrast she reifies the 'televised' boy as recognisable and thus highly visible, noticed and thus worthy of note. Tichi thus establishes two categories of being - 'the ordinary and the televised' - and extrapolates an association between televisual and real:

The 'boy from on television,' as the fictional moment suggests, is special, privileged over and above the ordinary. Hyperreal, he is not to be confused with an 'ordinary kid'. He is the real thing, supra real, precisely because he is an on-screen simulation. (130)

Tichi's analysis cites Umberto Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality* and invokes Walter Benjamin's paradox of authentic reproduction, in which the object is more real precisely because it is more mediated.³⁸ Theories of hyperrealism allow the formulation for 'real life' to shift again: to be televised (thus re-presented) is to be real, while lived everyday experience is ordinary to the point of complete negligibility. The shift from film to television in this equation means something more than the simple substitution of one medium of mass entertainment for another. 1940s and 50s Hollywood stars were delineated not only by their medium but by their glamorous wardrobes, exotic sets and high acting style; television actors of the same era, coached in naturalistic performance and presented in domestic comedies or realist dramas, were made special simply by their appearance on the screen. The essentially ordinary nature of television suggests that the special status accorded to the televised, has less to do with content (what is represented) than with form (the fact of representation itself).

However, none of the above necessarily accounts for the emergence, in the late 1980s, of a television genre which appropriated the very term 'reality' and asserted the possibility of a television

³⁷ Mona Simpson's *Anywhere But Here* (1986). The excerpt quoted by Tichi is as follows: 'The boy from on television sat playing checkers. He was wearing a velour shirt with a zipper, just like any other kid. But I knew he wasn't. I'd seen him on television' (Tichi 129).

³⁸ See the Introduction for a discussion of Walter Benjamin's theories of image reproduction.

format which delivered an actual 'real life' to the viewer. This model of re-presentation deployed television as a conduit for things happening in the empirical world, a medium which re-presented events without restructuring them. The raw material appearing on television screens in the eighties - gleaned from store CCTV cameras, the amateur's handycam and police video archives - threw into relief the constructed nature of conventional programming. Drama, sitcoms, soaps and all the commercials in between presented, in contrast, a television world which bore little relation to the bodily, actual experience of being in the empirically-determined world. Even non-fiction programming such as newscasts and televised sports events could be re-read, in contrast to am-cam video clips, as processed - sanitised, narrativised and formulaic. As discussed in detail in Chapter Four, video clip shows presented short, erratic video extracts of indeterminate visual quality, out of context and in no particular sequence, depriving audiences of some of the conventional pleasures of television viewing. Both the appeal and the realism of this material (for they were one and the same thing) lay in the fact of its simply being captured and broadcast in the raw. This returns to the idea, noted above in relation to fiction forms of television, that it is the fact of re-presentation itself, rather than the subject of representation, which generates the *frisson* of real-feeling experience appreciated, and even pursued, by viewers.

As a televisual epoch, however, the eighties will always be remembered, not for *America's Funniest Home Videos* (ABC 1990-) or *Cops* (Fox 1989-), but for the glamour evening soaps – *Dallas* (CBS 1978-1991), *Dynasty* (ABC 1981-1989), *Falcon Crest* (CBS 1981-1990) et al – which defined an era of material excess. These programmes harked back to the heyday of Hollywood, with their 'charged overpresence of stars, glitter and glamor' (Mann 41). The gowns were back and the cult of celebrity surrounding the stars of these shows willed a confusion of character and performer which escalated the untouchability of both in the same way as had occurred for studio stars of the silver screen in an earlier age.³⁹ In this context, the emergence of early experiments in reality programming in the late eighties may be read as a reaction to the extreme gloss of trends in television fiction of the same era. Precisely the shininess which once marked 'real life' (the sensory intensity offered by Hollywood as an alternative to actuality) now seemed brittle, stylised and synthetic. The 'Who shot JR?' slogan campaign which followed a *Dallas* character's untimely demise was one hip in-joke in a media savvy world - a joke which asserted the perspicacity of viewers who had never known a world without television. While the glitz and high-life of the evening soap seemed to offer audiences the same brand of escapism and fantasy exhibited by the Hollywood of a pre-television era, the reception and appeal of such material in the eighties was ironic. Raw footage reality shows evolved in direct contrast to the glamour soaps, offering an alternative representation of reality which was alarmingly crude but strangely compelling.

³⁹ See Mann: 'The Hollywood star persona from the past projected a cohesive portrait of an individual – a synthesis of the various elements of the star's career and home life, all engineered by the studio publicity department' (54).

In short, the ordinary, non-televised world has attained a heightened affect of realism because it is not the shiny 'new reality' of screen life. But neither is it the 'old reality' of day to day lived experience in the pre-television era. This is ordinary life understood through and in contrast to the supra real of screen life. Only in contrast to the televised world can ordinary life seem so gritty, earthy, complex, irresolvable, challenging and fascinating. In this formulation it is ordinary (as the opposite of televised), which equates to real. However, the ordinary and the televised are co-dependent states, as it is only through their perceived relationship with the televised world that the ordinary practices and presentation of lived human experience attain such a heightened value. What reality television does so effectively is to conflate the two states of being (ordinary and televised) to create a television genre which may be summarised as *the ordinary which is televised*.

In a world conditioned to the formulaic speech patterns of scripted dialogue, the stumbling syntax of 'naturally' occurring speech between human beings can seem startling, unusual and strangely compelling when it is re-presented on screen. This unfamiliar speech appeals because it is different and unknown; being unusual, it seems rare and important; being artless, it seems transparent and thus truthful. The same logic can be applied to every aspect of lived experience once it is reframed as part of a television programme: consider narrative form, mise-en-scene, make-up and costuming, sets and scenarios. The novelty of reality television, and what binds it as a genre, is its attempt to bring some of this ordinariness, un-modulated, to the screen. Whether this ordinary world is re-presented on television via the artlessness of amateur handy-cam (as occurred in the video clip shows of the eighties) or the seamlessness of high-end television production (as deployed in most contemporary examples of reality programming) it is freighted with a particular promise of authenticity. However, as has been suggested here, the reception and evaluation of the real on screen has less to do with the actuality of empirical existence than it has to do with an imagined and abstracted intensity of experience.

Its provocative title notwithstanding, the housemates show *The Real World* exemplifies a will towards intensity of experience which is typical of the genre of reality television. The ostensible banality of much of the material aired on *The Real World* – household chores, daily routines and interpersonal bickering – does not mask the narrative drive towards emotionally intense moments of self-revelation. The young people in the house are repeatedly confronting their fears, dreams, failures and fantasies as they negotiate the basic challenges of living in a new city. The journey from the American hinterland to the Big Apple represents, for the young protagonists of *The Real World: New York* (1998), a culturally localised equivalent of the Antipodean OE. Thus, the programme concept is wound around a mythology of being which reifies some human experiences as being more 'real' than others, which imagines some kinds of 'world' as more intensely realised than others. The 'real world' in this narrative is both more prosaic (a gritty, competitive meritocracy in which dreamers are brought down to earth) and more fabulous (a wonderland of opportunities in which dreams come true) than the familial domesticity they have previously known. The moment pursued by *The Real World* format is the point of encounter - the moment of reckoning in which the

individual is challenged, defeated and forged anew and their dreams of success in the world modified accordingly. This 'world' is less a place than a state of being, a crisis or process. What is 'real' about this state is the intensity of feeling which accompanies it.

This is the 'real' of reality television. This is the experiential intensity which motivates and makes meaningful all the diverse scenarios of reality television. As this chapter and those which follow will consider, the manifestation of such intensity is often fleeting and the context trivial. However, it is the pursuit of just such an intensity of experience, often occurring at moments of personal crisis, which motivates producers, programme participants and viewers alike, and which drives the evolution of the genre. As this chapter goes on to consider, evidence of bodily response is one of the ways in which this intensity of experience is made manifest.

The Broken Body

The reality of reality TV for Mahesh Muralidhar is the savage burn scars stretching up his arms and down his torso. (Corbett 15)

When a young New Zealand man was badly injured on the set of a locally-produced reality series the incident was quickly co-opted by critics of the genre as evidence of reality television's dangerous obsession with the body. The newspaper article from which this quote is taken draws a well-worn analogy between competitive reality formats and the gladiatorial spectacles of Ancient Rome and denigrates reality television in general as too violent, too crude, too 'savage' and too much about the body. Amidst references to *Fear Factor* (NBC 2001-), *Extreme Makeover* (ABC 2002-) and *Treasure Island* (TV2 2000-) the journalist describes with delight and disgust a rumoured 'sperm race' format about competitive insemination. Of interest here is the extent to which the human body, and incursions into this body, function as evidence of actuality on television⁴⁰.

As has been established by Linda Williams and others, certain screen genres - including pornography, horror, slapstick comedy or melodrama – not only display bodies on screen but demand physiological responses from their audiences. Designated 'body genres' by Williams, these screen images affect viewers in ways which 'move the body' (5). The degree of movement entailed by these responses ranges from barely perceptible (goosebumps, nausea, muscular tension) to convulsive (laughter, shivers, screams). In this continuum, responses which produce bodily fluids - tears, semen, vomit – have a special place, because the bodily movement is accompanied by

⁴⁰ Of related interest is Jason Jacobs' work on 'body trauma TV' in which he analyses fictional medical drama series. Jacobs cites early examples of reality programming, such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* and emergency services video clip formats, as influencing the police and hospital dramas of the nineties, both in terms of form and content (54-57).

evidential material which ends up outside the body, lending the expression of feeling not only visibility but tangibility.

This kind of theorising around the 'body genres' of cinema sets up a framework which transfers readily to television. Programme types such as the crime drama, soap opera, sitcom, chat show and reality television provide equivalent examples of gore, tragedy, farce and erotica. As Williams notes, citing Richard Dyer, cinema genres which move the body suffer cultural devaluation (5). The same is true of equivalent television genres. As illustrated by the 'Gladiators of Our Time' article cited above, reality formats attract derision and condemnation in the public domain because of their appeal to the body as a site of response.

Bodies both on and in front of the screen become, in this equation, a locus of the real as they supply corporeal evidence of being and feeling. In chapter two of *Hardcore*, subtitled 'The "Frenzy of the Visible"', Williams considers the relationship between visibility (or tangibility) and truth. Guided by the 'principle of maximum visibility' (48) pornography highlights everything which can be rendered visually explicit. Thus, the male sexual organs and the male orgasm dominate narrative and sexual form. In contrast, the female organs pose a representational crisis for hardcore cinema as the drive to know by way of seeing is defeated by the interiority of the female body. This physiological interiority is problematised as non-representational (because non-visible), thus fakable and therefore untrustworthy. This slippage is significant because the association between the non-representational and the faked becomes automatic. Thus, only the explicitly visible can be trusted as a site of truth.

Writing on televised professional wrestling, Leon Hunt cites Williams' theorising around the 'frenzy of the visible' as he works to extrapolate the various degrees of authenticity made available by the wrestling show presentation:

'Corporeal' authenticity locates the real in evidence of physical danger, in what the star is prepared to subject his or her body to. [Stars of professional wrestling and martial arts films have] a star persona characterised by self-endangerment, injury and a willingness to endure pain (both theatrical and genuine). (119)

In the highly spectacular presentation of pro-wrestling matches, blood is taken as the incontrovertible proof of reality – real violence and real pain – despite the common practice of 'juicing' in which combatants cut themselves with concealed razors at the moment of impact to exaggerate damage done and heighten visibility. Hunt quotes Sharon Mazer, who comments that the blood in these matches is 'the most vivid sign' that 'the game has passed from simulation to actuality' (qtd in Hunt 121). Hunt himself suggests that the blood which flows from these self-inflicted wounds is 'a self-mutilating fakeness which may constitute another kind of "real"' (121).

The turning point in Hunt's critique, however, is his delineation between the fanspeak terms 'work' and 'shoot'. This fan terminology has evolved in response to contradictory evidence of truth, performance and credibility presented by the spectacle of pro-wrestling.

A 'work' is another word for a match, pointing to the performed, constructed, narrative qualities of wrestling; grapplers often talk of good matches 'telling a story'. To 'work' is to draw the audience into this performance, to 'sell' one's opponent's moves or 'put them over', to make fans suspend their disbelief. [...] A 'shoot', on the other hand, is an unplanned or illegitimate excursion into the real; 'the plan is forsaken, an accident occurs, or a genuine conflict erupts with the violence spilling over from display to actuality'. (qtg Mazer 122-123)

So, the 'work' is the pre-meditated story of the wrestling performance (the plan about blows, falls, triumphs, gains and losses within the match) whereas the 'shoot' is an unanticipated injury, either inflicted in anger and outside the agreed parameters of the 'work' or via an accident arising 'naturally' out of the dangerous conditions of performance. It is important to note that damage done to the body within the framework of the 'work' is absolutely real in terms of bones broken, blood spilt, teeth lost and so on. The difference is determined by the context in which the injury occurs.

These two ideas, the 'work' and the 'shoot', do not contradict each other, but operate alongside each other as different kinds of authenticity, which are judged according to different criteria. Because damage to the body functions within this genre as the principal marker of realness and because this damage is inflicted and accepted as legitimate within either context, the distinction is not necessarily hierarchical. That is, an incidence of violence which is determined as being a 'shoot' is not absolutely more real than a similar incidence within the 'work' of the match. As Hunt observes, 'the dividing line between a "work" and a "shoot" is less a matter of the degree of violence than consent' (123). Moreover, the highly spectacular nature of the pro-wrestling performance actually blurs the boundary between the two. As Hunt comments, fans may delight in the '*frisson* of authenticity' generated by the 'shoot', but they may never be sure whether or not they have seen it (123). Part of the thrill of spectatorship lies in the possibility of detecting a slippage from premeditated to spontaneous violence, but as the performance of animosity is so good, the distinction is often difficult to detect.

The complex dynamic generated by this intricate display of bodily violence has forced a re-evaluation of the real and the fake; as such, it provides a useful framework for thinking about screen authenticity in more general terms. The construct of the 'work' tells us that the reality which is contrived, premeditated and performed may still make legitimate claims on the real. In the context of professional wrestling, and in that of film pornography, the realness of the 'work' is sanctioned by the high visibility of unfakable incursions into the human body and the bodily fluids which these elicit. The endurance spectacles staged by American illusionist David Blaine - as analysed by Biressi and Nunn in their book on reality television (131-143) - manifest bodily damage as a slow deterioration. Stunts like 'Above the Below' in which Blaine starved himself for forty days in a locked

glass box suspended above a busy intersection near London's Tower Bridge, are relevant to this analysis of the bodily real because they are all 'work', all spectacle and all real. Here, as for pro-wrestling, the locus of the real is the body and the irrefutable, spectacularised damage done to the body. Similarly, the elaborate contrivance which marks the event does not undercut the irrefutable impact on the bodily site. Much of this damage was visible to spectators during the process; the rest was imagined (or speculated) and later verified by doctors who examined and treated Blaine upon his release. The authority of the medical experts who commented on Blaine's deterioration during the forty-day event and reported on his exit weight, blood toxicity, the exact degree of damage done to his internal organs and so on provided confirmation of veracity of both experience and spectacle.

As lamented by critics of the genre, reality television often relies on the ritualised investigation, mortification or transformation of the human body as a process by which it might stake its claim in the real. The *Survivor* format and similar 'desert island survival' shows (including local series *Treasure Island*) may appear to have much in common with David Blaine's starvation spectacle. These shows isolate participants in inhospitable terrain and expose their bodies to the elements without adequate food, water or clothing for a maximum of thirty-nine days. The damage done to these bodies is a principal narrative of the format and an inventory of suffering - hunger, exhaustion, heat-stroke, insect bites, sunburn, coral cuts and other minor injuries - is logged daily. Again, this damage is all 'work' in the context of these reality shows because it is anticipated, inevitable and consensual. And yet it is incontrovertibly real as the deteriorating bodies of the programme participants attest. The notorious plastic surgery format *Extreme Makeover* may also be read as an 'extreme' example of corporeal realism and one which is explicitly all 'work' - pre-meditated, controlled and consensual. A 'shoot' in this context would be unthinkable.

On the other hand, the construct of the 'shoot', as defined by pro-wrestling fandom, indicates an authenticity determined by the context of accident, crisis and surprise. As pursued in Chapter Four, am-cam and CCTV video clip shows thrive on the tension generated by the unanticipated event. In fact, these brief clips - showcasing accidental injury, freak storms, car crashes and violent or otherwise aberrant behaviour - are pure 'shoot', presenting the moment of impact, crisis or trauma isolated from context and rendered meaningful only by the evidence of pain, fear or surprise registered by the human bodies on screen. Just as the moments of crisis are isolated from narrative context (or 'work') so are the bodies of the individuals on screen rendered without identity. In these slapstick physical blunders, car chases and medical emergencies, faces are obscured or illegible (in potentially defamatory material they are even digitally erased). There is no back story, characterisation or contextual information which may provide an opportunity for emotional engagement with bodies on screen. (Indeed, this would make viewing too painful). An interesting comparison to video clip show footage is the long-running practical joke format *Candid Camera* (PAX 1948-). Arguably the forerunner of reality television, this stunts-based format is pre-meditated on the part of its production crew, but unanticipated and misunderstood by the duped passer-by. Thus, it represents a paradoxical moment - the contrived accident - and deploys the pleasures and

payoffs of both the 'work' and the 'shoot'. Although the represented incident is contrived (and employs actors, sets, props and a hidden camera) it is made authentic by the gullibility of the credulous passer-by (or in pro-wrestling fan terms, the 'mark'⁴¹) who believes everything he/she sees and experiences shock, displeasure, grief or surprise accordingly. Both the show's humour and its claims to authenticity rely on the innocence of the stunt victim, who really feels the emotions he/she has been set up to experience. Interestingly, the blood of the pro-wrestling match ('the most vivid sign' of actuality) is here substituted by subtler evidence of bodily movement - facial expressions or body language - which lend visibility to interior experience.

As analysed in Chapter Four within the context of production aesthetics, second generation reality programming may also fall prey to the vagaries of the 'shoot' and undergo a consequent shift in terms of perceived authenticity. In the Australian Outback series of *Survivor* (CBS 2001) tribe-member Michael Skupin passed out in the ashes of a campfire he was tending and sustained second degree burns to his hands and face. This surprise event, which clearly fell outside the anticipated and acceptable scope of bodily damage indicated by the 'work' of the format (as discussed above), bore all the characteristics of a pro-wrestling 'shoot' and consequently heightened the perceived authenticity of the format. In a similar incident on New Zealand television, also discussed in Corbett's newspaper article, a former Miss New Zealand and local television personality participating in a Celebrity series of *Treasure Island* (TV2 2004) left the game early when a coral cut became infected. The progression of the infection was slower than the instantaneous damage done to Skupin and provided a different kind of narrative impulse around which the series built a story. However, the impact of the rare infection turned out to be much more serious and the woman, named Lana Coc-Kroft, spent months in an Auckland hospital in a serious condition, attracting a great deal of media attention. Both Skupin and Coc-Kroft's bodily trauma was sustained as a result of environmental conditions naturally occurring within the context of the Australian outback and a Pacific atoll respectively. Although their being in that place was contrived by the television production house in question, the circumstances of their injuries were 'natural' and thus morally defensible. Thus, in both cases, the injuries were incorporated into the narrative of the programme and freely deployed as markers of the real in ways similar to the treatment of more routine bodily trauma such as hunger and exhaustion.

However, the pyrotechnics accident on the set of *Going Straight* (TV3 2003), a local derivative of the American competitive stunt show *Fear Factor*, which burnt Mahesh Muralidhar so badly, was the result of human error and occurred when special effects technicians miscalculated an explosion on location. As such, the responsibility for the accident lay squarely with the production house and Touchdown faced subsequent court action. This was one 'shoot' which could not be acknowledged

⁴¹ Fanspeak for a gullible spectator is a 'mark' yet Hunt indicates that 'even the more knowledgeable fans look to experience the real just as they "revel in their own deception", celebrating "the moments when they 'marked-out' "' (qtg Mazer 123). Likewise, the fan chant which erupts in the auditorium at moments of violence/spectacle/intensity is 'Holy Shit!' which 'seems to translate into something like 'You made me believe' '(123).

or worked into the story. In fact, the episode which represented the challenge in which the injuries occurred was edited in such a way as to elide the accident entirely. This is not to say that the episode fabricated a story to cover up the incident, as Muralidhar had in fact completed and won the challenge before the accident happened during re-takes. What is of interest here, however, is the media response to the accident. What was essentially a workplace accident which happened to occur on the set of a reality show was reversed by critics of the genre as an inevitable consequence of reality television's dangerous fascination with bodily excess - as if the injuries were motivated by the milieu of the reality television industry. But, of course, this accident did not happen because Muralidhar was participating in the production of a reality television programme. It happened because he participated in a pyrotechnics stunt for which he had no training and which was mismanaged by the technical staff concerned. The matter was one for the Occupational Health and Safety board to review certainly, but it was not a case for the Broadcasting Standards Authority.

Corbett concludes her article by 'raising the question' - 'will someone make a reality-TV show in which people have to fight to the death and will people watch it?' (16) - and implies that reality programming is on a trajectory of increasingly extreme forms of violence, degradation and bodily-endangerment. However, the subtitle for the article - 'The Romans watched real life and death struggles for entertainment. Is that any different from watching the ritual humiliation that is reality TV?' (14) - unconsciously answers Corbett's question when it substitutes the non-corporeal and non-life threatening pain of 'humiliation' for the 'life and death' blood sports of Ancient Rome. As this chapter goes on to argue, an evolution may be traced in reality programming which indicates a trend away from the random and anonymous crime and violence of early experiments in video clip television and towards the character-driven, emotion-based narratives which are typical of second-generation formats.

Corbett's article is contentious because it damns reality television both ways. On one hand, Corbett denounces reality television as a pretender to the throne of authentic representation, quoting a one-time promoter for the first British series of *Big Brother* (Channel 4 2001) as saying: 'The reality of reality TV is that the genre is misinterpreted because of that name. They are creations of the producers' (15). This industry informant presumes a mismatch between a 'reality' which remains undefined and a 'creation' or fictional framework. If the circumstances of programme production are contrived, she asserts, the programme content is rendered invalid. Corbett contrasts this insider perspective with graphic photographs of Muralidhar's burn scars and the story of his accident. In this way, Corbett foregrounds the physical evidence that events which take place within the parameters of reality television production are (at least corporeally speaking) all too real. Thus, on the other hand, she is criticising the irrefutable realness of the tasks, locations and interactions represented on screen which can and do write themselves on the bodies of programme participants. Her coverage of the Muralidhar and Coc-Kroft cases registers profound indignation, even moral outrage, that reality should ever be signified via damage to the body. Such a discomfort with screen representations of incursions into the body (even when they are consensual and

painless, as for instance in the supposed sperm race format) indicates a powerful desire to disassociate herself (as a cultural representative) from the abject, the liminal and the visceral. More than distaste for bodily display, however, this article expresses anxiety about a model of representation (ie. reality television) which asserts the possibility of things which feel real occurring within a framework of things which clearly are not. The contradictory impulse in Corbett's argument - that reality television is both too real (bloody, violent and pornographic) and not real enough ('creations of the producers') – can be clarified as a confusion between context and content as a site of meaning and/or realness. Because the circumstances of production in reality television formats are often heavily contrived and manipulated, the irrefutable reality of bodily contact (scalpel cuts flesh, fire burns skin, sperm meets egg) which have permanent and irrefutable consequences (a body disfigured or transformed, a baby conceived) and which occur within the parameters of a 'false' environment, is shocking, unacceptable and irreconcilable.

The Crying Game

An analogy between film pornography and reality television is illuminating because the locus of the real is so clearly demarcated in the former, rendering the tension between context and content irrelevant.⁴² The viewer of film pornography knows very well that the people represented on screen are actors, that the circumstances of their sexual encounter are wildly contrived, that the configuration and presentation of the sex act itself is stylised and improbable. Yet this overstated artifice never encroaches on the credibility of the sexual act itself. Elements of the sex act which are visually explicit - penetration of the female, male erection and male ejaculation – are determined by the porn film as 'really' happening somewhere, sometime to the bodies of the people represented. In other words, the context of performance doesn't devalue the realness of the physical sex act in pornographic film. The same may be said of televised professional wrestling - the stars are actors, the matches contrived and the effect spectacular but the blood which flows, even when self-inflicted, still testifies to the opening of the body and the pain of the incision.

Reality television, in contrast, suffers from a critical preoccupation with context as the site of realness. Individual formats such as *Survivor*, *Big Brother* or *Popstars* (TV2 1999) are often derided on the grounds that they are 'unreal' because the social groupings and the situations portrayed are contrived, improbable and beyond the everyday. In this context, it is assumed that the kind of movements these bodies make – including injury, weight loss, fatigue - are of diminished validity. This equation presumes a reading of reality located in context - the processes of production, the

⁴² Note that notions of the pornographic are occasionally applied to reality television in another context, ie. in reference to the obscene. See, in particular, Jean Baudrillard's article on the French version of *Big Brother* (*Loft Story* [M6 2001]) in which he suggests that 'Sex is everywhere to be found, but that's not what people want. What people deeply desire is a spectacle of banality. This spectacle of banality is today's true pornography and obscenity. It is the obscene spectacle of nullity (nullité), insignificance, and platitude' (1). This is a wholly separate interpretation of pornography to that which I am applying to reality programming in the above discussion.

intent and the agency of the participant and the social environment of the setting – rather than the moment. Emotional display or personal confessions produced within a contrived environment such as the *Big Brother* house are read by critics as being of lesser truth-value than an equivalent experience in a non-televised world. This reading not only confuses event and context, but registers an automatic distinction between an induced kind of emotional response (read ‘faked’) and a spontaneous one (which is read as ‘natural’). This latter distinction between real and faked emotional display carries with it an assumed hierarchy which favours naturalness as the site of truth. As has been suggested at the beginning of this chapter, however, realness is less easily defined or delimited. An emotional experience which has been induced in a person by extreme circumstances may still exist, in its own right, as a genuine and truthful moment of self-expression. No matter that a programme participant has been isolated in inhospitable terrain with a group of strangers, starved for weeks and bribed with money, the homesickness, anger, loneliness or fear he/she may feel is still a genuine physiological and affective experience for that person at that time, one which is certified by the extent to which it visibly, in Williams’ terms, ‘moves’ their body⁴³.

Williams’ notion of the body which is moved is poignant because it connotes both physical and emotional moving. This double meaning, fully deployed by Williams, also points to a distinction between the bodies of those on screen and those off. When Williams and Dyer speak of moving the body, the body in question is that of the viewer. This body is moved in re-action: exhibiting tears, laughter, screams and sexual arousal. These are responses to sounds and images on screen which have been orchestrated to produce just such an affect on the body of the viewer. However, the body which is moved off-screen always has its counterpart on the screen – a celluloid body which undergoes (or appears to undergo) a parallel visceral experience. It is thus worth making the distinction between two different kinds of relationships between on-screen and off-screen bodies. The first, perhaps the most common, displays one kind of moving on screen (typically physical), to produce a different though related moving in the viewer (typically physiological). For instance, a body slashed and broken by a masked pro-wrestler on screen produces bodily evidence of shock, anguish and horror in the viewer, but not pain; similarly, the surgical procedures of makeover formats provoke a reaction in the audience which is reactive rather than sympathetic.

The second kind of relationship, in contrast, displays one kind of moving on screen (typically emotional) and a very similar (emotional) moving in the body of the viewer. For instance, when a bride sheds a tear during her wedding vows (on a reality format such as *Weddings* [TV2 1999-]) a viewer who is moved by the scene will duplicate that tear in their own body. This is not only in the same category of emotional experience (ie. crying) but it is a very similar kind of tear, generated in response to certain universal triggers. That is, both the television bride and the at-home viewer respond directly to the wedding and are moved to tears by universal sentiments of romance, faith

⁴³ Producer Mark Burnett makes a similar argument when he says of *Survivor* ‘Whether it’s not giving them enough food or causing a moral dilemma by giving them chickens, its contrived, but the outcome is very, very real. We don’t tell them what to do’ (qtd in Halfpenny 30).

and love. This emotional doubling is critical to reality television effects of intimacy. This kind of duplication of emotional experience incorporates the viewer into the programme as a subjective participant rather than objective spectator. Or, to figure such an engagement another way, this 'same kind' of emotional response brings intimate and interior experiences off the screen and animates them inside the body of the viewer, making them properly real.

This emotional moving and doubling facilitates intimacy and immediacy between viewer and screen subject and as such promotes a feeling of the real. Reality television is at its most successful when it achieves this experience of momentary but validated connection. The thrill of intimate and immediate emotional response is part of the intensity of experience linked, in the opening section of this chapter, with the imaginative pursuit of 'real life'. Importantly, reality television body-centric formats like *Survivor*, *Fear Factor* and *Extreme Makeover* deploy this strategy of emotional doubling in much the same way as any other reality show. The physiological reactions audiences may have to the 'gross out' challenges on *Fear Factor* or liposuction on body-makeover shows define these programmes as 'body genres' in the classic sense defined by Williams et al. These responses are certainly one way in which audiences interpret, experience and validate a real event on television. However, emotional doubling, outlined here as a nuance of bodily moving, is a more compelling and thereby more affective strategy in the pursuit of televisual intimacy. The moment at which the protagonist of any reality format, be it a competitive challenge show like *Survivor*, a romance format such as *Weddings* or property DIY programme such as *Dream Home* (TV2 1999-), exhibits spontaneous emotional self-expression the potential for viewer engagement reaches an all-time high. Whatever the bodies on screen may be subjected to, the crucial 'confession' is the emotional one. Tears in reality programming are ubiquitous and may accompany any number of emotions - surprise, embarrassment, disappointment, gratitude, remorse or elation - besides the more obvious grief. As such, they seem to register the point at which intense emotional experience simply overflows the body, proving at one stroke the manifestation of unbidden emotion and the degree of its excessive intensity.

Michael Skupin's burn injury in the Australian Outback series of *Survivor* has already been cited as an example of a bodily real which authenticates on-screen experience. Alongside killing the pig and eating eyeballs – two other notorious incidents from this series of *Survivor* in which Skupin was involved - Skupin's burning body is part of the significant visceral evidence of actuality provided by this format. However, as has been observed by Steven Vrooman, Skupin's greatest contribution to the show and to its reality affect was his propensity for emotional self-expression. In the programme finale, in which participants were re-grouped in a studio-set back in the States to find out the result of the final ballot, Michael choked back tears as he re-inscribed his burn accident as an emotional epiphany:

What happens just – it transcends money or prizes or anything and the spiritual growth and the family growth. What happened to me was – a million bucks couldn't buy it. (Skupin qtd. in Vrooman 191)

Not only does his injury authenticate the show by breaking the frame of a controlled and contrived environment (that is providing the 'shoot' which complements the 'work'), but it also lends itself to another axis of authentication – that of emotional self-expression, manifested by the ubiquitous tear.

The point of intersection being pursued here lies between Williams' theorising around visibility as a determining characteristic of truth and the particular claims to realness made by reality television. Bodily responses (usually accompanied by tears) induced by reality television in bodies both on and off screen are critical to the genre's affective realism because they bring the inside out. What is interior, private or secret holds an automatic association with what is authentic, truthful and real. But the inverse, in a different discourse, also holds true, for what is public, exterior and readily visible is sanctioned by its own visibility as unfakable, trustworthy, truthful and real. Thus tears, as material and external markers of personal and interior human experience, draw together two potent associative threads of the real. The fleeting quality of the tear narrows temporal focus to the moment in a way which, as will be explored in Chapter Five, eliminates context and heightens immediacy. The reality of reality television has never resided in the context, the situation or the environment of the particular format, but in the affective experience of individual participants (and the attendant viewer experience). The moment of involuntary emotional display (in most cases accompanied by tears) is thus the true 'money shot' of reality television, the pivotal conjunction of the real with the visible which makes good the artifice of context.

Shock Treatment

As the genre of reality television matures, a shift in emphasis may be observed, from the purely visceral and decontextualised violence of the video clip shows (all 'shoot') to the intricate emotional contrivance of social experiments like *Big Brother* or *Beauty and the Geek* (WB 2005-) (all 'work'). This evolution is also characterised by a shift in viewer position from objective spectatorship (decried by critics of the genre as voyeuristic, or even punitive)⁴⁴ to subjective emotional engagement. As a consequence of this re-focussing, the first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a rise in formats which do not challenge the body physically but guarantee emotional strain and self-expression: dating shows, real-estate and property makeover formats and domestic diary-cam formats, examples of which will be discussed in the following chapters. However, as evidenced by the following sample analysis of the physical challenge format *Shock Treatment* (TV2 2006), even body-centric reality shows are pre-occupied with emotional challenges and emotional self-expression.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Germaine Greer's 2001 article on *Big Brother* for the British newspaper, *The Guardian*. She comments that watching *Big Brother* is 'about as dignified as looking through the keyhole in your teenage child's bedroom door. To do it occasionally would be shameful; to get hooked on it is downright depraved' (1), but goes on to say that fans of the programme are 'worse than voyeurs, for the part they agree to play is not that of a helpless peeping Tom but that of Big Brother, Chief of the Thought Police' (3).

In 2006 TV2 aired a new, locally produced reality series entitled *Shock Treatment* - a physical challenge format which exemplifies both bodily and emotional 'moving' as discussed in this chapter. This format takes two local 'celebrities' and sends them overseas to a mystery destination which specialises in physically gruelling activities. The title of the show and the way in which it is pitched in promotional teasers emphasise bodily shock. Excursions include a military boot camp in Puerto Rico, an alpine adventure retreat in France and a detoxification and fasting centre in Thailand which requires its inmates to undergo regular enema treatment. The subjection of celebrities to ritualised bodily degradation is one way in which the ordinariness of 'special' people on television is exposed, as discussed in the following chapter. What is of interest here is the extent to which these incursions into the body (of which the enema is a particularly piquant example) are deployed by reality television as evidence of an irrefutable, unfakable, bodily real. The pre-occupation with bodies and bodily functions (no less than three of the six episodes in this series involved obligatory 'colonic irrigation') is cited by critics as reason enough to assign reality television the low cultural value it currently retains. However, damage to the body is rarely the whole story in reality programming. Increasingly, second generation reality formats use the bodily real as an anchor point around which narratives of emotional, personal and spiritual development may be tethered.

Thus, in all of these episodes of *Shock Treatment*, the mortification of the body works in tandem with the chastisement of the spirit. This duality is encapsulated in the rhetoric of the task sheet at the French retreat which introduces participants to their 'Inward Adventure' - a 'rite of passage' which will provide them with 'a whole new set of rules to live by'. They are told that they will be tested by 'extreme physical challenges' and learn to 'focus energy' and 'control fear'. It is signed by their instructor for the week, who defines himself as a 'Physical and Spiritual Guide'. However, of the seven tasks undertaken at the adventure camp only three could be described as 'extreme physical challenges' and by reality television standards (see *Fear Factor* et al) they are not even that extreme: a rope climbing course, spelunking (abseiling into a cave) and a steep mountain climb. The other four comprise two sessions of body-therapy (Tai Chi and Shiatsu), an overnight camping expedition and an outing to the remains of a Roman amphitheatre. The intensity of the 'extreme' challenges is registered not simply via strain to the body but via emotional response in ways typical of reality programming. One of the two participant celebrities - reality show veteran and pop singer Jo Cotton - is easily defeated by the physical challenges presented by the climbing tasks and breaks down on each occasion. Emotions ripple across her body as fear, embarrassment, failure, self-doubt, anger and frustration mingle with expressions of muscular strain and pain. Thus, Cotton's experience dominates screen time during the physical challenges, as she exemplifies the dynamic by which reality programmes seek to evidence emotional truth via the strenuous scourging of the body. However, the Shiatsu session - so mild in its demands upon the body - requires a physical intimacy between the two participants which both parties find almost unbearable. Both Cotton and her male counterpart - actor/director and arts show host Oliver Driver - are highly resistant to the demands of a situation defined by intimacy, sensitivity, spirituality and intuitive response. The tension between the two celebrities, selected on the basis of their

antithetical personalities and thrown together as part of the format's 'surprise!' narrative, renders this esoteric form of physical contact one of the more gruelling challenges presented by the programme – despite, or rather because of, the fact that the participants' intense discomfort is principally internal. Thus, a format which purports to be, and promotes itself as being, all about trauma to the body turns out to operate in pursuit of other kinds of crises – emotional, spiritual and social.

As 'Physical and Spiritual Guide' of both the Inward Adventure course and (by default) this episode of *Shock Treatment*, the instructor Chris Milford's value judgements in regard to the realness of emotional and physical responses accords perfectly (if perhaps surprisingly) with that of reality television in general. The lessons Milford endeavours to teach are all about the relative truth-value of physical and emotional expression. He determines early on that some physical expression is performative (Cotton is branded a 'drama queen'), while some is unperformable and uncontrollable (convulsed with tears, Cotton's quivering, shaking body on the end of an abseil rope has to be believed). Equally, some emotions are interpreted within the forum of the Inward Adventures school as staged or affected, while some are interpreted as being an expression of essential being. This kind of classification differs from a distinction between real and fake which takes context as the determining quality of truth and which, consequently, disqualifies any emotion produced within a contrived environment (ie. the critical reading made most frequently by detractors of reality programming). Here, within the parameters of the Inward Adventure course, distinctions are made between different levels of physical and emotional engagement, all of which occur in a contrived situation and in response to deliberately induced social, physical and psychological stresses.

Inevitably, reality television, like the medium of television in general, subscribes to the 'frenzy of the visible' as it weights that which may be realised visually over that which cannot. For this reason, the highly self-conscious, emotive and performative Cotton dominates screen time in this episode of *Shock Treatment*, while the taciturn and emotionally restrained Driver takes a supporting (although very un-supportive) role. However, what this episode indicates is that types of emotion which are determined as being less easy to see are valued more highly than those which bubble so lightly and randomly to the surface of Cotton's body. The anger, aggression, frustration and disappointment expressed by Cotton when she shouts rudely at her instructor as she fails the final hurdle on the rope climbing course (a highly television-worthy moment which is played in all the episode teasers) is taken by Milford as evidence of her fearfulness and low self-confidence, and is, therefore, quietly dismissed as a false representation of feeling. The programme intends the audience to make a similar reading, so that while Cotton's repeated shouts of 'Shut Up, Chris' at the camera are appreciated for their high visual drama, the audience is aware that this instance of emotional expression lacks integrity. Cotton's journey, which becomes the dominant narrative of the episode, may be summarised as a transition from emotional experience which is mostly display to that which is mostly feeling. Interestingly, this transition is accompanied by a reduction in visibility. On the final challenge, the mountain climb, the story is that of Jo's redemption as a person who is, finally, better

able to both connect with her emotions and manage the expression of them. At the beginning of the climb she says that her 'Motivation today is just to get there as quickly as possible with no tears or drama' and in the debriefing repeats this idea, saying: 'Even I was sick of crying – even I was over feeling upset about it and I knew I had to do it. [...] It was good that there were less dramatics today. Even I enjoyed it'. The lessons of the Inward Adventure programme suggest that her higher enjoyment of the final challenge is the correlative of her decision to cut out the 'tears [and] drama'. In her moment of triumph at the mountain's summit, she declares with uncharacteristic restraint that when she 'go[es] back to [her] room and think[s] about today' she will 'feel quietly proud, quietly proud'. This image of quiet, private reflection and interior emotion, anticipated with pleasure by Cotton, is the summit of her personal journey from exhibition to introspection, for which the ascended mountain functions allegorically. Jo has learnt to curb emotional excess and by containing and managing her emotions can feel them more intensely and with more satisfaction. Milford's to-camera summary of Jo's experience is indicative of this drive:

Jo has learnt to come into the moment a little more. Certainly, drama is something she needs to cut from her life. It is not necessary for her now. She needs to acknowledge herself as being a person that people can relate to and like. She doesn't have to do anything. So, Jo, that's the message, you don't have to do – just be.

Jo Cotton, a stage performer selected for the format (and for several previous reality series) on the basis of her bodily and emotional excesses, is exhorted to show less and feel more. The surprise is that her attempts to do so make highly satisfactory reality television viewing, as full visibility is traded in for a heightened feeling of the real.

The penultimate challenge in this episode of *Shock Treatment*, the trip to the colosseum, deserves special consideration. Of all the activities undertaken on the 'Inward Adventure' this outing is the least demanding physically, yet it assumes a key position in the narrative of the personal journey. In the context of television criticism (cited above) which considers reality television entertainment as analogous to the spectacle of gladiatorial games, this may seem highly ironic. Indeed, as the programme participants are lead into the sandy arena, uncertain as to the task ahead and gazing around themselves at the vast and sun-bleached ranks of (seemingly deserted) spectator seats, the programme collapses in on itself in an alarming (because unintentional) instance of *mise en abime*. Beyond the amphitheatre, thousands of viewers wait for the games to begin as Cotton and Driver square off in the arena and prepare to face their mortality. But, of course, the task for today is a contemplative one and the two people, asked by their instructor to consider their personal mortality, are likely to shed tears rather than blood. If this is the modern equivalent of a gladiatorial spectacle, it seems a pretty gentle alternative to being torn apart by a lion. It is worth noting, moreover, that Cotton and Driver relocate to the tiered stone benches for their moment of reflection on life and the hereafter, choosing to look down upon the place in which so many people suffered and died instead of occupying the space themselves. This defection to the audience shifts the *mise-en-abime* to a different axis as spectators watch spectators watching an empty space. As such, it also sets up the potential for emotional doubling, an affect of reality programming described earlier in this chapter,

as both on-screen and at-home viewers look down upon the empty arena and respond (in the same television moment) to everything this place might represent. In a simple sense, this relocation also points to the free will of participants - a factor readily overlooked by critics of reality television - who are able, unlike the slaves of the Roman Empire, to position themselves how they wish.

Besides offering up a curiously self-reflexive reality television moment, the episode at the colosseum underscores the dynamic between bodily and emotional expression proposed by this chapter. Within the logic of the programme, the colosseum operates as a symbolic site of carnal damage which is intended as a trigger point for personal contemplation, reflection and resolution. Thus, the viscerality of the bloodied site and its history are foregrounded in ways which lend bodily evidence to the parallel narrative of personal development. This dynamic has been evident in all the challenges undertaken on the programme so far, but the exercise at the colosseum is different because it renders the bodily real entirely figurative. As the participants enter the arena, the Inward Adventure instructor invites them on a visualisation exercise in which the audience is freely included. All we see on screen are three people standing in the sandy stadium, but Milford (who has obviously done this before) verbally conjures vivid scenes in which ill-fated gladiators pace cold stone cells as mass hysteria sweeps the sun-baked amphitheatre and the 'blood lust' rises. Here blood is once more a potent and vivid sign of actuality (to paraphrase Mazer) but the game remains in the realm of the historical imaginary. Instead, tears – produced, inevitably, by Cotton - are 'the most vivid sign' that this particular game 'has passed from simulation to actuality' (Mazer qtd in Hunt 121) and that she (and we) have been moved. This moment typifies reality television as a form because it actively pursues a visceral real which references the body, but focuses on emotional response. The tear is the 'bodily confession' which testifies to an intensity of experience which is original, authentic and transformative.

It is also here, in the ruins of an ancient civilisation, that the two young New Zealanders are most clearly someplace other than home. As has been suggested, the positively charged intensity of experience associated with 'real life', either on or off the screen, is heightened, even triggered, by the stimulation provided by an exotic place. For many New Zealanders who make a beeline for Europe on their first OE⁴⁵, this exotic site is also and conversely a mythologised 'home' – a locus of history, culture and identity for those New Zealanders who identify as descendents of European settlers. The rugged colosseum, nestled amongst the terracotta-tiled roofs of a French township, makes the perfect cradle for such fantasies of place, self, history and being. Thus, as Cotton and Driver enter the stone arena a symbolic confrontation is staged – not only between moderns and ancients or youth and mortality (as may be the case for any participant involved in the Inward Adventure course) but between the New World and the Old. In this moment, the intensity of

⁴⁵ For a reality television take on the cultural tradition of the young New Zealander's OE see *The \$20 Challenge* (TV2 2001) which challenges four young travellers to survive in Paris on \$20NZ a day and *The Big OE* (TV3 2000) which follows a coach load of kiwis around Europe.

experience, registered in silence by both participants, fulfils the fantasy of 'real life' which locates real feeling in emotional extremes and at some geographic distance from home.

Thus, the exemplar of *Shock Treatment* draws together the two threads of argument in this chapter as it elicits response not only through its visceral evidence of bodily and emotional strain, but through the representation of special experiences in exotic locations which induce intense feeling. Whether the mortification of the body is vigorously incursive, as for the luckless recipients of the obligatory enema elsewhere in the series, inflected with spiritualism as in the Shiatsu challenge or simply imagined as at the colosseum, the bodily experience in this format, as for other reality programmes, always stands in for a parallel interior process. The redemption of the emotionally voluble Jo Cotton, from showing to being, is also the redemptive narrative of reality television as a programme type increasingly motivated by the pursuit of true, private and less-than-visible response. At the same time, the fact that all episodes in this series relocate participants outside New Zealand – making culture 'shock' part of the 'treatment'– is indicative of cultural assumptions which correlate cultural, historical and geographic relocation with a heightened and intensified experience of the real. The prescribed 'work' of this format takes both strands into account, as it drives these emissaries of New Zealand towards their discrete epiphanies.

CHAPTER TWO

Everyday People:

Ordinariness, Authenticity and the Nobody

We were the most normal family – boring and normal – and now we are the most un-normal family.

Emma Hutton, *Colonial House*

The final episode of the 2003 history-reality series *Colonial House* (TV One 2003) concludes with the above observation by the Hutton family's teenage daughter. Despite its clumsy construction, Emma's remark gives poignant expression to one of the pre-eminent narratives of reality television: the transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary. The Huttons, once nobodies, are now doubly 'the most un-normal family', once because they have undergone the stringent demands of nineteenth century domestic immersion and twice because they have been on telly. Emma is right to coin her own term. When she says 'un-normal' she means something quite different from 'abnormal' with its associated meanings of deviancy and illegitimacy. Adjoining a negative prefix to 'normal', she seeks to suggest a state of being 'not normal' which includes and accommodates the status of normality. For Emma Hutton, the past normal-ness of her family provides a way of measuring and defining their new status. Her comment thus traces a trajectory of personal transformation; from and through normal-ness they came to the hallowed place of non-normal-ness, a status completely free of the nasty connotations of abnormality. This is true on a practical level, as the Hutton family were selected as the subjects of the programme on the grounds of their representative normality, for being, as promotional material declared, 'an ordinary New Zealand family'. It also applies on a discursive level, as the two constructs (normal and not normal) are played off each other throughout the format. A normal 'twenty-first century' family is put in the extraordinary position of re-animating the domestic experiences of an imagined normal version of the past - that of a typical family of pioneer settlers arriving in New Zealand in the 1850s. As unusual as the activities undertaken by the Huttons on this programme may be (within the context of 2003), being normal is what *Colonial House* and most other examples of reality programming is all about. When Emma comments on a perceived shift in the status of the family group, she observes the principle irony of a genre which valourises the ordinariness of its subjects, only to put it beyond their reach forever.

Emma Hutton successfully negotiates the family's transition to the other side of normal by coining her own phrase. However, reality programming usually reserves the normal/abnormal binary for formats which present socially unacceptable behaviour, criminality and violence. For domestic and family focussed programmes such as *Colonial House*, the preferred construction is always

ordinary/extraordinary - a win/win situation for participants, who are celebrated either way. As Emma's comment intuitively suggests, the positively charged status of extraordinariness is always arrived at through the definition of ordinariness, and the two states of being, far from being mutually exclusive, are co-existent and co-dependent. This chapter interrogates the construction of ordinary and extraordinary people in reality programming, with particular consideration given to the ways in which ordinariness intersects with and informs codes of on-screen authenticity.

An Ordinary/Extraordinary Medium

As this chapter will show, the contradictory appeal of ordinary-yet-extraordinary people generates a productive tension which motivates the various formats of the reality genre. Both aspects of this identity serve the affects of reality television – intimacy, authenticity, immediacy – in various ways. The appeal of ordinariness is that it brings things close (socially, culturally, geographically) and makes things safe (conferring constancy, familiarity, regularity). This appeal is partially indebted to the extent to which the ordinary is enmeshed within the domestic. Domestic life is synonymous with everyday or ordinary experience because it is part of the very fabric of human existence. The site of the private, familial home is a locus of both intimacy (social, filial, sexual) and banality (repetition, routine, menial labour). Reality television, so often set in or around the private home, fully realizes the potential *frisson* between the intimate and the banal and incorporates this into its representation of the ordinary. The corollary of this – the intimacy of ordinariness - is that the appeal of the extraordinary is registered through distance. Extraordinariness is everything that is away from home: the novel, the exotic, the unexpected. Distance determines desire, and anything determined as unknowable and unattainable inspires a compulsive need to know or to experience or to own. The ordinariness of people in reality programmes is played off against an aspect of themselves defined as extraordinary in ways which both provide for and contain dramatic tension. The combination of the two - ordinariness and extraordinariness - makes them TV-worthy: the former supporting affects of intimacy, authenticity and credibility, and the latter driving the compulsion to watch.

Just such a dynamic may be applied to the medium of television itself. Located in ordinariness (the home) the television offers the potential for engagement with the extraordinary wonders of the outside world. Since its commercial introduction in the 1950s, television has been promoted for its contradictory appeal as public and private, marvellous and everyday, distant yet domestic. Cecelia Tichi's analysis of television's commercial promotion during the period of its introduction to the American public⁴⁶ illustrates this tension. At the point of its inception, the potential strangeness of this remarkable military technology had to be repackaged for the suburban family home. The general sales pitch promised consumers excitement and adventure from the comfort of their

⁴⁶ For a local perspective, see Laurence Simmons' article on the commercial introduction of television to New Zealand in 1960. Simmons cites Tichi and Spigel in his analysis of advertisements, cartoons and articles about television and its uses in the popular press during this period (59-67).

favourite armchair. Thus, television always hedged its bets, promising escapism, adventure and excitement on the one hand and security, familiarity and continuity on the other. The hyperbolic print advertisements for television sets in this era, as analysed by Tichi, engage in the 'simultaneous expansion and containment of meaning' (16) in an effort to both celebrate and circumvent the very newness of television.

Tichi has also interpreted the marketing effort to retro-style the television set as evidence of just such a contradictory desire. In an effort to ameliorate the alarming modernity of such space-age technology, manufacturers of television sets in the 1950s hit on a Trojan horse marketing ploy by which each set was encased in a faux-antique cabinet. The emphasis on the packaging meant that many advertising campaigns shifted the locus of consumer attention entirely onto the console. As Tichi extrapolates, this item of furniture was overburdened with connotations of the old world (models named after English counties or European hotels), a nostalgia for pre-industrial craftsmanship (products labelled 'hand crafted' or 'hand rubbed'), evidence of material value (the use of expensive woods such as mahogany and cherry) and aspirations to high culture (the implied replication of a private box at the theatre) (18-23). All this served to make television appear classy as well as classic, aspirational yet traditional, contemporary yet historical. Moreover, the emphasis on television as a piece of furniture tied it to the domestic sphere in ways which naturalized the foreign body of military surveillance equipment. The extraordinary was made ordinary thanks to a sugar-coating of domestic familiarity.

Both Tichi and Lynn Spigel interpret this marketing strategy as having a gender bias. The faux-antique console was clearly intended to please the housewife rather than her husband. Elsewhere, different kinds of marketing plans pitched television sets to men: as the sportsman's 'ringside seat', the adventurer's rocket ship, the fantasist's 'magic carpet' (Tichi 12-18; Spigel, *Installing* 12-16). Such a distinction seems to seal men and women into the public/private binary: male consumers of television are discovering continents, pitching for their favourite team and engaging in current affairs, while their female counterparts are quietly at home polishing the mahogany veneer. And yet, on closer inspection, television was sold to both men and women along a similar axis – that of technology tamed. The emphasis and the aesthetics of these gendered marketing campaigns may have differed significantly, but the pattern of containment is the same. Military technology encased in antiquated furniture and escapist fantasies which begin and end in the living room are similar strategies by which the extraordinary may be both appreciated and contained. Thus, whatever the content of television, the domestic site and the mode of reception insure that it is framed by the intimate banality of home life, making ordinariness the point to which the medium always returns.

Aspects of television's form and function which distinguish it from other models of family entertainment (such as cinema) or togetherness (such as sports games) reiterate a model of social and spatial proximity which tethers the medium to the ordinary and/or domestic. The television set itself (at least from the 1960s on) is diminutive, portable and affordable. Since its inception, and

according to changing trends in interior design, it has been styled so as to fit naturally amongst the living room furniture. Once established, its presence in the home has been constant and thus unremarkable. Transmission is continuous, ubiquitous, simultaneous; being everywhere it is nowhere in particular and might be taken for granted. Though the technology which facilitates television broadcast may be marvellous, the arena of the television set is so emphatically domestic that it quickly becomes naturalised as something commonplace and ordinary. Thus, the dimensions and domesticity of the television set (small, local, knowable and ownable) countermand potentially extraordinary aspects of the medium.

In terms of viewing practices, the medium of television reiterates this model of privacy and containment. The conflation of the television set with the hearth, the radio, or the family piano on one hand and the cinema, playhouse or sports arena on the other (Tichi 23-30) shows the extent to which television audiences sought familiar reference points for family togetherness and/or public entertainment on which to model their relationship with the new technology. However, the medium of television offered a unique combination of public spectacle and private viewing. A ratio of one television to one or several viewers and close physical proximity between screen and viewers established a kind of intimacy rarely found at the theatre or sports field. The optimum position for the television set in the living room is one which facilitates comfortable engagement with all available seats, so that the set appears as a participant in a confidential (even dialogic) circle. Indeed, commentators seem to find it difficult to resist the anthropomorphisation of the television set, as a member of the family, an old acquaintance or a 'fireside guest' (Judy Dupuy qtd in Berenstein 32). Unlike the imperious cinema screen, enthroned in her velvet draped temple and to be visited only at certain pre-assigned times and according to certain rituals of behaviour, the family television is cosily ensconced in the second-best armchair and always ready for a chat. Thus the physical attributes of the medium allow for a particular relationship with the viewer, one characterised by proximity, intimacy and familiarity.

Ordinary People

As the medium stations itself within the home as a family friend or cheerful neighbour (even when it is switched off), it follows suit that the people presented on screen occupy a similar cultural domain. Since its commercial introduction through to the present day, people appearing on television have adopted personae characterized by the everyday, the local and the familiar. Even though television undoubtedly functions, in many instances, as a vehicle for the representation of the extra-ordinary person – such as a celebrity guest on a chat show – the imperative of the medium to engage with ordinary viewers means that the status of these 'special' people is contained and modulated by a discursive emphasis on ordinary experience.

As Rhona Berenstein's review of early commentaries on television acting indicates, actors for the small screen were coached in the art of 'natural', understated performance and, as Mann has delineated, their roles were those of 'ordinary individuals – frustrated butchers and homely aunts' (Denise Mann qtd in Berenstein 42). Fiction genres, such as sitcom and soap opera, which evolved in response to the new format of television, have thrived there ever since. With their emphasis on family, domesticity, and everyday experiences, these programme types were fully appropriate to their medium. Glamour, spectacle and stardom belonged at the local picture house; television relied instead on the appeal of intimacy, familiarity and believability. As one early commentator noted, the 'intimate home screen' was an interface by which 'the artist [became] a member of the family circle; he or she enter[ed] the home more as a friend or neighbor than as a performer' (Orrin Dunlap Jr. qtd in Berenstein 43). In much the same way as the medium of television, and the object of the television set itself, were accommodated (discursively and bodily) by 1950s households, the people appearing on television were coded as ordinary, and located amongst their audience as relatives, friends and neighbours.

Spigel summarises the drive towards typicality, familiarity and social proximity in her assessment of the fifties family sitcom *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (ABC 1952-1966):

In popular magazines the Nelsons were famous for their typicality, and in many ways the program was constructed on realist codes of representation. The Nelson home was decorated with a warm family feel, and shots of their surrounding neighborhood created a sense of a real space. The stories centered around normal, real-life adventures, so that the program has a general sense of 'everydayness' about it. (21)

In Spigel's reading, aspects of realness (ie. realist codes of representation, real space, real-life) are bound up with constructs of localness, normality and familiarity. Ordinarity on television, however stylized, set-dressed or selective, works to certify the authenticity of the characters and events portrayed. Familiarity brings the behaviour and attitudes of people on screen close to the lived experience of the viewer and makes them credible, generating in John Ellis's terms 'a relationship of humanist sympathy' (*Visible Fictions* 136). Domestic spaces, as represented in sitcoms and soap operas, are easily recognized and approximate the environment in which audiences are located at the time of television reception. This effect of social proximity is critical to the dynamic by which many television formats foster viewer engagement because it heightens authenticity – even when the world portrayed is fictional. As noted by Ellis, 'Broadcast TV has ingested the domestic and bases its dramas upon it. When it does not address its audience directly, it creates a sense of familiarity between its fictions and its audience, a familiarity based on a notion of the familial which is assumed to be shared by all' (*Visible Fictions* 137).

Sitcoms do not affect to show actuality, but they knowingly deploy the tropes of ordinariness, domesticity and the everyday in ways which authenticate the characters and their motivations. In the case of *Ozzie and Harriet*, as for many sitcoms from *I Love Lucy* (CBS 1951-1957) to *Two and a Half Men* (CBS 2003-), the stars of the show used their real names and borrowed from their

public identities to create their screen characters. *Ozzie and Harriet* extended this device to the supporting cast and has been cited as 'perhaps the only series in television history in which the entire regular cast play themselves as scripted characters' (Kompore 115). *Ozzie and Harriet* Nelson and their coterie re-presented a version of their domestic, married life according to the prescriptions of family-centred television situation comedy. This device, which co-opted actual names and pre-existing social relationships from the world beyond the studio sets, fused a *frisson* of actuality (affecting to glimpse into the actors' real marital relations) with a generic formula characterized by intimacy, familiarity and domesticity. Elements of extraordinariness (the star power of the Nelsons) were balanced by ordinariness (marital squabbles, domestic chores) and framed by the stylized version of the ordinary presented by the sitcom rubric.

Frances Bonner has written of non-fiction television entertainment - a field which she broadly characterises as 'ordinary television' and which includes infotainment, game shows, cooking and gardening programmes, talk and chat shows, and some examples of reality programming - in ways which indicate a similar dynamic between the ordinary and the extraordinary. Bonner cites John Langer's discussion of the television personality and the terms by which he differentiates this figure from the cinema star. Bonner summarises his distinctions thus:

stars were 'larger than life' while personalities were 'part of life'; a distance is maintained between star and audience while personalities insist on intimacy and immediacy; contact with stars is sporadic and uncertain, with personalities regular and predictable; stars play parts, personalities play themselves; stars are idealised and revered while personalities are experienced as familiar. (65-66)

In Langer's analysis (as interpreted by Bonner) the concept of ordinariness typifies television personalities in much the same way as it has been deployed earlier in this chapter to define television as a medium. Both the medium and its personalities are integral ('part of life', everyday and everywhere), close by (intimate and immediate) and banal (enmeshed in diurnal routine, 'regular and predictable'). Conversely, the structures of cinema produce distance, controlling and delimiting access to stars and reifying their status as unattainable. Cinema stars are idealised because of this distance, which promotes admiration, envy and desire. Moreover, an assumption of truthfulness is attached to performance on television as people are considered to 'play themselves' rather than 'play parts'. For Langer, this holds true even for television personalities who are in fact characters in serialised television fictions such as soap opera or sitcom. Not only is the representation of self on television more likely to be read as authentic but, as Langer suggests, '[t]elevision personalities become "guarantors of truth"' in a broader sense:

Because personalities are embedded in television's cycles of repetition, becoming over time both intimate and familiar, they also may come to be defined as trustworthy and credible sources of knowledge and experience. The very repetition of their appearances week after week supports the authority of their wisdom. The way that they are seen to make sense of the world and to contextualise events - whether in 'factual' or 'fictional' forms - begins to take on a certain truthfulness and even a certain infallibility. (364)

Langer identifies the extent to which this perception of truthfulness and authenticity arises out of temporal patterns of broadcast which make the appearances of various personalities on screen routine, reliable and thus ordinary and everyday. Ordinarity creates familiarity, which generates intimacy and trust; regularity promotes reliability and credibility. In short, when people on television are perceived as ordinary and viewed regularly, they seem utterly real.

Building on this distinction, Bonner considers the extent to which those people appearing on ('ordinary') television who are coded as 'special' because of their fame, fortune or professional success work to certify their ordinarity and thus their authenticity as television personae. Well-known presenters, such as Roseanne Barr in the United States or Cilla Black in the United Kingdom, who have celebrity identities which precede and continue to operate outside the parameters of the television programme they are currently hosting, get 'on side' with the audience by giving up personal information of a domestic and private nature, or asserting their personal weaknesses, past addictions or romantic failures (69). By aligning themselves with the everyday experiences of ordinary people, and by exposing themselves as human and fallible, star presenters trade in the distance of celebrity for the intimacy of commonality, as they deliberately play to the strengths of the television medium. Similarly, Bonner suggests, celebrities on chat shows will promote themselves and their latest commodity or cause through the carefully managed exchange of personal information for air time (83). When Hollywood actress Jennifer Aniston appeared on Oprah Winfrey's chat show in the wake of her high-profile divorce from another film star⁴⁷, she described (in response to Oprah's meaningful invitation to let the audience know how she was getting along) the experience of waking up each morning, thinking about the day ahead, making a cup of coffee and reading the paper. The activities described are domestic (set in the home) but more especially intimate (set in the bedroom), both banal (it is the same everyday) and generic (everyone has a similar start to the day). These connotations are precisely the reasons why these activities are presented by the star and received by her audience as utterly and irrefutably true. At this moment, the intensely ordinary nature of the star's experience certifies her integrity as an individual and (conversely) as an actor. It also certifies the authenticity of the intimate, 'live' exchange between Aniston and Oprah, by narrowing the temporal frame to a moment. (See Chapter Five for a full discussion of temporal immediacy on television). Aniston's detailed remarks serve to eliminate the context of the flashy, over-lit stage set (complete with billboard-size photographs of Aniston and a projection screen scrolling extracts from her latest movies) and focus on the specific content of her particular and private life.

As Bonner notes, the habit of contextualising celebrity output (movies, books, albums) through biographical information about the performer works to 'shift the focus from the work and its artifice to the "real" and its naturalness' (83). This makes an interesting counterpoint to formats like *Ozzie and Harriet*. The scripted sitcom which adopts names and (in this case) marital, familial and social

⁴⁷ This episode of *Oprah* (Harpo Incorporated/CBS Broadcast International) screened in New Zealand on TV3 on 12 Jan 2006.

relationships from beyond the frame authenticates the screen story with a peppering of actuality, and heightens an affect of intimacy between viewer and performer by seeming to facilitate access to the actors' real lives. In the performance of her public self, the sitcom star Jennifer Aniston knows just how to engage an audience, describing her personal experience of post-divorce life as if it were the opening (and highly generic) scene of a domestic comedy. Thus, the discursive intersection between ordinariness and authenticity takes place in the private home. The domestic arena is read as a site of truthfulness precisely because it lacks an audience, rendering performance meaningless. For actresses Harriet Nelson, on set in a prime-time comedy, and Jennifer Aniston, on the silver stage of a chat show studio, it is enough to simply cite the fact that there are times when the public is not looking.

An Ordinary Family

In 1973 the breakthrough documentary *An American Family* (PBS), a 'fly-on-the-wall' twelve part series covering seven months in the lives of the Louds, an affluent Californian family, provided a new axis for the recognition and interpretation of ordinary people on screen. Partly in response to the idealised representation of domestic life offered by the sitcoms of the 1950s and 60s (*Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best* [CBS 1954-1962], *Leave It to Beaver* [CBS/ABC 1957-1963] et al), documentary producer Craig Gilbert created a television series which he hoped would show (in the best observational tradition) the actuality of wealthy, upper-middle-class American families (Ruoff 17). The title of the series alone indicates its discursive emphasis on the everyday, the local and the familiar. The intentionally unoriginal subject of family life promises typicality, domesticity and familiarity. The use of the generic pronoun makes this 'every-family' and, in a contradictory movement, the specificity of 'American' makes it a particular family with certain cultural characteristics. For American audiences, this inclusive/exclusive dynamic sited the family within a shared cultural domain, fostering a sense in which this American family was less representative and more 'one of us'. This is typical of the way in which an emphasis on the ordinariness of people on television brings them close to viewers, citing not only shared human experience (the family group) but shared space (the domestic interior) and shared place (the nation).

However, the extent to which *An American Family* cited other models of televisual domestic relations only heightened (as intended by the producer) the contrast between the two. Hitherto, ordinariness on television, as typified by family sitcoms, had been codified through the use of domestic settings, familiar relationships and trivial concerns which were nevertheless highly stylised, formulaic and contrived for laughs. In *An American Family*, the settings, relationships and topics of conversation were the same, but their representation – in terms of visuals, audio track and storylines – was radically different. Although material was edited into coherent narrative threads and cut to maintain spatial and temporal continuity, the look and feel of this programme was much like an amateur home movie: the hand-held camera shakes, shots lose focus or become

overexposed, takes are over-long, audio reproduction is sometimes imperfect, 'characters' mumble and repeat themselves, action is often slow and aimless and episodes end inconclusively (see Chapter Four for a detailed discussion of the affective intimacy of the home-movie aesthetic). Thus, *An American Family* presented a new televisual language for the particular nexus of intimacy, domesticity and banality hitherto associated with ordinariness, and television audiences were obliged to revise their interpretive framework. The dialogue between characters in a family sitcom could now be read as a performance of ordinariness, a polished, formulaic and stylised version of everyday familial interaction. In contrast, the broadcast footage of the Louds appeared to show, with a minimum of mediation, the actual operation of ordinariness in its natural (private and domestic) environment. Domestic ordinariness on television had a new look, one which was linked more closely with actuality.

The phenomenal popularity of the series, as well as the media frenzy and critical debate which surrounded its broadcast, was a surprise to both the programme makers and the broadcasting network, as documented by Jeffrey Ruoff.⁴⁸ Documentary precedents for *An American Family* which presented similar material in another medium (for instance the feature documentary film *A Married Couple*)⁴⁹ or different material in the same medium (for instance the television documentary *The Triumph of Christy Brown*)⁵⁰ had attracted neither the viewership nor the intense critical scrutiny. *An American Family* became a media phenomenon because of the critical conjunction of ordinary, domestic subject matter and the ordinary, domestic medium. As argued above, the power of television rests with its capacity to generate affects of intimacy and immediacy. Thus, in form and content, it registers a thematic propensity for the domestic, familiar, ordinary and everyday. *An American Family* incorporated all of these discourses and, radically, tethered them to a representation of actual, lived experience. The real existence of the Loud family exacerbated the intensity of their on-screen ordinariness just as their ordinariness certified the truth of their self-representation. In this conflux between realness and ordinariness, television found its moment. Grounded in domesticity, everyday experience, mass culture, personal exposure and emotional response (both on screen and in terms of reception), *An American Family* and the media circus it generated revealed television at the height of its power.

Although Ruoff is at pains to distinguish *An American Family* from types of programming now termed reality television (xi-xii), the documentary series from the 1970s may be read as a successful prototype for 'ordinary people' TV. The representation of non-media-worthy people,

⁴⁸ See Ruoff, in particular Chapter Six (95-119).

⁴⁹ A feature-length observational documentary covering ten weeks of 'a marriage in crisis' (Allen King qtd. in Ruoff 12) recorded the private lives of a couple with a young child, and was released through cinemas in 1969. Directed by Allen King and filmed by Richard Leiterman, it was a direct influence on Gilbert when he wrote the treatment for *An American Family*. See Ruoff 12-13.

⁵⁰ An Emmy Award-winning documentary 'which told the moving story of a man who overcame physical disability to become a talented writer' (Ruoff 11) broadcast on NET in 1970. Directed by Craig Gilbert and recorded by Alan and Susan Raymond, this was the first project they collaborated on prior to *An American Family*. See Ruoff 10-11.

conversing 'unscripted' within a domestic setting, characterised by the thematic use of banal and repetitive activities, intimate relationships and personal confession, reads like a rubric for much of the material now screening under the banner of reality television. The discourses which governed the promotion and reception of *An American Family* similarly anticipate the media life of people presented on television through reality programming. The extent to which the media representation of the Loud family indicated the contradictory pursuit of the extraordinary in the ordinary, is a case in point.

In the broadcast phase of the documentary series, publicity material distributed to reviewers and advertisements promoting the series to viewers deliberately sensationalised the Louds and their behaviour in order to attract attention to the show. Advance press material described the Loud family via a litany of material possessions: an 'eight-room stucco ranch house', a pool, 'a Jaguar, Volvo, Toyota and Datsun pick-up truck' and 'a horse...two standard poodles...two cats and a bowl of goldfish', implying an excess of wealth and property which did not correlate to that of the average viewer (qtd in Ruoff 98). In terms of identity, the most notorious aspects of the Loud family during and after the broadcast of the show, played up by publicity releases and associated media, were the eldest son's homosexuality, the father's infidelities and the mother's decision to file for divorce. In this way the family were offered up to the viewing public as somewhat aberrant, a discursive shift which impacted directly on reception. If the family were abnormal, the programme could be read as a freak show and its audience were spared the discomfort of recognition. Once again, a representation of extraordinariness excites interest, heightens spectacle and generates distance.

However, network publicists knew that in order to really engage an audience, the programme would have to make its claims on the ordinary as well. As noted by Ruoff, *New York Times* teasers for the show seemed motivated equally by sensationalism and conventionalism:

Conflict and strain are showing between them, but you'll see some of the positive aspects of their marriage: cooperation when a special problem arises, and shared pride in their daughters. Conflict, cooperation and pride. Aren't they part of most families? (quoted in Ruoff 101)

This promotional blurb in the programme schedules exemplifies the pattern by which the medium of television facilitates forays into the extraordinary while maintaining the frame of domestic normality. In terms of both form and content, the abnormality of the divorce story is here contained within the discourse of ordinary family life. The trope of the nuclear family, emblematised here by parental pride, is a universal trigger to which all viewers are invited to respond empathetically and to refer to their own experience of living in a family. The extraordinary or aberrant aspects of the lives of the Loud family enticed viewers to tune in, but the conventional, familiar and recognisable elements of their daily life kept them watching.

Even as publicity material for the show managed a fine balance of representation between ordinary and extraordinary, critics of the format insisted on a conflation of the two positions, in which the

extraordinary (here freighted in the negative as abnormal, dangerous and false) subsumed the ordinary (freighted as wholesome, safe and authentic). This reading of the family arose in part out of a determination to read context as content, so that the luxury, materialism and excess which defined the Loud's habitat and lifestyle were taken as indicative of personal identity. In addition, this negative interpretation of the family wilfully confused the identities of the Louds as represented by the documentary with the extra-diegetic story of their post-broadcast celebrity. In this regard, the Louds encountered a similar slippage to that described by Emma Hutton at the beginning of this chapter. Like the Huttons in *Colonial House*, or any other 'ordinary' family which has appeared on television over time, the Louds - selected because of their anonymity - became extraordinary simply by being on TV. Thus, the Loud family were denounced by critics as exhibitionists, not because of their behaviour on screen but because of their willingness to appear on screen at all. Their celebrity, generated entirely by the circumstance of their mediation by television, was regarded by cultural critics of the era with profound suspicion and occasioned vitriolic personal attacks on individual family members in the press.⁵¹ The family were repeatedly accused of being brash, over-emotional, exhibitionist, posturing, vacuous and materialistic – all terms which undermined their integrity as self-representing subjects.

Critics fearful of television's power – and the extent to which this power was grounded in everyday experience, emotional response and personal confession – attempted to grind away the foundation of the programme's status as real, by redefining its subjects as media con-artists, motivated by narcissism and materialism. By suggesting that their engagement with celebrity and its trappings was conscious and deliberate, critics relocated the family's essential identity at a level of superficial performance, implying that the family had signed a Faustian pact with the programme makers to sell their private lives as spectacle in return for fame and fortune.⁵² In this way, the programme's critics deployed aspects of the family's celebrity as a way of undermining the truth-quotient of their representation on screen. In this equation, the more media-savvy the family appeared to be, the more their representation within the documentary *and* on the media circuit post-broadcast was rendered as a self-conscious performance of identity. Thus, the more the Louds were presented as extra-ordinary (in any way), the less credibility they were able to maintain as self-representing subjects.

There is thus a discursive intersection mapped here among ordinariness, intimacy and authenticity. Critics of *An American Family* attacked the credibility of the programme and its participants by extrapolating and emphasising the more extraordinary aspects of the family's experience. These were either part of the diegesis - their material wealth, their divorce, the son's homosexuality - or extra-diegetic - their celebrity appearances and the material wealth generated by their post-

⁵¹ The novelist Anne Roiphe's review in the *New York Times Magazine* was one of the most vicious. See Ruoff 102-105.

⁵² Anecdotal evidence collected by Ruoff suggests that in fact the family were largely misled by Gilbert's intention to produce a documentary on the modern American family and believed the portrait would be flattering. See, for instance, 18-19.

broadcast fame. As the family members were exposed on television in both cases, their identities became entwined with issues of mediation and performance and thus discredited as inauthentic. The intimacy of the family portrait in the documentary gave way naturally to an extended public celebrity which constantly re-staged the exposure of their private lives, so that their identities were again defined by the circumstances of their notoriety, and they were characterised as exhibitionist, thus performative, thus inauthentic. *An American Family* attracted passionate responses from its audiences, both positive and negative, because it engaged the ordinary and intimate medium of television in the re-presentation of ordinary, intimate and actual lives. As extrapolated by this chapter, ordinariness on television is deployed as both a structure of intimacy, bringing people on television close to viewers, and as a structure of authenticity, certifying their self-representation as genuine as it gestures to their real lives beyond the scope of the screen. When *An American Family* took the intimacy of family life as its theme, and the banality of off-screen life as its process, the affect was so powerfully intimate, ordinary and real that it appeared, to some, both excessive and offensive.

Performing the Ordinary

The rise of reality programming in the late twentieth century fulfils the precedent set by *An American Family* for representing ordinary people on television. Like the documentary series, reality television is grounded in domesticity, everyday experience, mass culture, personal exposure and emotional response (both on screen and in terms of reception). Likewise, reality programming attracts the kind of negative critical attention (indicative of cultural anxieties circulating around the medium of television in general) which was trained on *An American Family* in its day. Subjects of contemporary television phenomena such as *Big Brother* (2000-) are interrogated and undermined by critics of reality programming in ways which echo the public condemnation of the Louds.⁵³ Now, as then, the pursuit and attainment of fame is regarded as an aspiration to fakery, rendering television participants not only unworthy of attention, but unworthy of their status as real. In this context, the acute self-reflexivity of much reality programming in the twenty-first century (including programmes about television cameras, wannabe superstars or celebrities looking for a comeback) seems like a pre-emptive strike. When programme formats contrive televisual landscapes in which viewers watch viewers watching themselves, naysayers' accusations of narcissism and voyeurism seem redundant. More usefully, reality programming which stages extreme encounters with celebrity and/or performance may be read in terms of its continued adherence to television's precept of ordinariness as a marker of authentic experience, despite, or perhaps through, its over-determined relationship with the extraordinary.

⁵³ John Corner's summation of critical objections to the *Big Brother* housemates in 2004, which he defines as 'the problem of the "bad ordinary"' (*Foreword* xiii), might apply equally to the furore around the Loud family three decades earlier. Corner describes this 'problem' as arising out of 'concern [...] expressed at a representation involving apparently ordinary people (always, in certain dominant views, inclined towards the vulgar and the personally disappointing in ways unsuited to national visibility) being enjoyed by quite large numbers of other ordinary people' (*Foreword* xiii).

As noted above, the status of ordinariness is put under pressure by the publicising effects of television. The simple fact of re-presentation on screen problematises the definition of ordinary as regular, commonplace, unexceptional. To be televised is to be picked out from a crowd (literally in the case of vox pop interviews, or spectator close-ups at a sports event), to be selected, however briefly, as television-worthy. Reality programming (with the exception of 'celebrity specials', of which more later) is predicated on the camera-innocence of its participants, never using the same participant twice, unless (ironically) he/she is brought back as a television celebrity. As for Emma Hutton and her 'un-normal' family, subjects of reality television who are selected on the basis of their anonymity and normality find themselves straddling conceptions of ordinary and extraordinary as soon as broadcasting begins. This dynamic has been argued both positively and negatively. As the critical backlash against *An American Family* exemplified, a willingness to be exposed by a public medium may be taken as evidence of a wilful, personal exhibitionism and performativity. Here, the non-ordinary (read as deviant) status of a person on screen eclipses and nullifies his/her potential status as ordinary. On the other hand, Langer's reading of the television personality (cited above) suggests that the powerful and pervasive condition of ordinariness which defines the very medium of television creates an environment in which a person who appears on television is necessarily received as ordinary by his/her audience (regardless of his/her particular status on screen as factual or fictional, famous or unknown). Within this framework, as extrapolated by Bonner, elements of the extraordinary (such as the specialness of a film star appearing on a television chat show) are tested productively against evidence of the ordinary. Ordinariness is the discursive point to which the medium of television (domestic, quotidian, routine) always returns. Likewise, people appearing in reality programmes are always recalled to their status as ordinary, no matter how far they may seem to stray from its path. This is because the ordinariness of people on television, conferring credibility, familiarity and proximity, is critical to their public appeal. For these reasons, high-rating and internationally popular reality formats which take performance, celebrity and the pursuit of fame as their principal subjects - including, but not limited to, *Big Brother*, *Popstars* (TV2 1999) and *The Osbournes* (MTV 2002-2005) - begin and end in the domain of the ordinary.

Of all reality television phenomena the internationally successful format *Big Brother* (reproduced by thirty countries since 1999 [Mathijs and Jones 1]), has garnered the most intense critical scrutiny. As the pre-eminent instance of 'social experiment' reality television, *Big Brother* invites attention on the basis of its questionable ethics (incarceration and surveillance), its over-exposure of private life (the shower room and reputed sex scenes) and its compulsive manifestation of self-perpetuating celebrity (making people famous for being famous). Moreover, its innovative strategies of broadcast and reception, which enable viewers to see everything, all the time, and to subsequently vote out the programme participants they are least interested in watching, have invited comparisons with Bentham's Panopticon. Thus, *Big Brother* may be characterised as outré, extrovert and exhibitionist (extraordinary and liberating) on the one hand and contrived, mechanical and controlling (extraordinary and punitive) on the other.

However, on closer analysis aspects of the programme which identify it as extraordinary are both modulated and contained by discourses of the ordinary. Firstly, by taking the medium of television as its theme, *Big Brother* engages with discourses of domesticity and the everyday.⁵⁴ Furthermore, unlike the high-profile 'social experiment' format of *Survivor*, *Big Brother* chooses to watch people interact within a domestic environment. In each of the countries which have produced the series, the set has been built around the familiar social-spatial construct of a 'house'. Following on from this, the activities which take place in the house – principally eating, sleeping and lounging – correspond to the conventional and routine use of domestic space. In themselves, these activities produce evidence of ordinariness, generating a sense of social proximity with the audience who watch from their personal living spaces. Moreover, as form reflects content on this show, routine behaviours are represented through the extended duration of coverage, making the experience of viewing monotonous, repetitive and banal. The everydayness of *Big Brother*, both in terms of content and structures of broadcast and reception, compounds, as Corner notes, an almost 'criminal level of the inconsequential' (*Foreword* xiii).⁵⁵ Thus, *Big Brother* presents domestic and ordinary content via a domestic and ordinary medium. Rather than being extraordinary in any way, the form and content of *Big Brother* attracts attention because it takes the representation and manifestation of the ordinary to an unprecedented extreme.

Despite the very public context in which the intimate lives of the *Big Brother* housemates are watched and re-watched by audiences, the programme still contrives to produce affects of privacy through its staging of confession.⁵⁶ While Jennifer Aniston asserts her realness by reminding her public that there are times when there is no-one watching her (even as they watch her recount the missed event), housemates on *Big Brother* resort to the Diary Room when they wish to exhibit their true, private selves. The contradiction may seem too obvious, as the rubric of the show is that 'Big Brother is watching you' all the time. Nevertheless, the relationship between a solitary diarist and a video camera (explored further in Chapter Four) produces a particularly intense degree of intimacy through its manifestation of private, cathartic confession. The Diary Room confessions, often

⁵⁴ See Chapter Five for a detailed discussion of the extent to which the particular broadcasting strategies adopted by *Big Brother* determine the experience of present time on this show. This discussion includes considerations of ordinariness and the everyday, as daily broadcasts and parallel webcasts incorporate the format into the fabric of day-to-day life and viewer vote-casting heightens an experience of social immediacy. In this way, the more extraordinary elements of *Big Brother*'s processes of broadcast and reception are contained within discourses of the ordinary.

⁵⁵ To quote Corner in full, '*Big Brother*'s use of the mundane event, of casual, incidental talk and narrative duration (preparing the meal, chatting in the garden, sleeping!) carries with it for some a criminal level of the inconsequential' (*Foreword* xiii).

⁵⁶ Biressi and Nunn note that 'The paradox of shows such as *Big Brother* is that in order to satisfy their own ends of achieving media celebrity, of hopefully managing a transition from the *Big Brother* house to the postmodern public sphere of celebrity culture, the housemates must agree to inhabit a kind of parodic private sphere of enforced domesticity and therapeutic confession. In this sphere the housemates are forced to interact in contrary naturalistic and un-naturalistic ways; washing dishes, cooking and doing chores but also playing party games, dressing up and talking in the diary room' (21). Thus, the staging of confession is linked with celebrity culture, and demarcated from everyday, ordinary activities. I would argue, however, that the converse also holds true: through confession, people on television (including those already determined as celebrities) exhibit their ordinary (fallible, emotional, vulnerable), and thus authentic, selves.

accompanied by demonstrative displays of emotion, are no less paradoxical than Aniston's 'private' admissions on the chat show circuit. Within the logic of the *Big Brother* format, it is the gaze of the other housemates (with whom each participant is in direct competition) which constitutes a threat to privacy, rather than that of the television audience. Because *Big Brother*, reflecting the form and function of the medium itself, makes recording cameras a constant, continuous and ubiquitous presence, the experience of either watching or being watched, is naturalised and unremarkable. Thus, it is possible for housemates to be alone in the Diary Room, even as they engage the omniscient, but unseen, *Big Brother* as a confessor, and through their status as alone signify a truthful representation of self.

The interrogation of housemates' identities becomes the *raison d'être* of *Big Brother*, providing the motivation to watch and vote. This interrogation is driven by an insistent belief in the existence of a 'true' self, one which might be 'revealed' by the structures of surveillance in the house,⁵⁷ emotional confessions in the Diary Room, the investigative reporting of the popular press, or speculative readings made by armchair psychologists in the audience.⁵⁸ Su Holmes, in her work on *Big Brother* and celebrity, has observed the inter-textuality of the media phenomenon generated by this format, in which a full range of media - tabloid newspapers, celebrity gossip magazines, subsidiary television productions such as 'behind-the-scenes' documentaries and the late night 'Uncut' versions of the show, official and unofficial internet sites – extrapolate the personal narratives (past, present and future) of the housemates in ways which multiply and amplify their contradictory identities as both ordinary people and celebrities (124-130). These articles offer stories about the individual's life and experiences prior to their exposure on television as evidence of their true (ie, unmediated) existence. As Holmes clarifies,

This emphasis on the past self is paradoxically an attempt to offer the intimacy of the 'unmediated' identity. It is presented as 'authentic' precisely because it has not been subject to the manipulation of the televisual lens and the performative context this engenders. (125)

As stories in the press are always based on the testimonies of family and friends (since the person in the house is unable to speak to the media) the information provided is filtered through other lenses, including memory, affectionate bias and comparative judgements, which are arguably more distorting than that of the television camera. Nevertheless, the actuality of these relationships (as opposed to the virtual intimacy generated between viewers and the people they watch) confers an authority on the stories told, which authenticates the identities of the people on screen. Typically,

⁵⁷ For further discussion of the revelation of self through structures of surveillance, see Mark Andrejevic's work on *Big Brother* - in particular, Chapter Four (95-116). Andrejevic suggests that 'reality TV helps to reposition the portrayal of surveillance and highlight its advantages not to the watchers but to the watched' (95) insofar as being watched on television provides opportunities for personal revelation which support and manifest the generation of self.

⁵⁸ For further discussion of the extent to which *Big Brother* housemates are interrogated by audiences for signs of their 'real self', and evidence of the kinds of speculative readings made by fans on-line, see John Hartley's article on the second series of *Big Brother* in Australia, in which he makes a case study of an unpopular female housemate named Katrina Miani.

these background stories produce ordinariness as a nexus of intimacy (sexual history, friendships and familial relationships), domesticity (childhood photographs, family anecdotes) and banality (school life, work life, favourite food and beloved pets). Thus, proof of an existence prior to television exposure is both a proof of ordinariness on *Big Brother*, and a proof of the real. Yet the background story presented in the popular press is only one aspect of the construction of identity on this show. The private self may also be exhibited on television via the intimacy of the domestic setting, the banality of daily routines or the heightened intensity of the solitary confession in the Diary Room.

While *Big Brother* makes people famous simply by causing them to be watched, talent show reality formats such as *Popstars* and *Idol* (2001-), as noted by Holmes, produce celebrity as an effect of innate ability and hard work (120). By engaging with the mechanisms of the celebrity industries, 'reality pop' (Holmes 119) formats actively authenticate the transformation of ordinary into extraordinary as they anchor the fantasy narratives of a talent 'discovered' and 'overnight success' in the economic realities of a competitive marketplace. (Talent formats of a different kind - including *America's Next Top Model* [UPN 2003-], *Project Runway* [Bravo 2004-] and *The Apprentice* [NBC 2004-] – likewise invoke a meritocratic logic in their processes of selection and reward). These performance-oriented programmes thereby run two stories in parallel: the making of a (pop)star, in which the participants interact with featured experts such as record executives, choreographers and make-up artists, and the making of a media celebrity in which the participants interact (in a different way) with the directors, editors, production company press agents and television audience fan base. Although the making of a media star (famous for being famous) is carefully obscured by the making of a professional (famous for their talent), it is an open secret on these formats that the success of the second relies on the success of the first. In the British version of *Popstars* (ITV 1999), these two sets of relationships collapsed into each other in interesting ways: the hundreds of fans who lined up for autographs outside the music shop are not fans of the music but fans of the television programme; similarly, the journalists who flocked to interview the new band did not question them on their plans to tour or their upcoming single but on the impact of television exposure and their experience of participating in the programme. In this way, the making of a pop star operates as an allegory for the making of a television star, both obscuring and revealing the strategies of celebrity which drive the programme's appeal.

Despite the openness with which 'reality pop' formats manufacture stardom, the preservation of the participants' status as ordinary remains critical to the success of these formats. While the display of extraordinariness provides for the kinds of viewing pleasures associated with envy, admiration and desire, an appearance of ordinariness sustains familiarity, proximity and credibility. In the absence of established celebrity, talent is not enough to keep viewers engaged. Rather, audiences watch (and vote) because they care about pop show competitors, and they care because they believe they are real. Consequently, pop formats stage-manage the delineation between the private and professional, or ordinary and extraordinary, identities of competitors. This distinction is most clearly

revealed by the *Idol* shows, as the brightly-lit stage explicitly identifies the arena of performance. On stage, participants adopt the mannerisms, dance moves and accents of a pop performance code, and cinematography, lighting and editing follow suit. Off stage, the same participants revert to the bashful, mumbling, giggling personae of the ordinary person, and the representational mode shifts to observational. Their ordinary identity is protectively maintained by the format, which frames each stage performance with snapshots of their off-stage life, including larking about with other competitors in the *Idol* house and visits home to the family. More specifically, the *Idol* presenter and the judging panel, as media professionals and industry experts, marshal the border-crossing between ordinary and extraordinary through their brief interviews with competitors at either end of each performance. In this way, the *Idol* shows distinguish between instances in which subjects are officially watched (as professionals) and moments when they are watched unofficially (as private individuals). As for any reality format, it is the unofficial, backstage glance which affords glimpses of the 'real' person.

One reality format which takes the backstage glance as its principal motif is the MTV series *The Osbournes*. As an intimate portrayal of notorious rocker Ozzy Osbourne and his family, *The Osbournes* combines the domestic setting under surveillance (*Big Brother*) with the meta-text of professional celebrity (*Popstars*). The success of the show not only ensured the resurgence of Ozzy's cult following, but launched the pop career of his teenage daughter Kelly. Thus, *The Osbournes* produces, sustains and reinvents celebrity in a variety of ways, even as it engages with discourses of the domestic ordinary.⁵⁹ In fact, the series riffs on the self-evident tensions between abnormality (excessive wealth, drug use, abusive language, outlandish personal display) and normality (breakfast in the kitchen, a teenager's curfew, banal daily exchanges of domestic information). As noted by Derek Kompare, 'The hook of *The Osbournes* is the fact that despite their apparent excesses of wealth and behavior, the family still somehow functions as a normative, loving unit' (108). Compared upon its release with both *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* and *An American Family*,⁶⁰ *The Osbournes* manages to exemplify the tropes of domestic family comedy even as it sends them up. (The retro-styled title music and credit sequence both mock the television sitcoms of the fifties – and the family values they assumed - and pay homage to them). As noted above, domesticity sustains a relationship with authenticity because the private, intimate loop of home life – where confidences are shared, bodies exposed and diaries kept - discloses non-performative, thus truthful, behaviour. As Kompare suggests, 'the point of *The Osbournes* is to distinguish the "real" Ozzy (and his family) from that already-established celebrity. Accordingly, the series pushes Ozzy's star persona to the background [...]. Instead, we are constantly shown a "backstage" Ozzy' (Kompare 110). Thus, in ways similar to the *Idol* shows, Ozzy Osbourne's

⁵⁹ For further discussion of *The Osbournes* and celebrity, see Jonathan Bignell's case study of the MTV show in his book on *Big Brother* (162-169).

⁶⁰ For further discussion of this aspect of the format, see Derek Kompare's article, in which he considers the extent to which *The Osbournes* pays homage to *An American Family* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* as it tests the boundaries of television genre and the construct of the family, only to revert to conventions of both. See also, Jennifer Gillan's article on the 'reality (star) sitcom', which similarly sets up a comparison between Ozzie Nelson and Ozzy Osbourne.

personal and professional identities are demarcated through the alternation of home and stage. Within this dichotomy, the 'real' Ozzy emerges within the frame of the domestic ordinary.

Writing on *Big Brother* in 2004, John Corner suggests that critical issues surrounding this programme may be 'closed up around three terms, the "ordinary", the "real" and the "honest"' (*Foreword* xiii). As this chapter has suggested, these three ideas – ordinariness, authenticity and credibility – are critical to both television as a medium and reality television in particular. In different ways, *Big Brother*, the *Idol* shows and *The Osbournes* seek to generate celebrity for programme participants while maintaining their status as ordinary. As these formats illustrate, the process by which 'nobody' participants are inducted into the realm of media professional threatens their relationship with the ordinary, as their newfound social status, wealth, travel and experiences put distance between them and their audience. When this occurs, the pleasures of watching from up close (with recognition) are exchanged for the pleasures of watching from afar (with admiration and envy). However, as discussed, television insists on the re-inscription of ordinariness in the representation of its celebrities. Once reality show participants become media stars (or, in the case of shows like *The Osbournes*, are stars already), they rely on familiar strategies of ordinarification – exposing details about their personal failings, domestic habits and intimate relationships – to maintain popularity with their audience and re-instate their relationship with the real. In this way, reality television circumscribes the production of celebrity, as it grounds the arc of stardom in discourses of amateurism, intimacy and domesticity.

The Extraordinary Story of Ordinary New Zealanders

Read in a national context, the discourse of domesticity applies equally to the private home and the country of citizenship. As noted by Misha Kavka, reality programming in New Zealand provides evidence of the extent to which global formats "come to ground" in a particular cultural zone' (*Paradise* 68) as internationally-generated formulae take on a local inflection. For New Zealanders, still adjusting to the novelty of seeing themselves on screen, the prevalence of locally-produced reality formats in prime-time provides ample opportunities for self-reflection. As suggested in the Introduction, New Zealanders readily own up to a cultural resistance to high-flyers and scene-stealers (popularly known as the 'tall poppy syndrome'). The tough traditions of pioneer settlement and high country farming have forged an image of the 'local hero' as a hard-working, gruff and taciturn 'kiwi bloke' (or bloke-ess). Thus, cutting tall poppies down to size reflects, on one hand, a remembered pride in a practical, commonsense society which worked as a team and, on the other, cultural insecurity (also founded in a settler history) translated into an excess of modesty. For mainstream New Zealand, being ordinary is inevitably tied to the cultural myths and legends which contribute to this understanding of national identity. This is one reason why reality programming in New Zealand is distinctly 'low key', both in terms of design and delivery. Although a broad range of programme types are produced in New Zealand, the mid-range, family formats about regular

people going about their working day (or, as discussed at length in the following chapter, mending their houses) are by far the dominant model. In this sense, reality programming in New Zealand conforms to Frances Bonner's notion of 'ordinary television' – a constant yet unremarkable presence on screen, part of the daily fabric of viewer's lives and populated by ordinary and familiar faces.

Nevertheless, even the most ordinary of reality television formats trade on the appeal of the extraordinary. In New Zealand as elsewhere, the combination of ordinary and extraordinary is, as noted by Kavka, 'perhaps the most elemental aspect of reality TV' (*Paradise* 69). Locally-produced reality formats tend to intensify the impact of the ordinary by subjecting it to encounters with the extraordinary. Elements of extraordinariness, whether provided by environments, activities or an aspect of the subject's personality, leaven the ordinary and provide visual and narrative interest. Through this device, a balance is struck between the complementary viewing pleasures afforded by the discourses of ordinariness and extraordinariness, naturalness and performance, privacy and exposure, familiarity and originality, routine and revelation. To this end, reality programmes which are most clearly located in the ordinary world and represent social relationships which are naturally occurring,⁶¹ such as 'life story' formats like *Life on Tape* (TV2 2000) or occupational reality shows like *Towies* (TV2 2000), seek to engage with the pleasures of extraordinariness by playing up unusual or remarkable aspects of the participants' identity or experience. These people are sometimes represented as ordinary people to whom extraordinary things are happening, or equally, extraordinary people attempting to meet the defining challenge of a 'normal' life. In this way, incursions into, or confrontations with, the extraordinary certify the all-important ordinariness of participating individuals by throwing up a foil to their everyday identities or experiences.

The New Zealand production of *Weddings* (TV2 1999-), a popular reality format about people getting married, neatly expresses the paradoxical impulse of the ordinary/extraordinary person. The central motif of the series - the wedding itself - is socially constructed as an extraordinary event in a person's life (the bride's 'special day', a supposedly once-in-a-lifetime experience) and yet it is also understood as a normalising ritual which indicates a person's conformity to certain tenets of conventional, ordinary existence. Thus, on the programme *Weddings*, every participant is both an ordinary person moved to tears by the emotional pressure of their 'special day' and an extraordinary person approaching a normative process in a unique way. Storylines on this programme range from the freakish (the nudists, the cross-dressers, the *Days of Our Lives* devotee) to the mundane (couples dealing with a very tight budget, an over-bearing mother-in-law, a time constraint) but in each case the participants are structured in this double way. This balancing

⁶¹ Participant relationships may be defined as 'natural' when the social grouping in which they operate exists prior to, and remains unchanged by, the making of the programme. This is usually a traditional family unit, although alternative family groupings such as work colleagues or young people in a shared house are included in this definition. The represented group is easily recognised and interpreted by the audience, and is perceived as both familiar and 'ordinary'. In another sense, 'natural' can also apply to participants' on-screen 'performance', or to the behaviour exhibited by them in the course of the production.

act between ordinary and extraordinary is, however, contained within a particular cultural framework which valorises a practical, 'DIY' approach to tasks. To this end, the cross-dresser has his wedding dress (inspired by Sharon Stone's) made by his mum and the *Days of Our Lives* enthusiast decorates her garden with synthetic baubles and garlands from the local Two Dollar Shop. In both cases, fantasies of other-worldly glamour (absorbed via American media) are re-created by New Zealanders in a low-budget, no-nonsense, number-eight fencing wire kind of way. Thus, extraordinary behaviour is re-incorporated into a local and familiar frame, modulated, with no small amount of affectionate pride, by a dose of Kiwi practicality.

To take a slightly different example, *Life on Tape*, a diary-cam format which follows ten storylines for a period of several months (see Chapter Four), works hard in its introductory episode to establish the credentials of its participants as both ordinary and extraordinary.⁶² One story which illustrates this paradigm is that of Fred and Theresa, a middle-class couple with a comfortable home and income who are unable to have children themselves. The series follows them as they travel to Russia and legally adopt two small children from a Russian orphanage. Their introductory screen title, 'How far will they go to get a baby?', and sound-bite, 'Well, I think when we lost him we felt like parents without a child, didn't we?', are deliberately ambiguous, designed to heighten viewer interest rather than represent their story. The statement 'parents without a child' is a gift to the producers as it offers a succinct paradigm for the ordinary/extraordinary person. It is the productive tension which arises from this paradox which provides the impetus for this particular story. Throughout the programme Fred and Theresa are consistently represented as both an ordinary married couple caught up in tragic and unusual circumstances, and a startlingly abnormal couple (Theresa actually describes herself as 'sub fertile' early on in her story, explaining that even IVF procedures could not make her pregnant) whose only wish is to function as a normal, nuclear family. Although the themes may be universal, and the balance between ordinary and extraordinary typical of video diary formats everywhere, *Life on Tape* speaks of particular cultural aspirations from a particular place. When Fred and Theresa travel (such a long way) to Russia, they stop over in London and turn their diary-cam on red London buses with antipodean enthusiasm. In another storyline, a low-income family with young kids send dad off to a surf-casting competition in the hope of raising a deposit for their own home. Taken as a whole, *Life on Tape* bespeaks a culture grounded in modest ambitions towards family and home-ownership. In this sense, even extreme circumstances are inflected with a low-key sense of New Zealand-ness.

⁶² Writing on the Australian video diary television series *First Person*, a format which has much in common with the New Zealand production *Life on Tape*, Michael O'Shaughnessey outlines the contradictory viewing pleasures entailed upon the ordinary/extraordinary axis:

I think the desired paradoxical implication is both that we could be like these ordinary subjects, and that they are special. 'Anyone can be a hero' says Tracey (FP,1996) and this seems to be one of the messages in the series: we, ordinary people, can all be heroes, extraordinary people. This is significant because if they were only extraordinary it would invite a distanced, voyeuristic audience perspective; if they are also ordinary it invites empathy and identification. (91-92)

Both *Life on Tape* and *Weddings* present participants in pre-existing social relationships (the family group) and in their natural habitat (the private home). As suggested above, both the family unit and the domestic site are freighted with connotations of intimacy and authenticity, simply because they are so ordinary and familiar. To this end, the furniture, accessories and architectural details of people's houses in 'life stories' formats are rarely highlighted or individuated by camera or narrative. Rather, buildings and rooms are backgrounded in ways which indicate their status as generic and confirm their function as a marker of ordinariness. Similarly, subjects may occasionally speak to camera in these programmes, even appearing to respond to questions posed by an interviewer, but the boundaries of their world are never crossed by members of the production team, thus preserving the authenticity of the re-presented scene. The presence of production personae is limited to voice-over commentary or, in the case of *Weddings*, linking segments shot at a neutral location. Although participants may have been selected by the production company, any sense of a formal selection process is elided from the format as such a concept would work contrary to the themes of community and common human experience. Thus, the foregrounding of their story, be it a wedding day, the birth of a child, or the fulfilment of a career ambition, makes these individuals special, while the themes of family, home and work contain their experiences within ordinary, daily life.

Occupational docu-soap formats which track the day-to-day experiences of a group of people who live, work or study together, such as *The Zoo* (TV One 2001-), *Towies* or *Service With a Smile* (TV2 2000), present another social category of the ordinary. Workplace formats show participants in their natural environment, occupied by their ordinary tasks, while the camera mode is principally observational. However, these formats differ from programmes located in the home, as they foreground details of the environment and mark the participants as professionals or 'specialists'. The equipment associated with the represented workplace is highlighted, even fetishised: the veterinarian's surgical implements, the towie's truck, the waitress's white apron. The occupational habitats presented by *Park Rangers* (TV One 2002), or the emergency rescue format *Choppers* (TV2 2001), both of which include sweeping aerial footage of mountains, farmland, forest and coastline, also trade on the resonant appeal of 'natural New Zealand'. In this instance, the 'workplace' has significant cultural currency, as images of a landscape which is distinctively New Zealand fosters a national nostalgia for working the land and being close to nature. This landscape is both 'special' because highly appreciated and everyday because it signifies home.

In this way, the more ordinary the programme, the more carefully elements of extraordinary experience are framed. At the other end of the spectrum, the inverse may be true. Examples of reality programming in New Zealand which revolve around performance and celebrity (and thus have extraordinariness built in) work to emphasise the ordinary. This includes formats which

contrive unlikely social relationships⁶³ in exotic locations under bizarre and/or competitive living conditions, thereby compounding a sense of the extraordinary along the axes of people, place and activities. New Zealand's desert island survival format *Treasure Island* (TV2 2000-) (discussed in more detail in Chapter Five) has been superseded by a succession of more extraordinary spin-offs: *Treasure Island: Extreme* (2002) *Treasure Island: Couples at War* (2006) and *Celebrity Treasure Island* (2001-). In each case, participants are defined as non-ordinary, either through their sporting success, public notoriety or personal eccentricities. Not only are these individuals extraordinary in some way, but their relationship with each other is contrived by the television production, generating the paradox of 'intimate strangers' (Kavka, *Paradise* 70). The selection process, as a marker of the contrived nature of the community, is not only acknowledged within these formats, but dominates the narrative. The principal storyline of any competitive/isolation format is the construction and de-construction of a community: weekly episodes are built around themes of tribal loyalty and lone-wolves, alliances and subterfuges, power and diplomacy. It is this thematic treatment of social behaviour, however, which provides the key to reading ordinariness in isolation-challenge reality formats. As extraordinary as the circumstances of island incarceration may be, an emphasis on social relationships – friendships, feuds, power plays and romantic attractions – makes these formats curiously domestic and familiar. In fact, programmes such as *Treasure Island* counter the artifice of stranger-relations in an exotic setting through the repeated incorporation of aspects of ordinary, domestic experience such as the daily routines of sleeping, eating and bathing. In the absence of ordinary settings, societies and circumstances (such as are presented, without ceremony, by the 'life stories' formats described above), more extraordinary examples of reality programming zero in on the intimate (and even banal) details of social relationships and human survival as a means of anchoring represented experiences to the real.

Although the evolution of the 'celebrity special' may seem an anachronistic development for 'ordinary people' television, the extraordinary status of participants in these shows works to heighten and reify the exhibition of intimacy and ordinariness (as occurs, for instance, in the example of *The Osbournes*). *Celebrity Treasure Island* manages this contradiction by re-casting their extraordinary participants as ordinary within the logic of the format. The challenges encountered on the deserted island are determined as social levellers and, in this context, the celebrity participant has no advantage over the next person. The voice-over relishes the irrelevance of their special skills:

Voice-over: Leading the South Team is Frank Bunce, who may be a legendary All Black Centre, but is he tough enough to tackle *Treasure Island*?

Bunce: I've never caught a fish in my life, I don't hunt, I can't cook – what am I going to do?

⁶³ The 'artificial' social grouping is not recognisable as a 'normal' social encounter within contemporary western culture. It has been contrived by the production team as the result of a careful selection process, exists only for the purpose of the production, and will disperse afterwards. In this way, it is entirely dependent on the production, not only for its actual existence, but for meaning. This type of social grouping has become so common in reality television formats that it is now easily accepted by audiences, although it trades on its status as unusual. In terms of social performance, 'artificial' can denote either self-conscious stylised behaviour, or an incongruent social encounter or relationship.

In a neat inversion this show casts a competitor from the first series of (the ordinary persons') *Treasure Island* as the presenter. Thus, celebrity reality formats are the exception which proves the rule. Where *Treasure Island* makes ordinary people special, the impulse behind the celebrity version of this series is the de-reification of the non-ordinary via tropes of intimacy and banality. Similar strategies are evident in other celebrity reality shows from around the world, such as the British jungle-immersion format *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here* (ITV1 2002-), the title of which speaks for itself. As a television format devised in New Zealand, however, *Treasure Island* is inflected with cultural resonances of land-clearing and domestic settlement from a colonial past. As noted above, to be ordinary in New Zealand is to conform to cultural paradigms which valorise hard-working, no-nonsense practicality, a framework which incorporates legends of a pioneering history. In this context, All Black Bunce's ineptitude in the wild is doubly unsettling. Not only does Bunce fail to sustain his status as extraordinary (as a sporting hero), becoming, in the face of simple tasks of food provision, rather pathetically ordinary, but he disappoints the pervasive fantasy of New Zealand masculinity, turning out to be, like most of the other celebrities in this series, a namby-pamby urbanite. This is all the more troubling because his celebrity is based on his sporting success in the reified arena of New Zealand rugby. While Colin 'Pinetree' Meads, a legendary All Black captain of the 1960s, never gave up his day-job as a high-country sheep farmer,⁶⁴ in 2004 Frank Bunce quails at the thought of catching his own dinner and misses his cappuccino. As will be discussed further in Chapter Five, isolation on a deserted atoll provides the perfect setting for introspection and self-analysis. The status of participants on *Celebrity Treasure Island* thus poses searching questions as to the condition of the national ordinary in New Zealand, at the same time as re-enacting arrival in a new land, inter-tribal warfare and struggles for sovereignty. In this context, the interrogation of the celebrity-ordinary on national television (incorporating a healthy dose of poppy decapitation) seems fraught with a sense of cultural mission.

Conclusion

Bill Nichols cites Tania Modleski's work on daytime soap operas when he discusses reality television as being 'bound up with everyday experience' (55). Quoting Modleski, he suggests that, like soap opera, reality television bears out

⁶⁴ In an article entitled 'Rugged life moulded Meads into greatest All Black', British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* paid tribute to Meads on the occasion of his 69th birthday in 2005. The inflection of the article valorises the kind of rugged masculinity Meads personifies, evidently for readers in the United Kingdom as much as in his home country. Meads is quoted as saying, 'The greatest athletes and performers I saw were the local sheepshearers, people like Godfrey and Ivan Bowen, the world record holders, who could shear 400 ewes or more in a nine-hour shift. They just rolled up their sleeves and got stuck in'. The article goes on to say 'The lifestyle on his Te Kuiti farm, meanwhile, was relentlessly rugged. The legend of him running up and down hills with a sheep under each arm is a false part of rugby mythology, but he would spend long days at the dipping pen - moving hundreds, possibly thousands of sheep around, one in each arm. Hardest of all was the work of clearing 100 acres of scrubland with Stan to enlarge the farm. Those years coincided with his best rugby seasons. "We worked so hard I would pray for the rugby season to come, for a bit of rest" he says' (Gallagher 1-2).

[A] participatory quality (connection to versus separation from); a sense that characters or social actors are 'like me' – unlike stars who are of decidedly different status; an emphasis on knowledge of what others might do or think (troubled characters, potential dates, criminals at large) rather than strictly factual 'know how'; acceptance and acknowledgement that viewers are subject to 'interruption, distraction, and spasmodic toil'; multiple plot lines; and casts of characters who may not know each other. (55)

The dichotomy between distance and immediacy is evident in Nichols' reading of Modleski's work: people on reality television are similar to their audience while 'stars' are different, information is intimate (and intimately shared) rather than authoritative (and produced didactically). Moreover, 'multiple plot lines', which may be discontinuous, reflect a viewing environment characterized by distraction and menial, domestic labour. Thus, the structural and thematic overlap between reality programming and daytime soap opera elucidates the essentially ordinary and domestic nature of reality television, regardless of dramatic or extraordinary content. In turn, the domestic-ordinary character of reality formats ranging from *Big Brother* to New Zealand's *Weddings* illumines reality programming's innate applicability to television as a medium.

Whatever else it may be, reality television is television of the ordinary person. However extraordinary the circumstances of production, however diverse the programme types, the determining principle of the genre is the casting of ordinary people as protagonists. This holds true even when participants are determined as extraordinary in some way, as the frame of reality television seeks to expose a person's true identity through the revelation of his/her intimate, private and domestic self. In this way, reality television perpetuates the long-standing affiliation between ordinariness and television as a medium and taps into discursive associations with intimacy, immediacy and authenticity. As ordinariness brings people on screen close to their audiences (think Jennifer Aniston's cup of coffee), it elides social, cultural, temporal and geographic distance. The person on screen becomes 'one of us', figuratively relocated in the viewer's living room or neighbourhood. In the case of formats which flag their local or national identity, this sense of community need not be imagined, as viewers recognize people and places on screen as actually being close to home. This sense of immediacy incorporates television personalities into the texture of viewers' lived experience, making them part of the actual world. Moreover, as suggested above, ordinariness is associated with realness via the discourse of private life. What is private is both ordinary (domestic, familial, intimate and banal) and lacking an audience. Even when the set of a reality show such as *Big Brother* has been constructed for the purpose of public display, the domestic setting and the mundane, routine tasks performed within it, are still freighted with connotations of a private life. In this context, self-expression is read as non-performative and thus truthful, and being believable it gains status as real. Thus, the use of ordinary people in reality shows is not only the defining characteristic of the genre; it is the single most important way in which reality television stakes its claim in the real.

CHAPTER THREE

Imagined Neighbourhoods:

Community, Locality and the Home-Made House

In the Neighbourhood

Like the 'ordinary people' who appear in all reality programming, the suburbs and small towns of New Zealand property shows are rhetorically coded as ordinary, accessible and 'close to home'. This coding is to a purpose; that which seems familiar is most understandable and that which is easily recognised and understood rings true and is thus interpreted as real. An interpretation of place in reality television thus relies on the same logic as is applied to participants, following the same trajectory from ordinariness to realness discussed in the previous chapter. However, place has other dimensions. An ordinary person on screen can only ever seem similar to the viewer – not the same as. An ordinary place is more expansive. Not only can viewers of locally-produced property formats suddenly find their very own neighbourhood featured on screen, but the whole of New Zealand can recognise any part of that country as being a place which they occupy coincident with the programme participants. The belief that 'this programme is set here where I am' is a powerful instance of viewer investment. Thus, the discursive practices of all property formats encourage this conflation of the local with the national because it supports affective structures of closeness and realness. This process of identification relies in part on pre-existing cultural perceptions of New Zealand as a relatively compact country with a small population, so that no where feels very faraway from anywhere else. The geographic isolation of the country compounds this sense of commonality. Aucklanders abroad may feel exasperated when asked whether they know such and such a person in Timaru, but at home this translates into a peculiar kind of pride – a cosy familiarity of 'our place'. The archetype of the small rural town where everyone knows everyone and community spirit is alive and well is a popular and abiding feature of the culture of kiwi-dom. The determination of the rest-of-the-world to interpret New Zealand as one big extended farming community can only compound national mythologising around small town values. Thus locally-produced property formats, which seem at first glance to be about the individual owners of private properties, turn out to be tales about living in a national community.

As Benedict Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities*, the ritualistic and synchronous consumption of a media text by the majority members of a particular group fosters notions of national community (30-36). That is, the act of consumption, regardless of content, will generate a collective sense of nationhood. Anderson's well-known analogy about reading the morning papers illustrates the production of this collective imaginary:

The significance of this mass ceremony – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. (35)

As various theorists have illustrated, writing after Anderson, the act of television consumption may make an even better example of such a moment of imagined communion. In her work on the formation of a television culture in the post-war period, Lynn Spigel indicates that the universality of image-based texts extends the potential scope of the collective imaginary:

As opposed to the language-based texts that Benedict Anderson claims are integral to the 'imagined community' of the nation, twentieth-century visual media (even dialogue-based media such as sound films, television, and comics) have often been conceptualized in terms of an *imagined global community* in which people in faraway places are joined together by a common lexicon of images. (*Dreamhouse* 251)

Spigel notes, however, that 'visual media are not interpreted the same way in all nations' (251), suggesting that the synchronous and collective production of imagined communities is most affective when it is localised. Anderson's newspaper analogy, figured at first as a private and spiritual rite, is subsequently extrapolated as a social event which is grounded in the local and the 'everyday':

At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbors, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life. (35)

Anderson balances the potentialities of imagined community against the empirically-determined evidence of local community, illustrating the more abstract concept with a sketch of social contact in the neighbourhood. Although the point of Anderson's concept of community is that it is a virtual one which requires only the confident knowledge of fellow communicants, the analogy falls back on a representation of an actual neighbourhood in which co-communicants might reach out and touch their fellow readers. Anderson's use of familiar locations in which banal activities are repeatedly performed – the subway, the barbershop – keys into the construct of ordinariness as a structure of authentication (as discussed in the previous chapter). Thus, although the material world - as a mechanical and banal performance of social community - is accorded a lesser status within Anderson's dynamic, the communicant is 'reassured' by the fact that 'the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life' because the virtual community gains meaning and validity from its reflection in the actual world. In this relationship, the material and delimited qualities of actual neighbourhoods are not only reassuring, or even metaphoric. Rather, they generate the very terms through which a virtual community may be understood. Thus, the outward signs of the kinds of social organization through which community may be manifested in the physical world (the barbershop and the subway, the commuters and their morning papers) make possible the projection of a parallel, virtual community on which an understanding of national identity may be more properly based. As this chapter will explore, the manifestation on national television of the

material aspects of home and neighbourhood building in New Zealand both reflects and facilitates the production of an imagined, collective and nation-based community.

Of the visual media cited by Spigel, television makes a particular investment in proximity – social, spatial and geographic – as it fosters propositions of national collectivity.⁶⁵ Although theorists such as Joshua Meyrowitz have argued that television, both in structure and content, works to disestablish the viewer's relationship with his or her actual neighbourhood community as it produces a fragmented and de-centralised electronic montage, this thesis argues that television brings viewers close to people on screen regardless of social disparity, geographic distance or temporal lapse. As television works to elide the various distances produced by the mechanisms of production and reception, the medium comes into its own when represented material is in fact produced and distributed locally. National television networks strive to imprint their nationality not only on programmes which are locally-generated but on imported material too. News anchors, commercial breaks and channel branding devices like programme menus and promos are all standard strategies by which the flow of television (much of which, in New Zealand, has been produced elsewhere) is given a local setting.

Like Meyrowitz, Howard Rheingold has investigated structures of community as manifested by electronic media. For Rheingold, cyberspace is configured as a series of 'colonies' which are 'virtual communities' after the model of Anderson's 'imagined' ones. Rheingold's argument⁶⁶, as extrapolated by Homi K. Bhabha, is indicative of the 'widespread concern amongst "virtual communitarians" about the illusory reality of on-line culture' (viii) because it emphasises the loss of geographic location. Like Meyrowitz's electronic media-scape, Rheingold's cyberspace produces placelessness. In response, Bhabha revises and resists the tendency to read the virtual realm of the Web as placeless and de-nationalised:

Although cyberspace communities are not obviously 'national' in character, their deterritorialization must not lead us into believing that they are detached from the national policies of technological innovation, education provision, science policy. (viii)

Bhabha cites examples of xenophobia and nationalism on the Web as evidence of the (in this case unfortunate) persistence of national boundaries in cyberspace. Thus, Bhabha seeks to remind Rheingold and other theorists of electronic media that Anderson's construct of 'imagined

⁶⁵ For further discussion of the formation of communities around the television set, see David Morley's article 'Notes from the Living Room'. Following on from David Chaney's work on 'the role of mass media in relaying civil rituals', Morley extrapolates the '“interfacing” of the public and private' (*Notes* 13) domains in another version of Anderson's 'mass ceremony':

On the one hand, the audience for such national events is usually atomized, either attending individually or in small groups such as the family or peer group. On the other hand, each such group sits in front of a television set emitting the same representation of the 'central' event: the 'public' is thus experienced in the private (domestic) realm; it is 'domesticated'. But at the same time the 'private' itself is thus transformed or 'socialized'. The space (and experience) created is neither public nor private in their traditional senses. (*Notes* 13)

⁶⁶ Bhabha is responding to Rheingold's book *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1993.

communities' was always intended as a commentary on the formation of nation-states. As such, the figure of Anderson's 'imagined community' and its operation is necessarily about locality and a particular, bounded place. This chapter reads Anderson's structure of community in this way, as a collective imaginary which both produces and references a particular locality.

Notwithstanding Bhabha's reservations about the misapplication of Anderson's construct to electronic media, a re-reading of the 'imagined community' formulation through television is irresistible and inevitable. As a daily ritual, the viewing of the six o'clock news is more precisely synchronous and even more ubiquitous than reading the morning papers. Anderson chooses daily papers to illustrate his concept of imagined communities because the content of this medium (stories of people and places) builds notions of national identity as it offers up, in Bhabha's words, 'the vernacular, popular dialect of the nation-people' (ix). In the same way local and international stories on the evening news or week-nightly current affairs programmes site New Zealanders in their own place, either by presenting local stories or by framing and incorporating international ones into the ambit of the local news production. Paul Holmes' signature remark at the end of each live-broadcast episode of the long-running *Holmes* show (TV One 1989-2004) - 'those were our people today, that's *Holmes* tonight' – asserts the format principles of local stories, ordinary people and temporal immediacy. Thus, the *Holmes* show appears fully cognizant of the viewing pleasures manifested by affective structures of national community as it name-checks three axes of viewer immediacy; the Here, the Now and the Us. When Holmes left the network in 2005, the format continued with a different anchor under the title of *Close Up at 7* (TV One 2004-). The branding of this show promises to bring New Zealanders 'up close' to the people concerned in national or international news stories, promising (just like the *Holmes* by-line) to fulfil television's potential as a medium of intimacy and immediacy within the terms of a specified national perimeter. This dissertation reads Anderson's notion of imagined communities not as virtual and thus placeless (as Rheingold would have it), but virtual because placed. That is, the manifestation of an imagined community in the 'everyday life' of the material world gives shape and meaning to the virtual experience. Within this dynamic, the imagined experience of national community is grounded in the actual, the everyday and the local.

Reality television programmes, especially property formats such as those to be discussed in this chapter, bring a specific type of content to this collective performance of community. Unlike news and current affairs formats which articulate 'extraordinary' events, reality formats reify ordinariness as a marker of authenticity (no matter how problematised the construct of ordinary may become). As suggested, the ordinariness of people, places and activities presented by reality television formats anchors programme content to viewer context and fosters social, temporal and geographic immediacy. Part of the success of the reality television phenomenon is the ready reproducibility of formats, which facilitates the generation of culturally specific versions of any given show around the world. In terms of place, this means that many reality shows flag their particular locality as a way of underscoring affective immediacy for domestic viewers. Further to this, the subset of reality

programmes which represent the machinations of the local property market – including those shows in which private homes are built, re-built, renovated, decorated or bought and sold - take the literal construction of local community as their subject matter. These formats in particular might be read as engaging with the production of a nationally specific 'imagined community' as they seek to represent, literally and discursively, the kinds of neighbourhoods actual New Zealanders live in.

In his work on the 'production of locality', Arjun Appadurai has assessed the 'processes by which locality is materially produced' (180) within the context of anthropological studies:

The building of houses, the organization of paths and passages, the making and remaking of fields and gardens, the mapping and negotiation of transhuman spaces and hunter-gatherer terrains is the incessant, often humdrum preoccupation of many small communities studied by anthropologists. These techniques for the *spatial* production of locality have been copiously documented. But they have not usually been viewed as instances of the production of locality, both as a general property of social life and as a particular valuation of that property. Broken down descriptively into technologies for house building, garden cultivation, and the like, the material outcomes have been taken as ends in themselves rather than as moments in a general technology (and teleology) of localization. (180)

Appadurai argues for a reading of these 'ritual processes' (the building and re-building of homes and gardens) as more than the mere 'spatial' production of a community. Rather, these activities are taken as symptomatic of the primary impulse behind the formation of community – that is, 'social life'. As 'moments in the general technology (and teleology) of localization', instances of home building and maintenance become part of an organic and ongoing formation of social, cultural and national identity. In the same way as Anderson's 'imagined community' is tethered to, and thus present in, manifestations of social organization in the material world, the production of locality as a social discourse is read by Appadurai through the production of local communities in material terms (ie, as a collection of dwellings).

If the activities of home building represented on screen in New Zealand's many examples of property shows are similarly 'viewed as instances of the production of locality', then the material construction of homes and gardens may be read as an allegory for the ongoing social formation and re-formation of this place called New Zealand. Certainly these programmes, and the activities they represent, testify to a national preoccupation with questions of home-building, home improvement and property ownership. For Appadurai, such instances of domestic settlement and the strategies of articulation, organisation and maintenance which accompany them, 'are substantially records of the myriad ways in which small-scale societies do not and cannot take locality as a given'.

Rather, they seem to assume that locality is ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality. Yet this very materiality is sometimes

mistaken for the terminus of such work, thus obscuring the more abstract effects of this work on the production of locality as a structure of feeling. (180-1)

In a small-scale, post-colonial nation such as New Zealand, with its attendant insecurities as to size, remoteness and cultural identity, the busywork of maintaining properties and ministering to the governance of the immediate terrain anchors such ephemeral concerns to a material, demonstrable reality. Reality television formats which feature property makeover, maintenance and marketing document this 'hard and regular work': showing, over and over, communities of workers (often centred around a particular family) scraping, sanding and painting, hoeing, weeding and planting, fencing, roofing and renewing. The laborious and repetitious effort required of home owners is thus the constant refrain of these property formats. However, an emphasis on the material progress of the properties in question (underscored by the iconographic 'before and after' photographs) should not be 'mistaken for the terminus of such work', nor is it taken as one by the television productions themselves. In fact, these shows invariably signal an appreciation of home-building as allegory and run a parallel narrative about the social production of locality as they work in stories about the property's occupants.

These programmes are the ideal samplers for considerations of locality, community and nationality. By illustrating and articulating the anxious busywork of settlement, they interrogate the processes by which a 'new' land might be established and contained. By focusing on houses, but all the while telling stories about the people who live in them, they register the production of locality (in this case New Zealand) as a manifestation of 'social life'. Co-incident with this, in Anderson's terms, the very act of viewing these formats generates a virtual community of 'silent' 'communicants', a secondary neighbourhood which far exceeds, in terms of size, breadth and diversity, the communities represented on screen. Property formats thrive on the kind of desire Anderson identifies in his theorising around communities: the desire for fraternity, for participation, for commonality. Representing collective and community based efforts at home building, these programmes meet such expectations on several levels as they appear to provide reassuring evidence that kiwi community spirit is alive and well while offering a working model for neighbourly relations which viewers could choose to put into practice in their own locality. By blurring the distinction between on and off screen communities, between empirically-determined and imaginary neighbourhoods and between local and national sites, property formats like these make everywhere 'close to home' in ways which satisfy the reality television precept of intimate proximity.

Neighbourhood Watch

'Reality Estate' (Kavka, *Reality Estate*) programming in New Zealand kicked off in 1998 with two copycat formulae imported from Britain. *Changing Rooms*⁶⁷ (TV One. 1998) and *Ground Force* (TV3.1998-) were tried and tested programme formats which made over interiors or gardens on limited budgets and in record time. The popularity of these imported formats soon spawned local variations. The quirky and short-lived *Garage Sale* (TV2 1998) combined the interior makeover formula with the kiwi vernacular of op-shopping and DIY to produce a curiously anti-consumerist alternative to the sponsor-drenched *Changing Rooms*. 1999 saw the first instalment of both *Dream Home* (TV2 1999-) and *Location, Location, Location* (TV ONE 1999-), two formats which took the measure of the kiwi dream of the quarter acre section and rated well, running to many repeat series. *Location, Location, Location* presents stories of homes and their owners at the critical point of selling up and moving on while *Dream Home* pits two young families against each other in a time-based building and renovation challenge. Although different in style and narrative formation, these two formats established the property genre as a market leader in New Zealand and variations on the twin themes of renovation and real estate have abounded on local screens since. In 2001, TV3 broadcast the first series of the ever-popular *Hot Property* (TV3 2001-) in which a house already on the market is economically made-over to boost its sale price at auction. The first of New Zealand's historical habitat formats also appeared this year in the form of *Pioneer House* (TV One 2001), a format which derived much of its hybrid appeal through the deployment of property makeover and sale formulae (see Chapter Six for further discussion of this format). 2001 also launched the first of the *DIY Rescue* (TV3 2001-) series, discussed in more detail below, which sends in 'experts' to take over the renovation of a private home after the resident do-it-yourselfer has been deemed to fail. In 2003 alone, *House Dates* (TV3 2003) combined the inspection of domestic interiors with potential romance, *DIY Dads* (TV2 2003) redressed some of the damage done by *DIY Rescue* by praising and rewarding the 'hammer happy husband', *Home On Their Own* (TV One 2003) handed the makeover reins to the children of the household and *The Ultimate Do-up* (TV3 2003) rebuilt an overcrowded family home with the family still on site.

However and wherever a community may be represented by property formats such as these there is always more than one house and these are always in a row. The suburban street is thus a stalwart image of New Zealand reality shows even when, as suggested, the nominal focus of the show is on an individual property. Many formats introduce an episode with a light commentary on the particular neighbourhood in which the subject of the programme is located, thus contextualising the property in question. This practice specifies region in a way which delimits the number of viewers who can legitimately identify the represented space as 'theirs', meaning that the pay off for those who can (speaking from personal experience) is high. However, these introductions function

⁶⁷ Note that many of the real estate reality formats referred to in this chapter are sponsored by commercial interests. In some cases, this has led to the brand name of the sponsor being prefixed to the name of the programme. For reasons of simplicity this chapter refers to these programmes by their original title only. Sponsorship titles are, however, included in the Videography.

in a broader way to promote fantasies of national commonality. Firstly, they provide enough information (graphic and discursive) about the area in question to make the place seem known to the viewer, fostering a sense of familiarity. Secondly, by identifying the geographic area in which the episode is set, sometimes with the aid of local and national map graphics, the programme asserts its status as a New Zealand made format making it 'close to home' for every viewer. Thirdly, by expanding the zone around the individual property or properties under consideration for makeover, renovation or sale, the programme opens up the field for possible inclusion in the programme. Your house, or your friend's house, or at least one that looks very much like it, may be just around the corner or just out of shot. Thus the specificity of the property under focus is always balanced by the general setting of its neighbourhood, allowing for an ever-expandable zone of inclusion.

One way in which property formats balance the pleasures of geographic specificity with the potentialities of non-specified place is via the genericism of the opening credit sequence. While individual episodes identify place according to properties featured in that particular show, the images of houses, streets and neighbourhoods featured in the introductory sequence of nearly every property format under consideration seem deliberately decontextualised. The function of this sequence is the promotion and identification of format themes and principles, rather than the topic of an individual episode, which allows more space for viewer identification across a broad spectrum. Typical images in these sequences are helicopter shots of tightly packed urban development, drive-by shots of suburban streets and static shots of individual houses or architectural details such as doors, roofs or letterboxes. These images of domestic properties may be intercut with close-up shots of objects which further specify programme content such as an auctioneer's gavel for a real estate show or an electric drill for a renovation show. The streets, houses and architectural details that flash by in these sequences are recognisably New Zealand in style, but resist identification with a particular region. These collections of images often seem deliberately diverse in origin so as to include as many types of homes and regions in their sweep as possible.

Life on Tape (TV2 2000), a video-diary format cited in the previous chapter for its careful construction of its participants as ordinary/extraordinary, also featured an extended introductory sequence which typifies the dynamic between generalized and specified place and, as such, exemplifies the construction of a televisual 'imagined community'. The ten individuals or families which participated in the *Life on Tape* series were determined by differing socio-economic markers. They lived in different parts of the country in different kinds of communities. The opening credit sequence thus worked hard to establish commonality, not only between the represented parties, but between the participants and the television audience. The archetype of the suburban street tracking-shot is deployed early on. A uniform row of brick and tile bungalows, mown lawns and mature trees glides by as a voice-over speaks of proximity in all its potentiality;

They could be your neighbours, your workmates, your friends, even the people next door – they are people with very special stories – in their own words, with their own cameras, for the very first time television goes behind closed doors – into their homes and into their lives as never before.

It is no accident that the voice-over commentary emphasises the possibility of neighbourly relations between viewer and viewed in its seemingly redundant use of both 'neighbours' and 'the people next door' as potential programme subjects. Work colleagues are too distant to be interesting and friends are already known. It is the conjunction of physical proximity with personal distance which makes the figure of the 'unmet neighbour' (see Kafka *Paradise* 69) such a promising one. The invasive movement from outside to inside the 'homes' and 'lives' (that is, the material and psychological identity) of these people is made explicit by the commentary and clinches the appeal of the format. The street image which accompanies this voice-over neither includes nor seeks to represent the particular home of any one of the featured diarists. Rather, it is a generic shot depicting a place that any one of the participants or any one of the viewers *may* live. By glossing over specifics, reality formats create a moveable neighbourhood which is always *y/ours*.

The generic drive-by shot which opens *Life on Tape* positions the viewer 'outside' a series of anonymous homes. This shot is followed by a sequence comprising a series of static images of six different houses and three different doors (from other houses) which takes the viewer 'closer'. In contrast to the drive-by shot of the street which emphasises the relationship between properties and their collective meaning as 'neighbourhood', the houses and doors sequence is structured by discontinuity. A jump-cut edit splices together nine images of house fronts and doorways which have been selected for their diversity of style and disparity of place (different architectural styles denoting different suburbs within a city, or different regions within the country). This stylistic diversity may reflect the variety of places from which programme participants hail, but it also seems intended to facilitate viewer identification across as broad a base as possible. As this sequence forms the opening of the first episode of the series, it is unclear to the viewer whether these houses and doorways belong to the homes of the featured participants (in fact they do not) or whether they are simply representative of variety. As generic images of 'places New Zealanders live in' these domestic facades stand in for the home of the viewer as much as for that of different programme participants, a slippage which makes this sequence as much about the construction of televisual viewing communities as it is about the representation of neighbourhood on television.

As each house is decontextualised from its neighbourhood, and each doorway decontextualised from its house, the affect is that of a virtual community of addresses linked only by the technologies of television production. Programme viewers and programme participants, both of which are iconographically represented by the dislocated house frontages, are then forged into a virtual 'street' as the images of houses and doors are cut into a close and sequential relationship with each other. Thus, this excerpt seems to act out the power of television as a medium to bring things far apart close together. As the disparate house fronts are drawn into close relations with each

other by the touch of a button in a digital edit suite somewhere, a virtual community is made manifest, incorporating everyone on the show and everyone watching the show.

In its movement from street to house to doorway, this introduction positions the viewer gradually closer to the point of access, tantalizing them with close-ups of doors which remain closed at present, but which promise to reveal all in the fullness of the programme. In relation to the drive-by street shot which denotes conformity, uniformity and normality these individuated houses and doors seem to denote social constructs of 'individual, different, one of a kind, original'. Just as the tracking shot represents uniformity which may shield abnormality these houses and doors represent difference which may yet house ordinariness – which may house 'you' the viewer. This is consistent with the rhetoric of the voice-over which suggests that 'you' the viewer may even live next door to one of the participants, that 'you' could almost be on this programme yourself. This sequence then holds a similar appeal to the *Daily Keno* lottery promotion which uses a series of static images of domestic letterboxes, some of which are a bit wacky, to display its winning numbers. These images appear to be amateur photographs sent in by viewers, an aesthetic which is, in itself, highly suggestive of the existence of a viewing community. The *Keno* sequence says 'look at all you funny, original kiwis who are yet all the same and very normal and all together playing the lottery'. In *Life on Tape* this collection of houses and doors addresses viewers as demographically diverse yet inherently normal, bound at least in that moment, like the lottery players, by the act of television consumption.

Door-to-Door

In his work on the production of locality cited above, Appadurai asks 'What can locality mean in a world where spatial localization, quotidian interaction, and social scale are not always isomorphic?' (179). One of the ways in which Appadurai approaches an answer is through an interrogation of the actual and material production of site-specific communities. In doing so, he defines the notion of the 'neighbourhood' as distinct from the broader and more important notion of 'locality':

I view locality as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial. I see it as a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts. [...] In contrast, I use the term *neighborhood* to refer to the actually existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variably realized. Neighborhoods, in this usage, are situated communities characterized by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual, and their potential for social reproduction. (178-9)

In the chapter notes, Appadurai comments further on his adoption of a 'colloquial term for technical use', suggesting that 'The term *neighborhood* ... has the virtue that it suggests sociality, immediacy, and reproducibility without any necessary implications for scale, specific modes of connectivity, internal homogeneity, or sharp boundaries' (204). Thus Appadurai's use of 'neighbourhood', both

as a word and an idea, positions it as both an aspect and actualisation of locality, one which is colloquial, social, immediate, one which summons up a nostalgic notion of community and perhaps, one in which 'spatial localization, quotidian interaction, and social scale' may still in fact be coincident (even if only in figurative sense). Appadurai's definition of neighbourhoods is helpful because it accommodates both 'spatial [and] virtual' manifestations of the neighbourhood site. Television programmes which engage with, and thus reproduce, evidence of New Zealand's neighbourhoods-under-construction thematise the spatial production of communities whilst contributing to the ongoing production of a virtual neighbourhood of national viewers.

The relationship between two households which are near neighbours is the principal production precept for the ever-popular property makeover show *Changing Rooms*. The occupants of the two houses 'swap over' so that each group is refurbishing a room which is not their own and much of the over-worked humour of the show relies on the potential damage this situation could do (but never in fact does) to neighbourly relations. The programme can be read as literally and figuratively taking the measure of the construct of neighbourliness. The physical proximity of the two houses (often, but not always, side-by-side) invites an iconographic representation of neighbourhood space. The street shot which locates the two houses within a single frame graphically illustrates the distance between the two houses, the negative space between them and the grass verges, the picket fences and the native shrubs which blur the two together. Thus the literal measurement of concrete things (how high is the paling fence? how wide the gravel drive?) blurs into sentimental estimations of the meaning and value of neighbourliness (how permeable is the boundary line? how far outstretched the helping hand?). The narrative arc of this particular format establishes the two sets of neighbours as the best of friends at the outset, and then introduces the makeover team as a threat to this special relationship. It concludes by reuniting the two households in a closing scene in which they laugh and embrace and forgive with glasses of bubbly in hand. This closing scene is as much a celebration of the strength of the neighbourly bond as it is a triumph of makeover magic. In Appadurai's terms, the parallel narratives of redecorated real estate and social bonding might represent the duality of 'locality as a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects' (182). In this way *Changing Rooms* represents 'local subjects' engaged in the production, both material and social, of their particular neighbourhood. The locally produced edition of the format (originally British, now franchised around the world) thus takes an indexical reading of the state of neighbourliness in this particular place called New Zealand.

In comparison, the *Dream Home* format incorporates a narrative of falsified neighbourliness. This programme relocates (in a very New Zealand 'cut them up and put them on the back of a truck' way) two near-identical dilapidated houses on adjacent sites of a suburban subdivision. The site itself is that of newly created neighbourhood. As these large rural towns (New Plymouth, Wanganui, Nelson) expand, young families pack out suburban fringe zones in rows of prefabricated modern homes. Here and there original kauri homesteads perch on ever decreasing sections as the

farmland over which they once reigned is cut away. The land is scored and fragmented, churned up by earthmovers and dotted with the fluorescent markings of surveyor's pegs. Here is evidence of Appadurai's 'locality building' as 'a moment of colonization':

The production of a neighborhood is inherently colonizing, in the sense that it involves the assertion of socially (often ritually) organized power over places and settings that are viewed as potentially chaotic or rebellious. The anxiety that attends many rituals of habitation, occupation, or settlement is a recognition of the implicit violence of all such acts of colonization. (184)

The relocation of the two wooden houses at the beginning of the *Dream Home* series is both anxious and aggressive as it 'requires deliberate, risky, even violent action' (183) in respect to the land. The trucks, cranes and earth moving machinery which preside over this re-siting grind like tanks over the newly acquired sections, crushing fence-posts, tearing tree branches and entangling power lines. Alongside, the homeowners-to-be, together with various passers by who have gathered for the spectacle, anxiously survey the damage being done to both house and section as the two are violently reconciled. Moreover, the very newness of the neighbourhood-under-construction inflects the house-moving project with an insecurity of tenure, for these properties are sited on a land in flux, pegged in between construction sites, vacant lots and new, uninhabited houses up for sale.

The two competing families in *Dream Home*, previously strangers to each other and living in different parts of town, are forced into a false relation as neighbours from the start as they are arbitrarily attached to two houses on adjacent sections. From this point in, in ways similar to the *Changing Rooms* format, *Dream Home* labours the device of neighbourliness. The construction of a six-foot high paling fence along the shared boundary line is built into the narrative of the first of the renovation episodes. This boundary marker has various functions: a screen ('no peeking at the other team's work'); a surveyor's peg determining the extent of land ownership; a 'no man's land' in a competitive war zone; and a trading post at which items of material value may be exchanged between the two teams. Throughout the extended *Dream Home* season the very real sense of competition between the two groups is played off against the sure knowledge that they are destined to be neighbours for many years to come (as the losing family always get to buy the house **they**'ve built). As the families are selected according to the same demographic criteria, it seems quite probable that they will enjoy friendly neighbourly relations in the future. Where *Changing Rooms* may be said to take the measure of existing neighbourly relations, *Dream Home* – laid out against a landscape of neighbourhood-under-construction – is all about the building of new communities.

Besides bringing in friends and family to assist in the renovations, property makeover formats often call on the services of specialist tradesmen and these people are always coded as local to the area. In a typical move, an episode of *DIY Rescue* set in the 'sleepy town' of Mahana in the Nelson Bay area, had the presenter put out an 'emergency' call over the local radio station for a qualified roofer after a last-minute cancellation left the team at a loss. 'Dave the roofer' responded to the call 'within

three minutes!' and was on site and on the job within the hour. This storyline satisfies the neighbourhood narrative of the format on several levels: the effective use of a regional station as a platform for such a distress call validates local radio as a community specific medium; the near-immediate arrival of the roofer on site illustrates in a literal way the physical proximity between the tradesman and the owners of the home, thus certifying their relationship as neighbours; the willingness of the roofer to pitch in at short notice confirms expectations of small town community spirit. (The fact that the high profile of the presenter and the programme itself was most likely the reason for the roofer's alacrity and generosity is, naturally, elided). The incorporation of local workers into these property renovation formats counters the problematic assertion of the show's resident experts (invariably hailing from Auckland and having urban design tastes) as being the only people who can help. In fact, the balance between the various sets of workers represented within these formats (the programme's resident experts, local tradespeople, family and friends), exemplifies the pull between local specificity and national genericism which typifies these programmes. The *DIY Rescue* team in particular is figured as a property renovation lone ranger, always on the road and travelling to wherever the need for 'DIY' support is the greatest. The team's distinctive black monogrammed transporter (an enormous articulated truck which doubles as a workshop and television studio) is always parked outside the property under renovation as a signal to the neighbourhood that help is in town. The term 'Rescue' aligns this format with emergency services reality formats such as *Search and Rescue* (TV One 2006) and *Emergency Heroes* (TV3 1998), elevating the renovation of private homes to a state of national emergency. As the presenter of the series always refers back to the previous 'rescue' in her introduction to each episode and forward to the next one in her closing comments, the team always seem to hail from the place of their most recent assignment rather than from Auckland where the production company is based. Thus the *DIY Rescue* entourage traces a criss-cross pattern across the land, knitting together rural hamlets, city suburbs and seaside towns in the commonality of home renovation.

In their different ways, *Changing Rooms*, *Dream Home* and *DIY Rescue* use the trope of neighbourliness as a means of facilitating viewer engagement. The banter between property owners featured in these formats and the neighbours who call in (as helpers, meddlers or outright competitors) indicates a special kind of camaraderie in which viewers are freely invited to participate. This jokey banter signals a particular relationship – that of intimacy founded on the proximity of living spaces – and, as such, acknowledges the pleasures, privileges and frustrations of operating within a shared place. The intimacy of this shared humour is embedded in certain conventions (both social and televisual), but the accent and terminology ('thanks mate') reworks the generic and universal as being particular to our place. This specialized banter thereby incorporates viewers into the picture as it produces locality as a 'structure of feeling' (Appadurai 181) and forges ahead in the production of a national imaginary of a particular place called New Zealand.

The motivation of the people featured in these programmes to acquire, build, renovate, or trade up private homes is naturalized as appropriate, socially sanctioned and even commendable. Rather

than an individual act or aspiration, the upward mobility of the housing market is accepted as a national concern, a collective ambition which (thus) assumes a shared benefit. Formats which improve the domestic situation of struggling families with young children (see for instance *Dream Home*, *DIY Rescue*, *The Ultimate Do-Up*) add a socio-economic imperative to the mix. Thus, property renovation shows of all types in New Zealand site the dwelling under re-construction as part of an ongoing and nationwide effort at home (land) improvement.

Personal Property

No less than any other reality television form, property sale and renovation formats seek to effect intimate and emotional connection between programme viewer and programme participant. Yet, as the preceding analysis illustrates, it seems as if the figure of the property itself (frequently represented by significant parts of the whole - facades, doorways, letterboxes, fence posts) is ritually interposed between audience and human subject. Rather than constituting an obstacle to engagement, however, the figure of the home is deployed on an allegorical level as a site of meaning which enhances understanding of its occupants and assists access to intimate knowledge. As has been illustrated previously in this chapter, property formats perceive an allegory of neighbourly relations in concrete examples of neighbourhood-construction or figure problematic human relationships within the home through the investigation of material problems with the house. Thus, an easy transition is made between intimate knowledge of a building and intimate knowledge of that building's long-term occupants. As Misha Kavka has indicated, the real estate format *Location, Location, Location* 'highlights the home as the site which generates personal narrative' (*Reality Estate* 233) via the rhetoric of its credit-sequence voice-over: 'every house is a home, and every home tells the story of someone's life'. As a 'home' rather than a mere 'house' these properties are seemingly ingrained with a human history of experience. Thus the material actuality of the home is offered up as a repository of its occupants' intimate history.

In his essay 'Unpacking My Library' Walter Benjamin confers just such a relationship on the book collector and his books. Handling objects in a glass case, the collector reads his possessions like a crystal ball 'seeing through them into their distant past as though inspired'.

Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property. The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership – for a true collector the whole background of an item adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object. (62)

Although Benjamin goes on to suggest that 'ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects' (69) he writes of this privileged relationship within the specific framework of a dedicated collector and the objects in his care. As a person who has invested time, emotion and expense in the acquisition of an object, the collector has generated a history of ownership, a story which may be recounted (and Benjamin recounts several of his own in this essay) of longing,

recognition, discovery, anxiety and finally purchase. This history is not only deeply personal but intensely subjective and thus, 'the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner' (68). When objects are displayed in a public collection, Benjamin suggests, their history as personal narrative is eviscerated. This highly sensitive reading of the relationship between objects and their owners illuminates the potential possessions may hold for telling personal narratives. However, the particular context of ownership presented by television programmes about private property differs from Benjamin's relationship with his library in significant ways. Firstly, the objects displayed in people's homes on television are rarely prized pieces in a collection. As for most of us, the furniture and possessions which fill the houses we live in are often quite random in their relation to our selves: acquired in necessity, selected in haste, gifted by friends or left there by other people who have moved on. Secondly, reality formats which showcase properties and their interiors invite strangers (in the form of experts, tradespeople, presenters and of course the audience) to read the objects on display. This not only transposes the private possessions into a public forum but it eliminates the subjective narrative which links its object to the person who owns it, uses it and lives with it. Nevertheless, reality shows about private property hook into a powerful and pervasive belief in the power of objects to tell stories about the humans who possess them, of which Benjamin's personal account is but one manifestation. Moreover, as has been expressed in earlier chapters, the very notion of the private domain resonates with the promise of secrets awaiting disclosure, so that the failure of houses to divulge coherent narratives about their occupants in practice is eclipsed by the *frisson* generated around their potential to do so.

This section of the chapter considers reality formats which pass from the exterior of the house to the interior, thereby shifting the reading of the 'story of someone's life' from material aspects of the building and its environs to objects inside the house. The moment at which access to the interior is gained on such programmes is, for reasons suggested above, a resonant event. Reality programmes which stage professional incursions into the private home emphasise and formalize this moment of entry through the ritual of the threshold-crossing. This edited sequence – in which the expert is shot from outside the house knocking on the door, and the homeowners are filmed from inside opening the door and inviting the expert over the threshold – evidently has several functions, not the least of which are narrative, spatial and temporal continuity. However, this sequence also stages the symbolic entry of the specialist reader into the protected and private family circle. Whether a real estate agent has arrived to ascertain a market value for someone's house or *Supernanny*⁶⁸ has turned up to sort out their children or Trinny and Susannah⁶⁹ are here to peer into their wardrobe, the moment of entry is sanctioned by a ritual of boundary crossing which is coded as both socially normative (we really do answer the door to guests in that way) and formally contrived (we know this isn't a 'true' encounter because there is already a camera inside

⁶⁸ Jo Frost, the expert nanny of the British reality series *Supernanny*.

⁶⁹ Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine, the fashion stylist team who front the British reality series *What Not to Wear*.

the house). When the door is answered by the home owner a special kind of permission is registered in the welcome over the threshold. This moment has a particular resonance in programmes like *Supernanny* (Channel 4 2004-), in which the home has become a site of distress and failure and the arrival of the professional is greeted as a long-prayed for sign of salvation. In programmes in which the subject is 'set up' in one way or another, this welcome may be provided by a proxy - such as the friend, husband or daughter who provides access to the offending wardrobe in *What Not to Wear* (BBC Two 2001-) - in which case the permission naturally carries a different inflection. Once permission has been sought, granted and staged within this threshold exchange, the reading begins immediately - think of *Supernanny* introducing herself to the children of the household as soon as she is through the door, or the real estate agent's mental inventory of the material features of the entrance way. As these examples suggest, programmes about private property emphasise the capacity of domestic possessions to generate narrative. Nevertheless, it is the emotional journey of the home-owner (the true occupant and index of the house) which invariably provides the narrative impulse behind these various formats, and the reading of things in the house (be they frilly curtains, smelly drains, vinyl stilettos or noisy children) is, ultimately, always a reading of his or her self.

Two New Zealand formats in which a designated reader enters the private home with the intention of extrapolating information about its occupant from the objects within are *House Dates* (a romance format in which potential dates are selected on the strength of their domestic interiors) and *How Clean Is Your House?* (TV One 2006) (in which housework's equivalent of Trinnie and Susannah make over unkempt homes). Neither of these are property shows as such, as the object of attention has been shifted from the material construction of the house to issues of domestic taste and/or maintenance. However, they both exemplify the function of the private home on television as an intimate textual surrogate for the body of the person who lives in it. Notably, both these formats stage the threshold sequence in the absence of the home's owners or occupants. In the context of comments made above as to the significance of the rite of welcome, this disruption of both social and televisual expectations seems consciously antagonistic. The camera set-up is the same (one inside the house and one without) but the welcome by the receiving party is missing. The homeowner's invitation to enter is presented metonymically as the house key in the hand of the intruder, a small but significant sign that permission to enter has been granted at an earlier, elided stage. Nevertheless, the absence of the human subject whose 'story' is to be told makes the entrance seem illicit and opens up the possibility for a cruel and unsympathetic reading. These empty houses appear unnatural somehow, full of signs of occupancy but abandoned and exposed.⁷⁰ Moreover, without the figure of the occupant (or his/her proxy) to intercede on their behalf, these homes and the objects they offer up to the intruder's gaze are vulnerable to

⁷⁰ These empty rooms, depopulated, recall the photography of turn of the century artist Atget, who photographed the streets of Paris when they were deserted, as discussed by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'The Work of Art'. Benjamin observes the 'exhibition value' of Atget's photography, suggesting that the marked absence of the people who routinely occupy these streets calls attention to the scene in unprecedented ways which 'stir the viewer' (219-220).

misinterpretation, and the possibility of erroneous readings further unhinges the relationship between possessions and possessor. In part to counter the unease of an unsanctioned entry, both formats deploy the discourse of science as a means of both facilitating and justifying access. In *How Clean is your House?* the cleaning duo dons protective clothing which aligns them with the forensic investigator (a white lab coat), the surgeon (latex gloves) and the chemist (protective goggles). One of these women in particular is presented as a clinician (the basis of her scientific authority remains, however, deliberately vague). She takes smears and samples from the 'grime-scene' which are sent to the laboratory for analysis. Magnified under the microscope the wriggling and mutating cell formations presented on screen offer up a text which is inscrutable to the lay reader. The authoritative voice which accompanies and translates these images thereby foregrounds and certifies the importance and expertise of the designated (here scientific) reader. Similarly, the dating show *House Dates* sends in a qualified psychologist to read the various homes under inspection and, as the voice-over to one episode states, 'keep it scientific'. Asserting the qualifications and specialist knowledge of the represented readers in both cases seems to countermand the possibility of misreading, opened up by the absence of the home's proper subject.

Much like the domestic makeover format *DIY Rescue* described earlier, *How Clean is Your House?* introduces trade-professionals to a private home to redeem the failure of its owner/occupants to maintain it. In the same way, the intervention is figured as an emergency rescue, saving homes and their occupants (the parallel narrative is intentional) from ruin. As with *DIY Rescue*, the unclean house begins as a house of horrors. In the introductory sequence, during which the cleaning professionals inspect the house in the owner's absence, the house is presented as a gothic ruin, strewn with cobwebs, crawling with insects, crumbling into decay. The sensation of horror is exacerbated in this sequence when the specialist intruders put their clean, ungloved hands into dark and filthy places to extract unthinkable material. Rather than exhibiting disgust, the female investigators rub the extracted material between their manicured fingers, peer into mouldering corners with interest, and stroke dusty surfaces with a slow and deliberate sensuality. This interaction with the illicit substances presented by the house seems to presage two related affects. Firstly, this sequence intensifies the viewer's experience of disgust, even to the extent of eliciting physiological responses (gasps, retching, nausea). Secondly, it reinscribes the scientific (thus rational) status of the investigators established elsewhere in the programme. This sets up a hierarchy in which the experts, in their fearless exposition of filth and mastery over the crisis, appear as both professionals and rescuers while the viewers, rendered weak with disgust, are their grateful subjects – if only vicariously. When the investigation is complete, the homeowner appears on the scene and the process of reformation begins. Full of apology and embarrassment, the failed house-cleaner must first be chastised for his or her offences, after which the cleaning duo re-enters the house along with a team of professional cleaners to get the real work done. At the same time, the occupants of the house are trained in the arts of house-cleaning, and, finally, when the house is sparkling, they are admonished with threats and promises in the hope that they will maintain it that

way. Thus, the narrative trajectory of the format follows a pattern through which the domestic site is read, purged of its obscenities, and then rewritten.

But it would be a mistake, in Appadurai's terms, to take this ritual of purification and the material effects it has on the property as the 'terminus of such work'. The heart of the dirty-house makeover is the story of the person who let it get this way. In a typical episode, an overweight, underachieving solo mother of two teenagers, who has a self-diagnosed spider phobia, is coaxed into regaining sufficient self-respect to vacuum once a week. As the housework specialists investigate her home they seem to read her through her dirt, peering at clotted hair and toenails like tea-leaves in a cup, as they puzzle over the meaning of such neglect. Like Trinny and Susannah, the house-cleaning experts on this show begin by chastising the subject and end with gentle and sympathetic encouragement and congratulations once the 'come on over to our side' trajectory has been completed. As for many domestic makeover formats, the show ends with a to-camera address in which the subject of the programme thanks the experts for their intervention and looks forward to a bright new future in his or her clean/renovated/re-decorated home. The closing sequence of the solo mum episode of *How Clean Is Your House?* is exemplary. The show which treats the exploration of filthy furnishings and mouldering food as an examination of character offers up the woman's smiling face as a testament to the transformation wrought – not in fact on the house but on the person who lives there. As she speaks to camera, rather than addressing the featured experts in person, she seems to thank the programme itself for her salvation. Indeed, much like the grateful subjects of America's *Extreme Makeover: The Home Edition* (ABC 2003-), who are cued to thank the network in their final address, this woman really is thanking the forum of reality television (and thus television itself) for the opportunity to change her life. As a participatory element of this tele-scape, the audience is also implicated in her gratitude. At this moment, the woman sites herself in a televisual community of which her participation in this format is both a manifestation and a productive contribution. Here, reality programming again offers up an exemplar of Appadurai's reading of 'ritual processes' (the busywork of building, mending and maintaining homes) as both a foundation and reflection of the ongoing social production of community and locality.

In contrast to the 'grime-scenes' offered up by *How Clean Is Your House?*, the occupants of the homes presented on *House Dates* (also inspected in their absence) have nearly always left their houses clean and tidy. This format invites participants to view a number of houses in place of their respective owners. The selection of a dinner date is subsequently based on reactions to these domestic spaces rather than any direct knowledge of the people they represent. The style, status and level of maintenance indicated by the homes are readily translated into a reading of the (absent) occupant's identity. The show's resident psychologist legitimates this transferral of identity as he applies his skills to a characterisation of each property and comments freely on the compatibility of participants based on his knowledge of the houses rather than the people. As the female presenter declares, this is a dating show based on 'good looks', but it's the 'look of how, and where, they live' that counts. Thus, contestants prime their domestic spaces for inspection just as

they might prepare their bodies in anticipation of a first date. Although the houses on this show are supposed to speak for their owners, they are not supposed to be encountered in their 'natural' state. Rather, they represent the owner as they would like to appear to a prospective romantic and/or sexual partner. With pillows plumped, mirrors polished and floors swept, these empty houses bespeak the yearning and desire of a person asking 'pick me, pick me'. In one instance a renegade contestant who chose not to make his bed before his home was opened for inspection (claiming later that as this was true to his form it seemed to best represent him) was dismissed out of hand by psychologist, presenter and potential date as immature, insincere and having 'hygiene issues'. It seems ironic that a format which overstates the potential for private property to represent identity should eliminate a candidate who dared to show his bedroom in its typical, familiar and thus most representative state. It is also interesting that this format shies away from any evidence of bodily intimacy or indeed proper occupancy. The unmade bed in this episode - all soft and tangled, squeezed and dented - is a startlingly vivid reminder of the physical presence of a human body, the body which has been so carefully eliminated from this house prior to inspection. Leaving his bed in this state, impressed with evidence of his occupancy, the offending candidate is ejected from the competition because he has broken unwritten rules of representation in this game of object substitution. Objects are supposed to represent their owners at a distance and in allegory; where objects err too close to the intimate or the real, they are rejected.

This may seem all the more surprising because *House Dates* is about knowing a participant in a sexually intimate way. For this reason the investigation of the property always culminates in the bedroom. Within this space, drawers, boxes and packages are broken into and their contents made to stand in for the sexual parts of the (as yet unseen) potential date: bras, knickers and boxer shorts are fondled as cup size, style and quality are noted; condom boxes are inspected for information about size and sexual preference; other sexual tools (lubricant, massage toys or oils) are eagerly inspected. Here the reading shifts from social to sexual. The relationship between represented objects and their owners has an additional dimension because they connect intimately with the sexual parts of the person who uses them. Where a country style kitchen may indicate traditional domestic values, a double D-cup bra definitely means big breasts. In other words, where the relationship between property and the self is realized via the body, the system of allegorical reading collapses into the literal. However, the clean bra extracted from a neat drawer of underclothes operates quite differently in this programme from the grubby and unmade bed of a previous episode. While it may have a literal relationship with its owner, the bra as object supports structures of fetishistic desire and so retains its distance from the body of its owner. The relationship between all of these sexualized and intimate objects and their owners is, thereby, at once more literal and more fetishistic, as the pleasures of object substitution begin to displace desire for the represented person. Thus, the sexual body of the owner is writ large upon the text, but only so as to push the intimate actuality of that body further into the imaginary. As has been argued by Misha Kavka,⁷¹ the substitution of sexualised objects for the candidate on reality dating formats such as *House Dates*

⁷¹ I am indebted to a conversation with Misha Kavka on the subject of *Blind Date*.

continues the rhetorical tradition of sexual innuendo established by studio-based dating shows. In such programmes, of which the United Kingdom's *Blind Date* (ITV 1985-2003) is a classic example, prospective dating partners are concealed from each other by a sliding panel or similar device. In this instance, a romantic candidate's voice is substituted for his or her body in the same way that articles of intimate clothing are substituted on *House Dates*. For contestants on *Blind Date*, the selection of a romantic/sexual partner is based on a carefully coded exchange of pre-rehearsed questions and answers which produce sexual innuendo. The double entendre, as a phrase which shadows its ostensible meaning with a second, subversive and sexualized meaning, is the verbal equivalent of object fetishism. Desire for a contestant's (unseen, thus imagined) body is displaced onto a sexualized hint or joke – a promise of sexual activity which remains at a distance. As such, the double entendre – in much the same way as the fetish objects displayed in *House Dates* - opens a gap between the subject it represents and the sign by which it is represented. In *House Dates*, the young man who left his bed unmade may be usefully compared to another male candidate in the same episode who left a pair of handcuffs shackled to the frame of his immaculately clean and orderly bed. When the handcuffs are discovered by the female contestant and the show's female co-host, they make appreciative use of the (not so ambiguous) sexual implications and conclude that it must be a joke, but they do not consider this lapse in propriety a reason to eliminate him. It seems the planted handcuffs (so reminiscent of the laboured sexual sparring of *Blind Date*) play very much by the rules of this show. It seems that in *House Dates*, sexual suggestion is encouraged in the form of sanitized symbols of desire or activity, but rejected as obscene when (as in the unmade bed) it verges too closely on the bodily intimacy of domestic occupancy.

As these examples indicate, reality programmes about private property signal an investment in the capacity of objects to generate narratives about the people who own them. As suggested, the private home and the articles in it are invested with particular constructs of truth-telling – partly because the domestic site is threaded through with associative notions of family, intimacy, secrecy and the ordinary, and partly because they are inanimate. As rooms are ransacked, doors thrown open and intimate possessions strewn across the furniture (think of America's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* [Bravo 2003-]), the home and the objects in it seem to enact a 'tell all' exposé of their occupants. The implication behind this ransacking is that, unlike their owner, an individual's private possessions are productive informers because they are unable to resist investigation, dissemble or answer back. Like the books in Benjamin's collection, objects are presented in these shows as supplying a 'magic encyclopedia' of memories, encompassing their history of use. Unlike the belongings in Benjamin's essay however, the things in people's houses on television are disengaged from an essential relationship with their owner or occupant. In Benjamin's terms, the reclassification of objects from a private to a public forum eviscerates their potential to trigger subjective memory and thereby empties out their story. On the contrary, the representation of private property in reality television programmes seems to suggest that objects can generate more complex narratives in a quasi-public arena. It is precisely the objective perspective of intruder

readers in the formats discussed above which opens up the possibility for latent, unconscious and even mistaken readings – as the laboured fetishism and innuendo of *House Dates* exemplifies. These alternative readings generate a sum of meaning which is, in one way or another, more than the owner could tell about him or her self. Moreover, the outsider readings on these programmes offer up a model of mediated intimacy which complements the viewing relationships posited by television as a medium. Like the long-distance connection represented in the Telecom commercial cited in the Introduction, intimacy between potential sexual partners on *House Dates* is represented as more authentic because it is more mediated (in this case by the allegory of objects) as the multiplied narratives presented by the rooms under inspection intensify the affect of the deferred meeting.

Rescue Me!

When *DIY Rescue* first appeared on New Zealand screens in 2001, audiences were surprised and mildly offended to find that bastion of Kiwi culture, the DIY husband, exposed and ridiculed as a fraud. Like several makeover formats already cited in this chapter, *DIY Rescue* sends in a team of building professionals to take over the renovation and redecoration of a family home. However, this particular format frames such an intrusion as a gallant ‘rescue’ of the family from the man of the house who has failed to complete various long-term renovation projects. In this and other ways, *DIY Rescue* thematises the failure of masculinity, a failure inflected by particular cultural assumptions about the proper way to own and occupy private property.

DIY Rescue is unique in its treatment of New Zealand masculinity because it figures more than one representation of the kiwi bloke as builder. The programme’s resident expert builder, Darren White, is set against the figure of the ‘DIY dad’, who is the owner and ongoing renovator of the featured property. The former exemplifies the character of idealised kiwi masculinity - the latter poses a disconcerting alternative. For while the expert builder is a rugged hero of few words and many tools, the ‘DIY dad’ counters infallibility with weakness and successive failure, meets authority with submission and displays a bewildering incompetence with the tools of the building trade. This is no simple juxtaposition of success and failure however, for the failed DIYer has been reared in the shadow of the particular archetype of kiwi masculinity apparently fulfilled by Darren. He has persevered with building projects for which he has no technical aptitude – even to the point of risking his family’s health and safety - because the popular mythology of the kiwi bloke overwhelms his rational estimation of his self. And yet, standing to account for his failure as a New Zealand male, this character reveals the emptiness of the mythology to which he aspires. For the expert builder Darren (here held as the exemplary figure of masculine kiwi aptitude) is a professional who has been trained for years in a specific skill base. His expertise is thus learnt rather than instinctive, acquired rather than innate. One of the recurring messages of all property renovation formats is to ‘get the experts in’ - an edict which reifies the expertise of the professional builder but which also

countermands the ostensible promotion of DIY home renovation and implicitly questions the capacity of untrained men to build or maintain their own homes. The legend of the 'pioneer man' makes home-building an integral part of the very gender of the New Zealand masculine - a conjunction which the formula of *DIY Rescue* seems to propound. Yet the figure of the trained expert builder on this format, no less than the shame-faced failed builder, unsettles the very premise of the kiwi bloke as a man born with a spirit level in his hand.

Beyond its intriguing and contradictory representation of masculinity, *DIY Rescue* attracts analysis as a format which exemplifies the wilful conflation of self and property. The allegorical function of the home is peculiarly intense in this format, in which problems with the property (leaky roof, exposed wiring, rotten foundations) stand in for problems with the marital relationship. An assessment of man as builder (in this case characterised by failures, shortcomings and costly mistakes) is transposed into a reading of man as husband. Even without the interpretive assistance of a resident psychologist (as supplied by *House Dates*), this man's relationship with his house may be freely taken by viewers for his relationship with his wife. This parallel proves to be more than simply allegorical. In a culture obsessed with home ownership, restoration and renovation, the mechanical malfunction of the family home really is the cause of marital disjunction. This blurring between different arenas of personal property and identity not only serves the genre precepts of reality television by insisting on an intimate relationship between participant and property, but it also reflects the double structure of a programme format which combines DIY tips with romance (providing information about a house in combination with information about a relationship - and how to fix them both).

Here, the house is opened up to the possibility for interpretive reading because it is shown in fragments, not simply because it is represented as a discontinuous sequence of architectural details or individual objects shot in close-up, as is the case with other property formats discussed above, but because it is actually in ruins. The rewriting of this domestic ruin (both the house and the marriage) is the guiding narrative of the format and significantly, in a show which takes a fairly extreme approach to renovations, the finished product is something quite new to behold. In the effort of putting the fragments back together, the process of reading this home inevitably writes a different story. The house which is un-ruined is never the same as the original house (either before it collapsed from old age, or before the DIY occupant messed it up). The house is then fixed (both in a material and discursive sense) in a new relation to its occupants. One of the stock pay-offs of this show is the response of the wife who, reintroduced to the spaces inside her home, is made to wonder where she is. As a consequence of this loss of recognition, she invariably struggles to adjust herself to match - to re-inscribe herself as the occupant of these rooms, as a person who could live here. This moment, though fleeting, is similar to the more drawn out processes of self re-

inscription represented on personal makeover shows like *What Not to Wear*, in which the restyling of the body's exterior precedes and precipitates a woman's renegotiation of her interior identity⁷².

An interpretation of the *DIY Rescue* format as one which conflates property with personal identity inevitably returns to a consideration of the thematic function of the failure of masculinity and the assignment of gender identity within this show. Each episode follows a pre-determined narrative trajectory which parallels the punishment and redemption of the husband with the demolition and renovation of the home. This process is initiated by an almost ritualistic discrediting of the male homeowner as builder (and therefore man). The 'hammer happy husband' is chastised, criticised and ridiculed by his wife as well as the show's perky female presenter and the resident builder. In the course of the programme he is made to demolish and rebuild projects of his own design, acknowledge his mistakes in direct-to-camera address and kowtow at every turn to the superior knowledge of the expert builder. Sometimes his plans for renovation, nurtured in his own mind for years, are summarily over-ruled. In the garden, into which he is forbidden to tread for the period of the makeover, his shed (or, in one particularly pertinent example, a ramshackle 'dog box') acts as his proxy and is ritualistically ridiculed, demolished, or cleaned out by wife and the show's resident (female) garden landscaper.

Ownership of domestic space follows a similarly pre-determined trajectory. The house initially belongs to the husband as the site of his (failed) fantasies of aggrandizement and masculine prowess. It is also his playground, his hobby project and a place where he stores power tools and hoards building materials. In this context the female of the household is represented as marginalized. Locked out of the woman's 'proper' domain of domesticity - she needs a kitchen to cook in! she needs a bath! she needs a glamorous bedroom to retire to! - she is disenfranchised within her marriage and her home. The room plans, drawn up in the initial stages of rebuilding, are always determined as being the fantasy projections of the wife rather than the couple, and the rhetoric of the format emphasizes the property makeover as being *her* long-cherished dream rather than his. Thus, by the end of each show the house always 'belongs' to the wife rather than the husband and has become her sphere of operation rather than his. This proprietorial transition signals a comforting return to 'proper' gender relations between husband, wife and domestic space.

As the traditional domain of the kiwi bloke and his shed, home renovation is a curious fit with the formula of reality television. The founding precept of the reality genre is emotional affect as figured by tropes of personal intimacy, self-expression, confession and sentimentality. The kiwi bloke on

⁷² For further discussion of the 'big reveal' on home and personal makeover formats see Rachel Moseley's article for *Screen*, and her analysis of the 'moment in the mirror' (306-307). Moseley discusses the 'power, danger and appeal' of the makeover reveal in reality programming more generally as a 'potent combination of high emotion and ordinariness' and suggests that 'thorough its closeup on the reaction of the 'ordinary' person on television, [the reveal] represents a moment of excess representative of the 'über-ordinariness' (in effect, 'tastelessness') to which [*Sunday Telegraph* columnist John] Diamond objects on contemporary British television' (303).

the other hand is characterised as taciturn, emotionally repressed, inherently sexist and anti-romantic. In part the crisis of masculinity manifested by the *DIY Rescue* format can be attributed to the inherent conflict between the form of reality television and the content of the kiwi male and his shed of tools. On the other hand, the intriguing contradictions arising out of this format turn on the transformation of this 'kiwi bloke' into something else. As suggested, the renovation of each domestic space is paralleled within this format by the 'makeover' of the DIY male. This secondary, social renovation is two-fold. Firstly, viewers witness the redemption of man as builder – finally completing, according to trade standards, his home renovation projects – a process which largely restores his masculine credibility. Secondly, we witness the redemption of man as husband. This is a more complex process as it relies in part on the man's return to an appropriate state of dominant masculinity (building a home to keep his wife and children in) and partly on the manifestation of his 'feminine side', in which he exposes his sensitive, romantic and emoting self (gifting the renovated home to his wife as a token of his enduring love and esteem).

The double strand of property renovation and romance, referred to earlier, is typical of the genre hybridity of so many reality television formats. In this context an interesting disjunction arises out of the different requirements each genre model makes of the male protagonist. As the central participant in a 'how-to' home renovation format, the DIY husband must prove his worth as a builder. As one of the parties in a 'marriage makeover' scenario, however, he must prove that he is capable of the sincere expression of romantic and sentimental feelings towards his wife. It is this latter objective which qualifies *DIY Rescue* as reality television. Without the romance narrative, this format would barely register the reality genre principle of intimacy. The transformation of an 'ordinary' kiwi bloke into an affectionate and expressive romantic partner therefore works in conjunction with the 'making of' a reality television protagonist. Arguably the climax of each episode (eclipsing perhaps, the nominal climax of the property 'reveal'), an emotional confrontation between husband and wife is staged by the production team via pre-recorded interviews in which participants face the camera and 'confess' their feelings for each other. As for the girl and her mother in the Telecom commercial (see the Introduction), the foregrounding of electronic media in this sequence reifies technologically-mediated intimacy as more affective (and possibly more authentic) than person-to-person contact. The *DIY Rescue* 'conversation' goes like this: first, the *DIY Rescue* production team sets up a separate interview with each party which positions the subjects in a direct address to camera, while the off-screen voice of the presenter prompts them to express their love for their partner. Secondly, each party is separately invited into the mobile edit studio in the back of the production truck where the presenter replays the edited highlights of the partner's interview, and monitors the reaction of husband or wife. As this set up suggests, the presenter is only one of the mediating forces in this intimate exchange. The video-technology which facilitates this interaction is emphasised by the decision to stage the interview playback in the mobile video production unit rather than inside the renovated home.

The following transcript provides an example of this peculiar husband/wife interaction as staged by a typical episode of *DIY Rescue*. It represents the conclusion to the presenter's interview with the wife followed by the presenter and the husband discussing his responses to the taped footage.

[On screen]

Presenter: If there was anything that you could say to him now – wanna take this opportunity...?

Wife: Thank you Tony for being such a wonderful husband and a wonderful father. I appreciate everything that you do for us. I know we never say it enough – but I love you. [Pauses – wipes eyes]. And I wasn't gonna cry!

Presenter: 'Cos you're the tough cookie.

Wife: I know, how wrong have I been proved! You gotta wipe those tears!

[In front of screen]

Presenter: Ah we got her going.

Husband: Got 'er going. That's cool.

Presenter: Its cool, ay.

Is it good to hear that sort of thing?

Husband: It's just um .. I just um .. Like I said - I love her very much and if I could give her the world I would.

Presenter: You're a sappy date you are.

Husband: I am, I am. Don't want that on TV! [Laughs - shrugs off tear in eye].

Thus, *DIY Rescue* validates the experience of tele-intimacy by staging an equivalent experience as part of the programme formula. Like the Telecom girl who grows warmer in the presence of a digitally transmitted image of her sun-kissed home, the husband on *DIY Rescue* manifests a physiological response to a projected image. As he watches his wife on screen and tears well up in his eyes, he enacts the potential of pre-recorded television footage to effect bodily and emotional change in the viewer. In this way, this sequence is charged with the promise made by many examples of reality television programming - that of intimate experience authenticated through its realization in the body of the viewer. Moreover, when the presenter, sitting next to him, is also visibly moved by the on-screen confession, she enacts the emotional experience of the stranger-viewer. As a person who is not intimately implicated by the footage, she sanctions the kind of emotional response experienced by members of the television audience who find themselves wiping their eyes during this sequence. Her intervening presence in the relationship between husband and wife provides a human manifestation of the mediating technologies of broadcast television, while her personal and bodily reactions to the scene validate the position of the programme viewer as justified and participatory. The time delay implicated by the pre-recording and playback of the woman's interview does not lessen the powerful affect of immediacy contrived here. In fact, as Part Two will argue, reality television as a genre is predicated on affects of temporal

contraction which locate viewer and viewed in the same ever-present moment, strategies which suffuse the re-presentation of things far away with a blush of intimate knowing.

Although the show's finale in which the husband 'reveals' the interior makeover to his grateful wife often precipitates an emotional reaction on her behalf, this sequence is unlikely to trigger physiological responses in the audience. The makeover of the home, run as the principal narrative of the format, is in fact a foil for the more intimate story of the marital relationship. The husband/wife romantic confession sequence is the reality television moment of the show, drawing together the delicate connotative threads of truth, reality, intimacy and immediacy. Thus, as emphasized by Appadurai, it would be a mistake to dismiss the 'very materiality' of the redecorated room, the completed home, the landscaped garden, as the 'terminus of such work', in property formats such as *DIY Rescue*. Through their double narrative of social and spatial 'home improvement', these formats signal an investment in the manifestation of neighbourhood, community and nation as both a 'structure of feeling' and a material concern. The display of tears on *DIY Rescue* makes manifest the range of feelings which accompany the formation of community as both intimate relationships (social) and a collection of neighbouring dwellings (spatial). In tandem with this, the representation on screen of New Zealanders engaging in the formation of neighbourhoods enacts in microcosm the production of a neighbourhood of viewers which is (to cite Appadurai again) both 'spatial [and] virtual' (179) as it operates in the collective imaginary whilst being grounded in the experience of a shared geographic location.

Conclusion

The figure of the neighbourhood looms large in New Zealand's reality programming – a pervasive presence only partly accounted for by the prevalence of the property genre (discussed, in this chapter, in terms of real estate, renovation and makeover shows). Reality television, in all its forms, is about communities – a thematic axis which seizes upon the potential of the small screen to manifest notions of proximity and commonality. The promotional campaign for TV2 (the high rating second channel of the TVNZ network) has run with the by-line 'In the Neighbourhood' since 2004, a phrase borrowed from a popular song by South Auckland female hip hop group 'Sisters Underground' which is used as the soundtrack to the campaign. Exemplifying the contradictory pleasures of specified and non-specified place, a 2004 network promotion blue-screened international stars from the network's flagship shows (*Friends* [NBC 1994-2004] / *The West Wing* [NBC 1999-2006]) into scenes of archetypal kiwi neighbourhood normality (street cricket / the local dairy / a garden barbeque). These scenes are at once nationally generic and culturally specific, as they represent the iconography of kiwiana as it might appear in any suburb anywhere in the country. The play between celebrity and anonymity, extraordinary and ordinary is here interwoven with constructions of place in ways which emphasise the capacity of television to bring things far apart into close proximity. In each commercial, American television stars are edited into scenes as

if they are engaging in normal social interaction with the other people in the shop/street/garden. These include both 'famous' New Zealand television actors or presenters and unknown actors performing the roles of ordinary or non-television people. The central protagonist is an 'ordinary' character, a handsome adolescent male with an intentionally indeterminate ethnicity (a 'suntanned New Zealander' of Maori or Pacific Island descent) who takes pleasure in the face-recognition of so many local and international television celebrities. Thanks to the sophistication of digital technologies, Rob Lowe, Stephanie Tauevihi and the un-named teenage boy are blended seamlessly into a sunny, all-inclusive community which naturally incorporates its audience.

Reality programmes screened in their country of production, such as those discussed in this chapter, are fully cognizant of the power and appeal of constructions of national community; as evidenced by the emphasis on local production and participation which accompanies the promotion of all local reality television product. Formats which take the literal construction of neighbourhoods in New Zealand as their nominal subject – representing the building and rebuilding of houses, the gentrification of old neighbourhoods, the development of new suburbs and/or the machinations of the real estate market – thereby capitalize on the affective pleasures of a genre which seeks to incorporate viewers in an experience of social, spatial and emotional immediacy.

CHAPTER FOUR

Intimate Technologies:

Amateurism, Intimacy and the Hand-held Camera

The amateur camera has a significant history in television culture, from the domestic accidents and bloopers shot on the home handy-cam for *America's Funniest Home Videos* (ABC 1990-) to the witness-cam footage of natural disasters, car accidents and criminal activity used on news programmes and compiled on the Fox Network's 'World's Worst' video clip shows. Similar in kind but different in content, video diaries generated by personal handy-cams have been structured into television formats which seek to represent narratives of selfhood. Both models of video production exist inside and outside television: the very qualities which signal their erratic, independent and non-professional production serving equally to manifest and exemplify the principal affective pleasures of the medium.

The amateur status of this kind of material is crucial to its affective immediacy and intimacy. Firstly, the process of am-cam production minimises mediation (in terms of crew, technology, post-production) therefore heightening the affects of liveness, present-ness and transparency associated with immediacy. Secondly, handheld, self-operated technologies of image-capture produce intimacy by implicating the emotional body of the film maker (who may also be the film subject) on the television screen. This attribute of amateur video production - the shaky, faltering, whispering camera which makes a bodily inscription on the televisual text - fosters intimacy between viewer and viewed regardless of content. However, the sensitivity of the handheld, eye-level portable camera also makes it ideally suited to the replication of personal narrative on screen, and this applicability of form to content has made the televised video diary formats of the nineties seem like an inevitable consequence of the technology.

The production of both immediacy and intimacy feeds irresistibly into structures of authenticity. As has been argued by Jon Dovey in his work on camcorder culture:

[T]he low grade video image has become *the* privileged form of TV 'truth telling', signifying authenticity and an indexical reproduction of the real world; indexical in the sense of presuming a direct and transparent correspondence between what is in front of the camera lens and its taped representation. (55)

As Dovey writes, the relationship between video camera, operator and subject so peculiar to handheld video camera footage 'has taken on precisely structured forms, has begun to develop its own grammar' (57). This chapter explores the audio and visual signatures of this particular brand of

realism, arguing that the amateur camera, televised variously as caught-on-tape or video diary formats, has embedded a particular construct of 'low tech' reality in televisual culture.

Both caught-on-tape video clip shows and video diary formats have been largely superseded by the professionally produced and narrative-led reality programmes of the new century. However, the legacy of 'am-cam' television persists. Both the accident-cam and the diary-cam are replayed through contemporary reality programming as fragments, inserted into the narratives of high-production reality series as snatches of a parallel construction of reality. As both an aesthetic and a discourse, amateurism in audio-visual culture is freighted with powerful affects of immediacy and realness, liveness and intimacy. For these reasons, as this chapter concludes, the am-cam will never be entirely relinquished by reality television.

Caught on Tape

The catchphrase caught-on-tape denotes both a mode of production and a televisual subculture. The very terminology of the phrase indicates a particular brand of content as well as a method of production and even reception. Material which is caught-on-tape is always a moment of crisis: a natural disaster, a criminal act, a private perversion, a hilarious physical blunder. Because the incident is unforeseeable, the circumstances of 'capture' can be characterised as inadvertent, meaning that the recorded moment arises out of a critical co-incidence of rolling camera and spontaneous or aberrant incident. Notions of entrapment and containment offered up by the term 'caught' are delusory. In fact this model of audiovisual capture is one in which both pro-filmic event and the mechanisms of its capture are spontaneous, aberrant, random or inadvertent. The past tense of the phrase registers the time lapse between image capture and reception – so often disavowed by broadcast television - even as the footage re-presented produces, for reasons this chapter will explore, a powerful affect of liveness. Caught-on-tape also cites its production technology and sub-broadcast quality in its candid reference to tape, as it nods at a multitude of anonymous authors wielding home handy-cams, storefront CCTV sets and police chase helicopter-cams. Portable, cheap and impermanent, video tape has a kind of innate applicability to the subject material of these accidental recordings. The label caught-on-tape thereby gestures towards a medium, a subject and a particular process of production; all of which are fleeting, mutable and often literally 'on the run'.

Thus caught-on-tape announces its own processes of production and makes a virtue of them. By advertising its own processes caught-on-tape footage defies the seamlessness of television production, and by specifying the kind of technology used (non-professional, sub-broadcast quality) it aligns itself with a domain of image production outside the parameters of the television industry. The circumstances of production – both the incident of capture and the mechanisms of tape recording – are actively promoted in this way to a particular end. They are made to serve as

certification of the product's authenticity, promising as they do the intersection of an unprecedented (thus unstaged) dramatic crisis and an amateur (thus innocent) recording medium. Out of this formulation arises a specialised aesthetic of television realism; one which not only announces its preferred medium (video tape) but freights this process of production with connotations of the amateur, the ordinary and the inadvertent.

The caught-on-tape video clip show proliferated in the United States in the late eighties and early nineties as a burgeoning number of cable stations hungry for supply came up against the 1988 screenwriters' strike in Hollywood. An abundant, nation-wide resource of pre-recorded images from personal handy-cams, store security cameras and police video archives proved the antidote, and much to the chagrin of the writer's union, 'unscripted TV' took off. Short extracts from these video tapes were quickly formatted into television series, presented as non-narrative collections according to certain themes, including domestic comedy, law and order or natural disaster. Whether footage derived from the home handy-cam or the closed circuit surveillance camera, images and audio were consistently poor quality and violated conventions of audiovisual broadcast standards. Low-grade video stock and amateur handling generated images which were poorly composed, lacking in tonal contrast or textural detail, unfocused, over- or under-exposed and accompanied by a muffled and distorted audio track. The basic unintelligibility of much of this material necessitated a format structure which leant heavily on post-production framing devices such as studio links, voice-over and captioning to give this decontextualised footage an easily-accessible meaning. In its appeal to spectacle and the body, the video clip show aligned itself with the 'body genres' of low culture cinema – horror, slapstick, disaster, shock and erotica. In its fragmentary form, depersonalised and decontextualised, it defied conventional narrative progression and/or closure. Michael O'Shaughnessey has compared video clips on television compilation formats like *America's Funniest Home Videos* to early Lumière films because they 'offer little in the way of sustained character development but show snippets of spectacle designed to raise emotions of wonder, laughter, fear' (85). Echoing Tom Gunning's work on early cinema, it is possible to read video clip shows as a 'cinema of attractions'; spectacular, fragmented, fleeting and ambiguous (56-62). For critics of television, however, these attributes relegated the televisual form of caught-on-tape to the ranks of 'trash TV' and its status as amateur was disparaged as unsophisticated.

For the fan of caught-on-tape television, however, the intersection of amateur and accident made a special promise of authenticity. As suggested, the status of caught-on-tape moments – however diverse represented themes may be – is that of crisis: a dog attacks its owner, a stunt plane explodes over a crowd of spectators, a bride trips in the aisle. Accidents and aberrations such as these stake their claim in the domain of the real by asserting their status as unpremeditated. The sudden and unexpected nature of these events is always emphasised by the rhetoric of caught-on-tape formats because it serves as a guarantee of truth. Events such as these cannot be predicted, pre-planned or staged – thus they cannot be faked. But this assertion of the unfakability of content is not enough. Without a correlative promise of a truthful medium, this putative reality is as suspect

as that of any other re-presented event. This is why the flag of amateurism is waved so high in the field of caught-on-tape television. The self-evident non-professionalism of footage screened under the caught-on-tape banner certifies that the represented event is not staged, because both the technology utilised and the operator controlling it lack the sophistication to fake. Thus, amateur image production is coded as transparent. Compromises in audio and visual pleasure, which this mode of production may entail, are traded off against a heightened feeling of the real - a trade audiences are more than willing to make. The poor quality of caught-on-tape footage thus becomes a marker of realness because it signals certain circumstances of production. The co-incidence of unpredictable content and unprocessed medium add up to a powerful and pervasive sense of the real.

The sources of the video extracts presented by these caught-on-tape shows – and thus the impulse behind their production - are varied. A single show may include footage derived from security tapes recorded on CCTV, vehicle or helicopter mounted police video, or the handy-cam wielded variously by the tourist, the passer-by, the accident investigator, the ‘mom’. Each is freighted slightly differently according to the context of production. Too easily lumped together (all the better to dismiss), an analysis of caught-on-tape footage generates many fine distinctions according to the technology used in the recording, the subject’s relationship with the camera, the impulse behind the recording (professional, archival, memorial, personal) and not least the controlling force behind the camera (be it human or mechanical).

The latter distinction is a productive one, generating two distinct categories: handheld camera and fixed camera. The handheld handy-cam is the embodiment of human point-of-view image capture, resonating as it so often does with the physiological responses of the operator. In contrast, the unblinking, mechanical eye of the wall-mounted surveillance camera betrays no investment in the recorded scene. The construction of reality necessarily occurs differently within these contrasting modes of image production. As has been discussed by Arild Fetveit, the first ‘feels real’ because it fulfils a ‘powerful urge for a sense of contact with the real’, as it ‘inscribes’ this physiological contact on the recorded text (130). As Dovey has articulated,

The contemporary video document is often nothing *but* an inscription of presence within the text. Everything about it, the hushed whispering voiceover, the incessant to-camera close-up, the shaking camera movements, the embodied intimacy of the technical process, appears to reproduce experiences of subjectivity. (56-57)

The aesthetics of subjectivity are also signs of amateurism as the portable camera shakes, laughs, runs, slips and swoops with its operator. Codes of amateur production enhance the authenticity of the video-maker’s presence in the text because the amateur is read as unlikely, or unable, to premeditate, stage or manipulate pro-filmic events. On the other hand, caught-on-tape footage generated by the CCTV ‘feels real’ because its inflexible recording position signifies its infallible and impartial omniscience, recording whatever occurs within its range 24/7 without preference or participation. This mode of production, while not exactly amateur in structure, similarly elides the

mediating processes of conventional television production, generating a sense of textual transparency. As it also inscribes the processes of its particular production on screen, the CCTV camera might be read as bearing 'the embodied intimacy of the technical process' as articulated by Dovey, even though the body in question is mechanical.

Two different extracts from a Fox special entitled *The World's Most Shocking Moments: Caught on Tape* (Fox, 1998) – a regular smorgasbord of am-cam captured crises occasioned variously by natural disaster, mechanical failure and human error or malice - illuminate the formal characteristics of both handy-cam and surveillance caught-on-tape footage. The sequence entitled 'Deadly Mudslide' exemplifies the strategies and affects of handheld, handy-cam footage. According to the format principles of this particular show, the video recording of a mudslide in a hilly suburban neighbourhood of Portland, Oregon is heavily framed by narrative devices - voice-over, digital titles, canned music and witness interviews - which code the event as fraught with a dangerous unpredictability. They also work to establish the credentials of the footage as inadvertently caught. The circumstances of production are announced by the presenter's voice-over as the sequence begins: two contractors 'are driving to a job site to inspect potential damage' in the rain-sodden neighbourhood. They bear with them a personal camcorder to document the site. The handy-cam is contextualised here as a tool of the trade, its usage is routine and professional. When the muddy bank upon which the camera is trained begins to slip ('What was about to happen would turn the next two minutes into a heart-pounding experience') the contractor's reaction to it - to keep recording - forces a formal shift into the domain of caught-on-tape. This shift is determined by the nature of the pro-filmic event as much as by the operator's cognitive process. At the very beginning of the extract, when the muddy bank is yet to slide, its status is mundane and the impulse behind the recording camera is that of routine engagement with the everyday. When the mud starts to slip, it becomes something special and the impulse to continue recording is predicated on a palpable desire to capture something rare, powerful and fleeting.

Once the circumstances of production have been marked in this way, the key footage of the mudslide is screened in its unedited entirety. At approximately 1.5 minutes in duration, the mudslide is a long-held shot for television but one which easily sustains viewer attention. A single handheld tracking shot, this footage performs a perfect narrative trajectory from the mudslide's initial discovery, through its hair-raising pursuit of the camera operator downhill to its subsidence at the base of the sloping street. The footage bears all the hallmarks of handy-cam caught-on-tape material. Low-resolution tape stock means that colours are washed-out and textural detail limited. The camera is handheld throughout the sequence and its swoops and jumps replicate the physiological journey of its operator. Initially calm in its survey of the muddy bank, the camera jerks with interest as a voice calls out 'The hill's going – have you got it?', an exclamation which is at once a warning to bystanders of oncoming danger and an urgent appeal to the gods of am-cam spectacle to ensure the safe capture of the event (even at the potential cost of human safety). The camera and operator then jump from the street into the back of a truck and the recorded view

wheels crazily, showing glimpses of a rain-lashed sky, running feet, battered umbrellas and the contents of the contractor's truck.

The footage generated by the operator's ascent into the truck is typical of the kind of 'proof of production' material included in caught-on-tape shows. Although it forces attention away from the mudslide itself, it rewards viewers with a heightened affect of immediacy and authenticity. For one thing, it shows that the camera was never turned off and that the sequence is being broadcast just as it was recorded, a production/reception trajectory which promotes a belief in an unmediated real. For another thing, this wheeling camera effectively expresses the physical and emotional state of its operator, as the jump into the vehicle tray and the steadying of the camera(man)'s body against the back of the cab is imbued with urgency, excitement and fear. Moreover, the movement from the street to the truck is ambiguous - does this moving vehicle provide its occupant with a means of escape or a more effective shooting angle?

Am-cam footage such as this mudslide sequence thus entails a double strand of fear and suspense: the fear of damage to the body and the fear of the loss of spectacle, as the aberrant external force – in this case several tonnes of speeding mud – threaten to overwhelm both. The particular reality effect of the handy-cam aesthetic derives from this interconnection of human body and recording device. In 'Deadly Mudslide' the verbal and physical responses of the camera's operator – expressing awe, excitement, fear and delight – are traced over the representation of recorded events. As the contractor turned cameraman urges on the truck driver, shouting 'faster' and 'go, go, go, go' (his voice rising in pitch with every word), it becomes evident that this footage is telling more than the story of the pro-filmic event. Rather, the 'Deadly Mudslide' recording reanimates the extreme physiological journey of a man running for his life and as such produces a specific aesthetic of a visceral, subjective real.

Another, much briefer clip from the same programme entitled 'Out of Control', shows surveillance camera footage of a prison riot. The contrast with 'Deadly Mudslide' is complete. Welded to a corner of the ceiling, this unblinking eye betrays no sensitivity to the scene of violence it holds within its gaze. True to its form, the camera misses nothing. A high-angle position and a wide-angle lens encompass every inch of the concrete room. And yet the result is characteristically low-visibility. The convex lens distorts perspective, the low-resolution stock eliminates detail and the high-angle shot makes it difficult to distinguish between guards and inmates. Moreover, for legal reasons, every other face in this clip is digitally blurred to protect the subject's identity, a post-production strategy which extends and literalises the defining unintelligibility of the clip.⁷³ The overall effect is an un-individuated blur of flailing limbs and batons, without narrative or resolution. In contrast to the handy-cam, which tells such vivid stories in its replication of the experiences of its

⁷³ Deborah Jermyn has discussed the obfuscation of identity on CCTV, caused by the low visual quality of footage, as producing 'screen ghosts' and notes that this degree of unintelligibility profoundly compromises the function of CCTV as an instrument of criminal surveillance. (82-83)

human operator, CCTV material has no narrative of its own making. This means that broadcast footage of the prison brawl pushes the limits of television tedium at just under thirty seconds, a third of the time given over to an unedited extract of the 'Deadly Mudslide'. Even though the surveillance camera (which runs endlessly) would have caught the outbreak and subsequent containment of the violence, the programme producers have been obliged to edit this footage down to its dramatic core. The screened extract therefore begins and ends *in medias res*, producing a narrative lack which exacerbates the unintelligibility of the extract. Nevertheless, the reality effect of this footage, if it can be quantified, is high. The sheer unintelligibility of the images presented to view testifies to a lack of design, either in terms of subject or representation. The singularity and simplicity of the recording impulse behind the prison surveillance camera – just to see everything and go on seeing everything endlessly - defies the precepts of television entertainment. Narrative, style and visual pleasure are sacrificed to the insistent demands of omniscience. Thus the all-seeing and never-ending medium of the surveillance camera produces an experiential real predicated on transparency of intent.

This 'transparency of intent' is the keystone of am-cam realism. The intriguing formal differences between handheld handy-cam and wall-mounted CCTV do not detract from the common ground of all caught-on-tape footage. Located outside professional broadcast-standard television production, this material asks audiences to invest in an innocent camera, one which always tells the truth because it lacks the art to dissemble. In the case of the surveillance camera this artlessness is that of an automaton – pre-programmed, indifferent, ongoing. In the case of the personal camcorder the recording impulse is not so different. As the dangerous mud bank begins to slip, the human instinct ('the hill's going – have you got it?') is to stay and watch rather than run and hide. Like a possum in the headlights, the cameraman is transfixed by the glory of the spectacle and unable to prioritise his escape from it. Thus, in moments of spectacular crisis, the human-held camera is as unable to turn away, or turn off, as the CCTV set. The resulting footage, in either case, seems to tell the truth of the event depicted because its sole intention is just to see and go on seeing until the end.

The Diary Room

The amateur camera is used to different effect in video diary television formats. Through the use of low-tech, self-operated cameras, these formats seize on the connotative power of amateur television and marry it to the discourses of confessional and diarised self-expression. Although video clip television shows often highlight the subjectivity of the camera operator, the brevity of each clip and the emphasis on 'shocking moments' eliminates context in ways which depersonalise the camera's human subjects and delimit narrative. In contrast, the video diary programmes which

first appeared in the nineties,⁷⁴ deploy the affects of amateur technology in the service of narratives of selfhood. These diary formats emphasise the possibility of sustained and intimate knowledge of both self (as a diarist) and the individual on screen (as a viewer). The combination of amateur image production with sustained character development provides for the most intense of reality television intimacies – individuals expressing themselves in private to a self-operated camera.

Television diary formats engage with various social discourses of personal disclosure which have strong associations with domesticity, privacy and truth-telling. Private journal writing, that is, the regular transcription of personal observations and emotions by way of a paper log (usually bound as a book), has altered little in form or content over centuries of practice. Twentieth century technologies have introduced new ways of making diaries – audio or video recordings and internet ‘blogging’– which have inevitably generated different modes of expression, yet the subject matter and production principles have remained constant. Whatever the form, a diary is typically written in a private space, within a domestic setting, when the author is alone. The book-diary may be designed with locks on the binding, or be locked away or hidden somewhere in the house between entries, and the personal computer or blog site may be protected by a password. This context of secrecy, privacy and domesticity is one of the reasons why diary writing sustains such a particular relationship with ‘truth’. The conventional hand-written diary has no intended public audience - it is addressed either to the pages of the diary or to the self. The diarist only shares his or her secrets with his or her self and therefore has no reason to dissemble. Thus, the feelings expressed in the diary should be as close to the truth of the diarist’s experience as the limitations of language allow. Internet ‘weblogs’ or video-diaries for television sustain this relationship with authorial integrity despite being intended for an almost infinite audience of anonymous readers. This is in part because diary-writing is understood as having a therapeutic dimension, that is, the process of self-expression in and of itself facilitates a relief of feeling for the author from which he/she alone can benefit. In this sense, the diary is not dissimilar from that other form of self-disclosure cited by reality television - the confession.

The designation ‘confession-cam’ is sometimes used in reality television as a screen label to identify participant’s private recordings, producing an alternative meaning to that offered by the more conventional ‘diary-cam’. This designation shifts the emphasis of the television moment from the domestic and routine to the extraordinary and scandalous. Although intensely private, ‘confession’ implies speech (whereas diary implies writing) and thus an audience. It also indicates an active going out into the world as conventional models of confession carry the individual from the home to a prescribed site of confession. With the nature of performance, the subject matter similarly shifts; a diary may be filled over many years with the minutiae of everyday life, whereas the act of confession indicates that the speaker have something particular to say at a particular

⁷⁴ International examples of this programme type include the British *Video Diaries* (BBC2 1991-1992) and *Video Nation* (BBC2 1993) and the Australian *First Person* (SBS 1996). In New Zealand, examples include *Life on Tape* (TV2 2000), discussed above, and *Get a Life* (TV2 2001).

time. In this context, the term confession carries a powerful association of guilt and a corresponding anticipation of punishment or redemption, a dynamic which seems to insist on some level of public exposure and interaction. The paradox of the public/private nature of confession, as discussed by others,⁷⁵ is a contradiction of which the confessional booth itself (as a site of private and anonymous speech incorporated into the architecture of a public institution) is succinctly illustrative. While the inanimate body of the book-diary provides a silent and non-responsive repository for personal information (which may only be reactivated by the author's re-reading), confession not only implies an audience but a respondent. Michel Foucault⁷⁶ interprets religious confession as

A ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile. (qtd in O'Shaugnessey 96)

Foucault's 'authority' is both an omniscient God and His mortal representative, the priest. Although the priest may mete out certain penalties and blessings, the ultimate authority resides with a God who already knows everything. The act of religious confession therefore implies a certain redundancy, as there can be no need to 'tell' God anything. For this reason, confession has a secondary, intrinsic function:

[it is] a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (qtd in O'Shaugnessey 96)

This is a useful interpretation within the context of television 'confession' as it freights the speech-act itself rather than the transaction between speaker and auditor. The act of confession holds an intrinsic capacity to effect beneficial change for the one who confesses and yet it is dependent on a public context for its fruition. The 'unburdening' of confession is a sharing of knowledge which may or may not carry guilt, a sharing which presupposes an audience. Like diary writing, the act of confession bears an assumption of truth-telling. Whether a person confesses sins to a God who already perceives the true state of the penitent's heart, or confesses to a public simply for the liberating pleasure of self-disclosure, the confession must be true for the dynamic of redemption to take place. Although diary-writing and verbal confessions differ markedly in terms of production and reception, they are equally bound, as intimate and interior forms of self-expression, by assumptions of truthfulness.

Alongside interpretations of the religious confession, twentieth century psychoanalysis has introduced a parallel confessional model – that which takes place on the analyst's couch. Like the

⁷⁵ This chapter is indebted to O'Shaugnessey's article on the private/public discourse of video diary formats and his review of theoretical debates, which he summarises thus: 'This tendency can be read progressively as the irruption of new discourses, new voices and modes of behaviour into the public arena, or regressively as the technology of the media being used to oversee, control and organise the technologies of the self, of who we are' (84).

⁷⁶ For comparative discussions of Foucault's theories of confession and their relevance to contemporary chat show confessionals, see Dovey (103-108) and Nichols (on the 'tele-sacramental') (54-57).

Catholic kind, the therapeutic confession is intended as a cleansing process (in one instance of the soul, in the other of the subconscious), an articulation of guilt, anxiety, fear and desire which purges the body and mind. In a way which mimics the Catholic confessional, the psychoanalyst's office is a sanctuary (outside the home) in which secrets may be told in confidence to an authorised auditor. The therapist is similarly bound by professional codes of honour which prohibit the retelling of confessional secrets. Neither therapist nor priest is expected to respond to the confession in kind, that is to share personal information about him or her self. Their response is heavily prescribed by their profession and in both cases is intended to guide (rather than marshal) the one who confesses on the road to personal salvation. Again, the therapeutic confession assumes both truth-telling and truth-seeking. The subject is a willing participant in the exchange, a person who seeks personal enlightenment through self-expression and analysis. In this sense, it is also 'a ritual in which the expression alone [...] exonerates, redeems and purifies'.

These forums of self-disclosure – represented respectively by the diary, the priest and the therapist – have been transposed by reality television into verbal confessional models which bear the contradiction of public/private. Daytime talk shows provide a forum in which people surprise friends, family and studio audiences with the pre-meditated (staged) exposure of personal secrets. The confessional content of these formats may be categorised as 'pseudo-public' because the programmes seek to engage with the discourse of public confession. On *Oprah* (CBS 1999-), for example, the stage setting, the panel of experts, the show host and the studio audience all stand in for and therefore acknowledge the wider, unquantifiable television audience. The studio audience participates in a 'staging' of the event of public disclosure which replicates the production and reception processes of broadcast television. The very public nature of the participant's 'confession' is thus acknowledged in a way which validates the public reception of these personal stories while seeking to sustain an imagined authenticity of expression. Significantly, this model of television provides for other pleasures besides the thrill of intimacy and authenticity generated by personal revelation. The cult of celebrity, the shock-impact of each revelation, the titillating nature of the subject material and the performance of the charismatic presenter are all viewer draw-cards. Production elements, including the brightly lit studio set, graphics and title music, a formulaic narrative, conventional editing techniques and broadcast-standard image production, add to the pleasures of reception.

In contrast, television diary formats offer little in the way of supplementary entertainment. The pared back audio-visual experience of amateur video production is a far cry from the show business of celebrity-hosted talk shows. True to the tradition of diary-writing (as opposed to confession) the content of video diaries is rarely revelatory or dramatic, preferring strategies of information-sharing which are incremental and quotidian. Although diary formats deploy structures of public confession in their production of self-disclosure, the form and content of these programmes is so different to that of the television talk show as to be almost antithetical. Confessional moments in video diary shows are thus 'pseudo-private' in form, as they persist in eliding, even disavowing, the public

dimension of the confessional moment. The emphatically private forum generated by these programmes arises out of a confluence of particular social and technological circumstances, that is, domesticity and amateurism. As these programmes are always set in and around the diarist's private home, they borrow from discourses of intimacy, ordinariness and the everyday. As amateur and self-directed instances of image-capture, video diaries elide the mediating processes of production and thus foster affective immediacy. Both connotative threads generate a model of authenticity predicated on the existence of a private, true self. For this reason, the structure and content of video diary formats draw a protective mantra around the arena of self-disclosure, one which suggests that the private self is only expressed authentically within a closed circuit. Thus, the framework of the video diary relies on the manifestation and maintenance of private space, both as discourse and habitat, to produce a feeling of the real.

For this reason, diary formats work to establish a particular 'zone of privacy' around the production and reception of each diary confession. The three discursive strands invoked by television diaries and confessions (ie. diary-writing, religious confession and therapeutic confession) all simulate a sealed room in which subjects may express themselves in secret and in private. Even when a human interlocutor is involved, the confessional contract provides for responses which prompt the one who confesses to self-reflection or self-awareness. Thus, while an audience may be required for some forms of confession, the confession is principally a solo performance, a monologue in a mirror. In video diary programmes the recording camera is always set up in a private room and the diarist speaking into this camera is always alone. The television viewer receives these 'confessions' when he/she is also alone (or in the company of a few family members) within his or her personal domestic space, setting up a production/reception mirror, which may feel like a closed circuit. The wider television audience and the mediating technologies of broadcast television are elided from this transaction. This self-reflective construction is significant in terms of assumptions of truthfulness, as there is no point lying to either yourself or your confessor. But it is also significant (within the context of television diaries and confessions) in terms of technology because it insists that the recording camera be self-operated. The 'am-cam in the diary-room' provides the point at which these two discourses of self (the personal handy-cam and the private confession) converge. For these reasons, the moment in which the diarist leans forward to switch the camera off, momentarily fading out of focus and leaning out of frame, is foregrounded. Technically poor and so easily edited out, this brief instance is included in the sequence because it confirms both the amateur status of the image-maker and the all-alone status of the one who confesses. Michael O'Shaughnessey, writing on the Australian video-diary series *First Person* (SBS 1996), elaborates on this particular televisual intimacy:

Seeing the camera being switched off points to the reality beyond the camera which we can never see. This reference to a greater reality confirms what we're seeing as real but at the same time it suggests some things can't be shown; there is a final privacy which the camera will not reach. (94)

For O'Shaughnessey, the incorporation of evidence of production produces a feeling of realness predicated on transparency of process, as discussed above in relation to handy-cam footage in video clip shows. However, the intense atmosphere of privacy which accompanies the production of domestic diarising reifies the limits of visibility (here emblematised by the moment of turning the camera on or off) as a sign of an interior and thus unrepresentable self. Two discursive strands (the amateur and the private) thereby converge upon the diarist's handy-cam, generating a reciprocal energy which magnifies the promise of authenticity carried by both.

The introductory sequence to the New Zealand diary format *Life on Tape* (TV2 2000) is broadly illustrative of the principles and pleasures of this mode of television programming, as it signals a relationship with both amateur production and domestic intimacy. A series of graphic titles on screen introduce the production premise of the show as self-directed: Ten Cameras/ Ten Stories/ No Scripts/ No Directors. The presenter's voice-over maintains this 'zone of privacy' by introducing the diarists as 'people with very special stories', who will represent themselves 'in their own words, with their own cameras' inside 'their homes' and 'behind closed doors'. In order to give this private world shape, however, the voice-over extrapolates the possibility of conventional narrative form, promising 'cliff-hangers, traumas and true life upheavals to rival any soap opera'. Studio footage of the presenter seated on a high stool and holding a handy-cam is used to re-inscribe both the axis of amateur production and generic precedents for televisual narrative:

Over the next ten weeks we'll be getting to know a unique cast of characters, who've been filming themselves with diary cameras – just like this. They are all playing a starring role in a real life serial drama, but without a director, and without a script.

These programmes promise the narrative shaping, plot resolution and consistent characterisation of drama and soap-opera, while seeking to retain the grainy realism of home-movies and the politics of access television. This is because each televisual mode brings something to the reality equation. Strong character development and sustained storylines foster affective intimacy in the same way in which long-running soap operas convince audiences that they 'know' fictional screen characters intimately. On the other hand, the politics and aesthetics of amateur television production manifest a kind of bodily intimacy between audience members and film making subject which brings things even closer. Moreover, as the presenter promises, the content of this format – private confessions which take place in a domestic setting – will insure that intimate and authentic self-expression is both the material and the process of the text.

Life on Tape, along with other video-diary formats, normalises confession through repetition by making the diary entry part of the domestic routine. Even if the ongoing narrative of a particular video-diary has dramatic potential (such as the adoption of two Russian orphans by a childless New Zealand couple) the daily diary instalments will include much redundant information and domestic detail. As has been suggested in previous chapters, the very ordinariness of such information works to certify its authenticity and assist in the production of intimacy. Apart from the subject matter of confessions, the perceived authenticity of the video-diary relies on a particular relationship between

diarist and camera, one which requires their mutual isolation. *Life on Tape* works hard to establish the 'alone' status of participants at the point of diary recording, despite the varying socio-domestic situations of the different diarists. As a format which represents participants in their 'natural' setting, that is, in their usual homes and in their existing family groupings, *Life on Tape* relies in part on associative meanings of 'the private home' to confirm the security and privacy of represented instances of self-expression. The truth-value of participant's emotional expression is certified by the connotations of intimacy, privacy, and secrecy borne by the family home. Within this home the bedroom is the most frequently deployed site of diary recording and its signification as a place of special privacy and intimacy is carried through the format. On *Life on Tape* participants determine where in their home the static diary-cam will be set up, a choice which usually reflects the extent to which the participant feels able to claim private space (ie. be alone) within his or her domestic environment. Teenagers living at home or young people in shared accommodation always use their bedroom. Single adults living alone are more likely to use the living room as it is the most spacious and comfortable room in the house and as private as anywhere else in the home. Adults with children in the house prefer their bedroom as the only 'adult space' in the house. Thus, intimacy with the camera is predicated on an environment of especial privacy and the opportunity for the participant to be alone with the camera. Wherever in the house the camera may be set up, the frame of the 'diary-cam' eliminates everything but the most intimate space in the participant's home.

The framing and representation of one of the *Life on Tape* diarists, the image-obsessed teenage girl Lauralee, offers a particularly piquant example of the manifestation of intimacy via private confessions of the banal. Lauralee is introduced to viewers through a brief, de-contextualised diary-cam clip which takes place in her bedroom. She is lying sprawled on her unmade bed, surrounded by articles of intimate clothing, make-up and other accessories. Picking up a pale pink bra-padder and showing it to the camera she says: 'These are good for pageants but not really the best thing for clubbing ... 'cos if a guy puts his hand down your top – he finds one of these and he pulls it out and ... not a good look'. Later in the same episode Lauralee describes her ideal physical body and how she plans to reconstruct her own through cosmetic surgery. The plastic breasts displayed in this clip are therefore emblematic of her pursuit of bodily perfection through artificial enhancement, and serve to introduce the terms of her diary narrative. More interestingly, however, this extract capitalises on television's capacity to facilitate intimate confession. Located in her bedroom, near the pillows of her bed, the camera is positioned, or perhaps secreted, much like a diary in book form. Lauralee leans towards the lens in a pose which is confidential, but utterly relaxed. Her state of undress and her disarrayed room draw the viewer into a quintessential 'zone of privacy', in which the viewer is addressed as an intimate confidant. In this context, Lauralee's confession, so personal in its detail and yet so disinterested in its delivery, is both titillating and banal. As she discloses the fake breast, she enacts a 'bodily confession' (as discussed in Chapter One) by revealing that which is supposed to remain hidden. As Lauralee comments, the inopportune revelation of this bodily secret may course disgust. In the private zone of the diary room, however, that which may be read as obscene in another context becomes a material proof of intimacy.

As for other television diary formats, the *Life on Tape* diarist alternates between two subjective positions: that of film maker and that of film subject. As the former, the diarist carries the handy-cam at shoulder height, seeing through the lens and speaking through or past the camera as he/she interacts with the people and places in his/her familiar environment, so that the camera appears to capture and replicate the diarist's sensory experience. Here, the intimacy, subjectivity and authenticity of the video document arises out of the 'inscription of presence within the text' (Dovey 56) as discussed earlier in terms of the handheld footage of video clip shows. As film subject, however, the video diarist locks the recording camera onto a tripod in a private room, generating an aesthetic affect reminiscent of the CCTV footage discussed earlier in this chapter, in which the very paralysis of the camera indicates a transparency of intent and an absence of mediation which adds up to an affect of truth-telling. Whether looking out or looking in the diarist is the exclusive operator of the camera and controls the positioning, framing and duration of the recording, meaning that the camera retains its subjectivity even when it takes up its static position as surrogate priest, therapist or television audience.

O'Shaughnessey details an incident in *First Person* in which the diarist as filmmaker trains her recording handy-cam on her mother and asks her to 'smile for the camera' (93). Her mother's embarrassed response is to mug a fake smile, a sort of 'TV' smile. When mother and daughter realise what she is doing s both explode with laughter and fall about on and off camera. Footage of the mother taken at this moment captures her involuntary, irresistible capitulation into laughter and good humour as the fake smile gives way to an expression of genuine happiness. This is a perfect reality television moment because it stages a transition from public to private, coding the former as artificial and the latter as authentic. The emotional equivalent of opening the front door to a private home on a property format, this revelation of the laughing mother behind her mask of self-conscious performance is all about gaining access to the private and thus the real. The laughter is an emotional accident - involuntary, spasmodic, unprecedented, uncontainable – and highly suited to its medium, the domestic handy-cam. As the daughter/diarist reacts to her mother's behaviour, the camera jiggles happily and chaotically, compromising picture quality on the one hand, and heightening body/camera intimacy on the other. The interaction between mother and daughter in this sequence suspends linear narrative and forces visceral, emotional experience into its place. The moment of spontaneous emotion (caught-on-tape) is the pre-eminent reality of reality television as it posits an irrefutable instance of authentic expression. As discussed in Chapter One, the physiological spasm associated with certain human emotions and responses – such as those generating tears, laughter or sexual orgasm – is interpreted as 'unfakable' because of its irresistible physiological compulsion. The affective power of the mother's laughter on *First Person* is based on this interpretation of the body as an instrument of truth-telling. Where her brain may direct her to 'fake' a smile in accordance with certain received notions as to appropriate or conventional performances for camera, her body betrays her and forces (in Williams' terms) a 'bodily confession' of internal feeling.

A memorable scene in *Life on Tape* accesses a bodily real in ways similar to that described above, although the camera is static and the diarist is positioned as the film subject. Pregnant with her first child after years of IVF treatment and alone at home while her husband is away on business, Sam makes an intensely emotional diary-cam recording after she learns of the sudden death of her grandmother. At first the diary entry takes the tone of a daily report as the woman begins to shape a story out of her day's experiences, which include receiving the tragic news. However, her emotional response to the situation begins to visibly overwhelm her, and, as she delivers the heart-rending conviction that her 'little girl could have no better angel', she starts to sob. The authenticity of this moment is certified not only by the domestic setting and the amateur status of the camera which she operates herself, but by the unprecedented nature of the event. Again, the personal handy-cam proves itself to be the perfect medium for the representation of unanticipated crisis. Not only is Sam's reaction to her grandmother's sudden death spontaneous, but the grandmother story itself erupts into the ostensible narrative of pregnancy and birth as an unpredictable force. Unanticipated by the programme's producers, the authenticity of this event, and the emotional response which Sam manifests, is certified by its unpredictability. Captured on the diarist's handy-cam, the connotative nexus is complete: the moment is authentic because the event is unanticipated, the response is irresistible, the representation is made in private and the means of image-capture is amateur. Reality television knowingly weaves the significations of accident, amateurism, domesticity and emotion into a single television moment which promises (and delivers) viewer connection with the real.

A Legacy of Low-Tech Reality

Much reality programming of the early twenty-first century bears little resemblance to the examples of am-cam television discussed above. The elaborate studio-based contrivance of the *Big Brother* (2000-) household, the cheerful transformation arc of property makeover shows, the self-reflexive selection processes of *Popstars* (TV2 1999) and other 'talent quest' formats or the convoluted set-dressing of 'historic' formats such as *Pioneer House* (TV One 2001) is now typical of the reality genre. Termed 'second generation' reality programming, all these shows present character-driven narratives which sustain interpersonal relationships over an entire season in a way antithetical to the short, sharp shock antics of video clip collections. In terms of film structure and aesthetics, these programmes differ markedly from either the crash-edited, fragments of spectacle offered by video clip shows or the grainy, shaky subjective camerawork of video diaries. Broadcast standards are the norm. Typically, a multi-camera set-up allows for a seamless edit and a conventional 'hero's journey' narrative arc, and post-production layering adds titles, voice-over and presenter links. However, the legacy of low-tech realism lives on. Never likely to settle for a single strategy when several will fit, contemporary reality television formulations allow for the discreet deployment of caught-on-tape and/or video diary style representation. The mechanisms of the am-cam ethos are reworked to suit the purposes of this character-driven realism and to serve the sophisticated palette

of a new generation of reality television viewers. Retained by some of these new formats is the selective use of the techniques and/or audiovisual markers of amateur video-cording and the deployment of associated discourses - of the ordinary, the domestic, the amateur, the unexpected. The self-reflexive acknowledgement (and often self-conscious display of) the process of production (even when these processes are not those of the amateur handy-cam) within second generation reality productions is also indebted to strategies by which both caught-on-tape and video diary footage produce an affective real.

Magazine or makeover shows frequently incorporate amateur video footage into a professionally shot and edited programme. The United Kingdom's fashion makeover format *What Not to Wear* (BBC Two 2001-) makes a feature of handheld handy-cam footage, which is both generated prior to and during each episode as the unwitting subject is 'caught' committing her style crimes. Similarly the garden makeover show *Ground Force* (TV3 1998-) cuts to a hidden camera carried by a family friend in a 'meanwhile' narrative construction to heighten suspense and emphasise the element of surprise. In both cases, part of the reality affect is the camera-innocence of the subjects – a potent indicator of authenticity embedded in the caught-on-tape catch-cry. These inserts are clearly delineated from the rest of the professional footage by the visual signatures of 'am-cam': shaky framing, low resolution stock, washed out colours and poor audio. They are further distinguished by superimposed screen titles (such as 'am-cam') and framing devices (such as the flat screen television in the *What Not to Wear* fashion stylists' workroom). Carefully labelled and framed by the programme in this way, these images bear the weight of Walter Benjamin's paradox of technology-permeated realism. For the 'am-cam' footage 'offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment' (227). At once more real-seeming and more manufactured-seeming than the professionally shot and edited material which sandwiches these video inserts, the connotative freight of amateur image production ensures that the 'am-cam' clips on *What Not to Wear* are more real because they are more manufactured, or in other words, because they bear the aesthetic stamps of their particular circumstances of manufacture.

The cultural valency of video diaries is evidenced by the frequent deployment of diary and confession-cam sequences in reality formats which are otherwise shot by professional crews. Domestic 'social experiment' formats such as New Zealand's *Pioneer House*, *Flatmates* (TV4 1997) or *Single Girls* (TV2 2000) are programmes which locate a group of people in unusual or uncomfortable living circumstances and film their attempts at co-habitation. The confession or diary-cam is a stock feature of such shows and provides an opportunity for 'housemates' to express their frustrations and disappointments. These sequences are shot in private on self-operated handy-cams just like the extended diary footage of formats like *Life on Tape*. The context of secrecy and privacy is crucial to the particular televisual contract of diary-camming and co-habitation formats play up to this through structures of competitive play or 'house rules' which compromise free expression outside of the diary-cam recordings. The construct of secrecy is sometimes further

exacerbated by the secreting of the cameras themselves, inside furniture or behind screens (a device deployed by the *Pioneer House* production team for reasons of 'heritage' interior design continuity). Video diarists on these shows have all the more reason to protect and monitor their own privacy as shared living conditions and stranger-cohabitants narrow the focus of private space. On these shows the programme participant always addresses the diary camera when he/she is alone in the bedroom. These recordings often take place late at night when the participant is confident that will not be interrupted. As this is a time when the rest of the house has gone to bed and the diarist is also preparing for sleep, the intimacy of the recording moment is heightened by the proximity of bed, sleep and undress. The content of diary-cam confessions on co-habitation challenge formats is frequently mundane. Diarists tell secrets of domestic guilt – dishes not done, food stolen, intra-household lusts and jealousies – and this banality supports structures of intimacy and authenticity through its inflection of ordinariness. As for the am-cam on *Ground Force* these diary-cam sequences are delineated on screen by titles, focus lines or digital time codes which mimic the screen displays of genuine handy-cam footage. In this way the signatures of amateur video footage – inadequate lighting, poor focus or composition, digital graphics - are re-deployed by professional television formats as markers of the real.

The competitive co-habitation format *Big Brother* is different in kind but comparable in intent. Where video diary formats foster notions of personal agency (as participants record their own images and audience members are invited into an all-access domain of amateur production), *Big Brother* is all about delimiting the agency of individual participants. Nevertheless, (as suggested in Chapter Two), the discourse of self-disclosure provides an outlet for members of the house, who make active use of the diary-cam in their efforts to maintain control over their own representation. Because the bedrooms in this special environment have been transposed into very public places (known as dormitories) the Diary Room constitutes a particular 'zone of privacy' for the purpose of 'confession'. This room is the only space in the house apart from the toilet which can be locked and which housemates are entitled to occupy on their own. Surveillance cameras hidden behind mirrored walls cover the Diary Room as elsewhere in the house, yet this room also has one particular camera on a tripod for the participant to address. This is the only intentionally visible camera in the house and provides a point of direct address for the housemate and an object focus for the non-specificity of the voice of 'Big Brother'. In this way, the participants on *Big Brother* are encouraged to dialogue with their diary-cam, which seems to speak to them in response. The religious confessional is invoked here as the unseen and omniscient authority metes out penalties, rewards and promises of consideration. As one of the most self-reflexive reality television formats of the age, *Big Brother* freely and knowingly performs its own processes of production. As for many reality formats, images of recording equipment are incorporated into the opening and closing title sequences and are signature elements of associated publicity material. Although specifics of production design vary from country to country and season to season, the emergence of each evicted 'housemate' into the studio world exterior to the closed set of the *Big Brother* house provides an opportunity for production transparency. The executive producer of the first *Big Brother*

series in the United Kingdom (Channel 4 2000), Ruth Wigley, has described the production of the weekly live 'Eviction Specials' in these terms:

I wanted it to look live and exciting, I wanted viewers – and the contestants who were evicted – to see the control room, to get an idea of all the behind-the-scenes work. After all, this was not meant to be a piece of polished drama. We were filming it for real, and it was a virtue of the programme that viewers understood that. (qtd in Ritchie 11)

In this formulation both participants and viewers are given the opportunity to bear witness to the technologies of their mediated relationship. The 'confession' of representational processes (thus exhibited) heightens both the temporal thrill of 'liveness' and the pull of the real. Wigley's statement also indicates the extent to which the self-conscious display of process is specific to the reality genre (as opposed to 'polished drama'), suggesting that part of the 'reality' of the reality television label is its truth-telling about processes of image production. In the same interview, Wigley suggests that the pleasures of 'seamless' editing are lost on a new generation of viewers, 'The audience we attracted understand television, they've grown up with it, they know its grammar' (qtd in Ritchie 10). Here, *Big Brother* rehearses the lessons of caught-on-tape formats, as it announces its own processes and makes a virtue of them.

As one of the slickest reality television formats in production, *Survivor* (CBS 2000-) exemplifies the 'second generation' shift away from an aesthetic of amateurism. Unlike some of the programme examples discussed here, *Survivor* resists self-reflexive references to television production and fashions itself on the 'polished drama' which Wigley's production design eschewed. In fact, the show's producer Mark Burnett strenuously resists association with the reality television label, coining the terms 'unscripted drama' and 'dramality' for his work. As a consequence this 'reality' format suffers from a perceived loss of realism. With its high-resolution saturated colour, classy camerawork and image effects, classical editing and smooth audio transitions *Survivor* attracts criticism for being insufficiently real. However, despite its allegiance to seamless production techniques and narrative shaping, the reality precepts of the *Survivor* format (ie the unscriptedness of the drama) make it vulnerable to the vagaries of human activity. Thus unanticipated and aberrant incidents - such as Michael Skupin's campfire accident in the 'Australian Outback' series - crack the well-polished veneer of the show's dramatic form. Curiously, this incident proved to be an aesthetic disruption as much as a narrative one. As Skupin's accident was unanticipated the camera crew were unprepared to cover the event. As a consequence the footage of this incident is much closer in tone to that of an amateur with a handy-cam than the professionalism of the usual multi-camera set-up. Shot from an awkward distance and including jerky movements as the cameraman runs to follow Skupin into the river, the footage of this dramatic incident has no edits and no close-ups. Skupin's screams are unintelligible and it is difficult to make out the extent of the burn damage to his face and hands. Suddenly we are in the domain of *The World's Most Shocking Moments: Caught on Tape* as horrific injury and rolling camera collide. Brief though this momentary genre-devolution may have been its impact on audiences was considerable. Cynical commentators noted that the producers would have liked to stage the event if they could, as it boosted ratings and

generated bonus publicity. However, it was the accidental clumsiness of this footage which accounted for its appeal. Fans, critics and watchdogs disagreed over questions of morality, safety and privacy raised by the episode, but nobody suggested it was faked.

The eruption of am-cam aesthetics at a point of actual emergency indicates that the production of televised reality is ineluctably intertwined with certain processes of image-making. For caught-on-tape is *the* medium for the representation of unanticipated crisis. In this way, Skupin's injury forced a formal shift in production for the *Survivor* crew, a shift which traded the visual pleasure of high-class cinematography for the pleasures attendant on viewing an accredited reality. As the entertainment tabloid *Who Weekly* reported, the *Survivor* team were not squeamish about the opportunity presented by the campfire incident. The programme's host Jeff Probst is quoted as saying 'On one hand, its horrifying to watch the skin peel off a human being. On the other, when things calm down, there's certainly a part of you saying, "Now that's gonna make for dramatic television". We have a responsibility to keep the cameras rolling' (qtd in Halfpenny 31). More succinctly, Mark Burnett told a press conference that he would have sacked the cameraman filming Skupin's accident if he had stopped shooting to assist the wretched man (Halfpenny 31). Both Probst and Burnett speak of the imperative of spectacle-capture, not only as a ratings puller but as some kind of grisly social mandate ('we have a responsibility...').

The compulsion to continue recording until the very end (think here of the final scene of *The Blair Witch Project* [Haxan Films 1999]) as manifested by examples of caught-on-tape footage, becomes a marker of realness because it testifies to the mesmerising appeal of spectacle. The *Survivor* cameraman, it seems, was never in any danger of losing his job because, as for the contractor from Portland or the female director in *Blair Witch*, instincts of self-preservation or human succour proved to be weaker than the instinct to keep watching.

Conclusion

'Second generation' reality television programming is arguably at its most real when it reverts to type in this way. Whether a diary-cam is installed in the wardrobe in *Pioneer House*, or technologies of surveillance are mocked up for *Ground Force*, or unanticipated crises prompt unprofessional recording practices as occurred on the set of *Survivor*, the low-tech reality effect proves to be a pervasive and persistent marker of authenticity in reality programming. As suggested, amateurism anchors the production of screen texts to a homely, familiar and ordinary point of origin. Low-tech production, which includes the surveillance footage generated by CCTV, borrows from the discourse of amateurism in its appearance of transparency, recording everything in its line of sight without design or discrimination. As different as the handy-cam and the surveillance camera might seem, this affect of transparency registers a special kind of truth on television, one which has become associated with a particular audio-visual grammar of low-tech production. Within this

nexus, video diaries retain a special claim to authenticity because they use the intimate technology of the handy-cam to produce narratives of self-disclosure, a structure epitomised by the production-reception loop generated by the self-operated 'confession-cam' in the private space of the bedroom.

Both video extracts screened on caught-on-tape shows (in their appeal to spectacle and the body) and the domestic diary-cam (with its unrelenting focus on a single subjectivity) narrow the frame of reference to a single 'shocking moment' or intimate revelation. The absence of temporal, spatial or narrative context produces television texts which are 'caught' in the present moment. The temporal implications of a medium which 'feels real' because it also 'feels live' is the subject of the following chapters.

PART TWO: NOW

CHAPTER FIVE

Island Time:

Isolation, Immediacy and the Present

Time is kind of out of my head. I don't have a clock or a calendar or a watch or anything. But for some reason I feel really, really comfortable. I think it has to do with just ... how little time is left.

Richard Hatch, *Survivor*

Reality television steps out of time in order to bring time to the fore. In this context, as one of the finalists of the first series of *Survivor* (CBS 2000) observed, it can be both missing and running out, both absent and urgent. The absence, even the explicit elimination, of markers of historical time (the clock and the calendar) is one of several strategies by which reality programming displaces conventional temporal structures. But this is not to suggest that reality shows like *Survivor* operate in a temporal vacuum. In fact, counting and numbering are obsessive activities in these formats as programmes are structured around increasing and decreasing numbers of participants, days, dinners and dollars. These progressive number sequences keep time present by offering up a series of counters which mark time without necessarily making it pass.

Thus, time past and time future fall away in reality programming. In this emphatic present, on-screen events and experiences are ushered into the moment of viewing, eliding social, emotional, spatial and temporal distances. Historical perspective, as a temporal structure of mediation, is foresworn. In its place, temporal immediacy telescopes time and space into an intimate zone of viewer engagement. The present-tense of reality television is, therefore, key to its feeling of realness because it underpins affects of immediacy and intimacy, making programme material seem both live (as a structure of broadcasting) and alive (as a structure of feeling).

As will be discussed, it is this specialised construction of time which separates reality television from other forms of factual programming. For the immediacy of reality television's present-ist time-code affords a pre-eminent role to the quintessential reality programming experience – the moment of spontaneous emotional disclosure and/or response. The emotional intensity which informs the heightened reality of reality television cannot be either retrospective or premeditated, but must be coincidental with the event which accounts for it. Although some reality formats may stage manage emotional events (diminishing rations on *Survivor*, the climactic revelation on *Changing Rooms*),

they do so in order to create a moveable present in which event, emotional display and audience reception coincide. This coincidence is what allows the viewers to be included, ever anew, in a living, breathing and fleeting experience of spontaneous emotion.

Present Time

A present-ist temporality has been claimed, however, as a defining characteristic of the medium of television itself. Mary Ann Doane, for whom '[t]ime is television's basis, its principle of structuration, as well as its persistent reference', has characterized the 'temporal dimension of television' as 'that of an insistent "present-ness" – a "*This-is-going-on*" rather than a "*That-has-been*" , a celebration of the instantaneous' (222). As Doane suggests, the very structure of televised transmission, in which content lives and dies in the moment of its reception, forces everything on screen into the present tense. For this reason, Doane proposes that television reaches the acme of its power and the very 'limit of its discourse' (222) in the live broadcast of catastrophic news events, as the present-ist discourse of the medium co-incides with technologies of actual live broadcast. Of catastrophe she writes, 'Its timing is that of the instantaneous, the moment, the punctual. It has no extended coverage (except, perhaps, that of its televisual coverage) but, instead, happens "all at once" '(223). Live broadcasts of human catastrophe as television events here epitomize television's capacity to produce urgency and immediacy because form and content coincide in the desire to represent everything 'all at once'. Doane's comments on catastrophe support arguments in the previous chapter in relation to the immediacy and correlative reality of caught-on-tape footage. The stuff of crisis and calamity, screened in fragments, has an innate applicability to a medium which might be characterized by its adherence to the present and fleeting moment.

In a different approach, documentary theorist Bill Nichols reads television's present-ist impulse in terms of a correlative loss of history. In his critique of contemporary forms of factual television programming, *Blurred Boundaries*, Nichols makes the 'problem' of television's ahistoricity specific to reality TV (43-62). Rather than accepting the mandate that television itself is incapable of historicity, Nichols emphasises television's capacity to open up distance and thus render 'intelligible' and historical discourse possible: 'The tradition of documentary film opens up questions of magnitude [because it] opens up a felt gap for the viewer between the representation and its historical referent' (48). Analysing early 'law and order' models of reality television (such as the American police video show *Cops*), Nichols considers that their proclivity for present-tense representation is particular to the aesthetic and discursive practices of such programming. 'Reality TV' as Nichols states 'anneals the felt gap opened by historical consciousness between representation and referent' (51) thus generating an ineluctable present-tense or 'the pervasive "now" of tele-reality' (54). For Nichols, this closeness is figured as a loss rather than an alternative. Thus 'the aesthetics of immediacy' are 'conjured in a timeless, spaceless telescope of mediated reality' (59) and reality television as a programming model is termed as a terrifying lack: 'decentered, ahistorical and futureless' (59).

Misha Kavka⁷⁷ has responded to Nichols' criticisms of reality programming by citing John Corner's outline of a 'post-documentary culture' which is marked by 'a performative, playful element' (qtd in Kavka and West 138). Elsewhere, Corner has observed a 'decisive shift away from the old co-ordinates, aesthetic and sociological, which ha[ve] variously worked to position documentary [...] as a specific project of recording the real' (*Afterword* 297). One of these 'co-ordinates' is the historically-determined temporality of documentary, which Nichols reads as essential to the production of the real. Reality television re-locates the real in the 'playful' context of the present moment, and makes the 'decentred, ahistorical and futureless' (Nichols 59) experience of time fun.

Nevertheless, Nichols' intervention is productive because it distinguishes between the structure and usage of historical time within the discourse of individual programmes or programme types. Although more consistent in its narrative development and characterisation, the police video material of an early reality show like *Cops* (Fox 1989-) has much in common with the caught-on-tape clips discussed in the previous chapter. Both in terms of aesthetics and discourse, this video footage of potentially violent or calamitous situations chimes in with the stuff of televised catastrophe as discussed by Doane. Thus, it seems that while television as a medium has a propensity for present-tense representation, certain types of programming realise this present-ism more effectively than others. Although a present-ist temporality eliminates historical perspective in ways which seem regrettable for Nichols, the loss of history may be reinterpreted as the advantage of intimacy and explored in relation to reality programming as both intentional and affective.

In comparison with other forms of factual programming, it can be seen that reality programming deliberately 'anneals the felt gap opened by historical consciousness' in its production of immediacy and intimacy. Documentary, news⁷⁸, current affairs and consumer advocacy programmes situate themselves at some temporal distance from the subject under discussion, generating a sense of historical perspective through the use of certain representative strategies: witnesses recollect events, journalists report on them and experts provide considered reflections. The gap this opens up between the occurrence of an event and its representation is the temporal distance which makes possible objectivity, reflection and analysis. But this distance (and the particular affects it produces in this context) is anathema to reality programming because it eliminates the possibility of spontaneous and intimate disclosure. This is a fine line to argue, because many news,

⁷⁷ For the purpose of this dissertation only, references to Kavka in the context of the co-authored article 'Temporalities of the Real: Conceptualising Time in Reality TV' (2004) by Kavka and West, identify work contributed by my co-author. Elsewhere in this chapter, sections of the article written by myself have been co-opted into the body of the text without further citation.

⁷⁸ Note that Bill Nichols categorises network news programmes quite differently to documentary (see 48-51). His discussion of American news formats aligns these programmes with reality television, suggesting that they 'oscillate[] vividly between sobriety and spectacle' (48-49). 'The boundary between news and reality TV blurs as the news stresses audience participation in the ritual of news production itself rather than in the world outside the frame. [...] The news makes vicarious participation in the news *show* a higher priority than decision making and responsible action' (49). Thus, Nichols criticises tabloid news formats because they seek to engage viewers in the present-tense of the broadcast programme rather than representing a broader historical perspective. However, I maintain that the narrative frame of reportage establishes a different temporal relationship with the audience to that offered by unfolding events in reality programming.

documentary and current affairs formats milk tears from their interview subjects (in ways which support the affects of intimacy and authenticity associated with 'bodily confession' as discussed in Chapter One), but they do so within the context of retrospection.

The specialized intimacy of reality programming relies on a perceived co-incidence of experience (thus a specialized temporality) which takes two forms. Firstly, the expression of emotion by programme participants must be seen to coincide with the occurrence which triggers it. The emotional testimonies offered in documentary or news programmes, although often affecting, falter here because the emotion represented is retroactive and coloured by reflection. In contrast, reality television privileges the immediacy of reactive experience. This distinction sets up a kind of past/present register of emotional experience. In this light, we might usefully compare an article on the six o'clock news in which a woman cries as she relates the story of her house burning to the ground (earlier that day) and an emergency services reality format in which a woman cries as she watches her house burn down. Even though the news footage may be screened within hours of the event, and the emergency services reality show edited and broadcast weeks after the fire, the affective strategies of the reality format will still maintain a pre-eminent present-ism over the news broadcast because the woman's distress is represented here in its reactive, immediate instant of being. When emotional responses on screen are shown as arising in that present instance, in reaction to unfolding events, they establish an affective immediacy which inflects the experience of reception, making that too seem 'live'.

Theorising around television as the purveyor of 'information', Doane notes that the use of 'file footage' in television news stories compromises the present-ist appeal of this format and thereby 'reduces the credibility of the story'. As Doane writes, 'Reused images, [...] undermine the appeal to the "live" and the instantaneous which buttresses the news' (226). The temporal plane of history opened up by the representation of archival film images heightens the 'intelligibility' (to use Heath's term) of the programme, and the extent to which it may provide 'information', at the cost of immediacy and the 'appeal of the "live" ' (Doane 226). Although pre-recorded footage of a daily news item is neither interpreted nor labelled as 'file footage' in the proper sense of the term, nor is it 'reused' as discussed by Doane, the construction of the news format, with its alternation of 'live' anchors and processed images, undertakes to produce historical perspective by reporting on events rather than simply showing them. The emphasis placed on the temporal positioning of the news programme itself (the date and time of the edition) and the temporal framework of the news story (the time of the fire, the response time of the emergency services, the subsequent reaction of the police department) invoke the authority of history so as to certify their credibility as cultural product and site themselves within Nichols' 'discourses' of 'sobriety' (47). By consciously locating itself in history, however, the news article about a house burning down is unable to sustain the affects of immediacy (and thus, arguably, both intimacy and authenticity) for which the medium of television is justly recognized.

Live Time

For early commentators, the technology of live and continuous transmission, coupled with the affect of immediacy which this served, distinguished the new medium of television – technically, culturally, ideologically - from its big screen sister, cinema (see Berenstein). Since then, television liveness has become a persistent subject of critical debate, notwithstanding the demise of television's 'Golden Age' of live broadcasting. In an era in which only a small percentage of television programming is constituted by the live transmission of events as they occur, debates as to the production and manifestation of televisual liveness tend to focus on the capacity of television as a medium to generate a feeling of present-ness. Nevertheless, the issue of whether or not television broadcasts are actually live inevitably inflects a reading of either present-ism or liveness on television. Doane's discussion of catastrophic news events, already referred to above, is indicative of this tendency to conflate affective structures of urgency and immediacy with instances of actual live broadcast. As form and content coincide, the capacity of television to mediate a live experience of the world in the present tense is tested to the limit.

Like Doane, theorists of television time tend to focus attention on news and non-fiction programme forms. The construct of liveness is debated via analyses of television events which are actually live; see Mellancamp and White on the Challenger explosion, Dayan and Katz on historical media events, Freidman on sport. Jane Feuer, however, addresses the subject of televisual liveness in terms of a medium no longer predicated upon live programme production. Writing in the early eighties, Feuer notes that a collective cultural desire to read television as live has persisted despite the fact that live broadcasts of actual events are increasingly rare. The medium itself, she suggests, is freighted with the thrill of liveness and, as a construct, this temporal imperative has become disengaged from the technical status of the broadcast itself (be it live or otherwise). As Bonner has noted of late night entertainment shows, 'Showing the camera, referring to off-screen crew, risking things going wrong' is 'an aesthetic choice that may signify liveness (and risk) but is no index of it' (36). These coded references to live production generate immediacy and intimacy by seeming to elide the technological mediation and temporal lag necessitated by standard broadcasting processes. (The extent to which these references overlap with markers of low-tech production and/or amateurism, as discussed in the previous chapter, is illustrative of television's tendency to affect realness via the elision of mediating processes – temporal, technical, professional, social). However, Feuer's analysis takes as its subject an American breakfast infotainment show which is partially live and partially pre-recorded. In applying her theories of an 'ideological' liveness, she chooses to remain within the domain of factual and (partially) live programming, so that the perception of live time continues to be anchored to a literal (or ontological) process of live transmission.

Whether liveness and history on television need always be mutually exclusive is addressed by Mimi White in her review of critical approaches to television and time, in which she ventures to 'insist that

history, duration, and memory are as central to any theoretical understanding of television's discursive power as liveness and concomitant ideas of presence [and] immediacy' (41). Reviewing CBS news coverage of the Challenger disaster of 1986 (already the subject of articles on television time by Doane and Mellencamp, as cited above), White discusses the 'dead time of live reporting' (42), showing that the processes (discursive, narrative and technological) by which catastrophic events are re-presented on screen simply take time, time which is filled on screen by news anchors with nothing to say, and the repetition of film footage which has yet to render a coherent narrative. Rather than structuring a debate in which liveness and history are irreconcilable, White makes links between history and catastrophe on the one hand and liveness and banality on the other, suggesting that 'liveness on television is routinely if variously imbricated with – and implicated in – history [and] momentous events' (41). This re-ordering of temporal allegiances disestablishes the cultural hierarchy implicit in Nichols' stratification of factual programming and makes for a more productive reading of televisual temporality.

Reading live television as (potentially) banal shifts the axis of interpretation in ways useful to considerations of reality programming. In her work in the field of 'ordinary television', Frances Bonner suggests that 'It is as much a characteristic of special television that it disrupts regular scheduling, as it is of ordinary television that it constitutes it' (43). Qualities of 'catastrophic' news coverage or televised special occasions such as a royal wedding or the Olympic Games assert themselves as events by disrupting the very fabric of the broadcast and reception of television. Although television may be good at liveness, it is also good at banality. Where catastrophe pushes television to the 'limit of its discourse' (Doane 222) by intensifying one and displacing the other, reality programming (included in Bonner's definition of ordinary television) makes good use of both. Ordinary television is so suited to its medium because it is repetitive, cyclic, regular, routine, quotidian, everyday and familiar, not only in terms of content but in terms of patterns of broadcast and routines of reception. As both repetitious and banal, the form and content of ordinary television threatens the progression of history. As Bonner observes:

It is not that there is an absence of events in the lives of ordinary people (or, one might add, ordinary television), rather that the regularity of these events is of a different order from the exceptional events that are held to comprise a more traditionally constituted form of history.
(43)

Where exceptional events punctuate, delineate and organize history, ordinary happenings in everyday lives go round and round, resisting closure or development. This notion of banality, coupled with John Corner's sense of the 'playfulness' of 'post-documentary culture' creates an alternative discursive arena for contemporary reality programming, in which the temporal logic of a serious and progressive historical narrative may be helpfully and legitimately suspended in favour of the present-tense, urgent and intimate temporality of the present moment.

Unlocated Time

This chapter advances a theory of 'unlocated' time as the most appropriate interpretation of the temporal construct of live or present-ist time as fostered by reality programming. The notion of a present-tense timeframe works against a concept of historical time. Historical time is defined here as a temporal plane which is both linear and infinite in ways which presuppose a past, present and future. Historical time can be characterised as 'located' because it functions to anchor events to particular points along a prescribed continuum and to locate them irrevocably in a specific relation to each other. Clock time, named days of the week and calendar dates can all function in this way, locating the moment in relation to other events within a particular spectrum of recorded time. In contrast to this, the way in which time operates in reality television programmes can be characterised as unlocated. Unlocated time is both finite and cyclic - the 39 days of a *Survivor* season, the 48 hours of a weekend property makeover, or the five minutes of a *Fear Factor* (NBC 2001-) challenge. Starting, stopping and repeating themselves at will, these are pre-set timeframes which flout the technical restrictions of regular pace and linear progression, as set by historical time, and posit an alternative temporal logic.

Unlocated time borrows its terminology from the clock and the calendar – that is, it speaks of minutes, hours, days and sometimes weeks – but it adopts the temporal logic of the hourglass or the abacus. Disengaged from the superstructure of a historical continuum, these units of measured time are released from the constrictions of linear progression and can function differently. Like beads on an abacus these units of time (hours, days) become simply counters which can be used to count up *or* down in a numerical sequence. Mary Ann Doane makes a similar analogy in a footnote pertaining to her definition of the time of television catastrophe:

The time proper to catastrophe might be thought of as compatible with that of the digital watch where time is cut off from any sense of analogical continuity, and the connection between moments is severed. One is faced only with the time of the instant – isolated and alone. (238)

This is a distinction not between kinds of time (both a digital and an analogue watch tell the same number of seconds, minutes, hours in a 24 hour day, and do it at the same pace) but between representations of time. As Doane suggests, the analogue clock face, with its presentation of a twelve hour number cycle and its regular 'clockwise' progression places the present moment in context, showing its past and future. The digital clock image offers the present time only, eliminating temporal context. In this way, the digital clock becomes a succession of numerical titles, flashed upon the screen, numbers which are unlocated within any greater temporal scheme. In fact, according to Doane's interpretation, the digital clock is nothing more than a spinning timecode, severed from the ordering rule of the twenty-four hour day. Doane's reflection on digital time reaches fruition in an analysis of reality programming because these formats make frequent and practical use of the digital timecode on screen. With its focus on each present moment as an 'isolated instant' the digital timecode suits reality television's purpose as both a figurative interpretation of temporality and a practical means of representation.

It is this attention to the 'isolated' or unlocated temporal moment which frees time from the linear and infinite imperatives of a historical timeline. Thus, periods of unlocated time in reality formats are counted backwards to zero as often as they are counted forward to a predetermined time, date or number. For instance, participants on a garden makeover show are just as likely to say '45 minutes to go' as 'it's nearly six o'clock' making the endpoint both zero and six. Whatever the apparently arbitrary number being aimed at there is always a pre-determined endpoint, a final deadline at which the clock stops or the hourglass is empty. It is this quality of finiteness, or self-determined expiry which makes unlocated time (paradoxically) ever-renewable: the time code graphic on *Fear Factor* is reset to 0:00:00 for each new contestant; every series of *Survivor* starts at 'Day One'. Disengaged from the linear temporal plane of 'history', units of unlocated time float (backwards, forwards and round-and-round) in a temporal vacuum. Via these cyclical temporal parameters, a several-month delay necessitated by post-production (say, on *Survivor*) slides neatly into 'Day One' of viewing, allowing programmes to traverse distance and time zones while maintaining the sense of immediacy necessary for establishing at-home intimacy between viewers and participants.

Another characteristic of unlocated time is a preference for the smaller units of measured time. Reality television speaks of forty-eight hours instead of a weekend, thirty days instead of a month and in instances of very close competition, makes every nano-second count. (Another reason why the digital timecode is favoured over the analogue clock face in competitive reality formats is its capacity to make these minute units of time visible and countable). This practice serves to focus attention on the present hour or day rather than the historical context in which that moment occurs. Unlocated time can operate because minutes, hours and days are in themselves finite and endlessly repeatable countdowns which do not commit the events they identify to any timeline longer than their own. When graphics or commentary draw the audience's attention to '2.45am' on *Big Brother* or Sunday on *Pioneer House* (TV One 2001), the format is selecting the smallest appropriate temporal marker because the smaller the unit of time, the more easily it can be floated within a present-ist temporal plane. For instance, the screen graphic '2.45am' separates the on-screen represented moment from the at-home moment of viewing occurring at 6pm, but it does not impede the viewer's will to interpret the represented event as occurring *that same day*.

By way of contrast, the use of markers of historical time in the representation of catastrophic news events, as indicated above, anchors such events to a linear historical continuum. The emphatic use of clock time, calendar date and year in coverage of the World Trade Centre attacks (both graphically – screen titles '9.30am 11th September 2001' – and discursively) attached each moment to a receding historical past as they occurred. The use of dates in live coverage of historical events excites a sense of intimate connection between viewer and viewed precisely because it confirms that those events are occurring *that same day*. The thrill of liveness, although genuine, is short-lived. Like the daily papers, the currency of the evening news is the very thing which renders it obsolete as the hour and date of its production passes. Reality television opts for a different strategy, an affected liveness which never dies. By eliding evidence of the time and date of

production from reality television programmes, these formats seek to replicate the thrill of liveness – and the intimacy this affects - by quietly proposing the *possibility* that events are occurring on the same day that they are being transmitted. Thus, reality television programmes do not need to be live or simul-cast, but only need to establish a floating present framework that conjoins the worlds of viewing and being viewed. As this chapter will explore in terms of quasi-simulcast reality formats like *Big Brother*, when reality television *is* live much of the success of its affective immediacy falls away.

Time in Isolation

Temporal isolation is key to the formulation of unlocated time in reality television. As will be explored in the following analyses of specific formats, an affective present is easily facilitated within a temporal zone expunged of historical markers of past and future. The reciprocal processes of social, spatial and temporal constructions within reality television mean that the isolation of a present-ist time zone usually works in tandem with unlocated social groupings and habitats. Thus reality formats which take isolation as their keynote – be it social, environmental, geographic or temporal – are instructive exemplars of the present-ist mode. These formats may be grouped as isolation-challenge formats, being those which relocate an artificially contrived social grouping (typically a collection of individual adults between the ages of eighteen and fifty who have no prior connection with each other) in an artificially contrived habitat. Formats such as these are structured around the principle of interpersonal competition, offering individual participants a chance at a substantial material reward. Also known as ‘false environment’ and/or ‘intimate stranger’ formats, these productions trade on a double axis of unfamiliarity as participants struggle to adjust to an ‘unnatural’ social grouping and an unfamiliar habitat. The negotiation and survival of the difficulties posed by both stranger relations and alien environment manifest the principal challenges of the show. Thus, social popularity is one of the ways in which individual success is measured in these shows and, via mechanisms of elimination, often impacts in practical ways on the participant’s progress towards the material prize. Similarly, the participant’s ability to adapt to unfamiliar surroundings is monitored and rated by the show and may effect the outcome of the competition.

Of all reality television formats it is the isolation-challenge show which most clearly manifests the mechanisms of unlocated time as defined previously in this chapter. The competitive structure necessitates and privileges the countdown principle. This in turn foregrounds a series of unlocated numerical sequences: the number of days, participants, dollars, square metres of living space, meals, and so on allocated to the programme. These are counted obsessively as an alternative to conventional mechanisms of time-telling. The countdown ethos drives the narrative and structures production and broadcast. The temporal compulsion provided for by the explicit function of social competition in these formats fosters affects of urgency and immediacy, bringing the production into an insistent present which sutures the viewer into a shared experience of represented events.

The relationship between geographic or environmental isolation and the temporal precepts of unlocated time is critical to the success of this format-type. All isolation-challenge shows relocate participants in an isolated environment, the boundaries of which are aggressively patrolled and maintained. This isolation is more than physical as the delimitation of space is accompanied by the prohibition of social interaction outside the prescribed group. The suspension of contact with anyone beyond the boundaries of the production facilitates mechanisms of unlocated time as it provides for an experience of daily existence stripped of temporal-social norms. By separating participants from mechanisms of calendar and historical time environmental isolation serves the temporal principles of present-ist time by disengaging represented events from anything which would mark the programme with the time of production.

In response to the loss of both place and time, however, the people in these shows work to structure the passing days according to conventional routines of social existence – eating, bathing, sleeping and working - referencing, as they do, another temporal model defined here as ‘societal time’. ‘Societal time’ is a time plan through which patterns of human behaviour are, by general consensus, synchronised for reasons of social cohesion and governance. Work hours, lunch breaks and leisure time are temporal-social institutions which depend on the simultaneous organisation of time by all members of society. These institutions are culturally specific and subject to change, as trends in ‘flexi-time’ work hours and Sunday shopping suggest.⁷⁹ Like Saturday morning school in France or late night shopping Thursdays on Auckland’s Karangahape Rd, the organisation of societal time is arbitrary and contrived rather than natural or rational. So long as all members of the community in question agree on the particular temporal construction, it will hold its logic. This specific usage of time indicates the extent to which societies manifest identity through the temporal organisation of collective activities.

Thus, the emphasis placed on domestic routines by isolation-challenge formats serves several functions. Firstly, the familiarity of mundane activities makes the programme participants ordinary despite their extraordinary circumstances and/or exotic location (in ways which support affective structures of intimacy already discussed in Chapter Two). In this way, the continuation of daily rituals familiar to participants from their lives outside the production format is valued by both viewers and participants as a connection to ‘home’. Secondly, the representation of daily domestic tasks - brief, banal and repeated everyday - constitutes an alternative temporal strategy for marking and measuring the passing of time. In formats which deprive participants of conventional time-keepers such as watches, clocks or calendars, an instinctive adherence to three meals per day, prescribed periods of labour and leisure, and sleep at night enables participants to keep track of passing time within each diurnal cycle. Thirdly, the isolation of participants in new and unfamiliar surroundings and away from markers of historical time is invariably compounded by the social

⁷⁹ Recent attempts to homogenise business hours across the European Union was met by protest in Spain where the long-held tradition of a midday siesta, adopted for reasons of climate, has configured business, educational, dining and shopping practices in particular ways.

disorientation of stranger-intimacy. Thus, the recurrent activities of domestic life represent an effort on the part of these re-located people to forge a temporary community. Indeed, the interpersonal relationships of group members in such reality programmes as *Survivor* and *Big Brother* is the governing narrative of the format. In this context, however, it can be seen that efforts towards social formation are intimately tied to efforts to counter both spatial and temporal disorientation.

Arjun Appadurai has written of the ways in which routine behaviours manifested by small communities, such as 'marking seasonal change and agricultural rhythms' or 'demarkating boundaries (both domestic and communal)' (180), indicate the socialization of both space and time in the social project of the 'production of locality' (178). As the territories of both space and time are demarcated and bounded in this way, the community emerges as both an actual place and an imagined one. Through their existence in a society, individual members begin to produce their social identities. Thus, the work of organising and maintaining temporal and spatial order within the collective domestic arena is both the means by which social order is produced and a manifestation of that order. The energies of social, spatial and temporal organisation are thus endlessly reciprocated as 'space and time are themselves socialized and localised through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation, and action' (180). This reciprocation is self-evident in isolation-challenge reality formats which present participants with a group of strangers and a patch of sand and wait for them to create social order. As everyone sets to building bivouacs, staking territorial claims and organising breakfast they assert familiar temporal and spatial frameworks through which both collective and individual social identities may be produced. Thus, the drive to create community in these contrived situations is manifested through efforts to organise space and time. As will be discussed in the following analyses of specific examples of isolation-challenge reality programming, the temporal strategies of present-ist time are balanced out against the reciprocal processes of spatial and social organisation. Thus, the more extreme the suspension of normative social activity, the more complete the substitution of present-ist time.

Island Life on *Treasure Island* and *Survivor*

A subgroup of isolation-challenge shows are those located on 'deserted' tropical atolls. As a place defined by its geographic isolation and emptied out of social and cultural references, the desert island is perhaps the ultimate setting for the isolation-challenge reality programme. The desert island, as myth, is a lost island - lost in space and lost in time. Found by accident and never found again, the desert island of popular literature, legend and film⁸⁰ is definitively unlocated (literally

⁸⁰ For example, the literary classics *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding or the feature films *Blue Lagoon* (1980) starring a young Brooke Shields or *Cast Away* (2000) starring Tom Hanks (to name but a few of many). On television, the comedy series *Gilligan's Island* (CBS 1964-1967), the teenage drama series *The Lost Islands* (0-10 Network 1975) or the wish-fulfilment drama series *Fantasy Island* (ABC 1978-1984) have all engaged similarly with the potentialities of lost time and space as the conduit for personal revelation and fulfilment. In a post-*Survivor* world, the cult television thriller *Lost* (ABC 2004-) continues this tradition.

uncharted), the geographic equivalent of present-ist time. The 'Here' of the desert island is one divorced of meaningful geographic context, just as the 'Now' of reality television is necessarily disengaged from the continuum of history. For the accidental inhabitants of the mythical desert island, the elimination of context fosters a heightened and pivotal focus on the self. Hence the lost island becomes a site of personal transformation, catharsis and redemption. Small wonder it works so well as reality television.

Arguably the first isolation-challenge reality television programme, Swedish production *Expedition: Robinson* (SVT⁸¹ 1997-), was set on a desert island. This format, a runaway ratings success for the state broadcaster which funded it, established a now familiar template for isolation-challenge reality television. A group of strangers were relocated to a remote atoll where they were divided into two teams and left to cohabit in difficult environmental conditions, form social alliances which would protect them from being voted off the island and compete against each other for a substantial cash prize. The final episode of the fourth season was viewed by 4,045,000 people in Sweden, making it one of the most viewed programs in modern television history (*Wikipedia*, 'Expedition Robinson'). Three years later, in 2000, the first series of the American desert island challenge format *Survivor* (CBS 2000-) went to air. At the same time, similar formats appeared around the world, including the piratical *Treasure Island*⁸² (TV2 2000-) in New Zealand and *Shipwrecked!* (Channel 4 2000) in Great Britain. The success of *Survivor* has spawned numerous variations in America, including the x-rated *Temptation Island* (Fox 2001) about relationship fidelity at an island resort, *Under One Roof* (UPN 2002), in which nuclear families compete for a luxury island holiday home, and *The Real Gilligan's Island* (TBS 2004), a reworking of the classic television comedy⁸³ in which actual millionaires, naval captains and film stars stand in for the shipwrecked characters. Variations aside, these reality formats are predicated on the social and emotional pressure which is generated by the geographic isolation of the desert island setting. Although all of these examples deploy the correlative strategies of isolated time and space, this chapter analyses just two: the United States hit *Survivor* and New Zealand's *Treasure Island*. In discussing these shows, it will be helpful to separate an analysis of time frameworks into two different categories: the social units of daily existence and the clock-bound time of activities. It will also be necessary to make a distinction between participants and the television audience, that is, between the time of the diegesis and the extra-diegetic time of broadcasting.

⁸¹ *Expedition: Robinson* screened in Sweden for seven seasons on the public broadcaster SVT, and then moved to the commercial TV3 for its 2004 season (*Wikipedia* 'Expedition: Robinson').

⁸² The format origins of these various productions are convoluted. The *Expedition: Robinson* format was developed by Planet 24, a United Kingdom television production company owned by Charlie Parsons and Bob Geldof who licensed it to Swedish broadcaster SVT in 1997. Parsons and Geldof's company Castaway Television Productions retained the rights to the concept when they sold Planet 24 in 1999. Mark Burnett then licensed the format to create the U.S. show *Survivor* in 2000 (see *Wikipedia*, 'Expedition Robinson'). New Zealand's *Treasure Island*, from Julie Christie's company Touchdown, was developed as an original concept and screened several months ahead of the first series of *Survivor* in 2000. While *Treasure Island* may not be (as has been assumed) a local 'rip off' of *Survivor*, it seems probable that it was 'inspired' by the success of *Expedition: Robinson* in Europe.

⁸³ *Gilligan's Island*. Warner Bros. CBS. 1964-1967.

True to the primitivist romanticism of the desert island setting, participants of both *Treasure Island* and *Survivor* forgo conventional time pieces for the duration of their stay and rely instead on naturalistic methods of telling time such as the progression of the sun and moon across the sky or the ebb and flow of the tide. In an early episode of the first *Treasure Island* series, one participant mocks this substitution, pausing to lick her finger and hold it to the sky as she estimates the number of light hours remaining in the day. Her gesture is a knowing one, and it is not the last time principles of spatial and temporal orientation will be confounded on this show. In keeping with this practical shift from mechanical to elemental time-telling, the production conveys the time of day to the viewer through the use of suggestive shots of dawn, high noon or sunset. These images help structure the narrative of each episode and provide visual shorthand for such cultural clichés as 'a new day and a new beginning'. In this way they orientate the viewer according to the temporal logic of classical narrative.

Another way in which *Survivor* and *Treasure Island* participants track and structure the passing of each day is through the observance of conventional domestic routines around sleeping, eating and bathing. Every day each 'tribe' gathers for the preparation and consumption of breakfast, lunch and dinner. This ritual serves various purposes - relief from boredom and narrative interest no doubt among them - but it is also a way of telling the time. Like sleeping at night, the routine of regular meals is a socially determined convention which structures the diurnal cycle and so marks the passing of each day. This behaviour indicates processes of 'societal time' and as such socialises the group in ways conducive to viewer intimacy. As a point of connection to 'home' regular mealtimes (three times a day) and conventional sleep patterns are highly valued by the show's participants and are consistently and ritualistically observed even when little or no food or rest are to be had. This patterned behaviour continues despite the fact that the social-temporal structures which necessitate the synchronisation of certain human activities are largely absent from the activity schedule of either show. As a mode of time-keeping, these routines not only locate participants temporally but socially ('breakfast time' signifying both co-operative group interaction and 8am). In this sense they go some way towards countering the temporal disorientation engendered by the unlocated time frame of the format. Use of time in this way signals a connection to a particular place as the participant's desire for socio-temporal structures is one way in which he/she expresses a longing for home. For viewers, these behaviours also register a note of ordinariness in a field of unusual objects and activities and foster the kind of intimacy which accompanies familiarity and the everyday. As suggested above, in relation to Appadurai's observations on the correlative socialisation of time and space, the domestic busywork of the tribes or teams in these programmes (creating separate zones for eating, sleeping, bathing and defecating, marking the boundaries of their territory with flags and fences, replicating the architecture of 'kitchen' and 'dining' rooms around the campfire) might be read as an effort towards social organisation as much as it is clearly an attempt to impose a familiar spatial order upon an empty plot of sand and a temporal order upon an empty day. Thus, the adherence to conventional

patterns of eating, bathing, working and sleeping exhibited by reality show participants in unfamiliar locations enables a co-operative community to emerge out of a collection of strangers.

The final episode of the original series of *Survivor* opens with a sequence which exemplifies some of the points made here. The screen graphic 'Day Thirty Seven' reads over an establishing shot of daybreak on the camp beach. A tracking shot shows Kelly sleeping and Richard standing, looking out to sea. The answer to the question proposed by this sequence – 'what does this new day mean for the group?' - is provided by two 'confession cam' shots of Richard and then Susan talking about time.

Richard: Time is kind of out of my head. I don't have a clock or a calendar or a watch or anything. But for some reason I feel really, really comfortable... I think it has to do with just how short - how little time is left.

Susan: We're down to sixty hours - so, sixty hours, if you look at it that way, I can deal with it.

Articulating their experiences of passing time, Richard and Susan both speak of time as 'finishing' soon, of 'just how little time is left'. This is evidence of the extent to which both participants and audience are sutured into the temporal logic of '*Survivor*-time'. Their statements require no qualification or explanation – Susan doesn't need to say 'We're down to sixty hours *of the game*'. For this is a kind of time which *can end*, and start again, and even go backwards. In particular, Susan's interpretation of the three remaining days as 'sixty hours' encapsulates the strategy of 'present-ist' time which dominates and characterises reality television as a genre. Living hour-to-hour rather than day-to-day has the effect of speeding up Susan's experience of passing time because it contracts her temporal focus to the present. By living 'in the moment' of the passing hour, she does not need to locate herself within the larger time-span of the day, or the three days remaining, thereby eliminating the processes of retrospection and anticipation (these being painful for her as they elongate her perception of her incarceration on the island). As suggested, reality television formats favour the smaller units of measured time for this reason. Focussing on the 'now' of this minute or this hour brings things closer, temporally, socially and emotionally, intensifying the viewing experience in a way which capitalises on the medium's propensity for present tense representation.

In this sequence, the theme of passing time gives way to the requisite complaint about limited food rations. Interestingly, this topic is interpreted by Rudy in terms of a number game.

Rudy: We made about two hundred pots of rice since we been here. Sometimes we ate three times a day, sometimes twice a day, sometimes once a day. I'd say I'd lost twenty-two pounds since I've been here.

In this context bowls of rice and pounds of fat are useful to Rudy as progressive number sequences which structure and mark the passing of his time on the island. As such they are ways of telling the time in an environment in which (as testified by Richard) conventional time-keepers are missed. Rudy's lament about the number of times a day the group eat (or don't eat) discloses a homesick

yearning for the familiar structures of 'societal' time. Counting the spaces where the meals should have been Rudy seeks to maintain the conventional temporal structures of the society he misses. Not only did these *Survivor* participants think and speak about time in this way, but the programme's producers chose to edit their comments into a sequence which introduces the final, mega-rating episode of the series. This is because Richard, Susan and Rudy here speak the temporal protocol of the reality television series. The devices which construct the present-ist timeframe of reality programming are freely acknowledged, signalling an alternative temporal frame into which the reality television viewer is readily inducted.

The diurnal cycle is the longest measurement of time on *Survivor* equivalent to that recognised by social convention. Beyond the day, passing time is organised in terms of a three-day 'week' and, as a multiple of three, a 39-day season. The three-day cycle may be conceptualised as a week for two reasons. Firstly, two days of activity (a. reward challenge, b. immunity challenge and tribal council) are followed by a day of rest which imitates the weekend or the Sabbath. Secondly, the format's particular relationship to broadcasting makes each three-day period equivalent to a seven-day week by packaging one three-day cycle as an hour-long episode to be screened weekly. This structuring encourages the programme's audience to interpret events as unfolding in 'real time' as footage appears to be shared on a week-for-week basis. Production participants and audience members alike are made very conscious of what 'day' it is within the 39-day season. Participants frequently refer to the 'number' (rather than the name) of the day and wear this as a badge of honour. The programme's presenter, encountered at challenges and councils, asserts this 'day' with some emphasis for the benefit of both participants and audience. Furthermore, screen graphics appear frequently, silently and insistently punctuating each episode in order to delineate the three days represented. Finally, the counting (up or down) of the thirty-nine days, is balanced by the correlative counting (up or down) of the sixteen participants,⁸⁴ a narrative-numerical relationship which is emphasised in the opening title sequence '16 Castaways - 39 Days - One Survivor'. Participants as well as days are located by their numerical position and audiences familiar with the format can 'tell the time' of the series by the number of participants left (or equally by the number who *have* left). In this way, counting becomes a way of telling the time and arbitrary number sequences replace clocks and calendars.

The temporal strategies of *Treasure Island* contrast with those of *Survivor* in terms of the organisation and allocation of time within the programme. Where *Survivor* proposes an alternative temporal plan to which participants, producers and audiences rigidly adhere, *Treasure Island* seems to 'let go' of time as a dominant organising force altogether. In the second episode of the first series (the episode in which the participants are delivered to the island), the voice-over notes that in 'less than one month' there will be only two competitors left. Indeed, throughout the series,

⁸⁴ The sequence of numbers between one and sixteen is read both ways within the narrative: the first person to be voted off is both 'number 16' and the first or 'number 1', equally the last person remaining in the game is both the winner 'number 1' and the last of the 16 to go, ie. 'number 16'. The reversibility of this numerical sequence is evidence of its status as unlocated and cyclic, rather than linear-progressive.

references to the maximum potential stay on the island remain vague, in contrast with the incontrovertible and oft repeated '39 Days' of the *Survivor* mantra. Similarly, although the elimination of participants on *Treasure Island* occurs at a regular interval of three days, neither participants nor audiences are able to anticipate this event. In the first series of *Treasure Island* the first of these elimination rounds takes place at the end of the third episode on the fifth day of island occupation. The voice-over introduces this event, telling audiences that two people are about to be eliminated and noting that participants do not know 'how or when' this might happen. The elimination test is thus set up as a surprise - one which the audience is let in on in the eleventh hour. To emphasise the unexpected nature of this event, the test is announced in person as one of the producers visits each camp and tells participants to pack their bags and be at the meeting point in five minutes. Thus, *Treasure Island* treats the temporal disorientation of both participants and viewers as part of the game.

In terms of broadcasting, the organisation of time within the *Treasure Island* format seems deliberately imprecise. Like *Survivor*, *Treasure Island* is screened as an hour-long episode once a week. In the case of the American format however, each episode follows a rigid temporal and narrative structure based on the three day cycle (as outlined above). Every episode thus includes a similar share and type of information and culminates, every week, with the spectacle of 'Tribal Council' and the elimination of one disappointed competitor. This narrative structure reflects a gameshow model and draws comparisons with the American challenge show *Fear Factor*. In contrast, the producers of *Treasure Island* adopt a docu-soap editing strategy, building each episode around elements of narrative interest as they arise and featuring an elimination round as and when it occurs in the ongoing story line. Intriguing though these structural differences may be, the timelessness of the *Treasure Island* project is no less an effective mechanism of 'present-ist' time than the rigid formulation provided by *Survivor*. For audiences of *Treasure Island* this editing strategy compounds a sense of temporal suspension generated by the absence of conventional patterns of historical time (clocktime, weekdays, dates) because it is difficult to anticipate what is to happen next. Events seem to take place in a temporal vacuum – forcing attention on the present moment as the only sure thing.

Processes of 'hidden' time are manifested most decisively on *Treasure Island* during challenge sequences. It is in the design and representation of challenges that the temporal differences between *Survivor* and *Treasure Island* become most evident. Both formats favour challenge contests which pit participants or teams against each other, rather than a clock. This means that it doesn't matter how long a challenge takes to complete in seconds, minutes and hours, only that it is completed first, or in the case of *Survivor*'s 'Who can stand on the wooden post the longest' challenge, that it is completed last. On *Survivor*, these contests are set up so that competitors can keep the opposition in sight, thereby using the progression of the other team as human stopwatches showing the 'Time to Beat'. However *Treasure Island* differs in its construction of time during challenge sequences because it chooses to set its competitors challenges which take place

over long time periods (most of the day) and large geographical areas (most of the island). The temporal principle of the race is the same, but as the players are out of sight of each other for most of the contest they are unable to register their progress against each other. They can tell the time of day by looking at the sun but within the context of the challenge this information is irrelevant and meaningless. The only kind of time which matters is the clock running against them in the form of the opposing team, and this is hidden from them. This difficulty combines with geographic obstacles, cryptic compass directions and hidden clues to create a challenge format in which participants are frequently stranded and helpless, completely lost and disoriented spatially *and* temporally. In this set-up, the absence of meaningful temporal markers works to compound spatial disorientation and vice versa.

For a genre predicated on the elimination of conventional temporal markers, the dislocation of geographic space is fraught with possibility. But this aspect of the game reminds us also of the equivalence of time and space within the present-ist formula. As has been suggested, reality television pursues intimacy (emotional closeness) through immediacy (temporal closeness). As Appadurai's formulation of socialized space and time illuminates, the practical organization of temporal and spatial arenas of communal living is an aspect of the production of locality as both an actual and imagined social identity. The triangular reciprocity of social, temporal and spatial order in desert island formats couples the urgency and immediacy of the present-tense 'now' with the proximity of a present-place 'here' to produce an endlessly re-iterable time of 'liveness'.

Doing Time on *Big Brother*

A different model of the isolation-challenge format is provided for by the international reality television phenomenon *Big Brother* (2000-).⁸⁵ Although features of this format distinguish it from its desert island counterparts in important ways, the principle of temporal isolation remains the same. For the *Big Brother* 'housemates', the walled compound constitutes a zone of suspended reality in which not only time but everything about their lives anterior to the programme stands still. In this context, the absence of historical referents (including information about participants' pasts) assists in the intensification of emotional experience because it opens up a space in which personal inhibitions, like everything else, may be suspended. The crossover between temporal and social constructions is far from arbitrary; to isolate participants from their normal social communities and to cut them off from mechanisms of historical time is to eliminate context. This effect is a desirable one because context (of either a historical or social kind) forms both a distraction and a process of mediation (thus distance) which compromises the immediacy and intimacy of the viewing experience.

⁸⁵ Note that the following comments on *Big Brother* are based on my viewing of the first Australian series broadcast simultaneously in Australia and New Zealand in 2001.

Big Brother has many format principles in common with the desert island survival games already discussed. A group of strangers are brought together in an environment of which they have no prior experience to cohabit for a pre-determined period of time. During this time frame they must complete certain challenges and vote individuals out of the game. Similarly, the designated period of three months habitation constitutes an unlocated time frame as participants count down (or up) to eighty-five days. Participants and commentators identify passing days by their number rather than a weekday name or calendar date, although in this format they may also speak in terms of unlocated weeks (Week 1, Week 2...). Because of the format's day-for-day broadcast ratio the production easily adopts the rhythm of the seven-day week, repeating the pattern of nominations, challenges and evictions over this time frame. This leads the 'housemates' to conceptualise their incarceration in terms of weeks as well as numbered days. The seven days are identified by certain regularly occurring events such as the announcement of the week's challenge, the food shop or evictions. This formulation suits broadcasters and audiences as the same events are shown on television each particular day of the week and viewing schedules can be planned accordingly. By joining in this weekly rhythm viewers become engaged in both the social pace and the countdown structure of the format; as John Ellis notes, '[h]umdrum weekday activities leading to a weekend of stimulation [...] is the rhythm of the week as conceived by many viewers' (*Mirror* 8). As for the competitive island formats, the 'weekly' elimination of one more competitor structures the passing of the twelve weeks by counting off participants. The *Big Brother* housemates don't take personal watches into the habitat and there are no clocks on the walls of the interior, so their use of time within the house is approximated. However the production orientates audiences according to temporally specific structures, running am/pm clocktime screen titles intermittently through episodes. Also consistent with the techniques of other competitive isolation formats, the use of night-vision cameras make coverage of participant activities appear continuous, while signalling the alternation of night and day.

However, the programme differs from desert island formats and from all other reality television shows because of its particular relationship with broadcasting and reception. Screened daily, and in some parts of the world twice and thrice daily, and incorporating a significant component of live broadcasts, *Big Brother* works harder than any other reality television format to effect an authentic relationship with 'real time'. The footage from each twenty-four hour period is contracted into a half-hour episode which is screened at least every night of the week. This fast-turnaround high-output formula means that recorded material is screened within twenty-four hours of being shot, minimising the temporal delay between production and reception. The high saturation of broadcast schedules with daily and twice daily episodes manifests a continuity of viewing experience which assists in the construction of on-screen existence as parallel, contemporary and co-incident with viewers' lives. The sheer volume of material screened in any one week allows for a more relaxed narrative pace as storylines unfold a day at a time rather than being contracted into a single weekly episode, similarly generating an affect of contemporaneous experience. This day-for-day ratio is

key to the series' effective realness, as *Big Brother* makes manifest the tropes of reality television immediacy by actually happening 'today' and 'everyday'.

In this context, the *Big Brother* party trick - viewer voting – is not so much the *raison d'être* of the format as the deciding evidence in a present-ist nexus of co-incident experience. As a 'proof of immediacy' the moment of viewer voting enacts the promise made by all reality formats to make present, here and now, on-screen events. As a 'reach out and touch' opportunity, viewer voting validates the audience's emotional responses by quantifying them in the weekly percentage charts and translating these ratings into empirically determined effect (the elimination of one candidate). In terms of time, the minimal delay between vote casting and eviction authenticates affects of immediacy, making a once-weekly practice stand in for the daily opportunity for less tangible (but equally immediate) contact with the housemates.

Despite the co-incident between production, broadcast and reception which *Big Brother* achieves, a co-incident which could serve to locate the *Big Brother* season within the historical continuum of the year in hand, the precepts of this production work hard to separate the temporal frames of located and unlocated time. The absence of contemporary media (daily newspapers, radio and broadcast television) from the *Big Brother* house, is one form of deprivation practised by the production code. Another is the prohibition of contact with friends, relatives or fans via letters, telephone or email. As suggested, social and geographic isolation are necessary accessories to the construct of present-ist time. For the desert island formats, the ocean provides a natural unassailable boundary between participants and the arena of the programme's reception. In the case of the *Big Brother* studios, sited in a populous city within the participants' home country, the boundary is only as high and wide as the garden wall. Thus the alienation of the 'outside world' requires constant monitoring and enforcement, both literally, by the ever-present security guards and CCTV cameras, and ideologically, via the induction of the participants into an environment of suspended social and temporal relations. The *Big Brother* habitat is thus hermetically sealed, allowing an alternative time frame to operate in parallel with the historically located world of the viewers.

The re-induction of each participant into the historically located time frame of the calendar year is therefore an interesting process of temporal crossover. Evicted from the house one by one, each participant is located within the format's rhetoric by the number of days he/she has remained in the *Big Brother* habitat, meaning he/she emerges on, for instance, 'Day 49'. However, the instant the evicted housemate leaves the house, he/she becomes front page news, monopolising media interest until the following week. As this person hits the pages of the popular press, he/she is date-stamped according to another temporal logic, branded with a calendar date at the point of his/her re-entry into the historical continuum. Like the political hostage photographed with the day's newspaper, images of these competitors in the print media serve to locate them in history in ways which are universally recognised as impossible to fake. Their existence in the empirical world is

thus authenticated by historical temporal markers, even as their intimate relationship with their fans is served by their prior occupation of a site of temporal suspension.

This delicate balance between formulae of located and unlocated time might be further extrapolated from a reading of eviction as temporal event, as opposed to simply perceiving the point of eviction as a threshold crossing from one temporal zone to another. The appeal of the live evictions, and their affective intimacy, lies precisely in the promise of 'real time' suspense. The moment at which the name of the evicted housemate is announced 'live', is almost unbearably present (right here, right now) as viewers, host and housemates await the fateful eviction announcement as one breath-holding body. Yet curiously, in relation to preceding comments on the comparative strategies of unlocated time and historical (located) time, the eviction template anchors the progression of any *Big Brother* series to a linear and non-repeatable continuum in ways more typical of historical time. As each competitor is evicted, he/she enacts an event which alters the course of the series (albeit at regular intervals and in predictable ways) and which cannot be reversed. Thus, a schism is created between the moment before the eviction (when there were still, for instance, ten people in the house) and after (when there were only nine). As defined above, this is significant of reality television's unlocated number schemes in which arbitrary countdowns take the place of calendar time. However, although the routine of eviction is repeated at the same time each week according to the same production formula, the individual participants cannot go back and repeat their exit. The moment of exit from the *Big Brother* house is thereby freighted with a different kind of intensity, one more akin to televised spectacles of historic events (such as a royal wedding or the catastrophe of 9/11), because once done it cannot be undone. For this reason, Frances Bonner has observed that 'ordinary television' does not work as repeats.

While the illusion of liveness provides that the outcome is unknown, there is pleasure in watching a contestant win or lose; once the outcome has been decided – which occurs at the moment of reception, not recording – there is no pleasure there to be gained. (40)

Similarly, Misha Kavka has noted that delayed viewing of reality programmes (that is, when the programme is taped at home and watched for the first time at a later date) is problematised by the instantaneous notoriety of evicted participants, meaning that media coverage (if not immediate friends and family) tends to spoil the feeling of 'liveness' by announcing the results of the game immediately after broadcast (Kavka and West 140). Thus, the pleasures of reality programming liveness depend on the co-incidence of viewing and (original) broadcast, so that the event is experienced simultaneously with other first time viewers. The extent to which these formats are cyclic in content, and thereby operate 'repeats' in the televisual sense of the term, is through the repetition of the whole formula with a new cast of participants each time the production is reproduced. Whether or not the represented event is actually broadcast live is, in most cases, of secondary consideration because strategies of present-time representation in reality programming mean that the fact of an individual's elimination from a competitive format occurs (as Bonner suggests) at the moment of reception, not recording. In the event of a *Big Brother* eviction, however, the status as live broadcast cements the competitor's elimination to a historical

continuum, not only because it attaches the broadcast of the programme to a contemporary and empirically-determined historical world, but because the structure of episodic, climactic and spectacular revelation insists on making history.

For these and other reasons, the live episodes are markedly different in construction from the daily narratives of in-house life. Heavily edited and studio based, these episodes utilise pre-scripted commentary read out by the show's host, interviews with 'experts' and guest entertainers as well as elaborate and spectacular studio sets and lighting rigs. Footage inside the house is limited in these Eviction Specials to brief inserts of the housemates sitting together on the couch awaiting the announcement of voting results. Thus, the observational mode of the *Big Brother* rubric collapses. At the moment of actually being live, the compulsions of broadcast television towards narrative and narrative interest preclude the possibility of watching the housemates live and in real time (for an entire episode). Far from affording the viewers a moveable and affective present, the live evictions create history, not only, as defined above, by attaching the event to a specific clock time and calendar date but through the very formulation of time within the structure of the programme. In order to certify their status as live events, Eviction Specials deploy temporal strategies which affect a historical past, present and future in ways similar to an evening newscast. Through the use of reportage, interviews and file footage, the eviction episodes construct processes of anticipation (awaiting the announcement of the results and the emergence of the housemate), reflection (through post-eviction interviews and reviewing old footage), speculation (on the future plans of the evictee) and nostalgia (for good times in house) in which the audience are encouraged to participate. The satisfactions of historical context are played off against the limitations of a 'once and once only' temporal frame as the *Big Brother* eviction shows make competitive elimination the stuff of history and catastrophe.

However, *Big Brother* does something else as well, something which does provide for continuous, co-incidental and live viewing. Part of the *Big Brother* production formula is that every series has a partner website, where images and sound from the house are streamed from particular cameras in real time, twenty-four hours a day. Viewers are thus able to access both the 'produced' (televised) and 'unproduced' (internet) versions of the programme. The impulse to supply audiences with an alternative means of production, transmission and reception suggests that fully authenticated immediacy may always lie beyond the capacity of commercial broadcast television. Despite everything the *Big Brother* television series does to generate an affect of liveness, including the use of segments which are actually broadcast live, it cannot bring to television an authentic real time relationship between viewer and viewed. The alternative format supplied by the webcam format fills this gap. Viewers can thus choose to supplement their daily viewing of edited, delayed-broadcast episodes with as little or as much continuous, live and unproduced footage from the interior of the house as they wish. In this way, viewers seeking proof of the participant's co-incident existence

may tap into a source of real-time, live-broadcast audiovisual data while still enjoying the particular pleasures of affective liveness as it is delivered daily via their television set.⁸⁶

However, although there have been some experiments in reality concepts delivered exclusively via the web, such as the New Zealand production *kiwiflatmates.com*, the *Big Brother* internet stream has only ever been intended as supplementary to the television series. This supplementary status is significant, as it supports the theory, suggested here, that the elaborate affects of liveness provided by televised reality shows deliver potent and meaningful experiences of immediacy, experiences which are not in fact available via footage which is actually broadcast live and in real time. In New Zealand, *kiwiflatmates.com*, which fed web camera coverage of young people partying in a lavishly-stocked, luxury home direct to the net, failed to deliver an audience.⁸⁷ This gives credence to the theory that internet streaming of *Big Brother* can only work as an adjunct to the television series rather than an alternative. The particular strategies of the edited, delayed broadcast television production coupled with the ubiquity, intimacy and familiarity of television as a medium, create an appetite for a live and real-time relationship with programme participants which might not otherwise exist. This formulation returns to the paradox of mediated intimacy, a strategy of personal connectedness (exemplified by the Telecom advertisement discussed in the Introduction) in which intimate relationships are enhanced by the technological and narrative processes of reproduction which mediate them, as emotional experience becomes more intense because more mediated.

In comparison with the desert island formats, the shift from exotic to domestic setting impacts on the interpretation and deployment of time within the *Big Brother* house. Unlike the desert island survivors, whose daily existence is defined by the rigours of the great outdoors, the *Big Brother* housemates are subjected to an environment which is inescapably interior.⁸⁸ Even the open air space adjacent to the building is surrounded by ten foot walls, allowing inmates a view of the sky but nothing of the neighbouring landscape. Consequently they speak of being 'inside' for so many days or weeks when referring to the term of their inhabitation. Patrolling security guards, twenty-four hour camera surveillance and the absence of exterior windows compound the format's semblance of incarceration. As a way of structuring the passing days within the house, from which mechanisms of conventional clock time have been withdrawn, the omnipotent 'Big Brother' indicates appropriate intervals for sleep and bathing by controlling hot water and lighting from a master switch outside the house. This too is knowingly inflected by prison culture and yet the narrative interest which arises out of this device revolves around the casual disregard with which this disciplinary measure is met: stay-a-beds shriek at cold showers and late night revellers in the

⁸⁶ For further discussion of *Big Brother* webcasting see Pamela Wilson's article on the first series in the United States. Wilson discusses the impact 'activist on-line fans and media/culture jammers' (323) had on the show, and the implications of an interactive television format.

⁸⁷ For further discussion of *kiwiflatmates.com* see Kavka and Turner, 'When Reality TV Goes Wrong'.

⁸⁸ The *Big Brother* habitat is a purpose built dwelling including one or two dormitories, communal showers, an open plan kitchen, living and dining space and a 'diary room' in which participants interact with the voice of 'Big Brother'. All windows and doors open onto the outdoor area which is contained by a high wall.

dormitories party on in the dark. This contrary play between totalitarian control and lackadaisical freedom is critical to the format's popular appeal. It is also the defining characteristic of the uses and function of time within the house. For this habitat is coded as both a prison and a home – the security cameras and perimeter fence supplied as much for the protection of the inhabitants as their containment.

As a 'home' the *Big Brother* site is both physically comfortable and culturally familiar.⁸⁹ Wherever the participants usually live within the country of production the *Big Brother* house is geographically and aesthetically 'close to home'. The greater ideological security which this affords them makes them less reliant on the daily rituals of socially-determined time-keeping than their counterparts on *Survivor* or *Treasure Island*. Although the rituals of mealtimes and bedtimes are observed by the *Big Brother* camera and utilised by the production to structure the narrative and indicate the passing of time in much the same way as other reality television isolation/challenge shows, the *Big Brother* housemates signal an irreverence for the temporal conventions associated with these habitual behaviours, as night activity and day napping are common, as is snacking between meals. This laxity is partly the consequence of the luxury and excess which define the living conditions of the *Big Brother* crew but it also indicates a diminished need for temporal/social order. In an environment which speaks of a familiar place (the domestic home) and is characterised by comfort, security and plenitude, the inhabitants of the *Big Brother* house are more able to adjust to a state of temporal suspension than they may have been (or their *Survivor* counterparts are) in a threatening and inhospitable environment. Temporal zones (for eating, working or sleeping) may be ill-defined because the physical spaces of the *Big Brother* format are so clearly bounded (both in terms of the perimeter wall and the definition of domestic zones inside the house). Again this correlation signals a reciprocal relationship between constructions of time and place in reality television formats, one which serves the principles of intimacy and immediacy in equal measure.

The poorly marshalled boundaries between night and day, breakfast and lunch or work and play within the *Big Brother* house fosters an environment in which challenges, like everything else, have only the laziest of temporal parameters. In part because of the elongated cycle between evictions, but also because of the interior nature of the habitat, challenges on *Big Brother* are principally 'time-wasters', long-term projects intended to occupy the participants for the best part of a week. The clock never runs on these challenges because there is always ample time to complete them. In keeping with the format's rhetoric of confinement, these challenges usually involve a small,

⁸⁹ See Biressi and Nunn's work on the *Big Brother* interior as 'therapeutic-domestic space' (21-22). They contend that the house is in fact 'unlike the majority of British homes' (21) because of its open plan design which facilitates both the leisure activities of the occupants and the surveillance activities of the television audience. They term the environment 'pre-adult' (21) on account of its dormitory style bedrooms, brightly coloured furnishings and multiple play and leisure areas. Nevertheless, they also argue, citing Baudrillard, that 'just like the traditional compartmentalised arrangements of more conventional homes' these interiors 'offer a reliable image of current familial and social structures' (22). Thus, as suggested above, the extent to which the *Big Brother* environment is coded as domestic largely determines the social behaviours which take place therein.

endlessly repeated action (such as practising stilt-walking or sticking paper strips on a *papier mache* model) which have a cumulative result (a trick mastered or a model built). Television coverage of these challenges is repetitive and tedious. As temporal constructions, the weekly challenges are not individuated from the hours and days during which they may take place. Where contests on *Survivor* are rendered distinct from domestic activities and inject the narrative with a dose of urgency and competition, *Big Brother* challenges are woven into the daily routine and are characterised by repetition and boredom.

Again, as discussed above in terms of domestic routines around sleeping and eating, the lazy temporal parameters of the *Big Brother* challenges are acceptable on this format because they are balanced out by the over-defined spatial boundaries constituted by the purpose-built environment. Moreover, if the usage of time within the *Big Brother* compound was disciplined to the same extent as the occupation of space, the format would veer too closely to the punitive compulsions of time/space management in an actual prison. As it exists, however, the incarceration of the *Big Brother* housemates is all about their liberation. As the *Big Brother* compound (with its unassailable walls, roving security guards and CCTV monitors) patrols the temporal, spatial and social isolation of the group, it also serves to suspend the stringency of conventional temporal and social order in ways which encourage the kind of behavioural laxity and excess for which the format has become notorious.

Going Underground in 100 Hours

Another New Zealand variation on the 'intimate strangers' model is a challenge format entitled *100 Hours* (TV2 2002). Like *Survivor* and *Big Brother* this show throws a number of pre-selected contestants together to eat, sleep and compete in a closed environment. Similarly the contestants are isolated from the world outside the production, cut off from the people, places and activities they know. However, *100 Hours* takes this isolation a step further. Sealed inside a network of disused, underground military bunkers, the participants on *100 Hours* are completely cut off from natural light, thereby isolated from the most basic of temporal references - the diurnal cycle of the sun and moon. As has been suggested, dislocation from conventional structures of time-keeping is one of the forms of deprivation which reality television endurance formats set up. However, only when participants are incarcerated in a habitat such as this one, can temporal disorientation truly take effect. The elimination of 'day' and 'night' as meaningful units of measured time allows for a radical displacement of conventional timeframes. Thus, the extreme physical isolation of the participants makes possible an extreme version of the present-ist, unlocated timeplane exemplified by the other isolation challenge formats already discussed. The affect of this total temporal displacement is contradictory. On one hand, the present-ist drive of reality television finds its purest manifestation in *100 Hours*, a format which privileges the immediacy and urgency of a countdown contest over all

else; on the other, temporal dislocation in this extreme form backfires as it starts to function at the expense of its correlative principle – intimacy.

In *100 Hours* there are no days - only hours, minutes and seconds. Participants don't take watches or other clocks into the *100 Hours* habitat as these would enable them to continue operating on a 24-hour cycle. In lieu of a conventional clock the common room features a digital screen running the countdown (or count-up) from 00.00.00.00 to 100.00.00.00 (yes, nano-seconds too). Within the rhetoric of the format, players 'tell the time' by this clock, as in 'It is nearly 50 hours' or 'At 78 hours I am going to the Engine Room'. This digital time-code appears on the bottom left hand corner of the screen intermittently throughout the broadcast programme.⁹⁰ Its appearance supports the structuring of a narrative arc, usually coinciding with voice-over commentary on the state of play. The narrowing of the temporal field from a day to an hour has the effect, as for *Survivor's* Susan, of speeding up the passing of the nominated period of play and focusing attention on the hour at hand for both participants and audience. Another way in which the programme makers indicate passing time is via the three computer stations in the common room. These 'open' the game's booking field for five minutes every hour, on the hour. This digital 'opening' is unheralded by obvious audio or visual flags and is sometimes missed by players, even when they are standing in the same room. This silent marker of passing time is just another way in which the production frustrates participants in their pursuit of time-based goals. As a form of clock within the realm of unlocated time, the computer stations are as much about obscuring time as telling it. In this way they are emblematic of the format's manipulation of time and the disruptive impact this has on the pleasures of both playing and viewing the game.

Disengaged from the ordering principle of the twenty-four hour day, the hour itself assumes a free-floating quality within the *100 Hours* format. The rules of the game interpret 'hours' in two ways: firstly, based on the alternative temporal logic of base ten, one hundred hours are counted down in a linear numerical progression; secondly, hours are interpreted and utilised as game tokens which can be bartered, sold or tendered in a variety of ways according to the strategy of the player.⁹¹ This double usage makes an hour a 'counter' in both senses: a type of time-keeper and a token with a commodity value. As the latter, hours are counted not only back and forth but doled out as a tender of exchange for other hours which 'count' for more. At this point an hour is entirely disengaged from the linear progression of time, resisting both the march of history and the

⁹⁰ This clock runs at the beginning of each episode, at the fifty hour mark, and at the end when it is set to run neatly to 100.00.00.00 as the presenter signs off. It may also appear at a few other times within an episode when the commentary runs on the subject of time spent/ remaining. It is never run across a sequence of edited shots, as this would give the lie to its temporal validity, which usually means that it can only run for a few seconds at a time.

⁹¹ The buying and selling of 'hours' is made possible by a distinction between three different types of hours. Out of one hundred, each player starts with fifty practice hours, twenty-five sleep hours and twenty-five downtime hours. Of these only the practice and sleep hours have commodity value. Where a large number of practice hours is traded for a single hour of expert tuition (ie a more valuable use of time) the deficit created is made up in downtime hours. This way, the four players can 'spend' a different number of hours during their incarceration while ultimately ending up at the same point in time.

ineluctable countdown of the gameshow. In *100 Hours*, time has become so dislocated from a historical spectrum that its units function in another domain altogether, leaving the participants afloat in an underground world of measured activities unconnected to any social structure. With the loss of society comes a diminished capacity for connection with a community of viewers and ultimately a loss of intimacy.

As this suggests, the temporal logic of the one hundred hour timeframe, combined with the requirements of the game rules, obliterates 'societal time' entirely. The structure of the game encourages players to take food and sleep in small frequent helpings and at any point in the one hundred hour period. Moreover the game contrives to keep different players in different rooms most of the time, which means that it is useless for the group to attempt to co-ordinate sleeping and eating routines. Unlike *Survivor*, which insists on collective domestic strategies and tribal allegiances, the *100 Hours* format gives participants no incentive to operate as a community. Players are encouraged to operate as lone agents and the organisation of their individual sleep, eat, work pattern is part of their game strategy. As has been suggested, the observation of the rules and conventions of societal time is one way reality television participants in unfamiliar habitats may orient themselves. On *100 Hours* this is neither practical nor profitable for the players. The displacement of conventional clocktime with the one hundred hour countdown is therefore not tempered by the familiar diurnal structure of mealtimes and sleeptime. This signals a more complete separation of participants from their previous lives (and the lives which make them like 'us' the viewers) than other formats have been able to effect. The consequent loss of societal patterns of time-related behaviours compounds temporal disorientation not only for the participant but for the viewer.

Temporal and spatial disorientation is flagged as a key principle of the *100 Hours* format. Participants enter and leave the bunkers at night, a device which largely obfuscates the time of day and exacerbates the dimness of the habitat. Daylight is correctly interpreted here as a tool for both telling the time and finding your way so that its absence provides for a double dose of disorientation. The voice-over of one of the episodes articulates this double dimension: 'Torches in hand, the four guys enter the tunnels. They need to get to the common room to begin their challenge. With no idea of direction, or even time, it's a tough ask'. In this instance it seems nonsensical to suggest that not knowing the correct time will make it difficult to find the common room, but the assertion bespeaks the slippage between space and time in evidence here. As for the participants on *Treasure Island*, the absence of temporal locators feeds into spatial disorientation and vice versa.

Unlike most reality television challenge formats, *100 Hours* does not completely suture the television audience into the alternative temporal logic proposed by the game, a decision which problematises the affective intimacy between audience and participants. Instead, it offers now and then to orient viewers according to both conventional patterns of measured time and the constructs

of societal time. In a sample episode the presenter is shot above ground, against a backdrop of a city at daybreak. She speaks to camera: 'It's 7am. A, B, C and D have been underground now for ten hours'. The audience immediately understand that the players entered the tunnels at 9pm and have effectively been underground 'all night'. She then elaborates by noting that one of the players has not slept at all yet, alerting the audience to this as a social irregularity and raising the disruption of conventional sleep routines as a problem for the narrative to resolve. This works counter to the temporal disorientation effected by the format in the various ways already discussed. The intimacy and immediacy set up by the genre's founding principle of unlocated time falters here. By making the audience privy to knowledge (specifically knowledge about time) which is unavailable to participants the programme (briefly) aligns the viewer with the presenter and the organising principles of conventional clock time which she cites, rather than situating them in the intimacy of a shared present with the participants. The presenter's commentary effectively invites the audience to analyse the behaviour of the players via the mechanisms of historical time, a process which engenders distance and objectification – the antithesis of intimacy.

In many ways the epitome of counting obsessed isolation challenge formats, *100 Hours* wilfully rejects the conventions of historical time, substituting an arbitrarily determined countdown in an environment which facilitates the complete obfuscation of normal time frames. Up to a point these strategies succeed in producing the desired affect of immediacy, bringing the events on screen into a moveable present and fostering viewer engagement via game strategies of competition and urgency. However, in its radical displacement of time, this format undervalues the reciprocity of immediacy and intimacy within the reality television nexus. The complete elimination of recognisable temporal structures alienates viewers, who find themselves located elsewhere from the text. As this chapter has shown, programme participants relocated in environments divested of conventional timekeepers quickly adopt other methods of organising and measuring time, in ways which determine and validate their status as social beings. As these people work to maintain domestic patterns in a timeless zone, they not only find comfort in a connection to their 'real lives' but they connect to the viewing community sited in the temporal zone of reception. When *Survivor* provides participants with just enough resources to sustain a site of domesticity within the exotic surroundings of a desert island, it correctly judges the viewing pleasures entailed upon the contradiction of the ordinary within the extraordinary. The diurnal cycle and the continued operation of socio-temporal practices bear a similar function within an unlocated time plane. *100 Hours* fails because it makes everything – time and place - unfamiliar. The presenter-fronted interlude described above surely invokes historical time but it does so in the wrong way - positioning the viewer on the outside looking in, rather than inside an affective present with the game players. As will be discussed in the following chapter, reality television is most successful when it strikes a temporal balance which allows for a participatory experience of a shared and authenticated present.

Conclusion

As indicated by the above analyses of isolation-challenge formats, the suspension of familiar temporal parameters is the starting point for a reciprocal play between temporal, spatial and social order. As each group of isolated competitors struggles to re-construct community (through the collective organisation of time and space) the give and take between the various manifestations of temporal, spatial and social order becomes evident. Accordingly, participants on *Survivor*, faced with a temporal and spatial wilderness, create locality and community through the obsessive marking and re-ordering of tribal boundaries and the repetition of menial domestic tasks. Meanwhile, the *Big Brother* housemates, incarcerated within a domestically-coded and bounded environment, meet temporal suspension with a parallel suspension of social protocol so that the community produced by this particular format is characterised by laxity, excess and exhibition. In both cases, however, the isolation of participants from familiar structures of historical time allows for a corresponding liberation of social identity, so that the narcissistic obsession with - and performance of - individual identity becomes the prevailing narrative.

In conclusion, it is a mistake to think that the 'now' of reality television signifies an absence of temporal structure. Rather, reality television steps out of time in order to bring questions of time to the fore; proffering an alternative temporal plane pre-eminently suited to the medium of television. Unlocated time works because it capitalises on television's propensity for the 'now', prioritising the intimacy and immediacy of the present moment over the objectivity of historical overview. Present-ist time is unlocated because it steps out of the historical continuum - transgressing the laws of linear, infinite time, it manifests a kind of cyclic present which begins and ends whenever and wherever it is transmitted. The present-ist time frame of reality programming utilises the smallest units of time in order to focus and intensify the experiences of both participants and audience. It also highlights the significance of socio-temporal structures, privileging the repetitive and cyclic structures of daily domestic routines. Reality television works in this way because the interpretation of realness is predicated in part on a temporal effect of co-incidence of experience, a perceived authenticity of diminished time and space. Borrowing from and sometimes blending with the mechanisms of simul-cast, reality television deliberately and successfully manifests a powerful effect of liveness, an ever-present here and now.

CHAPTER SIX

Living History:

Re-presentation, Nostalgia and the Past

So instead of looking through the window at history we're actually going to climb through that window to the other side and feel it.

Janice Feyen, *Pioneer House*

The historical re-enactment reality series, of which *Pioneer House* (TV One 2001) is the first locally-produced example, constitutes an anomaly in reality programming because it signals a clear intention to identify itself with a historical past. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, reality television privileges the affective impact of immediacy over the discursive intervention of historical context. *Pioneer House* similarly prioritises the present tense, even as it takes New Zealand's colonial past as its subject material. To quote Bill Nichols, this format happily 'anneals the felt gap opened by historical consciousness' (51) even as it seeks to represent the historical world. This contradiction is managed via a number of temporal strategies which pull the past into the present, rendering representations of lived experiences from a historical past as both contemporary and seemingly (a)live. As *Pioneer House* participant Janice Feyen aptly observes, reality television formats such as this, in which contemporary families adopt the living conditions of a past time, supply a 'feeling' relation with the history they purport to offer – an alternative model of engagement which is definitively sensory and significantly unmediated. In this way, readers of history are re-positioned. Instead of looking from the outside in ('through the window'), or backwards at what has been, programme participants are invited to corporealise bodily experiences from the past century as they bring history to life. Thus, the historical-reality show reworks the history programme as a 'body genre' and responsive viewers find themselves sharing the intimate feelings of past experiences with their proxy on screen.

This particular manifestation of history is possible because the historical material of *Pioneer House* is, to cite Frances Bonner's use of the term, 'uneventful' (43). The kind of history posited by this format is domestic, quotidian, intimate, ordinary and banal. As a project in 'social history', *Pioneer House* foregrounds the private and domestic texts of the previous century, telling tales gleaned from marginal notes in domestic manuals, personal diaries, grocer's bills and children's scrapbooks. As the marginalia of past times rather than the stuff of history books, the subject matter of *Pioneer House* constitutes a different relation to the present than that assumed by the great events of a public and national history. Like other reality-history shows of a similar type, the cyclical, repetitive and everyday nature of the domestic events which occur within the domain of the programme renders them timeless and familiar, meaning they slide easily into the present tense of production.

In fact, this kind of history may be discussed as temporally present-ist, and thus pre-eminently suited to the medium of a reality format.

For reality television, an authentic representation of New Zealand's past is one which is also intimate and immediate. Accordingly, *Pioneer House* boldly reconfigures the past as a series of private, bodily and domestic experiences which may be freely relocated within the buildings and bodies of a contemporary community and family. The spatial and temporal proximity of the past achieved by *Pioneer House* is a testament to the processes by which reality programming seeks to register realness via the body, the home, and the present moment. Thus, despite its apparently anomalous relationship with historical time, *Pioneer House* epitomizes the affective strategies of reality television as a genre, as the representation of past experience feels real because it is (perhaps surprisingly) bodily, ordinary, local and immediate.

Making Television History

When television theorists speak of history it is frequently history in the present tense, that is, history-in-the-making. Both 'catastrophic' events, screened as breaking news (as discussed by Doane, Mellencamp, White on the Challenger disaster or King on 9/11), and public spectacles, produced on television as media events (as defined by Dayan and Katz), are broadcast live and as they happen. The extent to which they constitute history depends on their indelible attachment to the historical continuum into which they erupt. That is, they make history as they occur because their occurrence is defined by its uniqueness in time and space. These events manifest a special relationship with historical time because they are, by definition, unrepeatable (the collapse of the World Trade Centre towers, the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana). However, even as the production of these events as televised spectacle constitutes the historical continuum in which they may claim a stake, their attachment to this continuum forces them to recede into cultural memory. These events can be both live (emphatically present) and historical (attached to the past) because the moment at which the event co-incides with broadcast is so brief. As has been noted, 'history comes to television, but only for the moment' (Kavka and West 143). Thus, perhaps paradoxically, the immediacy of televisual representation is critical to the manifestation of such events as history.

Writing on the problems of representing television, Stephen Heath concurs with Doane in his interpretation of the medium as playing out in the present tense, as he defines television by its 'constant immediacy' and the extent to which it urges 'TV today, now, this minute' (278). However, rather than considering the affective impact of televisual urgency in the production of historical events (as Doane does when she writes on catastrophe), Heath's analysis is weighted by his reflections on the correlative loss of history. As Heath writes, 'Exhausting time into moments, its "now-thisness", television produces forgetfulness, not memory, flow, not history' (279). Thus, Heath's formula deems immediacy and history mutually exclusive and the past, by definition,

cannot be rendered in the present. Even as television produces history, through its manifestation of media events, it cannot sustain it for more than a moment. For Heath, the rapidity with which history falls away from the instant of its live (or seemingly live) production by television renders the medium inadequate to the task of historical representation; on television, events which have already happened, even those which have happened in the instant of the immediate past, are left to fade and cool, 'already past and distant and forgotten' (279). Heath cites Frederic Jameson on the 'media exhaustion' of archival news footage, who suggests, similarly, that 'the very function of the news media is to relegate [...] recent historical experiences as rapidly as possible into the past' (Jameson qtd in Heath 279). Jameson is referring specifically to such iconic moments of televised history as the assassination of President Kennedy, a historical event which incorporated both the ritualized ceremony of public spectacle (the presidential parade) and the disruptiveness of catastrophe (the fatal sniper fire). This moment came to television because it was being recorded as the former, but made history as the latter. In a powerful example of the kind of 'accidental' recordings discussed in Chapter Four, the co-incidence of rolling camera and unanticipated catastrophe produced television history. The extent to which this event was characterized by its finality (as a human death it was unrepeatable; as the death of a president it terminated a political era and constituted a national catastrophe) assured its place as and in (television) history.

As historical events are defined by their unique existence in time and space, the capacity of television to re-iterate such events through the re-screening of televised images complicates its relation to, and manifestation of, history. Both within the immediate zone of breaking news and over time as archival footage, television repeats images of history-in-the-making, rendering them as an iconography of history rather than history-live. This repetition has been discussed by Mellencamp as therapeutic (245-249), or King as an effort to assuage anxiety and establish 'assurance and mastery' (55-56) over that which is initially too shocking to absorb. For Jameson, however, the process of repetition produces 'historical amnesia' (qtd in Heath 279) as it over-determines the past-ness of represented events. Yet, it seems unlikely that the repetition of these eminent moments in television history could induce forgetfulness in the viewer who is endlessly re-introduced to such images. Rather, the quality and significance of the pictures change. As repetition palliates shock; the pain or excitement experienced upon initial reception becomes separated from the images which accompanied the event. The sensations which historical events bring to television may recede into memory, but the pictures become increasingly intense as they become embedded in the cultural imagination. Thus, one need not have been yet born when Kennedy died to find the footage of his assassination mesmerizing, and, through these iconic images, to 'remember' the event. What may be lost over time, in the repetition of archival footage, is the immediate sensation of co-incident time and place effected by the live or near-live broadcast of history-in-the-making. It is just this sensation of immediacy which reality television, even reality television about the historical past, seeks to capture and reproduce.

Vivian Sobchack considers the recontextualisation of archival images in her article on New Year's Eve montage sequences. Sobchack analyses these programmes in terms of their special temporality, suggesting that they offer rare 'sites for reflective meditation' in the sea of material which constitutes television's present-ist 'flow' and 'its distracting insistence on the present moment of its ephemeral presence' (*Happy New Year* 92). Screened as part of television's countdown to the turn of each year, these montage sequences represent self-conscious moments in television's performance of history, in which television looks back at its own manifestation and mediation of events occurring in the world and clips these moments into an iconographic representation of the past year. In this way, media images from the recent past are re-formatted to produce history as a television event. Disengaged from their original moment in time, and reframed by their juxtaposition in montage, these images pause time while they produce spectacle. Sobchack's analysis also shows how these curious television texts illustrate Walter Benjamin's perception of history as inevitably fragmented, abstracted and decomposing. For Benjamin, '[h]istory decomposes into images, not into narratives' (qtd in Sobchack 94) - a framework which renders montage the pre-eminent strategy of historical representation. The fact that the year's round-up of iconic images always includes those of ruins - the rubble of war or the detritus of natural disasters - lends this reading a particular piquancy. In this formula, the very qualities which problematise television's relationship with history for Heath - the fragmentation of time and space, the ephemerality of content, the repetition of images - ease its production of montage, and thus, perhaps, history.

Karen Lury has also considered the extent to which television manages to represent time and history through the production of spectacle in her analysis of the BBC's special broadcast of New Year's Eve celebrations at the turn of the millennium. For Lury, this twenty-four hour broadcast, which included, at hourly intervals, satellite images from around the world representing the moment at which 2000 came into being in other places, was distinguished as a television event 'by the fact that "time" not only structures the programme, but is also the event it wishes to describe' (2005 138). Citing Stephanie Marriott's concept of the 'emergent present', Lury notes the difficulty with which the broadcast maintained temporal order, as different processes of time-keeping (mechanical, verbal or spectacular) proved non-synchronous and confounded efforts to either pinpoint or represent the present moment as it occurred (138-141). In this reading, even as television reaches its acme as a medium of the present, telescoping time and place into a spectacle of fragmented images of history-in-the-making, it relies on discursive strategies of anticipation or reflection to speak *about* the significant moments as they pass, rather than 'speaking into' them as they happen (Marriot qtd in Lury 139). As Lury concludes, television falters in this way when it attempts to attach the present which it produces on screen to a present moment in the historical world, as the 'constructed' time of the televisual present collides with the 'real' time in which events occur in the actual world (139).

Whether it arrives suddenly, as catastrophe, or ceremonially, as public spectacle, history, in the examples cited above, exists as a pro-filmic event. Television may amplify and multiply its

existence, and even confirm its status as history, but it does not create (or seek to create) the event which it represents. However, the BBC's marathon broadcast on the last day of 1999 was not the only television event to commemorate history at the turn of the millennium in Britain. A historical re-enactment reality series entitled *1900 House* (Channel 4 2000), which required a modern day family to live according to the social mores and material conditions of the year 1900, was commissioned in commemoration of the turning century. Another television project, entitled *Castaway* (BBC 2000), created a 'microcosm of British society' (executive producer Jeremy Mills qtd in McCrum 10) on a remote Scottish island and documented these people's lives for an entire year, beginning on 31, December 1999. In their different ways, both *1900 House* and *Castaway* attempted to produce history rather than simply mediate it. As television events specific to a time and place in history, these formats sought to make (television) history through their significant relationship with the historical present. By invoking the significance of the year at hand, both formats seemed to anchor themselves (as reality television never does) to a particular point in time. With their historical date writ large, these formats constructed themselves as television events with a use-by date, extended but nevertheless 'one-off' televisual experiences. Thus, their relationship with the time of history was structured by their intention to manifest themselves as events in television history. As for media coverage of historical events, the decision to emphasise the date of the *1900 House* or *Castaway* projects created a sense of immediacy between viewer and viewed only as long as the dates of production coincided with the time of reception. As the year 2000 receded into memory, the formats were likewise drawn backwards into television history.

However, as its subsequent re-incarnations and international transfers have shown, the *1900 House* format turned out to be quite free from the historical moment of Y2K. The popularity of the *1900 House* series lead the same production company to produce *1940s House* a year later in 2001, creating an arbitrary sixty-ish years between time of production and historical referent. The shift from a single and specific year (1900), with its neat centennial relationship to the year 2000, to a decade (1940s), blurs the significance of a particular numerical relationship between the time of production and the historical setting in a way that illustrates a slide away from historical specificity. At the same time, production houses in New Zealand, Australia and America purchased the rights to this format, generating in New Zealand *Pioneer House* (broadcast in 2001 and set in 1900) and *Colonial House* (broadcast in 2003 and set in 1852), in America *Frontier House* (broadcast in 2002 and set in 1893) and in Australia *Outback House* (broadcast in 2005 and set in 1861). The simple erasure of the numerical signpost '1900' gives this format a temporal freedom more suited to the principles of reality programming. The historical referent thus becomes a far less specific site, whether it is a decade (1940s), a broadly suggestive historical period (Colonial) or even a place (Frontier). Although a heightened attachment to a notion of history, fuelled by the turn of the millennium, may have precipitated this programming trend, the evolution of the reality-history format is illustrative of the ineluctable pre-eminence of present-ism in the reality television genre. The temporally specific *1900 House* has been gracefully adapted to the present-ist mode through the erasure of its historical-temporal markers.

Curiously, however, the sequel productions which followed the original series in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand exhibited a will to reattach themselves to history. As noted in the previous chapter, reality formats do not operate well as repeats once the 'zone of liveness' (Kavka and West 140) has worn off. Neither does reality television generate sequels, in the sense of producing programmes which carry over character or narrative from a previous series. Instead, what they do well, and which covers both bases, is to reproduce the original formula using different participants and, in some cases, other variations. These secondary and subsequent productions start over at the beginning with a new set of 'characters' and allow the interrelationship between these people to generate its own narrative permutations. Many also choose to introduce a significant variable to each new series; for instance, *Survivor* sets every series in a different location (which is nevertheless similarly exotic and remote) and introduces surprise twists which alter the course of the competition (while maintaining the basic rubric of the original game formula). After the success of *1900 House* and *Pioneer House*, both production companies here and in the United Kingdom chose to attach the second series to a more politicized period of national and social history, deploying the additional stresses these factors placed on domestic circumstances as a new reason to watch. Set in London during World War II, *1940s House* uses bomb scares, rationing and women's contribution to the war effort to refresh the formula established by the representation of past experiences of domestic life in *1900 House*. Similarly, the relative security of suburban life in Victorian Auckland, as illustrated by *Pioneer House*, is exchanged for the rugged challenges of pioneer settlement in the second New Zealand production, *Colonial House* (TV One 2003). In this series participants found themselves delivered to shore by sailing ship, carrying their worldly possessions several miles inland and living in canvas tents while they built a pioneer's cabin out of available materials – challenges which ensured plenty of new angles for the production to follow. In both cases, however, the great national histories of war and settlement form little more than a backdrop to the principal narratives of family, home and domestic labour. This is of interest here because it is indicative of the fluidity with which reality television forms attachments to a historical continuum, only to release itself from the constraints of chronological history by shifting the emphasis onto the kinds of past experiences which resist containment within any particular time frame. Drafted into service in this way public history loses its bite, as it is subordinated to the domestic discourses of reality programming. Subsequent productions in the United Kingdom, including *The Edwardian Country House* (Channel 4 2002) and *The Regency House Party* (Channel 4 2004), reverted to type, as they focused on intimate personal relationships, social issues around class and gender and the minutiae of domestic experience.

Unlike other instances of history on television, as discussed above by theorists of televisual temporality, the stuff of the historical-reality series is manufactured for the purpose. Although the domestic spaces represented by these programmes, and the activities which are undertaken within them, are attached (aesthetically, discursively, numerically) to a nominated period in the historical past, the history they express is not only created anew but created as, for and through the medium of television. In this way, reality television discovers the trick to sustaining the moment of history-in-

the-making, holding history up to television over the course of its extended (re)production on screen. This is possible because reality television does not seek to represent the kind of history which has a unique existence in time and place, which comes to television and stays so briefly. Rather, reality television makes history in its own image, producing a kind of history which manifests itself as everyday, intimate and banal. The temporal strategies through which reality programming maintains immediacy are easily accommodated by this kind of quotidian history. Thus, the past is made present by reality television and, as history unfolds in present time, stays for much longer than a moment.

Reproducing Past Times

In its efforts to make past times present, the New Zealand historical-reality series *Pioneer House* manifests a plurality of temporal frames. Insofar as *Pioneer House* is constructed as a challenge event, which takes place in a specially contrived environment over a delimited period of time, the programme adopts strategies of 'unlocated' time as it conforms to the temporal frame of the countdown. The nominated period of the family's occupation of the house is ten weeks, a number counted up or down as the series progresses. This time frame is finite (the production comes to an end), special (a suspension of conventional life), arbitrary (there is no especial reason for the number ten) and cyclic (as viewers can return to day one in the subsequent series *Colonial House*). However, in contrast to isolation-challenge formats which dis-locate participants temporally, socially and geographically, *Pioneer House* locates its people in the place and time of production. Like the original British format, the occupants of this historicised house are obliged to engage with neighbours, shopkeepers, employers and household staff drawn from the immediate and contemporary community in which they find themselves living. This interaction requires the maintenance of conventional patterns of societal time and attaches the family to the calendar year. The economy of temporal and spatial isolation operating in isolation-challenge formats is here inverted, so that the relaxation of boundaries of habitat affects a corresponding extension of temporal frames.

Even as it sustains temporal strategies typical of reality television's production of an isolated present, *Pioneer House* seeks to produce immediacy through its attachment to a local and contemporary time and place. As noted previously, television events which are broadcast at, or very near to, the time of production capitalize on the temporal co-incidence of production and reception, creating immediacy via an authentic connection with the present time. As *Pioneer House* sites itself within a particular month, season and year on one hand and a local suburb, city and country on the other, it engages viewers through the concurrent occupation of here and now. This located-ness is further extrapolated by the Feyens' social relationship with one another, as a family group which exists beyond the frame of the television programme. The family unit is non-competitive and (as the Feyens seem to have been chosen on the basis of their open affection and support for one another)

self-evidently intimate. Although the Feyens complain about their time in the house, they do not wish for time to 'end' in the way that *Survivor's* Susan once did because this experience is, for them, part of the texture and temporal plane of their ongoing life as a family. Thus, the will to localness and the will to family, as structures of spatial and social proximity, foster a temporal relationship with the present in the *Pioneer House* format. The present-ness of an actual neighbourhood and an actual family not only reinforce the perception of an actual (that is recognizably determined) time, but support structures of authenticity. In contrast to the elaborately falsified immediacy of exotically-located competitive formats, historical-reality shows like *Pioneer House*, which are all about family, domesticity and community (as much as they are ever about history), seem to represent the real thing, and do it in real time.

While clocks and watches are banned on island survival formats, there are no such prohibitions on *Pioneer House*. The family's interaction with the community in which they are re-located – through work, school, shops and services – requires their continued adherence to the temporal conventions of societal time, making timepieces a necessary aspect of their occupation of the 'past'. In a twofold temporal move typical of the *Pioneer House* discourse, timepieces inside the house are made available as markers of both past and present, as they are both attached and detached from a past and present temporal frame. Certified as authentic antiques from the nominated historical period, they also tell the present time and enable the family to interact punctually with contemporary society. The first episode of the series includes a sequence illustrative of the interpenetration of past and present, in which the modern day furnishings of a living room dissolve into equivalent possessions from the turn of the nineteenth century. As the room cross-fades into a tableau of a Victorian domestic interior, the furnishings of a past time emerge into the present, just as much as the modern articles dissolve into the past. The sequence ends with a close-up pan along the mantle piece as twentieth-century knick-knacks are replaced by a cluttered display of Victoriana. The vintage items include an ornate mantle clock reading half past four and an old-fashioned desk calendar which reads 'Sunday' in one wooden window and '30' in the other. These instruments of measured time float several constructions of time simultaneously. Firstly, underscoring the voice-over commentary on 'a real house restored to exactly as it would have been in the year 1900' they signal historical authenticity and the substitution of antiques for contemporary possessions. Secondly, they serve the production by alluding to the format's byline of 'time travel', reminding audiences that this is a reality television format which takes temporality as its theme. Thirdly, these articles - ingenious mechanical devices denoting mankind's organisation and containment of passing time – are emblematic of the format's assumed control over 'history', as the programme offers up an elaborate process of replication which packages and portions out a specified period of past time. Finally, they are indicative of a present-ist time frame as they indicate the smaller units of measured time – minutes and hours or weekdays and days of the month (the calendar window displaying the name of the month is obscured).

Later in the same episode, just prior to the induction of the family into their retro-fabricated environment, the voice-over seems to invoke this very mantle clock and its function in the production: 'Every detail is perfect. The beds are made up, the clocks are ticking, the only ingredient missing is the family'. The ticking clock is a standard device of game shows, talent quests (think of the American format *30 Seconds to Fame* [Fox 2002-2003]) and of course reality television challenge formats. A clock ticks because of the moving mechanism of the second hand; thus, a ticking clock focuses attention on one of the smallest possible units of measured time, increasing affects of urgency and immediacy long since understood and deployed by game show formats. By invoking the mantle clock in this way and at this point in the programme, the voice-over seems to address the participants according to the conventional rhetoric of 'and your time starts now'. As the clock along with all other possessions will be removed from the production site after filming ceases, its function as a time-telling device is limited to the ten week frame of the production. Thus, the mantle clock operates as a ten week stop watch, counting down the days until its time will end. In this way, the clock comes to embody temporal significations of both present-ist and historical time, counting down the minutes of a suspended present even as its appearance and status as antique validates the format's representation of times past.

The extent to which all the antique objects inside the *Pioneer House* dwelling, as well as the historic house itself, occupy both past and present may be the inevitable effect of the status of the project as a replica. In a theoretical paper on Australian museum and heritage site policy, Tony Bennett suggests that the historical past, when re-presented, is necessarily filtered through the present which defines, constructs and interprets it:

[T]he past, as embodied in historic sites and museums, while existing in a frame which separates it from the present, is entirely the product of the present practices which organise and maintain that frame. Its existence as 'the past' is, accordingly, similarly paradoxical. For that existence is secured only through the forms in which 'the past' is publicly demarcated and represented as such, with the obvious consequence that it inevitably bears the cultural marks of the present from which it is purportedly distinguished. (2)

Self-conscious processes of historic reconstruction and display are part of the *Pioneer House* format, which commences with the retrocedent makeover of the Auckland villa which comes to serve as the 'pioneer house' itself. The restoration of this turn-of-the-century home is presented, however, according to contemporary formulae of real estate reality programming, rather than the more sober discourse of historic preservation. The representation of this process unfolds in the present tense, under a time constraint of several months. It reveals processes of demolition and reconstruction as well as detailed redecoration and finishing, and includes DIY tips on renovation procedures and the obligatory 'before and after' shots. Although the revelation of processes whereby buildings and bodies are made over is critical to the success of all reality makeover shows (and usually constitutes the principal narrative of the programme), in the context of *Pioneer House*, the willful exhibition of processes of deconstruction and retro-fabrication might seem to compromise the programme's capacity to properly represent the past, because they expose the status of the

historic site as constructed, and thus (perhaps) inauthentic. However, authenticity is often linked in reality programming to the exposure of that which is usually kept hidden, meaning that property makeover shows strip back rotten floor boards in much the same way as personal makeover formats clear out wardrobes or cut open bodies. In the context of the historical re-enactment format, the authenticity of the historic house is verified both by this process of stripping back and by the reconstruction which follows. This is because history-reality formats thrive on the 'ambiguity of their status as facsimiles' (1) as they actively seek to embed 'cultural marks of the present' (2) in their representation of the past. The extent to which the status of replication confounds past and present in the *Pioneer House* project enhances rather than compromises the subject's status as history, because it brings the past closer.

The voice-over commentary to the introductory episode of the *Pioneer House* series engages with contentions of historical reproduction and authenticity as it strains to define the restored, Grey Lynn villa according to various conventions of historic representation.

From the outside, this house looks like any other Auckland villa, but inside it's very different – because all traces of life in the twenty-first century have been removed. But this isn't the set of a movie – nor is it a museum – instead it's a real home restored to exactly as it would have been in the year 1900 and a modern day family is coming to live here for ten weeks.

Not only does this commentary exemplify constructions of the ordinary concealing the extraordinary (as discussed in the analysis of the suburban façade in Chapter Three), but these words, the first of the series, clearly demarcate this representation of the past from alternative formulations with which audiences may be familiar, namely, the museum and the movie-set. This position is reiterated later in the episode by the show's resident experts, the social historian and the heritage architect. The approbation of two cultural analysts whose principal subject is the operation of the past lends the reconstruction of the 'pioneer house' a particular credence. Dr. Caroline Daley's commentary in the opening episode engages with questions of delivery and consumption:⁹²

It's not unusual to recreate rooms from the past – museums do it all the time – creating displays where people can see what it was like to live in that past – but what we're doing here is unique. We're recreating a home from 1900 – a sort of time machine for the family to go and live in.

When Daley calls the place a 'home', she inflects the 'pioneer house' with warmth, vitality and contemporary, common experience, rendering the time of history intimately proximate to the present. When she distinguishes the house from a museum, she identifies the different processes by which it may offer a connection with the past. In a museum, one may only 'see'; the promise of *Pioneer House* is that historic sites may be accessed and properly occupied, that is, 'lived in'. The family's occupation of the house, that is their use of it as a 'home', reconfigures display as experience. The historic building and its contemporary occupants produce history through their

⁹² The gist of this commentary was written for Daley by producer Julie Christie. Daley made some alterations to the text and delivered it to camera as requested, but the meaning expressed does not necessarily represent Daley's personal opinion. (Daley, Caroline. Personal interview. 9 November 2001).

engagement with one another, a symbiosis which characterizes the interpenetration of past and present throughout the format.

The status of the 'pioneer house' as a historic replica, and the ambiguity between past and present which this produces, may be extended to the material objects in the house. Writing of 'objects placed in history museums' Bennett considers that

Although, materially, these remain as they were, they become, on the plane of meaning, facsimiles of themselves. They announce a distance between what they are and what they were through their very function, [...] of representing their own pastness and, thereby, a set of past social relations. (1)

The antique objects placed in the 'pioneer house' are transported into a new set of social relations when they are worn, handled and used by the Feyen family. These household objects incorporate people into history when they 'call out' to be used in certain ways. As suggested, one of the recurrent subjects of interest in the historical-reality series is the menial labour of household management. In *Pioneer House*, episodes focus in detail on the family's efforts at cooking, cleaning, dusting, sweeping, gardening and laundering in which the materials of domestic life are disciplined into appropriate forms. This focus on housework also allows the production of history to occur through the interaction of contemporary bodies with historically located objects. However, in between the family (certified as being from the present) and the house and its contents (which are certified as being from the past), is the rubbish which they generate together. This domestic dirt and waste is critical to the representation of 'living' history in *Pioneer House*. Unlike either the museum or the film set, which, in their different ways, may be seen but not touched, the waste material generated by the family during their occupation of the 'pioneer house' clarifies the extent to which the format privileges experience over display.

Unlike the antique articles inside the house, which came into being in the late nineteenth century, have been well-preserved and are here redeployed as if new, the dirt in the house is generated as new, in that instant and from contemporary materials. The bread crumbs which fall from the table, the coal dust which falls from the coal range and the threads which fall from Janice's sewing machine manifest dirt in the style of the previous century, but they come into being in the present. The antique items (the table, the oven and the sewing machine) cease to function as articles in a museum display when they are used by humans in ways which generate mess. It is precisely this level of detail – the dirt which is manifested in the present-tense – which animates the history represented by *Pioneer House* into 'living' form. Thus, history comes into being in these reality programmes when it dissolves into instances of dirt and dust. In one episode, Janice Feyen is shown scattering damp, used tea-leaves onto the kitchen floor, prior to sweeping up, in accordance with a tip she has learnt from a Victorian domestic manual. When she completes the task, the commentary notes the efficacy of this technique and the camera moves in for a close-up on the dustpan showing the clumped wet leaves and balls of dust. The contents of the dustpan are shown here as the material evidence of Janice's productive embodiment of a historic practice. Just as

bodily emissions constitute a proof of the real elsewhere in reality programming (when the authenticity of human emotions are at stake), history in *Pioneer House* becomes irrefutably real when it produces dirt.

Although this instance of Victorian housework supplies narrative interest in the episode in which it is represented, there is no sense in which it can be absolutely located within the course of the production. Janice may clean the floor in this way at any time (and probably does many times over) during her occupation of the 'pioneer house'. This one instance of sweeping is made to stand in for daily repetitions of this task, which are invisible but presumed to occur. Many other examples of housework undertaken by Janice and her family during the course of their inhabitation of the 'pioneer house' are treated in the same way. Thus, as a subject, housework has a particular temporality in reality television, one which evidently suits the present-ist formula as cyclical, unlocated and 'uneventful'. As has been suggested in earlier chapters, domestic tasks are a recurrent theme of reality programming (from *Treasure Island*, to *The Real World*, to *DIY Rescue*) because they bring people on screen close, socially and temporally. In the context of a format about history, however, the present-ist temporality of housework impacts on the representation of the past. In just the same way as Janice's action of sweeping the floor cannot be chronologically placed within the course of her ten week occupation of the house, so as an instance of historic replication it resists attachment to any particular point in history. Although many aspects of the domestic experience of *Pioneer House* are markedly different from contemporary practices, they cannot be properly attached to the summer of 1900 - the historical moment they purport to represent - but only to a generalized sense of some time ago. As these domestic practices were repeated daily or weekly for many years or perhaps decades by many different domestic workers, they can never be attached to a specific place, time or person. Thus, even as information about the domestic management of household dirt supplies an important aspect of the programme's effort to represent a historical past, this information fails to assert any particular place in the historical continuum of the nineteenth century. It is in this sense that the subject of social history, as represented by reality television, fulfills Benjamin's notion of history as fragmentary, abstracted and (even) decomposing or ruined. As extrapolated by Sobchack, this material is pre-eminently suited to the medium of montage, which exacerbates the arbitrary, non-causal relation between instances of history. Despite its conventional narrative structure, *Pioneer House* can be read, temporally at least, as a kind of montage because of the extent to which the 'events' it represents are episodic rather than contiguous, 'unlocated' rather than chronological. As a project in social history, the historic material of *Pioneer House* really is the dust and detritus of past lives. Here, television displays history as a patchwork of rubbish, presenting butter papers, soap shavings, coal dust and tea leaves as the recurrent signs of past times.

Although, as a television project inspired by the turn of the millennium, the series makes much of the one hundred year timeframe separating the Victorian household from its re-enactment in the twenty-first century, the space between the two remains, in practice, significantly vague. Moreover,

the programme's interest in the dirt generated by domestic activities during the course of the re-enactment continuously resolves the past as a process of replication via its manifestations in the present. Finally, because the production of domestic dirt by human beings occurs constantly and repetitively through time, the representation of such domestic details resists attachment to a particular moment in the historical past, or indeed, the historical present. In this way, the dust and dirt of *Pioneer House* is indicative of the extent to which the format manages the representation of history by subsuming history to the immediacy and intimacy of domesticity.

Feeling History

Importantly, *Pioneer House* makes history present by re-enacting it inside a contemporary space – making it domestic, quotidian and ordinary – and within contemporary bodies – making it visceral, vivid and occasionally vulgar. In other words, it makes history palpably and purposefully the stuff of reality television. While critics of reality programming in general focus their censure on the various bodily excesses committed by reality television shows, the visceral evidence of bodily experience in a historical format such as *Pioneer House* is doubly provoking, as it appears to corrupt the proper, epistemological function of exhibitions about history. As observed by Misha Kavka, reality programming is contentious because it contravenes the 'educational or consciousness-raising impetus which defines documentary' (*Reality Estate* 225) through its adherence to a series of isolated presents and the elimination of socio-historical context. As *Pioneer House* attempts to 'do history' as reality television, it might be read benignly as an educational programme which utilises the populist strategies of reality programming to deliver its history lesson. More radically, however, *Pioneer House* seems to offer an alternative mode of learning, one which generates dirt and disgust, one which is grounded in visceral responses and bodily functions, one which seeks to *feel* rather than to *know*. It is this aspect of the format which challenges the pre-eminence of conventional documentary strategies of knowledge-sharing. Like all good reality television formats, *Pioneer House* seeks to bring things closer and to privilege the experiences of the everyday. What makes the programme contentious is that it takes as its subject the material hitherto characterised by distance, objectivity and particular forms of authority. *Pioneer House* makes history visceral and, more radical still, makes the past present.

A pre-production promotional article in the national paper *Sunday Star Times*, sets up a confrontational debate between Massey University academic Dr. Alan Meek and Touchdown executive producer Julie Christie. At issue is reality television's capacity for pedagogical processes. In the article Meek is quoted as saying that reality television series lack critical perspective and that *Pioneer House* is basically yet another 'cheap' reality television series that 'doesn't demand anything of the viewer'. Meek is then quoted as saying, 'It will be easy to watch which I think is the reason so many people watch real television shows because they simply have the TV already turned on and do other things in between watching' (Ferguson A4). Meek's definition of reality

television focuses exclusively on questions of intellectual engagement, disregarding the potential of reality television formats to 'demand' powerful emotional and visceral responses from audiences. Invoking reception theories around televisual flow and distracted viewing⁹³, Meek seems to condemn reality television for facilitating the kind of viewing practices that have been registered elsewhere as inevitable and appropriate responses to the medium itself. Christie counters Meek's remarks as 'unsubstantiated rubbish', asserting that 'It has been proved that reality television shows relate to people in a non-judgemental way. Reality television is drama where real people take over. And it certainly makes you think – real situations, real people - they and the situations make you think' (A4). Christie's definition of reality television is one which offers an alternative epistemological model to that of documentary. She implies that reality television breaks down the hierarchy of didactic information, offering instead an equality of experience - a participatory coming-to-awareness through emotional and visceral response. Christie's comments are supported by participant Janice Feyen, who is quoted in this article as saying 'instead of looking through the window at history we're actually going to climb through that window to the other side and feel it' (A4). Although she has yet to participate in the production, or view the outcome, Feyen exhibits an instinctive awareness of the particular formulation of history-learning offered by the *Pioneer House* format - a process of knowing which is sensory rather than cerebral. Susan Crozier outlines this position when she writes of *Pioneer House*:

At issue is our capacity to know the past, and in this sense the programme brings into play the tension between the pedagogical ambitions of documentary which sets up a social experiment, and the more intimate ambitions of reality TV. Reality TV sets out to stage a set of affective experiences for our interactive participation. That is to say, we not only learn but are also called upon to *feel* something of what it would be like to live in the Pioneer House. (1)

Like Janice Feyen, Crozier distinguishes between pedagogical processes of information-gathering (looking through a window) and visceral interpretations of historically-located experiences (feeling) which may be experienced vicariously by viewers. The possibility of *feeling* what it may have been like to live at the turn of the century is a process of historical re-incorporation which forces the past into a contemporary relationship with the present. The activities portrayed by the *Pioneer House* series are historical in kind but enacted on a contemporary plane. The Feyen family share bodily experiences with the programme audience, expressing how it feels to knead dough, to taste new bread and butter, to sweat into woollen underwear or to menstruate into calico pads, to shave with a cut-throat razor or scrub clothes on a washboard, to retch at the stench of boiled tripe and onions or to hold a warm new-laid egg in the palm of your hand. The tasks, domestic articles and foods with which the Feyens interact are determined by their historical authenticity, but they are experienced in the present and interpreted via sensory response.

⁹³ See, for instance, Raymond Williams' well-known explication of television's 'flow' (*Television* 93) or John Ellis on the televisual 'glance' (*Visible Fictions* 137-138).

After the programme had screened, the show's resident historian, Dr. Caroline Daley, responded to the series in an informal paper for an academic newsletter:

[F]or all my high hopes that this programme could challenge the ways the public thought about New Zealand history, I have to admit that many seem none the wiser after ten weeks of viewing. In part I think this is because Touchdown was rather less interested in inserting interesting historical tidbits [sic] into the voiceover than I would have liked. When Janice, faced with cooking tripe, resorted to the port bottle, the narrator could have said something about drinking habits in 1900, about Grey Lynn being a home of the temperance movement, about contemporary attitudes to women's drinking. My report contained the information, but that opportunity, and many similar opportunities, was not seized. Instead the camera dwelt on how repulsed the family were at the thought of eating a cow's stomach lining. I guess Touchdown thought it made for better TV and maybe they were right. (6)

Like Meeks, Daley contends that the present-ist and sensational mechanisms of television itself make it an unsuccessful medium for pedagogical pursuits. The conventional discourse of history-teaching, in which information, provided by authorities, is shared didactically, does not serve reality television's purpose here. When the producers of *Pioneer House* narrativised the 'tripe episode' as a series of physiological activities and reactions - showing the family cleaning, cooking, serving, tasting, regurgitating and finally burying the old-fashioned meal in the garden - they prioritised bodily and contemporary experience over a cognitive reading of history. As Stephen Heath has written, 'television actualizes rather than intelligibilizes time' (279). In *Pioneer House*, knowledge of history occurs via the 'actuality' of sensation, a proof of the real which is made present, bodily and temporally. The acknowledgement that the favoured material of reality television programmes 'makes for good TV', here reiterated by Daley, is frequently cited as evidence of the debasement of television as a cultural institution rather than, as it can be reframed, a recommendation of reality programming as the natural and appropriate communicative mode of television. As Misha Kavka has written; 'In this sense, reality programming is not the sorry debris but rather the *sine qua non* of television as a medium' (*Reality Estate* 226). Thus, the sensational immediacy of reality television need not eliminate understanding, or even history. As sensory and bodily manifestations of historical experience in the *Pioneer House* format show, knowledge of the past may take on a variety of guises.

Midway through the family's occupation of the house, Janice Feyen is required to serve a three course meal at a formal evening dinner to which social historian Dr. Caroline Daley is invited as a guest. The particular challenges associated with the event are the preparation of an unusually complex meal in the coal range, the setting of a formal table in the dining room and the after dinner entertainments in the parlour. The family's performance of this domestic event, and the ways in which this is disrupted, is illustrative of the extent to which sensual interpretations of history displace didactic conventions of history-teaching within the *Pioneer House* format.

Firstly, while the selection and preparation of food, the table setting and the parlour games are all period-appropriate, thus conveying information to the audience about Victorian domestic practices, the behaviour of the family engages with, as Crozier puts it, reality television's 'more intimate ambitions'. These ambitions are well served in this episode by the 'unfortunate gravy incident'⁹⁴ in which Janice spills gravy down her front at the dinner table and then explodes in laughter and embarrassment when it is discovered. In a productive instance of theatrical 'corpsing', as defined by Karen Lury in her discussion of ordinary people performing themselves on television (*Television Performance* 124-127), Janice's accident 'breaks the frame' of the production, causing a disruption of both the television text and the historical re-enactment into which the audience has been drawn. In Lury's terms 'Corpsing engenders a moment where the television performer reveals his or herself as truly live, uncontrolled and expressive' (127). In the context of *Pioneer House*, it reveals Janice's status as 'truly live' on a temporal plane, not only because it brings her into the present television moment, but because it signifies her occupation of the twenty-first, rather than the nineteenth, century. The extent to which her outburst is 'uncontrolled' certifies its authenticity as emotional expression, because it produces the kind of 'bodily confession' discussed in Chapter One, rendering that which is usually interior and unseeable outwardly visible. As her body shakes with laughter at the dinner table, Janice is unable to 'sustain the look of the camera, or the other performer[s]' (127) or, indeed, the 'look' of history. Because she trembles and splutters when she laughs, Janice bodily disrupts the appearance of history as it is presented by the tableau of the dinner party. Moreover, when her performance breaks up, the persona of the Victorian colonial housewife whom she both imitates and reproduces floats away, as if Janice can no longer sustain the 'look' of her. In this way, the disruptive laughter opens a fissure in the parade of history, into which the present gushes with unseemly *joie de vivre*.

Significantly, Janice's laughter is triggered in response to an instance of mess – the gravy splashed down the front of her bodice. As discussed above, domestic dirt in history-reality formats is authentic to the style of the period but always generated afresh. In this instance, the gravy is authentic to the period in its proper place, but is here outlandishly out of place and thus re-presented as mess. Together, Janice's explosive, bodily emotion and the accidental, inappropriate production of mess override the contrivance of the historical performance to produce a quintessential reality television moment – intimate, immediate and authentic. In a format which offers up 'living history', the accidents and slips of the ordinary people inside the frame of history offer up the proof of the real which brings history to life.

Apart from Janice's misdemeanour, the dinner party sequence is significantly disrupted by problems arising out of Caroline Daley's contradictory construction as both Victorian dinner guest and contemporary expert. On the one hand, she is set up as a contemporary social historian who comes in from the world outside the production, in order to observe and assess the behaviour of the family. In this capacity she is an expert participating in (and thereby validating) the rhetorical axis of

⁹⁴ Caroline Daley. Episode 5, *Pioneer House*.

the programme which separates her from the non-expert family. On the other hand, she appears as a formal dinner guest, who is able (because of her specialist knowledge) to behave in a manner appropriate to the designated period, and to interact with the family in an 'authentic' way. In this role she is expected to blend in to the environment as the equal (and contemporary) of her hosts. The Feyens themselves are clearly ambivalent about their interaction with this figure. Although they adopt a certain social formality towards her (for instance the children do not speak to her before being spoken to), they continue to refer to her for advice on their own behaviour, or to report to her on skills learnt and progress made within the house. When the gravy spill is discovered Janice's first reaction is to ask Caroline, amidst the laughter, 'What would I have done?'. This interaction locates not only Janice but Caroline Daley in the present, as it asserts their status respectively as game participant and expert. For her part, Caroline Daley is a far more successful performer of Victorian etiquette than the Feyens. She chooses to exhibit a characteristic self-restraint and composure throughout the evening, and only reluctantly reverts to her role as advisor when outbursts from the family insist upon it. However, while she seems to have adopted a period persona to an extent the family almost never manage to do, she chooses not to dress in period costume⁹⁵. Given her double function, this may seem to be an even-handed response to a complex role. However, her choice of modern day clothing scored very low with the programme's fans, who responded through numerous letters to the editor of a popular television listings magazine called the *TV Guide*. In a typical letter, 'Pioneer Fan' of Birkenhead writes,

I very much enjoy *Pioneer House*. However, I was incensed by the poor attitude and rudeness of Dr Caroline Daley, the social historian who was a dinner guest on a recent episode. My main complaint is that she could not be bothered dressing in keeping with the period. But she also adopted a supercilious 'perfectionist' approach to the culture of the day as if it was something that existed frozen in time in a museum instead of a living culture that had many different forms of expression [...] Good on the Feyen family for making such a great effort under difficult circumstances. (106)

This passionate response illustrates the viewer's perceptive understanding of the kind of history offered by the historical reality television series. As suggested above, 'living history' renders history visceral and brings a contemporary consciousness to the enactment of long-past tasks. This fan insists that the programme honour this promise and continue to render history as 'living', mutable and expressive rather than formulating it via the didactic lessons of 'a mean old history teacher' ('Pioneer Fan' 106). For this viewer, reality television has freed history/historical experience from its 'frozen' position in the distant past (a position museums are apparently guilty of maintaining) and warmed it up, brought it closer and made it tangible and lovable in the form of the Feyen family. The

⁹⁵ Daley stated early on in her relationship with *Touchdown* that she did not want to be dressed up for the programme and there was no resistance to this preference. She used the reasoning that she was a social historian, not of the period, and this was accepted. After the complaints in the *TV Guide* about her clothing the director continued to support her preference. There was never any pressure for her to adopt period clothing for the second appearance at the farewell drinks. (Daley, Caroline. Personal interview. 9 November 2001).

generous encouragement of the family, typical of all the letters printed, wilfully overlooks the fact that it was they who 'failed' the dinner party test and not Caroline Daley.

Responses to Daley's appearance in modern dress indicate that, for fans of *Pioneer House*, the locus of authenticity resides in the material trappings of a historical period, rather than in performed behaviour. Mrs. A. Taylor of Oamaru wrote to the *TV Guide*, 'It was an authentic Victorian dinner party. The historian came to check THEY did everything correctly. SHE arrived in sandals, slacks and shorts. She killed the authenticity of the evening. How did the producers allow it?' (106). The audience's strong objections to the historian's contemporary dress code on the one hand and her 'supercilious' ('Pioneer Fan' 106) manner on the other are occasioned by the contradiction of her two roles. Her performance as a Victorian dinner guest is criticised because she wears clothes that signal her status as a contemporary and expert, while her performance as an advisor and authority is criticised because of the reserved, controlled demeanour she adopts as a Victorian. Although their objections may be inconsistent, these viewers have recognised that Daley was being made to function in a double and contradictory way. Her clothing ends up at odds with her environment because the production company chose not to properly delineate her role in the programme, that is, to register her as being either of the past or the present. This viewer's perception of the dinner party as bearing an 'authenticity' which was only broken by the historian's appearance in 'slacks' - and not, presumably by Janice's accident with the gravy - is indicative of the extent to which reality television shows about the past authenticate history through the interaction of contemporary bodies with historically-located objects.

Memory and Desire

As illustrated, the 'time travel' projected by the *Pioneer House* format is more than an imaginative ride. The programme promises to corporealise a notion of history through the re-embodiment of experiences which originally occurred in the past. However, this promise is complicated by the extent to which the format eulogises '1900' as a time and place in which virtues of family, community and home-grown vegetables prevailed. Even though the Feyens' practical experience of living in the house makes history an itchy, awkward and exasperating place to be, the programme fosters a sentimental affection for the colonial era. These contrary positions, both of which generate satisfactions for the viewer, highlight the complex treatment of past time within the historical-reality television series. While the programme succeeds in its present-ist impulse (bringing history near) it also encourages the production of nostalgia (thus, keeps history at a distance).

Linda Hutcheon has discussed the operation of nostalgia as a longing for a time and place which cannot be returned to, or which would be meaningless once returned to (3). She suggests that nostalgia depends 'precisely on the *irrecoverable* nature of the past for its emotional impact and appeal' (original emphasis) for this unavailability opens up a space in which the longed for time and

place can be reworked, 'imagined' and 'idealized through memory and desire' (3). Insofar as nostalgia is experienced as longing – that is, as a yearning for something out of reach – it positions the object of desire, of necessity, at a distance; once lost, it must be lost forever. Like its forerunner, *1900 House*, *Pioneer House* invokes the historical continuum (citing the centennial space between the represented period and its recreation) in order to maintain its distance from the nineteenth century. Even so, as argued above, history is recovered in *Pioneer House*, becoming intimate, contemporary and bodily, through its reincarnation by the Feyen family. At once near and far, the contradictory position of the past in *Pioneer House* may in fact be explained by the structure of nostalgia, which forges the past according to contemporary desire. Even though its subject is frequently the past, nostalgia operates through the present tense and from a present place. As Hutcheon writes, 'nostalgia is less about the past than about the present. It operates through what Mikhail Bakhtin called an "historical inversion": the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected into the past' (3). This notion of projection is particularly apposite in a discussion of nostalgia on screen. *Pioneer House*, like other historical-reality formats, produces history according to the demands of a present-ist medium, framing it for the small screen and warming it up for the living room audience. As a structure of longing which is predicated on the interpenetration of the past by the present which forges it, nostalgia, as read by Hutcheon, produces an ambivalent temporality: 'Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near' (3).

Within this dynamic, that which is rendered distant and unavailable is irresistibly idealized. As Hutcheon writes,

The simple, pure, ordered, easy, beautiful, or harmonious past is constructed (and then experienced emotionally) in conjunction with the present – which, in turn, is constructed as complicated, contaminated, anarchic, difficult, ugly, and confrontational. (3)

True to its ambidextrous treatment of past and present time, the historical reality series manages to resolve the past into a number of different tableaux, which are variously embraced, idealized or repudiated. In the popular press, when the Feyens discuss their experience after their return to Palmerston North, they speak of it as one might reminisce about a family camping holiday: recalling peace and quiet, home-cooking and outdoorsy adventures. In this context, despite its format origins in the United Kingdom, *Pioneer House* is a peculiarly New Zealand text which speaks of a cultural affection for camping out and the kiwi icon of the bach.⁹⁶ The aspects of the experience which the family recall with affection are those which relate to the absence of modern technologies and a focus on family, rather than anything which locates their experience in a certain period of history. The by-line to a story on the Feyens in the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* 'How living in the past changed us for the better' (Archer 8) sets up an article which structures the family's experience according to the nostalgic discourse identified by Hutcheon, in which the 'past' is peaceful,

⁹⁶ The term 'bach' (an abbreviation of 'bachelor', thus pronounced 'batch') is a North Island colloquialism for a basic holiday cabin, now in standard usage in New Zealand. South Islanders traditionally use the alternate term 'crib'.

contemplative, healthy, ordered and virtuous. Michael Feyen is quoted as saying, evidently with some feeling, that 'it was the best possible thing we could have done as a family and as individuals because it reaffirms a lot of values we had been trying to instil at home' (8). This 'other' place, away from home, made communication between parents and children more effective and was the site of personal insight and moral development. The journalist quotes Feyen as saying that the family all went through a 'cleansing process' and reports that 'Ten weeks without preservatives, caffeine, colouring and additives – all of which are modern-day evils – has left the Feyens feeling fantastic' (9). Thus the '1900' site becomes a place of bodily purification as well as moral edification. Finally, the article determines the lasting good done to the family by their experience on the programme, declaring that they are 'determined to retain much of what they loved about the 1900s' (9) and listing limited television, 'phoneless Sundays', shared meals around the kitchen table and regular letter writing among the resolutions the Feyens have made upon their 'return' to 2001.

Maybe they should just go camping more often, as two or three summer weeks in a basic bach or tent with only a long-drop, the sea to bathe in, camping gas to cook on and card games in the evening, would provide everything the family now miss in their contemporary life. For the nostalgia the Feyens (and many of the programme's viewers) feel for the turn of the nineteenth century is simply a longing for an alternative lifestyle marked by the absence of telephone, television or personal computers, and the presence of basic (preferably home-grown) ingredients to cook with and communal meals. In her *Listener* review of the programme Diana Wichtel cheekily remarks that in her day this was called 'being a hippie' (77). In this day it may also be called living an 'alternative' lifestyle such as any number of families permanently resident in remote regions of New Zealand such as Great Barrier Island (which has no mains power) choose to live all the time. So the nostalgia operating here is in part that of urban professionals longing for an alternative lifestyle, and the virtues of family, community and manual labour. As for the homesick girl in the Telecom commercial (see Introduction), nostalgia for an ideal of New Zealand life operates via recollections of a childhood at the beach.

However, working in tension with the nostalgic impulse is the physical experience of the Feyen family. As their bodies are subjected to the strictures of nineteenth century dress, labour-intensive household tasks and poor sanitation, 'history' doesn't feel so nice. The extent to which the historical reality series attempts to experience the past in close-up undermines the distancing and idealising function of nostalgia. The romantic fantasy, once encountered, becomes mundane. The laundry copper, the cotton bloomers, the coal range – all aesthetically and ideologically appealing at an imaginative distance – are re-sited as quaint, illogical, inconvenient and impractical. According to the particular rhetoric of the programme (as manifested by the voice-over commentary) the past (especially as it is represented technologically) is a poor imitation of the present. Moreover, the prevalence of twenty-first century sensibilities privileges a present day psychology in a way which devalues behaviours identified with previous generations. As if in response to Hutcheon's binary formulation, Crozier writes, '[T]he series performs a reversal of the opposition that identifies

authenticity with the past while the present is understood as a site of fakery. In *Pioneer House* the past is characterised by ridiculous, pointless social convention and personal pretence, while the present, in the form of the Feyens themselves, is the site of truthful expression and real experiences' (2). The repudiation of the past, particularly its social and technological practices, is another way in which the *Pioneer House* series disrupts the assumed chronology of past and present within its framework of nostalgia. As contemporary sensibilities reject the domestic experience proposed by history, the longed-for ideal detaches from the centennial calendar and becomes free-floating.

As suggested, domestic content is critical to the production of historical experience in the history-reality format. While the Feyen family's intimate and domestic experience of living conditions in colonial Auckland serve to de-romanticise the past, these same experiences create links with other longed-for times and places. The version of history presented by *Pioneer House* draws on contemporary fantasies of the 'good life', in which simple pleasures (fresh air, fresh food and family meals) prevail. It is this focus on aspects of daily, domestic experience which, as suggested above, loosens the format's attachment to the continuum of history. The material content of *Pioneer House* - everyday, intimate and banal - slips in and out of the present day because it is universal, cyclic and a-historical. Through these slippages, the story subsumes other national fantasies about life in New Zealand, ones which are similarly domestic, communal and familial but not necessarily located in a time in the past.

Like Hutcheon, Arjun Appadurai has written on nostalgia as an affect of desire rather than memory, suggesting that the nostalgia facilitated by advertising campaigns for material goods 'teach[es] consumers to miss things they have never lost' (77). Appadurai's 'ersatz nostalgia – nostalgia without memory' (82) suggests that nostalgia operates as a generalized affect of longing for that which is missed from the present (rather than necessarily about the past). As *Pioneer House* fuses the warmth and affection of the Feyen family with antiquated objects of Victorian domestic life, it produces a hybrid fantasy which makes selective use of both past and present experiences. As these images take hold, they appear both familiar and irrecoverable, thus creating 'experiences of losses that never took place'. Thus, nostalgia in *Pioneer House* not only reworks temporal experience as a paradox ('simultaneously distancing and proximating' [Hutcheon 3]), but engenders desire for a time and place which is absent and idealized rather than past and remembered. In this way, mechanisms of nostalgic longing confound the relationship between the active present and the remembered past. As 'the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected into the past' (Hutcheon 3), the past is defined by its relationship to the present in ways which disrupt the chronology of historical time. The nostalgic longing which nags at the edges of the *Pioneer House* series threatens to undermine the temporal logic of past-made-present because it recalls us to that which is definitively absent. To return to Heath's contentions on the subject of television's ineluctable present-ism, the insistent 'now this' of televisual flow becomes, in the present-past of the history-reality format, a longed for, displaced, 'this that isn't now'. Even as *Pioneer House* deploys

strategies of present-ist representation, rendering its version of history contemporary and immediate, the locus of desire remains out of frame, out of reach and out of time.

Conclusion

At the close of the twentieth century the rise of the historical reality television format may be read as temporally charged. As Linda Hutcheon noted, writing in 1998, the turn of the millennium accorded nostalgia a 'surplus meaning and value' as it approached, because it intensified nostalgic fantasizing about the past (2). The role of contemporary technologies in this replication of a longed for past is noted by Hutcheon as an 'obvious contradiction':

[N]ostalgia requires the availability of evidence of the past, and it is precisely the electronic and mechanical reproduction of images of the past that plays such an important role in the structuring of the nostalgic imagination today, furnishing it with the possibility of 'compelling vitality'. (3-4)

The processes of reality television history differ from the digital reproduction of historical images or the documents of audio/video archives referred to here. A format such as *Pioneer House* facilitates nostalgia via the bodily occupation of historically loaded sites, bringing a representation of a longed for time and place onto a contemporary, localised plane. In this way, *Pioneer House* makes radical use of historically located past time 'furnishing it with the possibility of "compelling vitality"' beyond the strategies of mere photographic replication.

Nostalgia 'brings the imagined past near' because it inflects history with present-day desire, in much the same way as *Pioneer House* forges history according to the demands of a present-day medium. At the same time, it 'exiles us from the present' because it locates the object of desire just beyond the frame, making the desire for that which is absent a pervasive and haunting affect of the historical-reality series. As for the Telecom girl, the 'ideal that is *not* being lived now' (Hutcheon 3), but which resides imaginatively and collectively in memories of family holidays at the beach, is projected into the present moment via the magic of tele-visual communications. In this way, *Pioneer House*, as a locally-produced variant on an internationally franchised format, exhibits a longing for Home. Despite its careful elision of colonial politics, this domestic, intimate and familial text enacts a powerful will-to-settlement, as it goes searching for the archetypal New Zealand dream.

CONCLUSION

Holding the Baby:

Being, Feeling and Touching in the Televisual Domain

The capacity of television, and more specifically reality television, to bring things close and render them present - spatially, temporally, socially and emotionally – has been the recurrent theme of this thesis. As has been argued, the form and content of reality programming, which devolves upon the ordinary, the domestic and the local, has an innate applicability to the everyday, domestic medium for which it was conceived. As televisual texts which exemplify the affective strategies of their medium, reality programming may be usefully compared with the ephemeral material of commercial breaks. Like reality programming, television commercials may be easily dismissed as trivial, everyday, repetitive, banal and even irritating. Apart from celebrity endorsements (the equivalent of reality television's celebrity 'specials'), commercials generally represent ordinary people, in and around their homes, for a mainstream audience. The stories they tell are quotidian, domestic and, very often, culturally specific. As noted by Roger Horrocks, 'commercial breaks [...] provide viewers with a certain sense of local orientation' (*Local Content* 284), particularly when schedules are dominated by imported programming. In this sense, television commercials engage in the 'production of locality', to cite Appadurai, both materially and socially, as a project of the ordinary. For these reasons, I would like to conclude this thesis as I began, with a consideration of a locally-produced television commercial which exemplifies some of the traits by which I have sought to define reality programming.

'Being there is everything' is the current campaign by-line for Air New Zealand. One of the television commercials in this campaign, which ran on New Zealand screens from August 2005, told the story of a middle aged couple receiving news of the birth of their first grandchild. Because the older couple in the story live some distance from their daughter (although within the same country) this announcement is made first by telephone (an urgent call in the middle of the night) and then by post (a letter including photographs). Each instance of communication triggers a flurry of happy tears in the new grandmother (who relays the news to anyone who will listen and cries over the pictures at each re-viewing) while her husband remains taciturn and apparently indifferent. At last, the couple travels to Wellington (on board an Air New Zealand flight) and are greeted at Arrivals by their daughter, son-in-law and new baby. As the daughter places her swaddled baby in her father's arms, a transformation takes place: the grumpy old man is transfixed by the smiling infant and, succumbing to the emotion befitting the advent of a new child, begins to weep.

As if in response to the success of campaigns such as Telecom's (as discussed in the Introduction), which promise affective, intimate and immediate communication via new media, Air New Zealand's tagline insists that only person-to-person contact can facilitate real feeling.⁹⁷ Here, the 'appeal to a haptic sensibility' (Goode 279) made by the virtual 'touch' of the Telecom campaign, is pulled back to earth, and grounded in the stalwart figure of the no-nonsense Kiwi granddad. It is of further interest, in relation to comments made in Chapter Three on the significance of men crying in New Zealand's reality programming, that this commercial deploys a gendered hierarchy of emotional response. Girls may cry on the telephone (as both the Telecom and Air New Zealand commercials ably demonstrate), but real men need something stronger. As for programmes like *DIY Rescue*, the tear which is wrought in the husband's eye is valued dearer because harder won.⁹⁸ In comparison, (within the Air New Zealand story) the feminine intimacy between mother and daughter, mediated by the telephone, is valued more lightly because it seems so easily purchased. The Air New Zealand narrative privileges the display of male emotion (in which the old man acts as both a comforting cultural paradigm and an emotional barometer) in order to make an analogous, preferential claim for person-to-person contact. Thus, a correlation is set up between the practical, common sense values of the traditional Kiwi male and the tactile qualities of empirically-grounded experience, as real feeling is qualitatively assessed according to its material actuality. In this dynamic, the palpable, powerful experience of 'being there' is registered as both more real and more affective, more 'touching' because there is something to actually touch.

Apart from these intriguing differences, the two commercials are, in fact, remarkably similar. Both subordinate the marketing of products or services to a sentimental narrative which generates a 'love mark'⁹⁹ for the company. Both represent pakeha¹⁰⁰ New Zealand families fractured by geography, and re-amalgamated via modern technologies. Both centre on the affective bond between parent and child (or grandchild) as universal, instinctive and transcendental. Both climax in the production of a tear, as a 'bodily confession' of intimate connection. Both are enhanced by images of 'beautiful New Zealand' (the grandparents also live in a coastal property), and imply nostalgia for a remembered childhood at the beach. In other words, both storylines promote, in

⁹⁷ This notion is extrapolated in a different way in the campaign's partner commercial, which shows an Auckland executive attempting to broker a business deal with a West Coast fisherman. Communications made by phone, by fax and by email are rebuffed or ignored. Only when the businessman travels to the South Island port, gets his feet wet and shakes hands with the West Coaster, is the contract accepted and ratified. Thus, the 'real feeling' which constitutes the critical climax of the family storyline (discussed above) translates as 'real money' in the commercial aimed at the business market. The emotional framing of this advertisement aligns audience sympathies with the fisherman, who is characterised as the 'good keen man' of New Zealand cultural legend - gruff, taciturn and hardworking, but also genuine and trustworthy. As for the family reunion plotline, the heart of the story is carried by the emotionally self-contained working man.

⁹⁸ Note that the theme song to this commercial - 'You'll Never Know' by The Platters - humorously supports the subtext of male resistance to emotional display. Lines include 'You'll never, never know I care [...] You'll never know it, for I won't show it' and 'You'll never, never see me cry' and 'No, no I know I won't reveal, The way I really truly feel, But if you guess it, I'll confess it'.

⁹⁹ See the Introduction for an explanation of this term.

¹⁰⁰ 'Pakeha' is a Maori word meaning, variously, non-Maori or white European which came into usage in the late eighteenth century soon after the arrival of European settlers in New Zealand. It is in common English usage in New Zealand to denote New Zealanders of Anglo/European extraction.

equal measure, the affective possibilities of 'keeping in touch' and 'being there' together, within the same, culturally specific, locality.

These similarities may be extrapolated further within the context of television production and reception. The storylines of both commercials represent miniature narratives about processes of communication, modes of reception and experiences of viewing. Given that television advertising is medium-specific, having evolved through and for the discursive strategies of television, these narratives may be read as producing a meta-text about the production/reception context in which they occur. Thus, the different kinds of communication represented by these commercials – email, telephone and postal service (mediated) or holding the baby (un-mediated) – and the hierarchies implied therein, are subordinate to the medium which frames their broadcast and reception, within which a mode of television-mediated experience prevails. Importantly, however, a third category of communicative experience occurs in both commercials which is neither mediated nor non-mediated, but abstracted somewhere in between. This is the mythic moment of intimate contact between mother and daughter foregrounded by the Telecom campaign and slighted by the Air New Zealand one. In these instances, in which women cry on the telephone, bodies are palpably 'moved' in the absence of actual, physical touch. As argued in the Introduction, the storyline of the Telecom commercial legitimates telecommunications as a forum of intimacy, even going so far as to suggest that processes of mediation may enhance, amplify and clarify affective experiences, making them 'better' than ones which occur in the empirically-determined world. As much as the Air New Zealand campaign seems to countermand this possibility, marginalising and gently mocking the grandmother's capacity to feel emotion at a distance, it produces, as television text, an entirely compatible experience of mediated intimacy, if not for the granddad,¹⁰¹ then at least for the television viewer. This is because the commercial incorporates the audience into television's 'perfect view' (Spigel, *Installing* 25), interposing the viewer *between* the smiling infant and the teary old man. As close as their faces may be to one another's in this instance of intimate viewing, the magic of television ensures we are closer. We are in fact 'there', more intimately and more affectively than actually 'being' in the Arrivals lounge could facilitate. In this way, the grandfather's epiphany, which seems to clinch the commercial's message (proving that you really have to 'be there') becomes, within the commercial's schema, a proof of mediated intimacy after all. Thus, simply by utilising the basic structures of television's code of visual representation, the Air New Zealand commercial, just as much as the Telecom one, manifests and legitimates a form of affective communion which operates both at a distance (as tele-vision) and in close-up.

As suggested in Chapter Two, the prevailing ordinariness of television, as an everyday encounter and a domestic object, establishes a frame of reference which renders every person who appears

¹⁰¹ Although, it should also be noted, the aeroplane which facilitates the grandfather's intimate experience is also a mediating technology, which contracts space and time and 'transports' him both physically and affectively. In this way, it is analogous to the email technology which sends the picture of the garden to the girl in London, enabling her to experience, in a palpable sense, something from which she has become disconnected.

on television ordinary, regardless of their represented status on screen as fact or fiction, special or ordinary, celebrity or nobody. Similarly, in my discussion of the Air New Zealand commercial, I am suggesting that the intimate and affective strategies by which television fosters viewer engagement establish a framework in which televised experience is both mediated and immediate, regardless of content. Lynn Spigel's work on the early reception of commercial television in America, in which she analyses the strategies by which the television set was incorporated - discursively, figuratively and actually - into the domestic arena, highlights the difference between television and the silver screen. As Spigel notes, 'television - at its most ideal - promise[s] 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' (*Installing* 14). In contrast to cinema, which keeps its distance from the home, and thus distances itself from the viewer, the domestic medium is part of the household, assumes intimacy with the viewer and is, thereby, more able to bring the outside world up close. In this sense, the feeling of 'being there' afforded by television (as promoted and enacted by the Air New Zealand commercial) is an affect of television's 'being here' in the living room. When everything about the medium is a structure of proximity, the production of affective intimacy between viewer and viewed comes as no surprise.

As this thesis has argued, the form and content of reality programming has an intrinsic concurrence with the ordinary, domestic medium for which it was conceived. Like television commercials, reality formats fill the interstices of television's 'proper' programming. Likewise, because they are on all the time they are critically overlooked; because they are trivial, repetitive and ephemeral they are literally dis-regarded. And yet, as critical responses to *An American Family* in the 1970s or *Big Brother* from 2000 to the present day attest, the conjunction of ordinary, domestic content with an ordinary, domestic medium produces a powerful and intense degree of viewer engagement, as a conviction in the reality of represented people and places compounds the intimacy of the close-up camera. In this way, reality television exemplifies both the desire and the capacity to 'bring things "closer"' anticipated by Walter Benjamin (*Work of Art* 217) as it tests the limits of the 'technologically improved view' discussed by Spigel (*Installing* 27). By making a virtue of its processes of production, even as it elides them, reality programming renders that which is usually kept private visible, audible and public, while retaining and protecting the 'zone of privacy' in which events occur. Whether secrets are elicited from bodies (blood, sweat and tears), hearts (loves, losses and allegiances) or houses (dirt, dodgy wiring or naughty knickers), the context of confession provides a dynamic which certifies the truth of such emissions. In this way, the production of material evidence both mirrors and accompanies the parallel production of emotional affect. Furthermore, this generation of feeling as both bodily and affective correlates with the 'production of locality' as both 'material' and 'social' in Appadurai's terms. Thus, the extent to which reality television programmes 'provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project' (Appadurai 4) is both an aspect of their condition as domestic, quotidian and routine and an effect of their strategies of representation.

In its analysis of reality television texts produced in New Zealand, this thesis has sought to inflect the domestic, the local and the social with a particular cultural identity, thereby balancing a general interest in the affective strategies and discursive practices of the medium of television itself, with more specific concerns about 'local content'. On one hand, then, it has placed 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 has pursued a more specific project, as it has considered locally-produced programming as the particular output of the island nation of New Zealand. In this case, I have argued 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. Because the medium of television itself may be charged with both intimacy (being domestic, proximate, familiar) and banality (being quotidian, routine, platitudinous), the subject of reality programming, arguably the '*sine qua non*' of the medium (Kavka, *Reality Estate* 226), facilitates a wide-angle reading of television's form and content. Drawn down within a local context, however, and attached to a particular place, the domestic, the proximate and the quotidian reach their fullest potential as the affective yield of locally-produced reality television.

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