The illusory everyday: Narratives of pleasure in Australian ‘reality TV’

by

Emma Price, BA (Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

February 2011
I am the author of the thesis entitled

The illusory everyday: Narratives of pleasure in Australian ‘reality TV’

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This thesis may be made available for consultation, loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

Full Name .................................................................

Signed .................................................................

Date .................................................................
I certify that the thesis entitled

The illusory everyday: Narratives of pleasure in Australian ‘reality TV’

submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any university or institution is identified in the text.

Full Name......................................................... EMMA PRICE ............................................................

Signed ...............................................................

Date........ 20/7/2011 .................................................
Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the following people.

First, I would like to thank my supervisors Dr David Ritchie, Dr Keith Beattie and Dr Stephen Goddard for their input throughout the many stages of this research. An extraordinary amount of thanks especially to David for his belief, guidance and many cups of tea over the last three years, and for the faith he has had in me as a student and colleague since my Honours year.

Second, this thesis literally would not have been possible without my interview participants. Thanks to Helen Bullough, David Mortimer, Rick McPhee, Lyndal Marks, Tarni James and Asif Zubairy for their time and insight into the television industry and production. Thanks also to all my anonymous viewers for their open and enthusiastic discussions.

Thanks also to the anonymous peer reviewers of my conference papers and journal publications, for their insightful feedback on my work as the findings were publicly aired during the research period. This input provided great opportunities to apply and revise the emerging ideas and tangents of the thesis (see Price 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a, 2010b, 2011 forthcoming).

Third, I would like to thank the research student community at building EB. The camaraderie and collegiality forged by its inhabitants made coming to work a constant pleasure. In particular, I would like to thank my original office buddies Sally Percival Wood and Neena Sachdev, my fellow ‘starters’ Edwin Ng and Janet Watson, and Amy Nethery for all her advice and motivation.

Lastly, many thanks go to my family and friends for their encouragement over the last three years. Special thanks to my parents Judy and Peter, and also to my sister Megan for being the reassuring ‘last set of eyes’.

This thesis has been a roller-coaster experience that I would not have survived without the endless support and patience of my partner and dearest friend Joe – I can never thank you enough.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements i  
Abstract v  

## Introduction  

## PART ONE: ‘Reality TV’ Perspectives  

Chapter One: Genre  
*Is there a genre? - Myths of ‘reality TV’ - Amoebic entertainment*  
8  

Chapter Two: Industry  
*Motivations - Terminologies - Audiences*  
26  

Chapter Three: Construction  
*Television narratives - Jeopardy and the ‘everyday’ - The spectacle of ‘reality TV’*  
37  

Chapter Four: Audiences  
*Studying audiences - Perception and aspiration*  
52  

## PART TWO: Methodology & Case Studies  

Chapter Five: Reading for pleasure  
*Television narrative and Barthes’ S/Z - Pleasure of the TV text*  
65  

Chapter Six: In their own words  
76  

Chapter Seven: *Bondi Rescue*  
90  

Chapter Eight: *Border Security*  
118  

Chapter Nine: *Family Footsteps*  
149  

Chapter Ten: *Nerds FC*  
176  

## PART THREE: The Illusory Everyday  

Chapter Eleven: The illusory everyday  
205  

*Amoebic ‘reality TV’ – Dialectic awareness – Everyday entertainment*  

## Conclusion  

217  

Bibliography 229  

Appendices 251
# Table of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>The flow of the entertainment experience</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Comparison of hermeneutic progressions</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Adaptation of S/Z narrative framework for TV</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td><em>Bondi Rescue</em> episode structure</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td><em>Bondi Rescue</em> frame 1</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td><em>Bondi Rescue</em> frame 2</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td><em>Bondi Rescue</em> frame 3</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td><em>Bondi Rescue</em> frame 4</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td><em>Bondi Rescue</em> frame 5</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td><em>Bondi Rescue</em> enigmatic structure</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td><em>Border Security</em> episode structure</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td><em>Border Security</em> frame 1</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td><em>Border Security</em> frame 2</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td><em>Border Security</em> frame 3</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td><em>Border Security</em> frame 4</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td><em>Border Security</em> frame 5</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7</td>
<td><em>Border Security</em> enigmatic structure</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td><em>Family Footsteps</em> episode structure</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td><em>Family Footsteps</em> frame 1</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td><em>Family Footsteps</em> frame 2</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td><em>Family Footsteps</em> frame 3</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td><em>Family Footsteps</em> frame 4</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td><em>Family Footsteps</em> frame 5</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7</td>
<td><em>Family Footsteps</em> enigmatic structure</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td><em>Nerds FC</em> episode structure</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td><em>Nerds FC</em> frame 1</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td><em>Nerds FC</em> frame 2</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
<td><em>Nerds FC</em> frame 3</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5</td>
<td><em>Nerds FC</em> frame 4</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6</td>
<td><em>Nerds FC</em> frame 5</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7</td>
<td><em>Nerds FC</em> enigmatic structure</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Audience Interview Guide</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Industry Interview Guide</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>Bondi Rescue transcription</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>Border Security transcription</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>Family Footsteps transcription</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>Nerds FC transcription</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

While previous commentary on ‘reality TV’ has approached the genre as ‘trash TV’ in relation to a positivist ‘real’, this research argues that the fundamental basis of the genre lies in the ‘illusory everyday’: constructed narratives of entertainment. This concept is identified as the representation of the ‘everyday’ as illusion in ‘reality TV’, in a performance of banality and excess that is designed to connect with viewers as a source of pleasure. As a result, notions of ‘reality’ and ‘everyday’ are ontologically and epistemologically problematised as relative and subjective states in relation to television production and reception. Four key elements of genre, industry, construction and audiences are examined within a pluralist agenda of post-structuralism, phenomenology and constructivism to investigate the deficiencies in the extant literature on ‘reality TV’. This bricolage integrates various perspectives from this diverse set of theories, with particular reference to discourses of polysemy, pleasure, perception and context to establish an analytic framework for a series of Australian television case studies: Bondi Rescue, Border Security, Family Footsteps and Nerds FC. Textual analysis of the formats is triangulated with qualitative interviews with the industry and viewers in order to explore and understand ‘reality TV’ from those who produce and watch it. These personal narratives emphasise the subjective experiences of pleasure in the construction and reception of ‘reality TV’ as entertainment. Emergent design is used as the primary method, by which processes and outcomes are continuously shaped and tested as the research progresses.

The thesis concludes that ‘reality TV’ is broad and nuanced in an amorphous genre, in its production motivations and grammar, and in the individual experience of pleasure by viewers. The ‘illusory everyday’ is proposed as the site of multiple interpretations and pleasures, and as a framework for understanding this television phenomenon with three significant outcomes. First, the constant evolution and diversity of ‘reality TV’ is identified as an amoebic genre that draws on a range of television styles and techniques from informative to entertainment. Second, the construction of television narratives from the ‘everyday’ is essential in the triangular relationship between the industry and audiences. The central elements of jeopardy and aspiration are examined through narrative and the use of the ‘everyday’ to create engaging viewing, as well as the significance of local production and contemporary
subject matter. Third, viewer engagement through entertainment is understood through the pleasures of watching ‘reality TV’. The varying levels of entertainment and engagement are negotiated by individual viewers in relation to their own interests and experiences, in addition to their cognition of television conventions and representation. The ‘illusory everyday’ therefore provides a framework for the acknowledgement and understanding of the play that is essential in viewer engagement with ‘reality TV’ in negotiating the mirage represented for subjective resonance and pleasure.
Introduction

It was another long night at work. Between compiling the week’s format production schedules and pitch presentations for the next commissioning meeting, I tapped out a short email home. It read:

“Reality TV is the product of a contemporary existential crisis”

It was a fortuitous sequence of media posts that led me to the position of Development Coordinator for BBC Factual Entertainment from 2005 to 2006 in London, and the entire experience changed not only how I considered television but also provided an awareness of industry perspectives in programme development and broadcasting. Once back in Australia and deciding ‘what to do next’, I was reminded of that email statement and it reignited my curiosity in the phenomenon of ‘reality TV’. This research is the product of that spark.

As I was to quickly learn, ‘reality TV’ is a difficult beast. As neither an avid fan nor staunch critic, ‘reality TV’ presented a wealth of research possibilities with initial summaries supplying a wish-list of philosophical arguments in relation to interactivity, celebrity, surveillance and voyeurism. However, as I delved further into the extant literature, a discernible gap became apparent in the understanding of the genre’s breadth, production and reception, and an atmosphere of criticism quite removed from my own experience in the industry and as a viewer.

Since its inception, television has been subject to a range of developing critical responses, highlighting various questions of its functions and significance. The analysis of television is presented with a peculiar state: from the outside, it is a domestic electronic device, but through its broadcast and reception it represents an omnipresent mode of communication, displaying a variety of content and forms for audiences. It can entertain and inform, distract and engross, as low culture and high affect. Television has been both disregarded and celebrated in previous academic study due to its status as popular and mass culture. The commercial nature of television and its use as commodity to audiences, in combination with its entertaining and sensational content, may be seen as aspects of ‘low’ culture. But these aspects are not to be disregarded for this reason; they are also important in understanding the functions and uses of the medium (Hartley 1992, 2008; Fiske 1987; Fiske & Hartley
2003). Ellis argues that the mass form of television “means TV belongs to the everyday, to the normal backdrop of expectations and mundane pleasures” (1992: 160). Similarly, exploration of the ‘reality TV’ phenomenon provides any number of contradictions in the consideration of its evolution, construction and reception. Its criticism and praise is situated between fact and fiction, authenticity and performance, reality and illusory, spectacle and everyday. As a result, the term ‘reality TV’ is fraught with problems from the outset: can reality be on TV? Whose reality? How is it represented and for whom? The binary distinction between fictional and non-fictional screen texts is an artificial heuristic of theories and assumptions providing a simplistic understanding to representation and reception. For ‘reality TV’, this does not give scope for greater examination to question how programmes are constructed and engage. Somehow, the widely acknowledged “spectrum of manipulation involved at every stage” of television production (Dovey 2000: 6) has been overlooked in the dominant criticism of ‘reality TV’, with equal omission of the narratives of the industry and viewers themselves.

This thesis aims to understand Australian ‘reality TV’ through audience pleasure in the constructed illusion of the ‘everyday’. Using ‘emergent design’ as the primary method, the thesis conducts an evaluation of the genre’s criticism, and offers new insights into the production and reception of ‘reality TV’ as entertainment. The thesis argues that ‘reality TV’ is a source of pleasure, constructing and performing the national and the self for audiences, including exploration of notions such as simulation, the ‘everyday’, perception and engagement. It establishes the ‘illusory everyday’ as a central element of ‘reality TV’ programmes, where people and events are represented as ‘real’, but in highly constructed entertainment forms. The ‘illusory everyday’ is fundamental to both production and audience cognition in the expectations and conventions of the genre. The idea of illusion is not intended as an adverse judgment of ‘reality TV’ construction and reception, but rather to imply an engaging mirage or fantasy. As neither deceitful nor negative, the ‘illusory everyday’ is an inherent part of a format’s operations in the construction of a dramatic and appealing ‘everyday’ that audiences are encouraged to negotiate in their engagement for pleasure. This research challenges previous positivist, generic and audience assumptions by mapping key elements of production and reception, and highlights
the essential link between the industry and audiences in the narrative spectacle of the performance of the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’.

Previous studies of ‘reality TV’ have adopted a variety of viewpoints on representation, but early questions of “actuality and [its] epistemology” remain underdeveloped (Hill 2005: 9). Earlier commentary demonstrated a strong focus on the definition of a genre with links to documentary (Nichols 1994; Kilborn 1994). The arrival of formats such as Big Brother and Survivor shifted criticism to a Cultural Studies focus with emphasis on the origins of ‘reality TV’ in television history, representation of cultural politics, commercialism and economic concerns, audience interactivity, surveillance and voyeurism (Friedman 2002; Andrejevic 2003; Brenton & Cohen 2003; Murray & Ouellette 2004; Biressi & Nunn 2005; Bignell 2005). Commentators appear caught between establishing the ‘trash’ nature of ‘reality TV’ or its role in ‘democratising’ television (Cummings 2002; Ouellette & Hay 2008), with little consideration of the dialectic of an ‘illusory everyday’ – of representation and actuality – and how it is achieved, received and enjoyed. Often the main source of ‘reality TV’ analysis focuses on highly sensational formats, such as Big Brother and Survivor, which are framed as exemplars of the genre. Although these critiques explore numerous elements of format representation and interactivity, the concentration on a specific type of ‘game-doc’ overlooks the enormity of the field. A ‘water-tight’ genre is difficult to define within the diversity of the programmes now under the umbrella of ‘reality TV’. In addition, the earlier alignment with documentary has been developed with notions of “post-documentary culture” (Corner 2002: 255) in which ‘reality TV’ acts as an extension of the genre that is displaced from observation to entertainment as the dominant force behind the performance of the ‘everyday’. However, this perspective has often been limited to restrictive classifications of documentary and other television genres, and requires further acknowledgement of verisimilitude in television and cultural cognition of authenticity. This thesis evaluates previous definitions and argues that a traditional genre classification is unachievable for ‘reality TV’ and constrains its understanding. It offers instead the concept of ‘amoebic’ design as an alternative genre framework for a broad consideration of the cultural conventions and expectations of contemporary ‘reality TV’.
‘Reality TV’ has evolved into an immensely popular form of programming and this thesis presents further exploration of its production and reception as entertainment. This research challenges earlier views by exploring four Australian ‘reality’ formats (*Border Security*, *Bondi Rescue*, *Family Footsteps* and *Nerds FC*) with analysis of their construction and engagement. The four programmes were chosen for their varying representations of national narratives within the broad range of ‘reality TV’ styles, conventions and expectations of authenticity, and inclusion of entertainment qualities informed the selection of programmes. The choice also covers both commercial and public service broadcasters to highlight the breadth of the Australian industry in production, representation and expectations of ‘reality TV’. For audiences, the portrayal of the ‘everyday’ is significant as a representation of cultural identity with the local production of global format ideas emphasising dominant national values and experiences. The current success and constant development of ‘reality TV’ signals its importance for television broadcasting, and therefore it is equally important to examine how narratives are being portrayed and received by audiences as an expression of entertainment and culture. This thesis argues for the reevaluation of ‘reality TV’ in broadcasting as constructed entertainment in its spectacle, narrative and performance of the ‘everyday’. The chosen programmes are demythologised to uncover a superficially simplistic, yet highly complex form of television, aimed at and received for the subjective pleasures of viewers. The concept of the ‘illusory everyday’ is developed and deployed as a theoretical framework for the analysis of television formats to reveal the qualities in both production and reception that are essential for its construction and entertainment. The use of the term ‘everyday’ is problematic in that its invocation can often be “a sleight of hand that normalises and universalises particular values, specific world-views” (Highmore 2002: 1). Highmore identifies the ambivalent term as possessing an “unspecific gravity” in signifying not only immediate, daily life, but as a quality of ‘everydayness’ in the invisibility of the banal and familiar (2001: 1). The ‘everyday’ is defined in this research primarily in relation to de Certeau (1984) as a way of questioning and understanding culture in the minutiae of ‘ordinary’ actions and thoughts: to make visible the invisible. In this way, the ‘everyday’ is not defined through predetermined meanings, but as a “contested and opaque terrain” (Highmore: 2002: 1) that is highly dependent on the relative context of the subject.
This research adopts Kellner’s view that television research should be multi-perspectival to avoid “one-sidedness” (2005: 43). Perspectives and critical methods in both textual and audience research frameworks have undergone significant paradigm shifts that are discussed further in Chapters Three to Six. A *bricolage* of these approaches (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 4) is thus employed to understand television culture through genre, production, narrative theories and audience studies. This position is also situated with Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomic approach to avoid structured hierarchies, and to use frameworks as “lines of flight” (2004: 23) as links between theoretical and empirical discourses. In this way, several frameworks and theories are introduced and developed into a methodology for the case studies. Analysis of the screen texts is situated in post-structuralist frameworks in order to address the plurality and polysemy of television narratives, and the multiplicity of meanings and responses possible from viewers in their experience of television. Barthes’ *S/Z* (1970) provides a framework that privileges the role of the reader in the introduction of a ‘writerly’ approach as a non-prescriptive examination of narrative in the activity of constructing meanings in the infinite play of signification. As a result, it presents a reflection on the act of reading and identifies differences in the relationship between reader and text. This framework is coupled with Barthes’ later study *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) that establishes a physical mode of pleasure produced only through the reading of a text. In the combination of Barthes’ frameworks, the interpretations and pleasures of ‘reality TV’ viewers can be identified in their individual responses to and experiences of the formats. This paradigm of subjective narratives is maintained in qualitative research grounded in discourses of constructivism to allow a flexible process without preordinacy of salience, and to acknowledge the ideographic social context of the qualitative cohort, the visible role of the researcher and the limitations of defining the audience as an accessible entity (Lincoln & Guba 2003). This methodology is also connected to phenomenological approaches of individual perception and experience. Narratives of both the industry and viewers are presented “in their own words” (Hall 1986: iv; Lull 1990: 18) and triangulated with text analysis as a reflection of the construction and reception of ‘reality TV’ formats as entertainment. This process provides an emergent design for the consideration of the ‘illusory everyday’ as a liminal space between the ordinary and format ‘world’ for its production and audiences. Additional theories from de Certeau, Bakhtin, Baudrillard, and Merleau-Ponty are employed to
explore the representation and engagement of ‘reality TV’ as pleasurable experiences in constructed narratives of entertainment.

The thesis is divided into three sections in an unconventional structure. This design is a deliberate choice to reflect the emergent design of the research, in which processes and outcomes are continuously shaped and tested as the research progresses. In this way, this unorthodox structure avoids fixed or preordained positions and encourages the exploration and linkage of various theoretical perspectives. Part One introduces the four key elements essential to the research examination of ‘reality TV’: genre, industry, construction and audiences. Each of these chapters considers previous commentaries and explores theoretical frameworks as shifting paradigms in the emerging perspectives of the thesis in entertainment, production, narrative and reception. These chapters are part of the emerging research narrative to establish previous discourses and locate new possibilities in ‘reality TV’ understanding. Part Two presents the parallel research methodologies of post-structuralism and constructivism, before the four case study chapters that introduce each chosen format and detail viewer and industry responses with analysis of construction and pleasure. Part Three draws together the arguments and findings of the preceding sections for further exploration of the ‘illusory everyday’ in ‘reality TV’ production and reception.
PART ONE

‘Reality TV’ Perspectives
CHAPTER ONE

Genre

The use of the term ‘reality TV’ signals or implies a programming type, with the common label now a ‘catch-all term’ as a “convenient shorthand for many kinds of television” (Brenton & Cohen 2003: 8). However, the issue of genre continues to be a major concern in the criticism and analysis of ‘reality TV’. Previous attempts to define conventions, styles and expectations for ‘reality’ programme examination as a genre has implicated the demarcation of necessary parameters from an evolving field of production. This approach inevitably sees the exclusion of some formats from a genre definition for the sake of coherent and systematic categorisation, or alternatively, the need for ambiguity in order to cover “a range of popular factual programming” (Hill 2005: 41). Furthermore, the classification of genre can be argued as an abstract and cultural construct through a subjective identification of common textual qualities. Therefore, the question remains whether a genre can be identified from the current and historic forms of ‘reality TV’ programmes and to what extent its previous criticism has inhibited understanding.

‘Reality TV’ programming has defied any clear formula primarily because of its variety of forms. Programmes have evolved substantially across its lifespan to date, where contemporary choices of subject matter and representation styles are significantly different to that of the previous two decades. Specific genre boundaries are elusive for the identification of particular televisual styles and techniques as these can be diverse, and at times, oppositional. In addition, ‘reality TV’ constantly reinvents itself to maintain its currency and appeal, consequently avoiding the recurring predictions of its demise. As a result, ‘reality TV’ appears as more amorphous across televisual styles and techniques rather than adhering to strict parameters. Traditional consideration of genre from literary or film theories is therefore redundant in its criticism, and requires a cultural approach suggested by Mittell to account for the “specific industry and audience practices unique to television” (2005: 37), and specifically in this research for ‘reality TV’.
Previous studies of ‘reality TV’ have been dominated by comparison with documentary. While this may be historically based in earlier commentaries where the formats discussed primarily involved ‘on-the-job’ footage of emergency services (Kilborn 1994; Nichols 1994, discussed below), their parameters for analysis are limited when considering the range of ‘reality TV’ present in current broadcasting. In particular, the approach in new millennium formats such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor* has expanded the possibilities of construction and spectacle from the ‘everyday’, leading to claims of “lowest common denominator” and ‘trash’ television (Mosley 2000: 4; Dovey 2000: 83). These concerns are part of a ‘panic’ regarding the contemporary trends in broadcasting and the ‘loss of the real’ in television. However, the efficacy of this perspective is questionable: in the medium’s mediated state, is there any ‘real’ to have lost in the first place?

Neale’s concept of genre as “systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject” (1980: 19) is a useful foundation for further examination of ‘reality TV’ as a category of programming. The use of documentary techniques as a ‘claim to the real’ supports the comparison with documentary, but this comparison ultimately neglects to recognise the importance of entertainment in ‘reality TV’. This thesis argues that entertainment plays an equally important role in the aesthetics and context of ‘reality TV’, and in this way, informs both programme construction and viewer engagement. With this in mind, exploration of industry, text and audiences is crucial to achieve an understanding of ‘reality TV’ in terms of its conventions and appeal.

**Is there a genre?**

Although its origin is contested, the term ‘reality TV’ is thought to have entered common usage in the early 1990s, as a development from the ‘infotainment’ era of the 1980s in television (Bonner 2003: 23-4; Hill 2005: 24; Brenton & Cohen 2003: 13). An important distinction to note from the outset is between the purpose of the programming and its title. Although the term ‘reality TV’ is relatively new in constituting an “expansive and distinctive televisual movement” (Jermyn 2004: 88), the aim to show ‘real’ people and events on television has been present throughout the history of television. ‘Reality TV’ has become a buzzword for both the industry
and audiences to highlight particular production structures and expectations. However, this has also caused some misinterpretations that will be considered in Chapter Two. Although most critics agree that there are specific styles and techniques involved in ‘reality’ formats, concrete definitions have been elusive due to the specific aims of its criticism, which according to Bourdon serves “to condemn, to support, to defend, to debate” (2008: 67). As a result, the common classifications in current literature “err on the side of inclusiveness” (Nabi et al. 2003: 304) in order to unite the range of programmes within its “discursive, visual and technological claim to the ‘real’” (Holmes & Jermyn 2004: 5). Therefore, the idea of a specific genre of ‘reality TV’ is questionable and requires further consideration.

At its simplest level, ‘genre’ is described as a specific category, distinctive type or style (Feuer 1992; Gledhill 1999; Neale 2000). As an analytic tool for literature and film, the study of genre focuses on the division and classification of texts through identification of repetition and variations, implying that works can be categorised regardless of unique qualities, and emphasises structure and intrinsic textual elements. Neale states that genre guarantees coherence for texts by “institutionalizing conventions” (1981: 15) as part of its pleasure and function, and as a result argued to operate “as ‘horizons of expectation’ for readers and as ‘models of writing’ for authors” (Todorov 1990: 18). However, these coherent categories are ultimately abstract and culturally constructed in that they rely on the subjective judgement of integral features and boundaries. Mittell describes this as a ‘textualist assumption’ that looks “inward at texts to explain and delimit the formal mechanisms constituting the essence of any given genre”, linked to aesthetic and formalist paradigms (2004: 2-3). This discourse is extended through theoretical arguments such as Todorov (1975) in historical or theoretical genre approaches derived from critical observation or pre-existing cultural ideas, and Altman’s (1984) semantic/syntactic argument framed by Feuer (1992) as aesthetic, ritual and ideological approaches to consider systems of conventions, author/reader exchange, or structures of dominant ideals respectively. By moving away from the sole centrality of the text, genre can act as a discursive practice in order to position texts into frameworks of particular conventions and expectations that rely on the relationship between the work itself, its source and its audience.
For television, genre consideration requires acknowledgment of the production, marketing and viewing of programmes, with identification of specific and common conventions. This also allows for management of television’s programming range through reduction into comprehensible divisions; an important factor in broadcast scheduling and a reassuring guide for audiences (Turner 2001: 5). Fiske describes television as a “highly ‘generic’ medium” with clear categories between programmes determined by similarity (1987: 109-10). However, the application of film and literary genre frameworks to television is problematic due to the differences in function and reception. Television genres are increasingly less specific through the growing hybridity in programming, with postmodern characteristics of intertextuality, pastiche and reflexivity (Deming 2005: 133). In particular, the distinction between ‘fiction’ and ‘nonfiction’ has become progressively blurred through the development of television programmes that combine the generic conventions and expectations typically separated to each type. In this way, Mittell (2004) argues that attention must be given to how television genre categories form systems of assumptions that are utilised within individual programmes. This approach situates television genres as Foucauldian discursive practices, where the text is ‘decentred’ in order to consider definition, interpretation and evaluation as part of ideographic, cultural, industrial and reception contexts. Generalisation can therefore be avoided in the acknowledgment of television genre fluidity and cultural categorisation processes.

In discussion of ‘reality TV’ the application of genre has typically been informed by a ‘textualist assumption’ defined by internal programme elements. Persistent definitions of ‘reality TV’ often stem from the established agenda of pre-2000 formats and documentary. Early classifications display a specificity that is closely linked to their contemporary programmes, such as Nichols’ discussion of ‘reality TV’ as including “dangerous events, unusual situations, or actual police cases, often re-enacting aspects of them and sometimes enlisting [the audience’s] assistance in apprehending the criminal still at large” (1994: 45). Arguably, this precise demarcation of ‘reality TV’ elements excluded other formats at that time, and has
minimal application to current and future consideration of ‘reality TV’. In the same year, Kilborn issued his genre definition of ‘reality TV’ as involving “(a) the recording, ‘on the wing’, and frequently with the help of lightweight video equipment, of events in the lives of individuals or groups, (b) the attempt to simulate such real-life events through various forms of dramatized reconstruction, and (c) the incorporation of this material, in suitably edited form, into an attractively packaged television programme which can be promoted on the strength of its ‘reality’ credentials” (1994: 423)

This explanation is often used as a point of reference by later commentaries with its improved application to other formats, and most importantly, in the emphasis on packaging and ‘reality’ credibility. However, the impulse to strictly define ‘reality TV’ is eternally problematic due to the variety of forms grouped within the label. This breadth has led to greater generalisation in its definition, typically described as the use of ‘ordinary people’ in ‘ordinary’ or ‘unusual’ situations (Tincknell & Raghuram 2002: 205, Cummings 2002: xii; Biressi & Nunn 2005: 53), and a primary “discursive, visual and technological ‘claim’ to the ‘real’” (Holmes & Jermyn 2004: 5). A possible ‘genre overload’ results from Hill’s argument of ‘reality TV’ as a ‘catch-all’ category for a definition that is “all too easy to stray into the outer limits of the reality genre” (2005: 50-3). The ‘textualist assumption’ is present in these definitions being based upon elements that are recognised by its researcher solely within the television text. Although external economic factors are referenced as motivations in the existence of ‘reality TV’, the industry perspective is, for the most part, neglected within considerations of genre. Equally, definitions by audiences are largely ignored in empirical studies, preferring to impose a preordained category for audience response. This is a significant gap in the understanding of ‘reality TV’, and overlooks genre as a “triangular relationship between producer, text, and audience” (Fiske 1987: 110) which will be explored further in this research.

Corner characterises the genre of ‘reality TV’ as a “changing and increasingly hybridized set of practices, forms and functions” with cultural and commodity value in its familiarity and new expectations (2002: 255). This recognition of the fusion of styles is a different tack in ‘reality TV’ commentary, echoed in Roscoe and Hight’s claim of a hybrid form that “pairs documentary traits with fictional aesthetic devices” (2001: 38). This categorisation refers back to Kilborn’s initial definition, highlighting
the claim of access to the ‘real’ within a stylised presentation. Holmes and Jermyn argue further that the attempt to define ‘reality TV’ is indicative of larger arguments about genre and the “slippery and hybrid nature of television’s use of the concept” (2004: 7). The attainment of an exact definition has continued to be difficult due to the variety of programming now under the umbrella of ‘reality TV’ and the range of styles it draws upon. It is hard to imagine the prevalence of the term diminishing in favour of more comprehensive labels such as ‘Factual Entertainment’, stated by Hill as “perhaps the most traditional industry term for reality TV” that “usefully merges factual programming with entertainment-based television” (2005: 42). However, Dovey argues that the idea of ‘reality TV’ as a genre will only have more critical purchase once a stronger definition than “popular high-rating factual entertainment” is attained (2000: 80). There is little agreement amongst its commentaries how to exactly define the combination of observation and story that produces “a spectacular oscillation between the sensational and the banal” (Nichols 1994: 45). While Bignell denies the presence of a genre, emphasis is given to ‘reality TV’ as “an attitude to the functions of television, its audiences and its subjects” (2005: 172), consequently moving away from the ‘textualist assumption’. Alternatively, Brenton and Cohen highlight the oxymoron of ‘reality TV’ as a genre that does not seek to portray real life and enjoys its artificiality (2003: 8), and Murray and Ouellette focus on ‘reality TV’ as an “unabashedly commercial genre”, linked not by aesthetic qualities, but by the “fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real” (2004: 2).

While these commentaries recognise the difficulty in labelling a genre through historical or theoretical approaches where ‘reality TV’ appears ‘in flux’ through the “merging with other genres in a way that unsettles traditional categories” (Lunt 2004: 330), at the same time they seek to apply a structural understanding. Finding a balance between these varying responses to ‘reality TV’ as a genre is problematic, and ultimately leads to uncomplicated conclusions that there is “no one definition of reality programming, but many, competing definitions” (Hill 2005: 55). However, use of the term genre in relation to ‘reality TV’ may not be entirely questionable, depending on the approach in analysis. The acknowledgment of multiplicity should not be a resignation from categorisation, but rather the basis from which
consideration can be given to the variety of ‘reality TV’ between documentary and entertainment conventions, as well as its development, production and reception within different cultural environments. The continuing evolution and fluctuating levels of popularity are of equal importance as the delineation of stylistic elements in understanding ‘reality TV’, and this is a significant point to be explored further in this research.

Myths of ‘reality TV’

The label of ‘reality TV’ itself is a “direct contradiction” (Couldry 2003: 104). On the one hand, the subject matter promises everyday people and events, while on the other, it is packaged and produced into compelling television. The ‘reality’ it represents is distinguished by production choices to mould and choreograph the content with entertainment practices into engaging and identifiable viewing for audiences, as discussed in Chapter Three and Four. As a result, genre classification appears problematic within the traditional dialectic of fact and fiction. Hill characterises the genre as owing its “greatest debt to documentary television”, which has ‘almost’ vanished due to the rise of ‘reality TV’ (2005: 39). Corner suggests this as ‘post-documentary’ or “documentary as diversion” (2002: 260) where focus has shifted from observation and argument to the “pleasure of entertainment” (Beattie 2004: 193). However, oppositions are sustained through the comparison of ‘reality TV’ as a “documentary derivation” (Bonner 2003: 27) or a hybrid “lightweight entertainment vehicle” (Kilborn 2003: 11), suggesting a distinction between high and low forms of television based on notions of value and worth. Alasuutari describes the television ‘moral hierarchy’ as where viewers “explain, justify and excuse” their entertainment choices, while watching informative programmes is described “as if it were a civic duty” (1999: 11). He further argues the naturalisation of this hierarchy in television as contributing to what Bourdieu (1984) terms ‘legitimate taste’. UK Channel 4 Factual Entertainment Head, Julian Bellamy, echoes this view in relation to arguments against ‘reality TV’ as based in subjective judgements of value that are given weight through commentators (Media Society 2004). This critical perspective is evident in Hill’s audience study where viewers’ claims of ‘reality TV’ as entertaining are interpreted as “discrediting an already discredited television genre” (2005: 88). She frames this approach within Bourdieu’s notion of ‘cultural capital’
argued as low for ‘reality TV’ in its common reference as “mindless entertainment” (Hill 2005: 87). The ‘bad culture’ perspective can also be traced to the ‘cultural pessimism’ argued by the Frankfurt School in the ‘culture industry’ of mass media, commercialisation and audience effects (Adorno 1991). This hierarchy of programming privileges documentary as a ‘discourse of sobriety’ of “factual, pragmatic discourse” (Nichols 1991: 4), whereas fictional or entertaining television is relegated as lightweight and diversion for the masses. As a result, documentary is traditionally considered an “accurate and truthful portrayal of the socio-historic world” that links the image and reality in ideas of naturalism (Roscoe & Hight 2001: 6-7), and ‘reality TV’ has been observed as a “debasement of the documentary tradition” (Beattie 2004: 183) and a “general cultural malaise” (Kilborn 2003: 1). However, this is a misplaced consideration centred on a limited view of television construction and audience engagement that ignores the “complex way in which traditions and technologies combine to produce audiences” (MacCabe 1986: 8).

This point of contestation revolves around the “purpose and context” (Ward 2005: 7) of the ‘everyday’ subject matter of documentary as informative or expositional, and ‘reality TV’ as entertaining. Several ‘reality’ formats have been considered controversial in pushing the supposed limits of acceptability or worthiness in television, due to factors such as the choice of content and its portrayal (Dovey 2000: 83). This opinion stems from the enduring public service beliefs of broadcasting as a mode of communication to inform and educate, and the perceived boundary between the private and public. ‘Reality TV’ has been described as promoting a discourse of the “private sphere, of individual experience, … of the excessive, the vulgar and the personal” (Biressi & Nunn 2005: 24). This is manifested within a regime of subjectivity and “glorification of the self” (Dovey 2000: 27); a focus on the ‘everyday’ person as a point of interest and ability, as opposed to the traditional role of the celebrity or expert. In this way, ‘reality’ formats concentrate on the banal and its packaging within the narrative spectacle of drama or competition. The comparison of ‘reality TV’ with documentary has resulted in the moral panic of ‘lowest common denominator’ television in its mass appeal, promotion of voyeurism, and a dangerous ‘dumbing down’ of culture and loss of values (Cummings 2002: xiii; Biltereyst 2004). Biressi and Nunn argue ‘reality TV’ is linked to an “anxiety about the decline...
of documentary proper” and a “manipulative misuse of the camera” that destabilises
the “status of the distant and powerful documentary camera” through televisual
intimacy and ‘easy pleasure’ (2005: 147). The central focus and appeal in popular
culture is a criticism of ‘reality’ formats as a threat to the authenticity that is achieved
in television representation, and the implication of an unsophisticated audience
unable to negotiate its construction.

These commentaries adhere to the dominant discourse of television’s proximity to
broadcast “things as they really are” (Kilborn 1994: 422). In traditional use, the term
‘documentary’ refers to screen texts that “reflect and report on the ‘real’ through the
use of the recorded images and sounds of actuality” (Corner 1996: 2), which is
historically linked to British filmmaker John Grierson as a pioneer of the style and
influential in its development. However, Grierson’s philosophy greatly contrasts
these dominant ideas of documentary, which appear more aligned with notions of
direct cinema or cinema verité. By positioning documentary between factual (ie.
news reels or lectures) and fictional films, Grierson espoused the “creative
interpretation of actuality” rather than solely asserting realism (1933: 8), and his
films are widely accredited for their intervention and reconstruction in an
“imaginative capturing of a non-phenomenal ‘real’” (Corner 1996: 16). This
documentary philosophy is paraphrased by Cowie as a “dramatization of the
everyday of reality, not mere recorded actuality” (1997: 63). However, this
perspective appears to have diminished in contemporary understanding in relation to
‘reality TV’, argued by Corner (1996) in the shift of documentary between film and
television, and technology improvements for observation and immediacy.
Documentary is now widely identified as ‘non-fiction’: a term used as a signification
of fact and authenticity in the televisual translation of ‘actuality’ as ‘reality’ and
‘truth’ on the screen. The institution of television has been “ideologically,
technologically, and programmatically linked to the presentation of reality”
(Friedman 2002: 4) within Bazin’s ontology of the photographic image, where the
“objective nature of photography confers … a quality of credibility” (2005: 13-4).
Nichols echoes this argument about documentary that “something of reality itself
seems to pass through the lens and remain embedded in the photographic emulsion”
(1991: 5). This ‘realist assumption’ promotes the ‘truthful’ style and techniques of
documentary recording within a positivist paradigm where reality is ontologically objective with tangible existence as the state of things in actuality. However, this view is fraught with epistemological arguments on the nature of this state posed by the discourses of post-structuralism and constructivism. These two paradigms are fundamental to the methodology of this research (to be discussed further in Part Two) where knowledge and reality is “contingent upon human practices” (Crotty 1998: 42) and totalising concepts of signification, identity and truth are critiqued so that reality is a question of perception and cognition within a culture. An aesthetic of the ‘real’ is therefore present, and situated between the polarisation of the “Bazin vs Baudrillard tussle” (Bruzzi 2000: 4); of objective photography and the hyperreal creation of a model without origin. For all television a particular observation has been selected, constructed and viewed, and so therefore should not be classified as the reality, but rather a mediated representation of a possible reality.

The privileging of documentary as truth and authentic, as opposed to the panic of ‘reality TV’ manipulation, perpetuates the “fact/fiction dichotomy” (Roscoe & Hight 2001: 7) and implies an ‘epistemic confidence’ that “ignores the very wide range of narrative, dramatic and imaginative devices” (Corner 1996: 4) present in all television. The aesthetic of the ‘real’ is therefore achieved through the constructed representation of footage recorded from actuality that is mediated in production and broadcast through complex yet familiar sets of conventions. The evidential quality of recording provides a “unique promise of contact with reality”, but one that is informed through genre conventions and programme style (Feitveit 1999: 795-8).

The documentary aesthetic is described by Corner as a ‘literalism’, where tropes of composition and movement are combined for “unselfconscious, realist assent”, where the “apparent absence of style” signifies credibility (2003: 96-7). However, this ‘apparent absence’ is in itself a production style that requires techniques such as handheld camera, talking-head or interview scenes, grainy sound and available lighting to portray everyday people or events as realistic. These devices are part of ‘intertextual conventions’ that “mediate viewers’ reception and interpretation of the work as an accurate and verifiable depiction of the world” (Beattie 2004: 13). This immediacy can also be linked to a “myth of liveness” that operates to diminish the space and time between the television representation and its audience (Caldwell
The intimate location of television within the home and its ability for simultaneous broadcasting contributes to its reception as a highly immediate, genuine and ‘truthful’ mode of communication (Turner 2006; Kavka & West 2004) that “guarantees a potential connection to our shared social realities as they are happening” (Couldry 2003: 96-7). The aesthetic of the ‘real’ is therefore equally evident within both documentary and ‘reality TV’ in the constructed representations of their chosen subject matter in order to achieve authenticity in its portrayal and reception.

It may seem an obvious step to then equate this aesthetic with ‘realism’ as a representation of the “dominant sense of reality” (Fiske 1987: 21) coupled with fidelity to ‘the real’. Barthes argues that realism is “not copying the real but in copying a (painted) copy of the real” (non à copier le réel, mais à copier une copie (peinte) de réel), where reality is distantly positioned through the use of representational modes (1970: 56, own translation). This is linked to Barthes’ notion of a ‘reality effect’ as a textual device where the illusion of ‘real’ is signified as realism through narrative and connotation (1986: 148), or similarly through Hartley’s “regimes of truth” (1992: 46). This illusion of the ‘real’ is significant for greater understanding of the construction of ‘reality TV’, however these regimes are also deceptive in that they seek to naturalise the representation as ‘realism’. As a result, the aesthetic is therefore better equated to the notion of verisimilitude in order to consider the industry and audience understanding of television construction, where the illusion is not deceptive but rather a fundamental part of production and reception. This approach is central to this research as it identifies the cultural conventions essential in representation and cognition between the text and its referent through systems of credibility, rather than a fidelity to ‘the real’. Todorov identifies two types of verisimilitude: where the text relates to ‘common opinion’ and where the text conforms to rules of its genre (1977: 82-3). From this perspective, viewers have implied awareness of this construction, and as a result the effectiveness of the programme as ‘realistic’ is contingent on the use of familiar generic and/or cultural conventions that are “constructed by social knowledge which is culturally as well as historically specific” (Cowie 1997: 57-8). The representation of verisimilitude “does not imitate the world but is a world of its own”, where the subject and its mode of
representation are inherently connected and, in this way, its aesthetic experience does not rely on fidelity but is a “spectacle which is sufficient unto itself” (Merleau-Ponty 2008: 71-2). In this way, the ‘everyday’ represented is illusory in its portrayal of a television format ‘world’, but retains credibility in the recognition of conventions that are aligned with viewer expectations of television production and their ‘everyday’.

The aesthetic of the ‘real’ in both documentary and ‘reality TV’ is therefore dependent on the phenomenology of verisimilitude. Within this paradigm, documentary is “not a thing, but a subjective relationship to a cinematic object” (Sobchack 1999: 251), which is also arguably the case for ‘reality TV’. The attribution of authenticity is thus contingent on viewer perception and recognition of the aesthetics of production; the cultural cues of ‘real’ on television. The construction and reception of television is situated within a position of consciousness that “posits the existential states of what we see there in relation to what we have experienced and know of the life-world we inhabit” (Sobchack 1999: 243). This can be aligned with Merleau-Ponty’s relativity of perception where “absolute and final objectivity is a mere dream” as self-knowledge and experience are strictly connected to the individual observer (2008: 36). Documentary and ‘reality TV’ both utilise the cultural aesthetic of the ‘real’ in order to represent and engage with ideas of authenticity in the portrayal of ‘everyday’ people and events. However, the alleged inferior quality of ‘reality TV’ as ‘trash’ in comparison to documentary has become a myth that perpetuates cultural ideas of screen ‘truth’ and as an indicator of value. The assessment of ‘reality TV as a “weakening of documentary status” (Corner 2002: 263) lacks meaning without qualification as both programme types involve representations of the ‘everyday’ and are therefore problematic when questioned epistemologically and ontologically regarding the nature of televusual representation and reception. Alternative commentaries on the genre of documentary acknowledge the distinction between fiction and non-fiction as based upon conventions and expectations of ‘a real’ embedded within production, texts and audience reception (Corner 1996; Bruzzi 2000; Beattie 2004), and from this perspective, documentary is unable to provide an “unmediated view of the world, nor can it live up to its claims to be a mirror on society” (Roscoe & Hight 2001: 8). However, this exact point
causes a rift in the dominant criticism of ‘reality TV’. For this reason, verisimilitude is an important tool for further analysis of the representation of the illusion of authenticity and how this affects the appeal and engagement of ‘reality TV’, through the consideration of narrative, performance and audience pleasure.

**Amoebic entertainment**

The above discussions of the ‘trash’ myth and the search for a generic structure of ‘reality TV’ are ultimately unsatisfactory explanations of ‘reality TV’, and more research is needed as to its perception and experience. This thesis argues that previous commentaries have been limited by these issues of genre and consequently neglect the variety and irregularity of ‘reality TV’ outside its textual elements. Between the acknowledgement of ‘reality TV’ as a “catch-all category” and its multiple definitions (Hill 2005: 49), there is an evident gap in accounting for the entirety of ‘reality’ programming, in addition to its hierarchical comparison to documentary. There is an element of acquiescence exemplified by Hill in a problematic definition of the television industry, scholars and audiences as a genre that “by its very nature is concerned with multiple generic participation, and constant regeneration” (2005: 41), described as a “feral genre” in its excessive experimentation that “no longer can be contained in its original habitat” (2007: 127). The range of programmes under the ‘umbrella’ label of ‘reality TV’ may resist a structural classification, however a pluralist consideration of this programming style attempts to embrace its continuous evolution of diverse purposes and representations. Although argued as literally deficient, the label of ‘reality TV’ is retained in this research because of its common usage in both academic and general discourse; however it is presented in inverted commas to reflect its problematic status. This use draws on Mittell’s suggestion that the unifying feature of ‘reality TV’ is not found within its textual elements, but rather the “broad circulation of the reality TV generic label as a category” that allows recognition of its style and expectations merely as a result of the cultural use of the term: “reality TV is a genre because we treat it as one” (2004: 197). This treatment does not imply a homogeneous genre between its texts, but rather leaves space for consideration of the central role of hybridity, and more importantly, for that of entertainment.
As commissioner for the British Big Brother, Bellamy promotes the global format’s status as “just an entertainment show” (Media Society 2004). This “entertainment imperative” of ‘reality TV’ (Kilborn 2003: 102) requires further consideration in order to understand its role in production and pleasure, stated by Corner where “quite radical changes … both to the forms of representation and to viewing relations” are produced when entertainment designs are present within a documentary style (2002: 263). Although the fusion of the “entertaining ‘real’” (Murray & Ouellette 2004: 2-3) is mentioned in other commentaries, this is commonly stated in regard to issues of spectacle or hybridity, and disregarded in the strict comparison to documentary. Entertainment is a “ubiquitous phenomenon” (Bryant & Miron 2002: 549) that is difficult to define due to its abstract nature, and compounded by its relation to subjective ideas and choices of pleasure. Its study is summarised by Modleski as a “paradoxical enterprise” (1986: ix) with its consideration often situated within “physiological, affective, and cognitive dimensions” (Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld 2004: 389). Posited as a media ‘effect’, entertainment study has often revolved around psychoanalytic discourses of gratification and emotion states (Zillman & Vorderer 2000; Vorderer & Hartmann 2009) however, further understanding can be achieved within the “reception phenomenon” of entertainment (Bosshart & Macconi 1998: 3) in the consideration of the representation, perception and experience of pleasure. In this way, notions of entertainment shift from a ‘category’ to an ‘attitude’ (Dyer 2002: 6). The “complex, dynamic, and even multi-faceted experiences” of entertainment are illustrated by Vorderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld (2004: 391) in a flow chart of enjoyment (see Figure 1.1). Importantly, this progression acknowledges the ‘repercussive system’ of media elements based in self-knowledge and experience, which contribute to enjoyment from personal motivations, with various manifestations and effects. In this way, the experience of entertainment varies between “different users, at different times, and with different products” (Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld 2004: 405) suggesting that an understanding of ‘reality TV’ needs to take into account a phenomenological approach of its production and reception.
Figure 1.1 The flow of the entertainment experience (from Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld 2004)

Television is regarded as “mainly a form of entertainment, a daily resource for pleasure seeking and distraction” (Mendelsohn & Spetnagel 1980: 24), however this represents only a small fraction of the medium’s analysis. While this disregard can again be linked to hierarchical values of popular and low culture, where entertainment remains under-scrutinised as ‘only entertainment’, Dyer discredits the term in a distinctive emphasis on the “primacy of pleasure” and its possibilities for escapism from and affirmation of the everyday (2002: 1). He argues this experience is achieved through an utopian sensibility in entertainment characterised by energy, abundance, intensity, transparency and community as “temporary answers to the inadequacies of the society” resident in their opposites (Dyer 2002: 22-5). In this way, entertainment is directly linked to its audiences, and developed as an ideographic source of pleasure within a “context of complex interactions that involve institutions, social norms, group behaviours, and traditions” (Mendelsohn & Spetnagel 1980: 24). The entertainment of ‘reality TV’ can therefore be argued as pleasurable for audiences in viewing “people like themselves, realities like their own”, while still harnessing classic entertainment ideals of the extraordinary and exotic (Dyer 2002: 177). This perspective suggests an alternative for ‘reality TV’ rather than the sole comparison to documentary, with further consideration warranted.
in the ‘entertainment imperative’ through production choices, format construction, and audience engagement. The pleasure of ‘reality TV’ is specifically examined in this research through ideas of ‘jeopardy’ and ‘aspiration’ as essential elements of its production choices and reception, and discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four in relation to narrative construction and audiences.

As discussed above, the heterogeneity and perpetual development of ‘reality TV’ rejects a structural definition, and therefore warrants a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon that is characterised by this research as an ‘amoebic’ framework. In biology discourse, the amoeba is a single cell organism with a flexible plasma membrane, deriving from Greek origin meaning ‘change’ as the cell continually modifies with protrusions to move and function, resulting in an asymmetrical shape (Solomon, Berg & Martin 2008: 549). The amoeba has traditionally been classified as a ‘rhizopod protozoan’ due to its systems of extensions. This scientific definition suggests a link in its use here as a theoretical framework to the ‘rhizome’ of Deleuze and Guattari that involves “principles of connection and heterogeneity” and the adoption of ‘diverse forms’ (2004: 7). Rejecting the rigidity of meaning in the selective, hierarchical structure of ‘arborescent’ systems, the rhizome “links apparently disconnected impulses and forces” (Mansfield 2000: 143) and highlights the constant development and movement of new possibilities through multiplicity. Similar to the status of the amoeba cell, rhizome movement is “flexible and nomadic, transversal and nonhierarchical” (Kaufman & Heller 1998: 5) by operating through “variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 23). In this way, both rhizome and amoeba subvert the reductionism of ideological assumptions of structured and fixed meanings. However rather than establish a network of “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 4), the amoeba allows for the mass of programming to be connected regardless of its variety within an overall ‘membrane’ heading. In this way, the title of ‘reality TV’ can be retained as a cultural category as argued by Mittell (2004), but within an amoebic framework that embraces and highlights its multiplicity and morphological qualities in shifting genre boundaries.
The amoeba framework also rejects the previous structured assumptions of ‘reality TV’ that have been created from hierarchies of values of television worth and authenticity. Myths and panics resulting from the strict comparison to documentary discussed earlier are superseded as the framework encompasses the various television conventions and expectations involved in ‘reality TV’. The amoeba can therefore be conceived as an amorphous mass that draws on and bonds together established elements from the television continuum between information and entertainment. In this way, it does not dwell in consideration of either end of the spectrum, but more importantly, the analysis of the combination. Elements from documentary, soap opera, game and talk shows, and talent contests have been identified as some of the many genres that are combined to construct hybrid styles for ‘reality’ formats, and each can be recognised as part of the fluid status of the amoebic genre that gives equal emphasis to its role as entertainment, in contrast to previous definitions of documentary comparisons. The amoeba also extends the notion of genre hybridity that is common through previous ‘reality TV’ literature (Hill 2005; Murray & Ouellette 2004; Biressi & Nunn 2005) through acknowledgement of its not only its combination but constant shifts in style. In this way, the amoeba acts similarly to the rhizome as a model “that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and ... a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 22).

The question of genre is significant in the consideration of ‘reality TV’, but one that has been previously overlooked or insufficiently managed. The amoebic framework introduced in this chapter is the first ‘stepping stone’ in this research to expand the possibilities for understanding ‘reality TV’ in particular regards to entertainment and the ‘illusory everyday’. The abstract nature of genre is established in order to highlight the contextual basis for definition in comparison to the reliance of previous explanations of traditional notions of style and realist assumptions. These are redundant through the amoebic framework’s rejection of ‘arborescent’ systems, and reflect a television continuum from information to entertainment of multiple conventions and expectations, with equal weight across the spectrum. From this alternative perspective, focus can be given to ‘reality TV’ as an amorphous cultural category that requires more consideration into the many elements of its construction.
and reception, as an ideographic, subjective and polysemic practice. By doing so, the approach of this thesis aims to understand the genre’s production and reception in Australia as a constructed entertainment of the ‘real’; an ‘illusory everyday’.
CHAPTER TWO

Industry

“The bad television [of today] is worse. It is not only bad. It is damaging. Meretricious. Seedy. Cynical …reality implies authenticity and honesty. And whatever some of this stuff may be, it is not authentic and it is not honest …This is not just bad television in the sense that it’s mediocre, pointless, puerile even. It’s bad because it is damaging.” (Humphrys 2004)

Situated within the traditional and ‘moral panic’ discourses introduced in the previous chapter, the above quote from Humphrys’ MacTaggart lecture at the 2004 Edinburgh International Television Festival reflects the common critical position of ‘reality TV’. Humphrys (2004) describes the dominant, trivial, ‘popular pap’ in current television programming as an erosion and coarsening of cultural values and behaviour. His concern of reality as authenticity is indicative of a greater misunderstanding within a majority of ‘reality TV’ criticism that clings to a notion of the ‘real’ on television and the disparity of ‘reality TV’ terminology between its production and critics. While the industry has “been slow to adopt the phrase” of ‘reality TV’ (Bourdon 2008: 68), its role as a buzzword has provided a basic label for its critics, both academic and in general media, and consequently the audience. The differences in how terms such as ‘reality’ and ‘factual’ are defined between the industry and its critics reflects a divergence that is addressed here to provide further understanding of ‘reality TV’.

The limitation of terminology in ‘reality TV’ criticism also extends to consideration of the television industry involved in ‘reality’ production. Interestingly, direct input from the professionals involved in the creation of ‘reality’ formats has been minimal to absent in the extant literature. The following discussion of industry terminology, motivations and correlation with audiences in this amorphous genre derives from personal interviews with executives and producers, in combination with public forum recordings and media articles. The methodology of this data collection will be discussed at length in Chapter Five, where this dialogue forms the next research ‘step’ in the analysis of the triangular relationship within the genre between production, programme and audience. The resulting shift in perspective suggests a
nuanced yet broad approach to programming by its producers, a deep understanding of style and construction as entertainment, and a compulsion for audiences.

**Motivations**

Central to the idea of an ‘industry’ is the institution of television. From its exterior, television is a tangible household appliance that is common in homes as a source of leisure and information. However, over the development of its technology and content, the ubiquitous status of television has come to signify much more than simple domestic communication. The medium is argued to be a “somewhat difficult object, unstable, all over the place, tending derisively to escape anything we can say about it” (Heath 1990: 267). Silverstone contends that it has become socio-culturally naturalised as “part of the taken for granted seriality and spatiality of everyday life” (1994: 20), with a constant stream of audio-visual content whether switched on or off. From an original state as an exotic piece of furniture, the ordinariness of television has transformed into invisibility; a presumptive part of a domestic environment. It is now part of culture, and the experience of culture, acting as a “frame of reference for virtually every life experience” (Tichi 1991: 37). As a result, the omnipresence of television can often lead to a disregard or implied status of those involved in its production in academic consideration. Television analysis is primarily dominated by discussion of realism, appeal, or representation, where ‘television’ becomes a monolithic entity (Fiske 1987; Fiske & Hartley 2003; Ellis 1992), rather than also considering its processes and the fundamental links between industry and audiences. This is a significant point in this research; as a shift away from overarching criticism based in analysis of programmes as texts to a more holistic approach employing the tripartite status of television to understand the construction and pleasure of ‘reality TV’.

This shift can be illustrated in the comparison of industry treatment by Hill’s 2005 study on British ‘reality TV’, and Roscoe’s 2001 paper on *Big Brother* in Australia. Hill introduces the industry through statistical discussion of the structure of factual programming at the BBC and other British networks as a ‘brief overview’ aligned with traditional generic frameworks, where ‘popular factual programming’ is positioned by the industry as “closer to documentary” (2005: 42-3). Clarification is
neither sought nor reflected from members of the production teams, and as a result is subject to the analyst’s own definitions and opinions. Similarities in this criticism can be drawn to the treatment of genre discussed in Chapter One, where the parameters of definition are firmly set solely by its researcher. Alternatively, Roscoe’s analysis of innovation and interaction in the Australian production of *Big Brother* highlights its production strategies with input from personal interviews undertaken with its executives and producers. By doing so, Roscoe acknowledges the producers’ clear intentions that *Big Brother* is “a constructed event, rather than ‘real life’”, and how this is achieved in the techniques of the programme (2001a: 481). Industry professionals in ‘reality TV’ possibly have been cautious to participate in dialogue with academic criticism due to the ‘moral panic’ discourse frequently used. However, it is clear that this input is invaluable for greater understanding of the genre, its construction and reception.

In addition to industry dialogue, Roscoe’s discussion also raises issues regarding the Australian industry in ‘reality TV’ production. *Big Brother* is a popular case study as a global format success, internationally licensed from its Dutch creators but with malleable content in order to reflect its local audience through production choices. This process is indicative of the greater trend of British and European export dominance in the format market, with sales of programming frameworks for worldwide production and broadcast (Lantzsch, Altmeppen & Will 2009: 79). British Endemol CEO, Tim Hincks describes ‘reality TV’ as a “culture change in how television is made” (Media Society 2004), and this is evident in production shifts in economic success of format sales where “what is exported is not the content itself but a recipe for creating a local version of an internationally successful TV show” (Andrejevic 2003: 12). In this way, a format acts as a ‘brand’ of known popularity and revenue described as a ‘McTV’ business model for “efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control” (Waisbord 2006: 391). Within the uncertain success rate of television entertainment, the marketing of formats presents the possibility for a reduction in the “risk of failure compared with the production of entirely new programs” (Lantzsch, Altmeppen & Will 2009: 82). As with all television programming, formats progress through development, production and broadcast, however format trade creates an ‘iterative process’ through the licensing of reproduction in other territories. The license provides the production ‘bible’
consisting of format rules and concepts (Lantzsch, Altmeppen & Will 2009: 85) that either must be adhered to or adapted accordingly. In this way, formats can be “easily translated from one culture to another” (Deery 2004: 4), described by Moran as a “locally conditioned globalism and a globally constructed localism” (2009: 17) in the creation of national stories.

Commentary on this format market and continuing production motivations of ‘reality TV’ has often lingered on economic arguments of low costs and quick production in a multi-channel, global environment of fragmented audiences (Andrejevic 2003; Beattie 2004; Cummins and Gordon 2006; Deery 2004; Hill 2005; Magder 2004; Raphael 2004). The relative cost-effective production of formats and its possible revenue from sales and licensing is linked to the prominence of ‘reality TV’ and its valued economic status for broadcasters, as opposed to the high budgets of drama or sitcoms. However, these factors are only part of the equation from the industry perspective, and particularly regarding Australian content. Production budgets for ‘reality’ programming are relatively cheaper when compared to other programme types but this does not necessarily mean they are negligible. Format production has the possibility for extensive budgets in technical requirements, in addition to the outlay cost to license the format itself, particularly for ‘reality’ event programmes such as Big Brother. However, this is coupled with discounts from contributor choices, locations and development, and extra revenue from interactive components, sponsorship and advertising (Bignell 2005: 25; Magder 2004: 151). In the case of the Australian production of Big Brother, the annual renewal of the format alone cost the Ten Network approximately A$25 million per year (Holmwood 2008), with the production amounting to an estimated A$13–16 million per series (Roscoe 2001a: 475). Although this is a specific case, these figures reflect the production of ‘reality’ formats as not necessarily inexpensive. Furthermore, the argument of economic sense does not “explain their success as a television form”, nor predict this success (Bignell 2005: 20). The issue of budget is described as a “powerful driver” by BBC Head of Entertainment Production, Helen Bullough (2009), but it is part of many considerations including issues of quick production turnaround for topicality and currency, as a “useful way of responding to sudden ups and downs in television markets, audience interests or competition environments” (Bignell 2005: 22). In addition, the ‘x-factor’ of ‘reality’ in this type of programming signals an
unpredictability that “can make them very costly and difficult to make” (Kalina 2008: 3). For Bullough, format development can never be achieved with “pure commercialism in mind” as a programme solely governed by global marketability is likely to result in an “empty, over-engineered format” (2009).

Furthermore, production budgets are directly connected to television scheduling within the realm of network or channel executives and commissioners. While scheduling can be best described as an inexact science, the underlying principle is to gain a maximum audience within a relative schedule budget for a “popularity and high ratings” goal (Rosenthal 1995: 10). In this way, the dominant criticism of television often overlooks the important factor of television as a business; working for audiences in a competitive broadcasting market of both public service and commercial ventures (Magder 2004: 138). While the relative low cost of ‘reality’ programming may be a driver in its production, any reduction in audience figures typically results in the removal of the programme from a channel’s schedule, regardless of its budget, as seen in the cancellation of the Australian Big Brother by the Ten Network after eight series and diminishing ratings (Devlyn 2008b). The dominance of the low cost motivation in criticism is arguably linked to the ‘trash TV’ judgement, where lower production costs can be construed as lower production values. This is a misplaced criticism as essential factors in the success of a format are the production values of the industry. Managing Director of Fever Media in London, David Mortimer, states that part of a programme’s popularity results from the perception of solid production and audience choice, whereas programmes that are “just re-hashes of previous formats, or frankly aren’t very well made, are found out very easily” (2009). Seven Network Executive Producer, Lyndal Marks, echoes this rationale where audience success in programme interest and entertainment comes from a “high level of production” (2009). This perspective reflects an industry awareness of audience discernment in viewing choices, and therefore the issue of cheaper production costs is only a partial answer to industry motivations. Within the business of television, the relationship of format to audience is highly sought after as a fundamental goal in production, and the industry must negotiate its production between audience appeal and scheduling budgets.
While many international formats are purchased for local production and broadcast, Australia also develops its own ‘reality’ programmes drawing on global trends and/or national interests. Only one of the case study formats chosen for this research fits the definition of a licensed format with the other choices representing the wider state of ‘reality TV’ development in Australia. Australian television is an interesting case study as a “robust and audience-sensitive production industry” (Cunningham and Jacka 1996: 49). Its relatively smaller size in contrast to the United Kingdom or United States reflects the comparative national population, in addition to factors of competition, funding, and audience viewing practices. Cunningham and Jacka (1996) argue this status as a ‘recombination’ of the British and American systems in their respective public service and commercial emphases, where both channel types have regulatory protection and broadcasting charters concerning content requirements of local product. They argue this allows for an “identifiably indigenous” system, while also providing “structured, controlled access” to a variety of international formats and programmes (1996: 58). So although the current market of formats can be argued as a ‘bypass’ of local quotas in “culturally specific but nationally neutral” programming (Waisbord 2006: 378-82), it is equally important to consider the ‘reality’ programming developed within the Australian industry for national broadcast. From this perspective, questions of motivation are no longer centred solely on economic arguments, but require a wider approach of the industry’s concern for engaging its local audiences.

**Terminologies**

As outlined in the previous chapter, traditional distinctions of genre are commonly retained in ‘reality TV’ commentary regardless of its fluid nature. As a result, criticism has centred on qualities of ‘factual’ and ‘reality’ in relation to documentary values and consequently assessed as ‘trash’ or ‘lightweight’ (Kilborn 2003: 5). The reliance on the notion of ‘factual’ television has dominated previous analysis, exemplified by Hill’s categorisation as “shorthand for non-fiction content” (2007: 3), with a “sliding scale of factuality” evident between informative formats and ‘documentary gameshows’ (Hill 2005: 50). This ‘sliding scale’ is arguably linked in criticism to the moral hierarchy discussed in Chapter One, which defines ‘reality TV’ as a “weakening of documentary status” (Corner 2002: 263) and pandering to
common tastes as a “dumbing down” of factual values (Kilborn 2003: 1-2). However, these claims emphasise the questionable use and definition of the term ‘factual’ in regards to television production. Its critical use is equally as problematic as the term ‘reality’ in epistemological arguments of positive knowledge and in this way limits the consideration of ‘reality TV’ as a broad range of programming through its evaluation based on proximity to ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’. While the industry range of terms for the variety of formats allude to notions of genre and factuality, such as Factual Entertainment, Popular Factual, or Structured Documentary, these distinctions are based within production choices in techniques, rather than a marker of value or ‘truth’. As a result, the industry use of the terms ‘factual’ or ‘reality’ is fundamentally different to that of its commentators.

The term ‘reality TV’ is used sparingly by the industry to label particular format types. For some television producers, it is specifically reserved for highly constructed ‘event’ programming that involves members of the public as contributors, such as *Big Brother*, while others avoid the term altogether due to its possible connotations (Media Society 2004). Producer Asif Zubairy defines ‘reality TV’ as “where you take ordinary people and impose a framework of rules on them and watch how they behave in those rules” (2010). It is similarly summarised by Cordell Jigsaw Producer, Rick McPhee as “where you construct something, and you change something, and you impose something on a group of people” (2009). From this perspective, value judgements of ‘factuality’ or ‘reality’ in criticism are redundant as the format itself is knowingly manufactured and controlled as a “directed reality” between the producers, contributors and audiences (James 2009). Mortimer describes this as the creation of a “new reality” due to the presence of a crew and the “constructed space” of the format for its contributors and audiences (2009). This variance in definition of ‘reality’ in television is a key difference in perspective between the production of ‘reality TV’ and its criticism. The industry does not claim this particular type of programming to be ‘real’, rather this is often named by its critics (Media Society 2004). In this way, the inclusion of industry definitions highlights the important role of construction in representing the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’. The acknowledgement of construction by its producers suggests this illusion is less an act of fraud, but rather a hopeful space of engagement for audiences.
Furthermore, manufactured ‘event’ formats such as *Big Brother* contribute only one aspect of the wider fluid genre culturally known as ‘reality TV’. Also prominent within the cultural genre are formats referred to as ‘factual’ by the industry. Here the use of ‘factual’ by the industry is in relation to the approach in production, as distinct from techniques employed in ‘reality’ or ‘event’ formats. The fundamental difference is in the content choice of people or events that exist “without any manufacturing” (James 2009), and the use of observational documentary techniques as a ‘fly-on-the-wall’. In this style, the production follows events as they take place to simply “tell it as it is” (Marks 2009), such as in the case of emergency services or airports. However, construction is still evident in this ‘factual’ style in post-production, to be discussed further in Chapter Three. Entertainment is equally as important as informative qualities in this format type where the stories of ordinary people and situations are the central focus. These are fragmented and combined in order to provide a ‘rounded’ episode with plenty of ‘roller-coasters’ to “keep the audience interested” in the dramatic climaxes and lulls of the content (Marks 2009).

It is important to note that the distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘factual’ format styles is not a binary opposition within the genre. Rather these are two aspects that can be identified within the greater amoebic framework of ‘reality TV’ to be used or discarded as needed in individual formats. More importantly, the distinction shifts away from previous critical judgements of worth based on ability and proximity to ‘truth’ and ‘the real’. These stylistic choices highlight the industry’s acknowledgment of construction in ‘reality’ production and their connection with cultural cognition of representation of authenticity in television. The industry necessarily see this area of programming as a “broad brief” in its scope (Bullough 2009); as the “place where documentary meets entertainment” (Mortimer 2009). However, these distinctions reflect a highly nuanced genre with certain ‘grammar’ points to distinguish between formats in style and technique. Common use of the umbrella term ‘reality TV’ in criticism acts more as a “broad brushstroke” regardless of the peculiarities involved in individual programmes (Media Society 2004). ‘Reality TV’ can not simply be categorised as “when it’s got real people in it” (Bullough 2009). On closer examination, it is clear that there is more to consider in the choices and approaches of each ‘reality’ format as to how the ‘everyday’ is constructed. The objectivity implicit in positive notions of ‘reality’ is subsequently
rendered meaningless in the television production of narratives of the ‘everyday’ and their reception.

**Audiences**

As discussed above, a dominant concern for television production remains audience popularity and ratings regardless of economic motivations. The quantitative ranking of schedules and channels through a ratings system has been the traditional gauge of temporal audience viewing as a source of revenue and budgeting. The consistent high ratings of many ‘reality’ formats in Australia, and other territories globally, are arguably important reasons for the longevity and evolution of the genre, with motivations for format development and production argued by Mortimer as “hugely driven by the audience” (2009). Claims of ‘trash TV’ and ‘lowest common denominator’ programming imply a passive and unsophisticated audience where the formats do “not make undue demands on viewers’ powers of concentration” (Kilborn 2003: 11). This is a continuation of the high/low television opposition where popular entertainment is inferior to informative genres. The perspective of the industry in ‘reality’ production reflects two important factors to be explored in this research: firstly, an emphasis on entertainment in combination with informative elements within the amoeic genre as central to development and engagement, and secondly, the importance of audiences as active and discerning participants in an interconnected relationship with the industry. The elements of construction and reception will be discussed in further detail in Chapters Three and Four, but are first introduced here in regard to industry perspectives.

Although providing a discredit to the genre in previous ideas of television ‘dumbing down’, the premise of “television [as] an entertainment form” and audience motivations to be entertained in a relationship of leisure (Mortimer 2009) are essential in expanding understanding of ‘reality TV’. ‘Reality’ formats have the possibility to engage a mass audience on a range of subjects, but the key factors for programme development and production techniques lie within their ability to retain audiences through entertainment and the appeal of the subject matter and approach (Mortimer 2009). Production choices such as contributors, ‘takeaway’ moments of information, and ‘journey’ narrative structure are examples of essential factors for
format engagement. The ‘journey’ acts as a formal structure that can be built through choreographed stages of challenges and confrontations, or overlaid into recorded material through editing. In this way, the production creates a compelling and emotional narrative for audiences in either self-contained episodes, or overarching stories that continue through a limited series. The ‘journey’ reflects the central concern of “good story-telling” that is equally dependent on the casting of contributors (Bullough 2009). Independent Producer Tarni James (2009) argues that resonance for audiences in a format is due to the shared experience of the viewer and participant, with the careful choice of ‘ordinary’ people as ‘reality’ format participants for genuine performances of the ‘everyday’. This is important in its appeal for viewers “to present them with a fully recognizable and familiar realm of the ordinary” (Biressi & Nunn 2005: 146). However, it is also a fine line for production in avoiding ‘artificial’ or ‘over-engineered’ responses from contributors within a constructed premise or the presence of a camera, and this is increasingly a factor in ‘reality’ production where established norms of the genre are now widely recognised and adopted by the participating public. The role of contributors, experts and voiceover/hosts in combination with the production techniques in format propositions, narrative and style are all part of the industry grammar that shifts within the amoebic genre as required, to be discussed further in Chapter Three. These choices are essential to establish the “veracity of the story that is unfolding” (Bullough 2009), in combination with “built in entertainment moments” to engage audiences (Mortimer 2009).

Similarly, format development is based upon local relevance as an important factor for its success. Although many formats are sold as frameworks for global production, the local versions are adapted for national and cultural nuances for audience identification. As a result, subject matter is fundamental to how the format will engage an audience, where the more successful programmes connect “in the most guttural way with the life experience of the audience” (Mortimer 2009). The industry focuses format development on certain concerns that are common to the public, such as family, health, work and relationships, so that interest and pleasure from a programme’s relevance to a mass audience “overcomes resistance to new shows” (Bullough 2009). Mortimer (2009) argues that a select group of human concerns have the capacity to be more compelling as a ‘reality’ programme. He adds that it is
not simply an equation of making any subject engaging through a television format framework, as the approach for some topics should never be to ‘format it up’, and the premise must be a subject that “people are interested in and entertained by” (Mortimer 2009). The ‘everyday’ is therefore central as a source of contemporaneity and significance for formats; a way to tap the ‘zeitgeist’ of the audience (Bullough 2009), particularly evident in the constant evolution of the genre where formats change to reflect trends and concerns in order to remain current and pertinent for audiences. Additionally, it is argued that audiences prefer domestic content that “organise[s] experiences of the national” and relates to their sense of community, as a factor in the local development and/or production of formats (Waisbord 2006: 385-6). This appeal is also indicative of the huge ‘failure rate’ of many ‘reality TV’ formats, described by Bullough as a “crazy, creative risk” attached to development and production, where trends and formulas may not always result in audiences (2009). Termed as the ‘nobody knows’ principle, there is no formal science for the perfect television show due to the “constant ebbs and flows in programming trends” (Waisbord 2006: 378). Bullough describes this attitude as part of the greater “triangle of viewer, show, channel; with the viewer feeding the channel with its viewing habits, and the programme feeding the viewer with its expectations, hopes, ambitions, dreams and escapism” (2009). Therefore, the possibility of both entertainment and informative elements within the amoeba genre allows vast scope for the industry to represent various subjects of the ‘everyday’ to its audiences, through structure, style and appeal.

The industry perspective of the genre shifts the emphasis of previous criticism of ‘reality’ and ‘factual’ to a broad yet distinctive realm of production. The variety of ‘reality’ formats are produced in close relation to audiences, constantly adapting and changing the parameters and techniques involved in the representation of ‘real’ people or situations, but never outwardly claiming ‘reality’. The industry perspective highlights the extensive motivations and approaches that combine in the ‘reality’ genre, and the importance of construction and audiences in this process. In this respect, ‘factual’ and ‘reality’ are recognised in terms of style, rather than as a judgement value, and the genre’s popularity is situated within audience pleasure in entertaining and informative narratives of the ‘everyday’.
CHAPTER THREE

Construction

“The everyday world is a world of stories and tricks, wit, conceits, proverbs, fragments, memories, the articulate, the inarticulate, the ephemeral, the persistent, the indexical, the private, the profane, the playful – both predictable and unpredictable, conscious and unconscious... television provides an increasing amount of the raw material of the everyday life world.”
(Silverstone 1989: 85-6)

“Narrative as a mechanism for storytelling seems quite different from documentary as a mechanism for addressing nonimaginary, real-life issues. But not all narratives are fictions.”
(Nichols 1991: 6)

The second element in the triangular consideration of ‘reality TV’ concerns the television programme as ‘text’. The previous chapters have introduced the perspective of this research in the amorphous nature of the genre as encompassing a variety of television styles chosen by its production team in order to appeal to audiences. Central to this consideration is programme construction and the element of narrative as the fundamental basis of the industry-audience relationship and the conventions of specific television styles. The distinction between programmes, and in particular between ‘reality’ formats, derives from content choices and portrayals within issues of representation and expectations. Moreover, for ‘reality TV’ this representation is grounded in a notion of the ‘everyday’, a significant factor in the consideration of its production and reception. As Silverstone argues above, television draws on the diverse nature of the ‘everyday world’, however Nichols also reminds that narrative is present in both the fictional and ‘nonimaginary’. These two perspectives are combined in Ellis’ claim for television as a ‘vast mechanism’ that processes the “material of the witnessed world into more narrativized, explained forms” (2000: 78). This chapter will explore the role of television narrative in relation to the techniques utilised for informational and entertainment purposes, both present in the construction of ‘reality TV’. In particular, the industry ‘grammar’ of programme conventions and the importance of jeopardy will be explored with regard to the representation of story and the ‘everyday’, with further questions of this construction as simulation.
Narrative is described as an innate part of human nature through the act of telling stories; explained by Barthes as “international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (1977: 79). The ‘communicative act’ of narration implies a story with a ‘teller’ and a ‘listener’ (Kozloff 1992: 77) where narratives do not have an independent existence in ‘reality’, rather “we organise our experience and our memory of human happenings” in the form of narrative as an account of events occurring over time (Bruner 1991: 4-8). In this way, all narratives must be acknowledged as a constructed state of verisimilitude due to their inability to provide a “perfect copy of the reality constituting its subject” (Herman and Vervaeck 2005: 14). As previously discussed in Chapter One, this verisimilitude in television draws on cultural conventions of authenticity in documentary production styles, but is combined with entertainment techniques in ‘reality TV’ in format ‘packaging’ and narrative construction similar to soap opera serials or drama series. Elements such as plot and character development, titles, voiceover, non-diegetic music and editing directly contrast literal claims of ‘the real’. These aspects also signal the plurality and intertextuality of ‘reality TV’ in its variety of television conventions and expectations. In particular, these aesthetic and cultural conventions of television are strongly linked to the response of audiences and the perception of a performance of the ‘everyday’ which will be discussed further in Chapter Four and the research case studies. Narrative theories will be invoked here as ‘tools’ (Kozloff 1992; Allrath, Gymnich & Surkamp 2005) in order to examine television narrative, and as an introduction to the post-structuralist framework of Barthes’ S/Z used in this research, to be outlined in Part Two.

**Television narratives**

Television is described as a “principle storyteller” (Kozloff 1992: 67), which Fiske determines is “predominantly narrational in its mode” with narrative as a “basic way of making sense of our experience of the real” (1987: 128). A sense of narrative is constant across the many and varying forms of television programming, whether in news, sport commentary, documentary or drama serials, and additionally within the relationship between programmes and across schedules to create three levels of television narrative (Ellis 1992; Kozloff 1992; Allrath, Gymnich & Surkamp 2005). The first level is defined as ‘flow’ by Williams (2003) in the continuous stream of
broadcasting, in contrast to the defined narrative period of the cinema, as a significant progression between and within programmes in audience television reception as a possible “continuous sequence” of viewing (Allrath, Gymnich & Surkamp 2005: 3). Kozloff describes this level as a ‘supernarrator’ where the programmes and commercial breaks are embedded in the “metadiscourse of the station’s schedule” (1992: 89-94). The viewer is situated within infinite possibilities of multiple meaning constructions in their viewing experiences as they change between channels and programmes. The second and third levels of narrative progression as between connected programmes of series or serials, and that of an individual programme respectively are both discussed in detail below. Genre and style are particularly important to the way these different narratives are portrayed in adherence with their varying television conventions of representation. As a result, the act of constructing narratives for television is an essential part of the production process, as “narratives are not lying around in the world to be picked up” (Potter 1996: 79), and provides syntagmatic coherence through event linkage, or cause and effect. Paradigmatic elements are equally important in the representation and consistency of unique details that make up each television programme, such as characters and locations. Fiske notes that as the “dominant mode of representation”, the consideration of textual characteristics and reading strategies is fundamentally ideological in ‘realistic’ television narratives. From this perspective, narrative has three possible realms of analysis: in structural elements, its effect and appearance, and its relationship with dominant or normative ideology (Fiske 1987: 129).

The primary base for television narrative analysis has been the comparison with classic cinema structures. This type of narrative form is highly structured through stages of exposition, development, and resolution, presenting a transparent view of verisimilitude by “replicating the conventions by which sense is made” (Fiske 1987: 130). Barthes describes this representation as “referential illusion”, where realistic narratives develop unrealistically as a ‘reality effect’ (1986: 148). For this reason, story structures can be acknowledged as impressions of reality “reinforced by conventions of narrative construction” (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 188). However, Feuer (1986) argues that this classic model of narrative, based on linear progression and closure does not entirely encapsulate television representation due to its different programme forms. Kozloff (1992) defines television’s narrative
characteristics as multiple intertwined, formulaic storylines with standardised characters in evocative or functional settings, commonly termed as ‘series’ or ‘serial’. These familiar television structures involve varied configurations of classic narrative in their episodic qualities, where paradigmatic treatment of characters and settings is constant between episodes, but with varying syntagmatic elements in multiple plotlines. Ellis argues that these structures create a “pattern of the normal or the everyday” with various incidents propelling the story forward (1992: 158). The main distinction between the two forms lies in the resolution of narrative in each individual episode of a series, whereas a serial suspends story resolution across numerous episodes (Kozloff 1992: 91). In this way, individual episodes in a series are ‘self-sufficient’ with “perpetual tension” and the “constant repetition of basic narrative situations and characters”, while the serial contains a “small ration of incidents” that slowly progress to resolution (Ellis 1992: 124-5, 156-7).

This distinction is not necessarily a binary opposition. Similar to the amoebic framework identified in Chapter One for genre, series and serials can be identified as the “extremes of a continuum” (Allrath, Gymnich & Surkamp 2005: 6) where television narratives shift their balance between episodic and serial forms for “narrative complexity” (Mittell 2006: 32). The series, serial, or an amoebic combination, is thus a prominent part of television discourse of narrative construction. The amoebic complexity between series and serials is a common feature of ‘reality’ formats, particularly in situation-based concepts where narratives are resolved within episodes but can build up knowledge across a series, while the serial is more apparent in ‘reality’ event programmes with the progression of specific narrative elements across a number of episodes to a completion point. Both television series and serials are essentially more open than the typically closed narratives of literature and film as part of the medium’s ideology for “perpetual self-reduplication” to repeat and contain (Feuer 1986: 105). Hagedorn situates this ideology in relation to Barthes’ post-structuralism with “narrative as a commodity” in ‘episodicity’, as a discourse between its production and consumption (1995: 28-9). In this way, episodes provide “repetition and novelty” in their construction for viewer expectations and anticipation (Ellis 1992: 116, 126), to be considered further in Chapter Four.
Ellis identifies the third level of narrative progression within an individual programme in the ‘segment’, as a “relatively self-contained scene that conveys an incident, a mood or a particular meaning” (1992: 148). Both individually and in combination, segments act to motivate and intensify the narrative progression through enigmas, ‘clinches’ and ‘cliffhangers’, often in proliferating storylines that multiply incidents and suspend resolution (Ellis 1992: 151-8; Kozloff 1992: 74-5). This multiplication of time, space and character elements provides “greater narrative complication” (Hagedorn 1995: 28) and diffuses interest across the narrative in both the syntagmatic event chain and the paradigmatic “revelation and development of existents” (Kozloff 1992: 75), so as to “ensure that viewers continue watching” (Allrath, Gymnich & Surkamp 2005: 12). In this way, segments are assembled in series and serial episodes to “form patterns of repetition” with a “basic ongoing problematic” that refuses resolution but also provides coherence and continuity (Ellis 1992: 157-8). Consequently, Ellis argues that there is “no real difference in narrational form between news and soap opera”; rather the distinction arises from the origin of subject matter (1992: 159). This approach suggests a formal perspective in television analysis, as a parallel to the Russian Formalist narrative focus on the devices at work in the arrangement and presentation of narrative. In this paradigm, theorists such as Shklovsky, Tomashevsky and Eichenbaum outline the ‘immanent’ properties of narratives as “structures and systems, seen as independent of other cultures and society” (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 10) as an emphasis on “dominance of structure, of plot over material” (Eichenbaum 1965: 121). To examine a narrative structure in motifs and motivation, the text is ‘defamiliarised’ in order to explore the specifically literary in the text’s use of language. This theory of ‘defamiliarisation’ has been connected to television studies by Fiske and Hartley (2003) as a demythologising process of television’s normative state in the everyday, and thus to identify its arbitrary codes and messages in language and screen content.

This ‘defamiliarisation’ also requires further consideration of the devices of television narration and their subsequent connection to authenticity or entertainment. From this perspective, narration in television is an ‘agency’ that “chooses, orders, presents, and thus tells the narrative before us” in specific production choices (Kozloff 1992: 79). In addition to narrative structure, Allrath, Gymnich and Surkamp (2005) identify various aspects of television construction that contribute to narration,
such as ‘teaser’ or establishing sequences, voiceover and direct address, captions, soundtrack in theme songs or musical cues, and temporal representation. The use of voiceover is a literal narration device for television that facilitates explanation or information as a “partial equivalent of literary narrators” (Allrath, Gymnich & Surkamp 2005: 14). An omniscient or on-screen ‘heterodiegetic’ narrator imparts a “quasi-documentary feel” familiar from news and ‘non-fiction’ programming (Allrath, Gymnich & Surkamp 2005: 16). Similarly, the use of ‘direct address’, where the television subject speaks directly to camera, provides an “apparent precipitous collapse” of the narrative construction to appear as a straight communication between the speaker and viewer as a cue of reliability and authority (Kozloff 1992: 81). Ellis extends this form of narration to include ‘talking heads’ and close-ups as generating “an equality and even intimacy” between that on the screen and its viewer (1992: 131). The use of captions provides narration agency through a visual code of “verbal modes of expression” as a “highly efficient means of providing information” in quick exposition, and similarly non-diegetic soundtrack is argued to attribute specific tones to a segment, episode or series, as an evocation of mood or as a recognisable feature (Allrath, Gymnich & Surkamp 2005: 16-7). These elements of television narration analysis, and specifically in regard to temporal representation, signal a shift from formalist tools into structuralism in order to determine the presentation of the story in narrative as syuzhet or ‘plot’ and the fabula or ‘story’ as the raw material content of events and characters.

Derived from Saussure’s dichotomy of langue and parole, structuralist consideration of stories as “governed by a set of unwritten rules” requires analysis of arbitrary relationships between signifier and signified (Kozloff 1992: 72). This is also linked with semiotics and the systems of signification within language as a cultural organisation of communication. In this way, the structuralist paradigm attempts to uncover systems and patterns of meaning through identification of “certain universal narrative structures”, with influences from Propp’s morphology, to be discussed, and Levi-Strauss’ study of myth and binary mythemes (Johnson 1985: 223). The two levels of narrative are retained from Russian Formalism ideas in syuzhet and fabula to define the chronological series of story elements and the story as it occurs in the text respectively, but with varying terminology between theorists and often with expansion to a third distinction in relation to the presentation of screen narration. For
example, labels by Bal (2004) of fabula/story/text, Rimmon-Kenan (2002) in story/text/narration, Genette (1980) and histoire/recit/narration, Chatman (1978) in story(content)/discourse(expression), and Bordwell’s (1985) fabula/syuzhet/style. Within this paradigm, Bordwell focuses on the construction of formal systems in narratives that “both cue and constrain the viewer’s construction of a story”, as a process of “selecting, arranging, rendering story material in order to achieve time-bound effects on a perceiver” (1985: 49). Kozloff (1992) adapts this framework in consideration of television in the presentation of story and discourse, the hierarchy of events and stages, and temporal choices as chronology, ellipses and omissions.

For ‘reality TV’, there are multiple possibilities for narrative construction that are linked to stylistic choices in production. As introduced in previous chapters, packaging or shaping is an essential part of the narrative process for a ‘reality’ format. Corner argues that ‘reality TV’ uses “dramatisation and observational modes of narrative to new levels of intensity and with an eclectic stylisation” that emphasises the representation over its relation to ‘the real’ (1999: 57), or in this research, the illusion of the ‘everyday’. These constructions can be identified in the employment of both series and serial conventions in ‘reality’ programmes where certain characters/contributors and locations are constant features of formats, with narratives either resolved within one episode or suspended over a series. This illusion also relates to the unique temporality of television, where the immediacy of the medium is described by Fiske as a ‘nowness’ of suspense that “invites the viewer to ‘live’ the experience of solving the enigma” (1987: 145). Turner (2005) similarly argues the viewer engagement in story progression where the explicit use of narrative construction in ‘reality’ formats reflects audience identification and escapism, rather than elements of scopophilia. The amorphous nature of the genre requires the use of a variety of conventions in television techniques and narrative in order to create compelling programmes, and in this way the role of the viewer is essential in acknowledging these constructions and combinations as diverse experiences of ‘reality TV’. This inherent connection to audiences suggests that narrative analysis of ‘reality TV’ requires a framework that acknowledges its distinct and ideographic narrative elements in relation to reception and meaning construction by its viewers, to be introduced in Part Two.
**Jeopardy and the ‘everyday’**

As previously indicated in this research, the elements of ‘jeopardy’ and ‘aspiration’ are essential in ‘reality TV’ production and reception of ‘everyday’ narratives. At this stage, jeopardy is examined in regard to construction and narrative, with later discussion of aspiration and audiences in Chapter Four. Jeopardy is defined in this research in relation to drama and is directly connected with the construction of narrative. In the discussion above, formal and structural elements of television have been outlined as to their production of story, however, ‘reality TV’ in particular displays a multiplication of enigmas and incidents to propel forward and suspend narratives. This construction is commonly achieved through the use of soap opera techniques of multiple intertwined strands and the archetypal ‘quest/journey’ narrative, which are choreographed within the concept and production of the format and/or achieved in post-production. Further exploration of narrative construction in ‘reality TV’ formats is detailed in the case study chapters. These narrative elements are closely aligned with entertainment forms, where the development of enigmas and suspense to a possible resolution is essential, as opposed to expositional or argument-driven documentary. In this way, the construction and appeal of ‘reality TV’ jeopardy is closely aligned with familiar conventions of narrative progression outlined by Propp (1968), Campbell (1993) and Vogler (1998).

Often highlighted as a progression between formalist and structuralist theories, Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) deciphers narrative organisation through the comparison of fairy and folk tales resulting in the definition of characters into seven dramatic personae and narrative development determined by their actions within a set of thirty-one functions. The functions act as a sequence list in a specific and conventional structural pattern that retains a consistent linear order regardless of any omissions. This sequence is further defined into six phases in order to follow the journey of the hero character through a series of tests to their resolution: preparation, complication, transference, struggle, return and recognition. Propp’s examination has similarities to Campbell’s ‘monomyth’, which is derived from fundamental structures in myths where

“a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from the mysterious
adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man [sic]” (1993: 30).

This structure is also divided into journey stages of commencement in the ordinary world, the call to adventure and a road of trials, the achievement of a goal and return to the ordinary world, and populated with Jungian archetypal characters. The ‘monomyth’ is the basis to the screenwriting adaptation by Vogler in *The Writer’s Journey* (1998), which taps into the structure of the hero in departure, initiation and return as a universal framework of a transformative journey.

This agenda is readily employed for analysis, with specific adoption for screen texts in film and television study (Silverstone 1981; Fiske 1987; Kozloff 1992) due to the principle that the function structure demonstrates the “total uniformity in the construction” of narratives (Propp 1968: 105). More recent applications by Harriss (2008) and Kafalenos (1997) assert the importance of identifying Propp’s function sequence as a method for establishing conventions of television genres and the fundamental stages of narrative. However, Bordwell (1988) questions the veracity of applications of Propp in what he terms ‘misaProppriations’. The attempt to map other narratives into Propp’s function sequence is alleged to create forced action definitions, or temporal reshuffling for analysis, to “argue that films, or television shows, participate in widespread cultural assumptions” (Bordwell 1988: 16). Similarly, Fiske argues that the popularity of television narratives across diverse societies reflects narrative construction that is “more open and multiple than the singular fold narrative”; therefore any analysis must acknowledge not only a predictable narrative structure but also its contradictions and fragmentations (1987: 148). For this reason, Propp’s morphology, Campbell’s monomyth and Vogler’s journey retain value in this research as an analytic tool to highlight the importance of character as a driving force and the generic narrative form of the archetypal ‘quest’, rather than as a strict analytic method.

The infinite flexibility and variation possible described by Vogler in the journey narrative (1998: 27) resonates with the familiar narrative patterns used in ‘reality TV’. In particular, Kozloff argues the combination and suspension of various enigmas and storylines in ‘reality TV’ is a technique for narrative development and tension, and as a result, the “unforeseeable ‘messiness’ of ‘real life’” is made
coherent in television conventions of narrative to engage audiences with simultaneous complexity and unpredictability (1992: 74). The narrative situation in the ‘everyday’ contributes to the element of jeopardy where the ‘real life’ setting “makes the peril and the stakes much higher” (Kozloff 1992: 74) in the transformative journey progression. Additionally, where a format intertwines several storylines within an episode, the various journey narratives are given the impression of “considerable density and ‘lifelikeness’” (Thompson 2003: 57) in the apparent correspondence between events, and further drama in their separate suspensions as the episode progresses. The mythic formula of journey has become a core element in the construction of ‘reality TV’ as a means of choreographing or making coherent the ‘everyday’ events of the format into engaging programming for viewers. Corner terms this construction as an ‘event world’ in the “relatively stable system of place-time continuity” of a “greatly abridged and edited chronological sequence” (2004: 338). However, this has further connotations in relation to understanding the ‘everyday’ of ‘reality TV’.

This research has retained its presentation of the term ‘everyday’ within inverted commas as a cue to its problematic nature, akin to that of ‘reality’. This problematic nature has been a source of interrogation and discussion across many theorists such as Lefebvre, Bakhtin, Benjamin and Heller in active questioning and understanding of the minutiae of the commonplace and ordinary. As stated in the Introduction, this research primarily relates ideas of the ‘everyday’ to the work of De Certeau in its articulation as “ways of operating” (1984: xi), in both practical actions and interior memory and imagination (Highmore 2006: 112). In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau explores the ‘everyday’ in its “plurality and creativity” (1984: 30); as a “performative field of operations” that are elusive and hidden in their assumed insignificant realm of triviality (Highmore 2006: 111-4). He highlights the pleasurable ‘banality’ in the “minutiae of everyday life” that provides a “polysemy of gestures and symbols” (Gardiner 2000: 15). In particular, de Certeau comments on the ordered representation by the media of a heterogeneous ‘everyday’ which “is ‘recorded’ in every imaginable way, normalised, audible everywhere, but only when it has been ‘cut’ … and thus mediated by radio, television … and ‘cleaned up’ by the techniques of diffusion” (1984: 132). This commentary suggests strong parallels to the consideration of the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’ in both the elevation of the banal
and trivial from insignificance to a performance of entertainment, and the processes of its portrayal.

This pleasurable performance also has links to Bakhtin’s theory of carnival as a revelling in the ‘everyday’. In his study *Rabelais and his World* (1968), Bakhtin articulates the celebration of the “anarchic, body-based and grotesque elements of popular culture” in reference to the Middle Ages and Renaissance (Dentith 1995: 63-4). As an excess of degradation, profanation and laughter, carnival “transgresses the usual norms and rules that govern everyday life” and highlights the grotesque in the material functions and transformations of the body (Gardiner 1992: 46-7). In this way, Bakhtin’s carnival emphasises the “boisterous, disruptive and libidinous qualities of popular culture forms” as a spectacle that is “lived, experienced, and transformed into life itself” (Gardiner 2000: 63, 1992: 52). Bakhtin describes the parity of carnival as “a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators” (1984: 122-3) suggesting a collapse of the distinction. While not a “transhistorical phenomenon” (Dentith 1995: 69-70), the relationship between ‘everyday’ and carnival has resonances in the consideration of ‘reality TV’ in its focus on ordinary people, language and the body, in inversions of public/private and common/celebrity, and of pleasure in the excess of the popular. In this way, ‘reality TV’ reflects the carnivalesque image that “brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (Bakhtin 1984: 123). Both de Certeau and Bakhtin have further significance in the consideration of ‘reality TV’ perception in the act of reading and pleasure to be discussed in Chapter Four, however at this stage, these constructions of ‘everyday’ and carnival draw further questions as to the representation of ‘reality’ in narratives.

**The spectacle of ‘reality TV’**

In determining the important role of narrative and its construction in familiar conventions for ‘reality TV’, as well as its situation within the ‘everyday’, questions of the ‘reality’ of these programmes need to be revisited. The mode of story telling through journey narratives has been argued to provide coherence to the ‘everyday’ subject matter that is either designed or moulded by its production into television...
programmes. De Certeau describes stories as a ‘decorative container’ of ‘everyday’ narratives, but these stories can only provide fragments of the ‘everyday’ as metaphors (1984: 70), or for this research, as illusions. In this way, the representation of ‘reality’ in narrative is problematised as a “fictional space” (de Certeau 1984: 79). Narratives of ‘reality’ provide a further line of inquiry into construction in ideas of performance and Baudrillard’s simulation. As previously argued, events in the ‘everyday’ do not necessarily take the form of narratives and so the construction into story translates these experiences into a “form assimiable to structures of meaning” (White 1980: 5). For this reason, narratives of the ‘everyday’ are not only representations but also selective constitutions of ‘reality’ mediated by conventions (Bruner 1991: 4-5). Bruner argues that this construction is then “judged by its verisimilitude rather than its verifiability” as to its ‘truth’ to the ‘everyday’ it seeks to present (1991: 13). However, White adds that there is a difficulty where ‘real events’ are given a story form in that “morality or a moralizing impulse” can be introduced, particularly in the ranking of the representation (1980: 26). This construction is part of a ‘desire’ for the ‘everyday’ to have an image of “coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure” that “can only be imaginary” (White 1980: 27). As a result, the relationship between ‘reality’ or the ‘everyday’ and narrative raises further questions as to simulation in ‘reality TV’.

In the shift from ‘real’ to verisimilitude described in Chapter One, the representation in ‘reality TV’ is understood as removed from its referent as an illusion of the ‘everyday’. The highly produced character of television undercuts the signification of ‘the real’ through conscious designs of construction in production and leads to questions of the nature of this ‘real’ in ‘reality TV’. Can it be a portrayal of ‘reality’, or has it become an illusion in the combination of images and conventions to refer to a ‘reality’? Baudrillard’s theories of simulation comment on the postmodern role of the media as part of the origin and symptom of a world of simulacra; where everything becomes mediated and “threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false’, between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’” (1983: 5). Three orders of simulation are outlined: the first where the representation of the real is obvious as an artificial representation, the second where the boundary is blurred between the real and representation to appear as real as the real, and the third producing a hyperreal, being a mode of a real without origin in reality. In this third order, there is no ‘real’ to
judge this simulation against as the model is “always already produced” (Baudrillard 1983: 146); it generates a ‘real’ where its “representation and the reproduction” cannot be distinguished, and its success is measured by its performativity in the “codes of representation through which it is constituted” (Jervis 1998: 303). So within this hyperreal state “everything is as real as it pretends to be” (Jervis 1998: 304) and thus “produces a society of surfaces” (Lane 2000: 91). Consequently, the hyperreal reflects the illusory state of ‘reality TV’ where its credibility is based on its performance within recognised conventions for audiences.

This simulation of hyperreal also has close links to ‘reality TV’ in the “semiotic effect of a ‘more real than the real’” (Pawlett 2007: 71) and Baudrillard comments directly on the role of simulation in television with specific discussion of the series An American Family produced in 1971. The programme followed a family for an uninterrupted period and is commonly referenced as an early version of the current state of ‘reality TV’. Baudrillard questions the claims of voyeurism in this television style as the ‘fly-on-the-wall’ technique acts to diminish the distance between the spectacle and the spectator, but simultaneously queries what might have occurred had the cameras not been there. An American Family indicated to Baudrillard an amalgamation of the “opposition between seeing and being seen”, as the family on television simulated any family, and thus any family could be on television (Baudrillard 1983: 52). The hyperreal representation became centred on the self, where it is “impossible to locate an instance of the model, of power, of the gaze, of the medium itself, since you are always already on the other side” with the “dissolution of TV into life [and] the dissolution of life into TV” (Baudrillard 1983: 53-5). Baudrillard comments further specifically on the dominant criticism of ‘reality’ programmes as irrelevant as they are “only a spectacular version … of the transformation of life itself, of everyday life, into a virtual reality”, and any claim on the ‘truth’ of the representation assumes there is an original reality that the programmes seek to represent (Baudrillard 1995: 97). He suggests ‘reality TV’ programmes as virtual ‘ready-mades’; any person or event is a programme, with existence and identity confirmed in the simulation of their ‘reality’ and creating an illusion of the world (Baudrillard 1995: 99). In doing so, this continues Lyotard’s postmodern process of rejecting ‘grand narratives’ of rationalism and truth, with their replacement in the hyperreal of excess and spectacle (Lane 2000: 94).
These theories raise several questions for the consideration of ‘reality TV’ as illusion in simulation, and the importance of ‘everyday’ performance in both its construction and content. In its representation of the ‘everyday’, ‘reality TV’ calls into question the nature of its ‘reality’, as the production of the format’s ‘world’ has no existence except in its televisual state. Within Heisenberg’s principle, it can never be known what would have taken place if a camera crew had not been present to film the ‘everyday’ people and events portrayed, and the authenticity of the actions and events being filmed are questionable due to their knowledge of the camera’s presence (Simon 2005: 186). There is an unavoidable paradox in the assertion of television’s ‘reality as truth’ while neglecting the presence of the camera, producer and performer. Commenting on the Australian production of Big Brother, Roscoe asserts that the participants agree to and are constantly aware of their filmed situation and therefore are “performing for the cameras, for each other and for the television audience” (2001a: 479). This argument links to Goffman’s (1990) concept of the individual as a performer and character within cultural and social conventions. At the same time, Roscoe’s interviews with the production crew indicate their role in the construction of the ‘reality’ of the format, albeit with the potential for unpredictability. These elements of performance are applicable to the range of ‘reality TV’ formats where the ‘everyday’ is fashioned into an illusory spectacle of dramatic story, with the possibility of predetermined choreographed moments of challenge, judgement and elimination. De Certeau and Bakhtin’s excess of the trivial and banal is thus elevated into the realm of spectacle; as a performance of an ‘illusory everyday’ that has “become mere representation” (Debord 1995: 12).

This analysis of construction in ‘reality TV’ has outlined three areas of enquiry. Firstly, the organisation of television in levels of schedule, series/serials, and internal segments emphasises the formal and structural elements that contribute to the production of narratives. This exploration extends specifically to the quest or journey structure, which highlights the familiar conventions of narrative that are utilised in television in order to produce dramatic stories to audiences. These concerns are problematised in their representation of the ‘everyday’, providing an excess in performance as a hyperreal representation or illusion. While formalist and structuralist narrative theories are useful as analytic tools in the central concern of
how a narrative implants, interacts and resolves, there is a distinct omission in the reception of audiences/readers. Fiske and Hartley argue television’s unique characteristics as “ephemeral, episodic, specific, concrete and dramatic” are “fundamentally unsuited” to analysis as a literary text (2003: 2-3) in the limitations of these paradigms to structural and representational parameters with a focus on narration and temporality. The illusion of the ‘everyday’ constructed as a performance of narrative and excess is essential in understanding the production of ‘reality TV’, and will be examined further in the case studies. However, equally important in this process is the role and consideration of audiences.
CHAPTER FOUR

Audiences

“In the everyday realm, living with television involves a heterogeneous range of informal activities, uses, interpretations, pleasures, disappointments, conflicts, struggles, compromises. But in the consideration of the institutions that possess the official power to define, exploit and regulate the space in which television is inserted into the fabric of culture and society, these subjective, complex and dynamic forms of audiencehood are generally absent.”
(Ang 1991a: 2)

“Although television as an institution is dependent upon audiences, it is by no means certain what a television audience is.”
(Hartley 1989: 223)

Thus far, this triangular exploration of the ‘reality TV’ genre has introduced the research discourse on the industry and programme construction. The final aspect of this framework is the abstract group of ‘audience’. While the idea of the television industry can be examined through producers and executives, the notion of audience is more difficult to define, where ‘audience’ is “everywhere and nowhere” (Bird 2003: 3). Audience studies have developed over a long history of changing perspectives, with a common progression termed between ‘effects’, ‘uses and gratifications’, and ‘active audience’ reception theories. This evolution of approaches is reflected in previous audience research of ‘reality TV’, ranging from moral panic concerning its influence to consideration of audience motivations. However, it is common in the extant literature that an ‘audience’ is represented by its researcher or generalised in statistics, with the actual ‘voices’ of audiences rarely incorporated into ‘reality TV’ commentary.

The television discourse of audiences is essential to this research in understanding the popularity of Australian ‘reality TV’ as a constructed entertainment of the ‘everyday’. The omission or neglect of audience input is addressed in the methodology of response gathering from various individuals as viewers; their own narratives and “in their own words” (Hall 1986: vi; Lull 1990: 18), to be discussed at length in Chapter Six. In particular, this research incorporates a phenomenological discourse of perception in the act of reading by viewers in order to acknowledge interpretation and reception as a subjective experience of a contextual and
ideographic ‘reality’. This framework invokes perception theories of Merleau-Ponty as “a manner or style of thinking” that “tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is” (2002: vii-viii).

### Studying audiences

The study of television use is labelled as a “complicated cultural activity” (Lembo 2000: 7) and, similar to narrative theories, the examination of media audiences has a long and complex history of diverse emphases. This progression reflects the development of audience definitions and relationships with media as well as advances in technology. Overall, the very nature of the term ‘audience’ is problematic. It is debatable whether an audience is produced by the media industry or conversely that the media only exist with an audience (Ang 1991a: 3). This has resulted in considerable shifts in how an audience is theorised and examined across its continuing study. This progression is commonly divided into three distinct approaches: ‘effects’, ‘uses and gratifications’, and cultural studies’ ‘reception analysis’ (Ross & Nightingale 2003; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998; Jensen & Rosengren 1990). These approaches examine areas of the influence of media on viewers, viewing motivations, and viewing responses respectively. Parallel to academic audience study are the constant quantitative measurements for the industry in the form of ratings, which are situated more in economic and commercial concerns. However, these approaches are all based in an initial problematic of the definition of ‘audience’, being an “everchanging and fluid concept” (Hartley 1992: 4). An objective perspective of audience as a tangible mass is strongly linked to a transmission view of media and communication, where effects and uses can be classified, or identified as an amount of viewers through ratings. In this sense, ‘audience’ has become a generalising term to discuss people in relation to media, but from a “position of distance” where, as quoted at the start of this chapter, “subjective, complex and dynamic forms of audiencehood are generally absent” in what Ang terms as an “ontological given” (1991a: 3). Hartley maintains this perspective in consideration of audience as a discursive construct of the ‘implied reader’ whose response is invoked through the “projections of the personal desires and readings of the critic” (1999: 493). Consequently, the shift in audience approach from effect to activity signals the need to reconsider the reification of audience to an existence only
as “positions within analytic discourses” (Allor 1988: 228). The independent existence of audiences is argued by Hartley (1989) as the presumption of empirical research and a tendency to essentialisation, and neglects the “multitude of differences” described by Fiske as the best model for television viewers (1989: 56). The term ‘audiences’ will thus be used in this research in a plural form and in combination with the term ‘viewers’, as a way of talking about actual groups or individuals in relation to media use, but not as a definable cohort. In this way, this research does not presume an ‘implied reader’, and seeks to avoid generalisations about a mass group to form assumptions about the audience of ‘reality TV’.

The connection between audience and television presents a different engagement and relationship in comparison to other media. Television viewing is described as a process of “making meanings and pleasures” (Fiske 1989: 57) that is incorporated into everyday life, and conditioned by “experiences with and knowledge of other television texts” (Allen 1992: 132). In this way, television is closely attached to an individual’s social and cultural networks, but as a result, is simultaneously received and understood in infinitely different ways. Ross and Nightingale argue that by being audiences “people navigate the complexity of contemporary life” with a variety of “social and cultural experiences” (2003: 5-8). This social history, situation and activity of audiences is an important factor for the consideration of reception in its influence on the construction of meanings, which in this research are argued to be polysemic. However, previous audience study of ‘reality TV’ has slowly developed to this perspective, and the range of studies undertaken reflects the progression of approaches to audience.

Initial concerns in the evolution and growing popularity of ‘reality TV’ mirrored the ‘effects’ approach of audience studies. In this paradigm, new forms of media cause fear of harmful outcomes on the minds of its audience as moral panics, discussed in Chapter One. The audience is seen as a ‘media dupe’ in an unmediated cause-effect relationship, often likened to a hypodermic model with the media injection of dominant messages to a passive audience (Morley 1992: 44). ‘Effects’ studies argue that the media is highly influential, and examine its methods to “subtly influence the behaviour of their consumers” (Ross & Nightingale 2003: 72). In this way, media messages are seen as “symbolic stimuli having recognisable and measurable physical
characteristics” and often examined through survey analysis and statistical results (Jensen & Rosengren 1990: 215). While concerns about ‘effects’ typically centre on the potential influence in the representation of violence or sex, commentary on the effects of ‘reality TV’ expands this focus further with panics about the breakdown of morality and a public/private distinction in sensational programming. Due to the capacity to represent ‘everyday’ events and people in a spectacular format for popular audiences, the moral panic of ‘trash television’ has often focused on the promotion of voyeurism and a ‘dumbing down’ of culture and loss of values (Holmes 2004: 216). On closer examination, a majority of this strain of criticism is arguably based in its researcher’s opinion towards the ‘reality TV’ phenomenon, as a personal response of the ‘implied’ audience who are supposedly crass or deceived in their viewing. This view of the audience is defined by Corner as one of the main critiques of ‘reality TV’ where the illusion of the ‘everyday’ is argued as a deceit by the programmes to dupe audiences (2004: 293). However, this criticism lacks the actual voice of viewers, where overall “very little research exists into how audiences actually respond” (Dovey 2000: 96). This perspective is in direct contrast to other claims made about audience perception of hybrid programmes where “nowadays, viewers are much more aware that what is seen on the screen is in every sense a constructed reality” (Kilborn 1994: 422). This ‘savvy’ audience is thus described as appreciative of the role of ‘reality TV’ as “escapist entertainment [rather] than immersion in brute reality” (Andrejevic 2003: 4) and is “prepared to join in the performance of the real” (Roscoe 2001b: 19). The influential role of media continues to be a concern in the televisual representation of ‘reality’ such as the cultivation analysis approach by Barton (2007) examining the effect of ‘bad’ behaviour of ‘reality’ participants on viewers. This emphasis on the negative effect of ‘reality TV’ is also examined in Cohen and Weimann’s study where presumed influence is linked to a willingness to censor ‘reality’ programming classed as a concern similar to “genres such as pornography, misogynistic rap [and] hate speech” (2008: 394). In particular, Leone et al. (2006) present a statistical study on ‘reality TV’ effects through third person perception study, where participants typically believe that others are more affected by the media type than themselves. In order to ascertain this outcome, a cohort of media undergraduate students were directly questioned on their perception of the effect of viewing ‘reality TV’. Their study had little possibility to draw out further explanation of the respondents’ own narratives and experience of
Audiences

‘reality TV’, and therefore appears limited in its hypothesis of straightforward message reception to understand the audience relationship with the phenomenon.

Ross and Nightingale argue that all research into audiences is “to a greater or lesser extent, about effect” in examination of how viewers “react and relate” to media content (2003: 73). While the ‘effects’ paradigm emphasises the power of the media message over the masses, the progression to ‘uses and gratifications’ study shifts focus to audiences but still within the concept of “stimulus-response” (Seiter 1999: 12). This paradigm looks to establish the gratifications of the audience in order to identify the “differential needs, orientations and interpretive activities of members of the audience”, but again like the ‘effects’ paradigm, often resulting from experimental and statistical research (Jensen & Rosengren 1990: 216). The consideration of uses made by audience of the media is explained by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch to emphasise:

“ (1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences” (1974: 20)

In other words, the audience is considered as active and directed in their use of media in order to link this use to a kind of gratification, typified as diversion, companionship, identity or surveillance (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998: 7-8). This approach is reflected in previous ‘reality TV’ studies through a shift away from ‘panic’ criticism to consideration of audience use within larger frameworks of rationale and gratifications for viewing, such as the specific focus on voyeuristic and social attitudes in studies by Lundy, Ruth and Park (2008) and Baruh (2009). The paradigm is often utilised in psychological research in relation to ‘reality TV’ and produces statistical generalisations to ascertain why viewers watch various programmes. For example, two stages of research conducted by Nabi et al. (2003, 2006) firstly focused on the appeal and categorisation of ‘reality TV’ by audiences, and then studied emotional reactions and enjoyment predictors in formats. These studies were established through a series of hypotheses determined through survey responses and detailed in statistics. Similarly, Barton (2009) examines the specific gratifications obtained by viewers influenced by ‘reality TV’, in opposition to other programming, through Likert scale surveys resulting in a new gratification of ‘personal utility’ to reflect the individualisation of ‘reality’ content. This emphasis on
viewer motivation is also reflected in Reiss and Wiltz’s study of basic human motive associated with ‘reality TV’ viewing, concluding a “statistically significant, motivational profile for people who view reality television” (2004: 373). Other recent studies of ‘reality TV’ audiences by Hall (2006, 2009) have used undergraduate student cohorts in online surveys and focus groups to investigate understandings and gratifications of viewers in authenticity and involvement. This is echoed in Godlewski and Perse’s (2010) statistical study of viewers within the uses and gratifications paradigm of viewing motives and activity in identification and involvement. Although providing psychological insight into certain aspects of ‘reality TV’ viewing, these audience studies limit the scope of possible understanding in their functional and predetermined approaches, with consequent neglect in the consideration of viewer meaning production.

The further development of audience research to integrate empirical methods with ideological and social issues is often labelled under the umbrella term of ‘Cultural Studies’. Stuart Hall’s seminal work of Encoding/Decoding (1980) is described as a guide to “meaning-centred semiotic study of mass communication” (Nightingale 1996: 22) in the growing acknowledgement of the unfixed nature and polysemy of texts and the meanings constructed by audiences. In this paradigm shift, Hall argues that media texts are encoded with dominant or preferred messages that are decoded by viewers, but this is achieved through different positions with the possibility for non-identical readings, labelled dominant, negotiated and oppositional. As a result, this framework acknowledges the audience as active and highlights the importance of interpretation through engagement with media content, as opposed to the limitations of previous paradigms of “communication as a compartmentalized and linear process” (Nightingale 1996: 3). The framework was followed by several studies of media audiences, such as Morley (1980), Hobson (1982) and Ang (1985) through in-depth responses from viewers into the roles and engagement of media in everyday life. Their research highlights the multiplicity of responses and socio-cultural situations or experiences as essential in understanding media reception as “counterevidence to a simple-minded dominant ideology thesis” (Morley 1993: 14). Several of these studies have since been dubbed as ‘ethnographic’, a method of audience research that will be explored and problematised as to its appropriation for media study in more detail in Chapter Six.
In regard to ‘reality TV’, this framework has been evident in recent research in order to address the assumptions previously argued which lacked consideration of the ‘actual’ audience response. However, these studies often frame the activity of viewers within specific questions of audience understanding in relation to negotiation of reality construction, class formation, and categorisation (Jones 2003; Hill, Weibull & Nilsson 2007; Hill 2005). The approach seen in Morley’s (1980) Nationwide project of interpretation through social group is echoed in Skeggs, Thumim and Wood’s (2008) study of class and gender in relation to ‘reality TV’. Through interviews and focus groups with an all female cohort, the study sought to examine how ‘reality TV’ mediates complex moral economies and social categories, and its interpretation by specific viewers. In addition, Hill has published extensively on audience responses to ‘reality TV’ ranging from focus groups on the factual experience of formats (2005) to quantitative studies and content analysis on genre evaluation (2007). She concludes that audiences use strategies of evaluation and interpretation as ‘critically astute’ viewers in order to “assess the authenticity” of ‘reality’ formats (Hill 2005: 186). The emphasis on the ‘active’ audience is also often highlighted in the interactive components of many ‘reality’ programmes, particularly competition-based formats where the viewer is encouraged to contribute by voting for their favourite participant or to add their opinions through a format’s various media platforms (Holmes 2004; Tincknell & Raghuram 2002; Ross & Nightingale 2003), as a new level of activity for audiences in their media use.

For this research, the benefit of this ‘active’ paradigm is obtained in “situating structures of production, text and audience (reception) within a framework where each could be read, registered and analysed in relation to each other” (Nightingale 1996: 22), which is essential in the understanding of the triangular relationship of ‘reality TV’. The extant literature often avoids solely using ‘ethnographic’ research methods in order to show generalised results as well as qualitative data. A prime example of this approach is the audience study conducted by Hill (2005) where focus group research was informed by questionnaire results concentrating on issues of experience, performance, learning and ethics, however the qualitative input has a lesser presence in comparison to quantitative statistics. From this perspective, the ‘active’ audience is a growing concern in ‘reality TV’ analysis, but the study of
media audiences needs further clarification as a framework to understand the appeal and pleasure of ‘reality’ programming from the many perspectives of audiences.

The problematic notion of ‘audience’ discussed earlier is part of Alasuutari’s (1999) ‘third generation’ of audience studies, which entails a broader perspective in the consideration of the role and activity of media culture in ‘everyday’ life. This approach avoids isolating texts and/or audiences in analysis through extensive questions of “the cultural place of the media in the contemporary world” in production, reception and interpretations (Alasuutari 1999: 7). Roscoe, Marshall and Gleeson (1995) argue the wide use of the term ‘active audience’ is now taken for granted, signalling the need for greater consideration of the viewer as social subject and the entrenchment of their viewing activity in a “complex network of ongoing cultural practices and relationships” (Ang 1996: 42). While previous paradigms have emphasised the influences, motivations and interpretations of audiences, this ‘third generation’ highlights the gap in ‘reality TV’ analysis of the ways audiences read through interaction and consumption in the social leisure of television entertainment. Fiske (1987) states that the polysemy of television texts is integral to a programme’s popularity and pleasures in order to be “read and enjoyed by a diversity of social groups” and to appeal to the social interests of its viewers. In this respect, the ‘reality TV’ viewer needs to be considered in their subjective experience of the programme, where pleasures are possible through personal social experiences and interests.

**Perception and aspiration**

Highly dependent on viewers, the second element essential to ‘reality TV’ formulas in this research is that of ‘aspiration’. In combination with the dramatic construction of jeopardy discussed in Chapter Three, aspiration is intended through the portrayal of the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’ to appeal to viewer interests and dreams as narratives of desires and ambitions. This premise highlights the importance of the act of reading by viewers in their reception and interpretation of programmes, and the specific relationship of entertainment to subjective knowledge and experiences. To this end, the phenomenological perspective introduced in Chapter One will be revisited here in order to establish the subjective experience of ‘reality TV’ for each
viewer and the importance of the act of viewing as a process of individual interpretation and pleasure.

Aspiration in ‘reality TV’ programmes is dependent on audience identification, described as a mechanism through which “audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if the events were happening to them” (Cohen 2001: 245). The centrality of ordinary situations or people in the constructed narratives of ‘reality TV’ means that the likelihood of identification is increased in the “similarity of audience members to characters” and the provision of an “alternative reality to which they transport the audience” (Cohen 2001: 258). Within the narrative progression outlined in Chapter Three, audiences are encouraged to share the events taking place as desirable in the transformation of the self through journey, where empathy is triggered through the narrative progression that encourages an experience “from the inside rather than the outside” (Ellis 2000: 87). The narrative challenges and resolutions for the characters promote identification as an experience where audiences can adopt “the characters’ goals, and experience the feelings that result from the interaction of these goals and the events that take place” (Cohen 2001: 251). However, this aspiration is relative to the individual viewers’ own interests and experiences, and identification is contingent on the relevance of the narrative and characters portrayed to their own dreams and ambitions. It is therefore arguable viewers’ identification with the jeopardy and aspiration in ‘reality TV’ becomes a source of pleasure, to be discussed further in Part Two.

At this stage, the primacy of the reading act requires further consideration towards a phenomenology of the ‘reality TV’ experience. In The Act of Reading, Iser defines text meanings as a “dynamic happening” as opposed to a “definable entity” (1978: 22), suggesting the variety of interpretations possible in the actual process of reading by an individual. Hoijer argues that the current reception research approach in active audiences “gives coherent, rich and in-depth descriptions of audiences’ interpretations, of the interaction between text and audiences, and of how different audiences may find different meanings” (1992: 584). However, she also contends that there is a neglect of cognition in the process of interpretation and the influence of subjective knowledge and experience, and as a result suggests a “paradigm of
reading” that incorporates the “multifaceted character and complexity of the interaction between audience and media” (Hoijer 1992: 601). This approach requires the acknowledgement of the individual’s constructions of meanings in relation to cognitive processes where the viewer “interprets the discourse in the light of his or her collected experiences” (Hoijer 1992: 587). Hoijer’s argument suggests links to Berger and Luckmann’s theories of the social construction of reality where “we never take in the world ‘as it is’” (Hoijer 1992: 587), rather the ‘everyday’ presents itself as reality “interpreted by men [sic] and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world” that “originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these” (Berger and Luckmann 1971: 33). From this perspective, the illusory ‘everyday’ is part of a viewer’s cognition as a “microcosm of universal, socio-cultural and private worlds, shaped by social interaction with others and the environment and interpreted by the individual” (Hoijer 1992: 587) and thus highly subjective, contextual and ideographic.

In addition to his theories of the ‘everyday’, de Certeau (1984) contributes further perspectives in relation to the subjective process of reading, described as ‘poaching’ in the provision of different engagements that produce different effects in multiplicity. Arguing against the tradition of ‘effects’ and the “assimilation of reading to passivity”, de Certeau states “we mustn’t take people for fools” where “the story of man’s [sic] travels through his own texts remains in large measure unknown” (1984: 176, 170). This ‘unknown’ is created in the combination of fragments by the reader, organised by “their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings” (de Certeau 1984: 169). In this way, de Certeau emphasises that a “text has meaning only through its readers, it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control” (1984: 170). This approach to subjectivity suggests links with a phenomenological perspective on the act of reading, and in particular Merleau-Ponty’s (2002) phenomenology of perception.

Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as a “discourse of the world” (2002: xxiii) in the impossibility “to separate things from their way of appearing” in perception (2008: 70). Like de Certeau, he argues that “we find in texts only what we put into them” in an existential state “condemned to meaning” where all knowledge is
“gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world” (Merleau-Ponty 2002: viii-xxii). In this way, this framework acknowledges the “fundamentally worldly character of existence” that is situated with the individual body (Glendinning 2007: 119). By asserting the importance of this state of being ‘in the world’, Merleau-Ponty addresses the impossibility of Husserl’s notion of ‘reduction’ in the ‘natural attitude’ and its shift away from acknowledging how things are perceived through perception in the socio-cultural context of the individual (Glendinning 2007: 132). The relativity of perception is argued by Merleau-Ponty to confirm that “absolute and final objectivity is a mere dream by showing how each particular observation is strictly linked to the location of the observer” (2008: 36). In this way, the illusion of the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’ is based on individuals’ perception of the construction within their own ideographic situation and knowledge.

The phenomenological perspectives of viewers are described as “primarily practical” in their production of new and multiple meanings (Wilson 1993: 3-5). Sobchack (1999: 241-2) has utilised this approach in order to provide a “more dynamic, fluid and concrete description of film viewing” and in particular the evocation of credibility as related to the viewer’s “own life-world”. In The Address of the Eye (1992), she argues that phenomenological reflection on cinematic experience reveals “the spectator’s uniquely situated and embodied consciousness” and to describe phenomena experiences requires a subjective account that “addresses the life-world in which we live as sensible and significant beings” (Sobchack 1992: 308). Stadler echoes these perspectives with the addition of the television experience with phenomenology as a methodology that “treats the beholder as an active agent, [and] dynamizes the spheres of fictionality and facticity” (Stadler 1990: 37-8). In this way, a phenomenological approach recognises active viewers within socio-historical backgrounds that are drawn on to interpret and construct meanings, and the representation of a credible ‘real’ is situated in how the programme “fuses a necessary degree of recognisable reality with a desirable quantity of illuminating illusion” (Stadler 1990: 46). From this perspective, the illusory quality of ‘reality TV’ is emphasised in its need to balance between a connection to its audiences’ ‘reality’ and the construction of engaging television.
The problematic nature of defining an audience is not simplified through the phenomenological perspective, however it does contribute a framework for acknowledging the individual subjective experience of viewers in relation to media. Fiske states that interpretation of popular television is an activation of meanings that is “controlled within more or less determined boundaries by the socially situated viewer” and that it can be a source of pleasure when then incorporated into “larger cultural process by which the subject makes sense of his or her material existence” (1989: 57). As aspirational narratives, ‘reality TV’ relies on its ‘everyday’ relevance and interest for audiences as a basis for engagement and entertainment. While previous studies have progressed through the traditional paradigms of audience research, the notion of viewer pleasure in ‘reality TV’ has received little qualitative attention, commonly remaining in the realm of ‘uses and gratifications’. A phenomenological approach thus allows this research to acknowledge the diversity of experiences of the television text by each viewer towards active responses of entertainment.
PART TWO

Methodology & Case Studies
CHAPTER FIVE

Reading for pleasure

The preceding chapters in Part One have established the four key areas of concern in this research in genre, industry, construction, and audiences. Building on this discussion, this second section of the thesis outlines the specific theoretical frameworks and qualitative research methodology used in the series of four case studies from Australian ‘reality TV’, which draw together responses from both their producers and a cohort of viewers, as well as programme analysis. Hartley argues that television must be understood “via the creativity and imagination of its viewers as a complex adaptive system” (2008: 10). This chapter will introduce the narrative construction and viewer response frameworks modelled on the theories of Roland Barthes. Chapter Three highlighted the deficiency of formalist and structuralist paradigms in the understanding of television plurality and polysemy in narratives. The paradigm shift to post-structuralism in Barthes’ S/Z both builds on and negates its predecessors in the consideration of narrative, and as a result, lends itself more to the exploration of television, in an approach that correlates with the multiplicity of meanings and responses possible from audiences in a contextual and ideographic experience. This chapter expands this perspective through the introduction of Barthes’ The Pleasure of the Text as a further framework for understanding of the appeal of ‘reality TV’ by its viewers. The research methodology has been devised to take account of paradigms of narrative construction and the multiplicity of meanings and pleasures and will be connected to the qualitative research methodology for the case studies, to be discussed in the next chapter.

Television narrative and Barthes’ S/Z

Barthes’ shift of theoretical focus from structuralism to post-structuralism is described as a move towards “considering more fragmentary discourses or codes of understanding” (Potter 1996: 73). The paradigm of post-structuralism is defined as a “distrust of any centred, totalised theory” in its critique of the concepts of “stable sign, of the unified subject, of identity and of truth” (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitteman-Lewis 1992: 23). Signification is considered unstable within networks of possibilities, in opposition to structuralist ideas of orderly relationships of signifier to
signified. In this way, the subjectivity of language is emphasised in its articulation of multiple systems and processes. The subject has become the source of knowledge, and thus acknowledges the multiplicity and plurality possible in texts, as opposed to previous objective notions of narrative systems, discussed in Chapter Three.

Often credited as Barthes’ transfer from structuralism, *S/Z* introduces this new paradigm within its initial paragraphs by lamenting the attempt to examine “all the stories of the world … within a single structure” (*voir tous les récits du monde … dans une seule structure*) and as a result “the text loses its difference there” (*le texte y perd sa différence*) (1970: 9, own translation). Barthes argues this as a ‘readerly’ approach to a text that privileges its linear progression and realism through authorial mastery and passive readers. In comparison, the ‘writerly’ is introduced as a non-prescriptive examination of narrative, identifying the multiple possibilities available to an active audience in constructing meanings in the infinite play of signification. Rather than forwarding a model for analysis as seen in formalism and structuralism, *S/Z* presents a reflection on the process of reading, its “difficulties, pleasures and aims” and how the reader produces meanings from a narrative (Johnson 1985: 239). In this way, Barthes’ essay reveals that texts can be read and interpreted in multiple ways, “indeed various ways simultaneously” (Bruner 1986: 4), with the connection of text and reader in the construction of meanings and denotation/connotation of realism. The only method to be gleaned from Barthes’ essay is as a directive to avoid the structuring of a text, and to allow the identification of its difference in the essential component of its relationship with the active reader. This reflects the incorporation of both semantic and syntactic approaches from previous narrative theories where both paradigmatic and syntagmatic signification is recognised through a holistic approach to narrative constructions and meanings.

Although the original essay concerns a literary text, the framework introduced in *S/Z* has been adopted in the examination of screen texts (LeSage 1976; Mayne 1976; Modleski 1979; Hagedorn 1995). LeSage argues that Barthes’ work leads to increased understanding of “how the film narrative, image, and sound track both incorporate and also shape cultural conventions” (1976: 45), similarly claimed by Mayne (1976) in its evaluation of the articulation of ideology through either written or screen texts. Barthes’ distinction of ‘writerly’ texts is adapted for television by
Fiske to ‘producerly’, where the production of meanings is ‘delegated’ to the viewer (1989: 63). In this way, Fiske argues television offers flexible and “provocative spaces within which the viewer can use her or his already developed competencies” for interpretation, rather than a prescribed meaning or reading position (Fiske 1989: 63). More recent applications of S/Z provide interesting tangents to these applications in their adaptation to subjective narratives and screen development. Tohar et al. investigate personal narratives and their collection process through Barthes’ framework in order to link the texts to their “sociocultural setting without losing the voice of the individual story” and to retain reflexivity (2007: 60). Alternatively, MacDonald (2004) employs Barthes’ emphasis on the reader to understand the process of film development with the screen idea as a collaborative ‘shared concept’ in consideration of audiences. These applications reflect the ongoing relevance of Barthes’ S/Z framework in varying research, and also are directly related to the aims of this study to understand the pleasure of Australian ‘reality TV’ formats through subjective audience narratives in case studies, and the relationship of industry to audience in programme development.

Narrative in Barthes’ S/Z is fundamentally linked to the impression of realism in a text resulting in an ideological discourse of connotation where reality is “not something passively revealed or reflected in art, but an impression constructed with care and artifice” (Johnson 1985: 238). This sense of the text is produced through the operation of five codes defined by Barthes as a fragmented “mirage of structures” (un mirage de structures) that does not seek to impose a list or structure, but rather to identify the “multivalence of the text, its partial reversibility” (la multivalence du texte, sa réversibilité partielle) to produce a ‘structuration’ (1970: 24-5, own translation). The text is read through the interweaving of the hermeneutic, semic, proairetic, symbolic, and cultural codes; described by Barthes as intersecting voices in a “stereographic space” (espace stéréographique) (1970: 25, own translation). The production of meanings is an automatic and simultaneous action for the reader, and so Barthes protracts and deliberates through the five codes in order to examine the connotations involved in the process of reading. The plurality of possibilities in interpretation with the codes is affirmed through the arbitrary division of the text into lexia as reading units as “the best possible space that one can observe meanings” (le meilleur espace possible où l’on puisse observer les sens) (Barthes 1970: 18, own
translational). This process is derived from the acknowledgment of the reader as an intertextual being, an amalgamation of previous experience and texts, which consequently results in the construction of textual subjectivity.

Therefore, the framework introduced by S/Z acknowledges not only the central role of audiences, but also lends itself to the consideration of narrative television in its hybrid and multiple forms. The hermeneutic code outlines the textual elements that pose, suspend or resolve enigmas, but not necessarily imposing a linear structure for their analysis. This outline of narrative elements reflects the similarities between Barthes’ literary essay and screen text analyses in the representation of narrative enigmas.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enigma thematisation</td>
<td>Exposition</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Stasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enigma formulation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposal of enigma</td>
<td></td>
<td>Initiating Event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay</td>
<td>snare; equivocation; partial or jammed answer; suspension; ambiguity</td>
<td>Complication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>goal; complicating actions; orientation and exposition; abstract</td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>Denouement</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>New stasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>Cliff hanger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.1 Comparison of hermeneutic structures**

The distinction of the ‘readerly’ by Barthes as a classic realist text draws comparisons in screen analysis to that of the classic Hollywood structure, outlined by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985) in Figure 5.1. In this three act structure, the narrative events take on an ordered composition of enigma and resolution through cause and effect relationships and character agency. This narrative world is recognised as ‘realist’ from verisimilitude in the familiar representation and/or temporality for audiences. This causally linked narrative is similar to the progression outlined by Todorov as a set of five stages from one state of equilibrium to another, separated by a period of “imbalance, which is composed of a process of degeneration and a process of improvement” (1969: 75). Alternatively, Branigan’s cinema schema
Reading for pleasure

(1992) in Figure 5.1 is described in a hexagon configuration where the narrative can move from initiating event to outcome by any combination or repetition of the other four functions of complications (goal, complicating actions, orientation and abstract). This suggests a more open and ‘writerly’ text in relation to Barthes, similarly described by Ellis in television narrative in the reduction of event movement to “multiplication of incident, of action-clinch and of conversation” in episodes of continuous problematics (1992: 158). Similar to Todorov’s narrative progression, Ellis defines television narratives as moving between segments of ‘stasis’, in which the ‘equilibrium’ of the introduction/thematisation and outcome/disclosure reaffirms the programme’s “basic situation” (1992: 125). In this way, stasis is described as more than “a zero degree” that establishes the ‘stable normality’ of the television programme repeated in each episode, and is re-established as a new stasis after working through incidents and clinches “without a final resolution” (Ellis 1992: 125, 158). The demonstrated non-prescriptive systems of Barthes, Branigan and Ellis also allow for the definition of multiple enigmas and delays within a narrative, but also acknowledges the familiar structured composition of classic Hollywood narratives or journey sequences (from Propp or Campbell in Chapter Three) that is equally accessible to audiences.

As Barthes’ terminology in S/Z is closely aligned with his literary example, the efficacy of its adoption to screen texts requires evaluation. Although almost used verbatim by other screen analyses, the comparison above highlights the different emphases placed on ‘event’ in screen text narrative progression. Ellis’ terminology will thus be employed due to its definition specifically in regards to television texts, and the shifts between periods of stasis, still comparable to Barthes’ distinctions in the proposal and development of enigmas. However, the various ‘incident’ or ‘clinch’ aspects defined by Barthes of snare, equivocation, partial or jammed answer, suspension and ambiguity are unique in the recognition of the range of complicating actions in enigma development. Hagedorn argues that the multiplication of enigmas in television distinguishes its narrative structures from classic definitions, and Barthes’ terminology for these elements is useful in establishing the ‘episodicity’ of television (1995: 41), which displays what Barthes terms an “instinct of self-preservation” (l’instinct de conservation) (1970: 129, own translation). Branigan’s distinction of goal, orientation, exposition and abstract will also be included to
discuss these specific screen text complications that are prominent in ‘reality TV’ narratives in statements of intention, descriptions of current or past events, or summaries of situations to follow respectively. In addition, Barthes’ *lexia* as the textual analysis fragment or “units of reading” (*des unités de lecture*) (1970: 18, own translation) will be revised through Ellis’ televisual equivalent of ‘segment’ as a “coherent group of sounds and images, of relatively short duration that needs to be accompanied by other such segments” (1992: 116). Likewise, the five codes will be examined as their translated and adapted terminology from LeSage’s cinematic application, with ‘enigmatic’ in the place of hermeneutic, and ‘action’ to replace proairetic, with the retention of ‘semic’ (as signifiers of characters or ambiences), ‘symbolic’ (as signification through connotation) and ‘cultural’ (as reference to broader knowledge). The segments act as polysemic spaces where “the paths of several possible meanings intersect” (Barthes 1981: 37) through the five codes. The framework of textual analysis for this thesis is illustrated with its adaptation and terminology revisions in Figure 5.2 below.

**Figure 5.2 Adaptation of S/Z narrative framework for TV**

As a result, the framework introduced by Barthes in *S/Z* retains its relevance in application to ‘reality TV’ formats through acknowledgement of specific televisual elements in development and reception, with additional terminology from Branigan and Ellis. This adaptation provides a framework for exploration of the multiplicity of television narrative construction and interpretation. *S/Z* empowers the constructions of meanings and invites audiences to be producers rather than merely consumers of
texts. Therefore, this framework privileges the role of the reader as well as the text where neither is “entity or essence, but rather as interdependent processes” (Fiske 1987: 143). The codes are specifically used in the case study analysis and micro-transcriptions of the chosen episodes (in the Appendices) where the viewer responses inform the identification of codes within the screen text for analysis. This process emphasises that while the construction of narrative is essential in understanding the production of ‘reality TV’, equally important is the role and consideration of audiences and specifically for this research, their pleasures in ‘reality TV’.

**Pleasure of the TV text**

Although declared as stating the obvious by Harrington and Bielby, the pleasure of television viewing “must be understood as central to why we watch in the first place” (2005: 835). Pleasure is argued as the “primary imperative of most television production” (Corner 1999: 93) and the viewing of television as a “major source of pleasure” (Fiske 1987: 224) as a further emphasis of the connection between industry and audiences. Corner outlines this experience in a typology of television pleasures, including visual, para-social, dramatic, informative, comedic, fantastic, and diverting (1999: 94-9), which highlight its varying forms of construction and reception in texts and audiences. Alternatively, Singer’s (1990) cinematic argument utilises a phenomenological approach in the pleasure of the experience of perception. She sees this as a “visual pleasure” in its excessive state and purpose for the “activity of fascination, infatuation, and contagion” (Singer 1990: 57). While a majority of ‘reality TV’ criticism revolves around documentary comparisons and the recognition of authenticity by viewers, the appeal of the genre requires further consideration of the role and experience of pleasure in the construction of entertainment from the social world of viewers. Although Hill admits that audiences “consider much reality programming to be entertaining rather than informative” (2005: 107), this classification is seen as a criticism of the genre’s worth and the emphasis of this pleasure is qualified where viewers would need “to value reality programmes for their drama and entertainment” (2005: 175). In this way, Hill’s audience study revolves around questions of authenticity, ethics and information, and the assessment of these qualities by audiences through the argument that “the more entertaining a factual programme is, the less real it appears to viewers” (2005: 57). However, this
suggested that entertainment, information, authenticity and performance are unable to co-exist in their engagement with viewers. In the shifted paradigms of this research, the pleasure of ‘reality TV’ is not only present in interpretation but also “in the access it offers viewers to the process of representation itself” (Fiske 1989: 71) where “belief in the veracity of what you are watching is not a prerequisite to engagement and pleasure” (Corner 2002: 264).

Although commonly associated with psychoanalysis and notions of desire and motivation, pleasure is outlined by Barthes as a physical mode produced through the reading of a text. The Pleasure of the Text identifies two notions of pleasure in plaisir, as a confirming pleasure formed by culture, and jouissance, as a physical pleasure of the body’s senses. Importantly, both are claimed to be produced only in the meeting of the text and the reader, and not contained in a text alone (Fiske 1987: 227-8). This definition coincides with earlier discussion of active viewer theories and the possibility for polysemy in meaning production as a social subject, where pleasure (or displeasure) can be provoked by different means to different viewers from a single text. Plaisir is argued as more typical of television as a “more mundane, everyday sort of pleasure” (Fiske 1987: 228) in the “comfortable practice of reading” (une pratique confortable de la lecture) (Barthes 1973: 23, own translation). In this approach, the text is consistent with the viewing subject and allows identification between the text and viewer as a confirmation of dominant values (Ott 2004: 196). Alternatively, jouissance can be located in the connection of television and audience through affective engagement in physical pleasure and the ‘loss of being’ in escapism. From this perspective, Barthes’ essay shifts emphasis from the interpretation of meaning to an appreciation of the plurality of ‘writing’; of significance as opposed to signification (Ott 2004: 203). Therefore, the enticement of ‘reality TV’ viewers is explored equally in this research through the plurality of the S/Z framework established earlier, in combination with the play and pleasure of the reader introduced by The Pleasure of the Text.

Ott (2007a) proposes ‘criticism as pleasure’ as a mode of television reading that transforms viewers from consumers to producers, and emphasises the post-structuralist paradigm through “ways of viewing” over text essentialism (2007b: 295). The plaisir of ‘reality TV’ can thus be addressed in the packaging of the
‘everyday’ in jeopardy and aspiration, being simultaneously engaging and familiar in encouraging recognition of the subjective ‘everyday’ experience in its appearance of minimal distance between viewers and programme (Tincknell & Raghuram 2004: 258). Through the various format scenarios, the viewer is invited to negotiate their own pleasure in either affirmation or opposition to values, fears, and knowledge of the portrayed social and cultural contexts. In this way, Barthes’ *plaisir* in ‘reality TV’ acts to confirm the viewer’s identity through the representation of “mundane interactions [serving] to circulate discourses about preferred lifestyles, aesthetic tastes and cultural activity” (Giles 2002: 625). Additionally, the open nature of format narratives as series and serials allows for a pleasure in the lack of resolution where enigmas can “provoke still further questions, problems and complications” for the viewer (Allen 1992: 107). At the same time, this harnessing of the unpredictability of ‘reality’ is packaged in a narrative to act as a source of pleasure in adding “crucial moments of suspense” within the banality of the everyday (Tincknell & Raghuram 2002: 201), and allows development and closure in order to fulfil traditional expectations of narratives. As a result, the events represented range from the “trivially mundane and the bravely heroic” as a source of relevance and interest to audiences (Kilborn 1994: 424).

Defined as a bodily pleasure, *jouissance* can be identified in the embodiment of ‘reality TV’ by viewers. This embodiment is a further stage of identification as “a way of being in the text as well as a cognitive apprehension of its content” (Wilson: 1993: 56), particularly through emotional affective engagement such as empathy with characters or situations. The experience is heightened through the ‘affective reality’ of formats, where “feeling for the participants guarantees their reality, and the fact that they are ‘real’ justifies the feeling” (Kavka 2008: xii). In this way, Kavka (2008) argues that the performance of ‘reality TV’ is immediate and intimate as an emotional connection beyond questions of semiotic meaning construction in representation. For example, there is a common thread of *schadenfreude* possible where the viewer can take pleasure as relief, amusement, or astonishment in others’ misfortunes, intensified by the construction of the format’s ‘reality’, to be explored further in the case study chapters. Audience embodiment can also act as ‘wish fulfillment’ where the viewer can align with the represented characters as an act of role-taking, argued as resulting from the interchangeable audience subject and object
in the manifestation of “real-people-as-entertainment” in ‘reality TV’ (Ross & Nightingale 2003:147). This immersion into the ‘world’ of the programme is not necessarily delusion, but rather ‘play’ with the fluidity between the viewer and text, described by Barthes as a loss of subjectivity in a “fictitious identity” (*le fictif de l'identité*) (1973: 83, own translation). Ott outlines this ‘play’ through Barthes’ theories of ‘cruising’ and ‘drifting’ where the viewer creates new relationships between the television discourse and their own subjective ideas, or lets the mind travel and imagine within the gaps of the text (2007a: 203). This fluidity is also an important feature in the liminality of ‘reality TV’ as a constructed entertainment; that which is represented as ‘real’ is also a shifting ‘un-real’ through its choreographed or post-production packaging. The viewer is not only invited to ‘escape’ through the characters and situations represented, but also through a ‘loss of being’ in negotiating with the representation. Elements such as elimination competitions, personal confessions and ‘diarycam’, or additional soundtrack in music and voice-over are not present in the ‘everyday’ actuality of the viewing subject, but they are legitimate in the televisual ‘world’ of the format and this allows for an escape into the ordered and dramatic narrative. The illusory ‘everyday’ of ‘reality TV’ is thus a space for viewers to play in its particular construction of ordinary people and events within television conventions, rather than as a delusion. As indicated in Chapter Two, the production of ‘reality TV’ is aware of the balance for viewer engagement in the format premise and representation, and therefore pleasure is contingent on its resonance and credibility to audiences for identification and emotional embodiment.

A further distinction in ‘reality TV’ viewing is closely related to the continuing discourse of the “guilty pleasure” (Leone, Peek & Bissell 2006:265) in popular culture, where entertainment is knowingly sought from what dominant discourse describes as ‘lowest common denominator’ or ‘trash’. This can be aligned with Bakhtin’s (1968) notions of carnival, introduced in Chapter Four, in the qualities of excess, the grotesque, and the subversion of the dominant. ‘Reality TV’ revels in portraying the ‘ordinary’, equalising the ‘ordinary’ individual participant to the social standing of ‘celebrity’, often through the indulgence of the self and its promotion in ‘gossip’ (Turner 2005: 420). The focus on the ‘everyday’ also allows for portrayal of the ‘abject’ in bodily function and language as part of an ‘authentic’ representation that questions the limits of traditional norms of acceptable television. The ‘everyday’
is therefore represented as a site of drama and spectacle that is pushed to excess in order to create compelling television, particularly in manufactured event formats. In this comparison, ‘reality TV’ echoes the blurred distinctions of carnival “between mind and body, self and other” and the challenge to traditional “ideals of predictability, stability and closure” as a source of popular pleasure and play (Gardiner 2000: 68). As opposed to fictional creations, ‘reality TV’ reinforces the importance of ‘everyday’ narratives, but within a stylised and entertaining form for viewers as a source of pleasure.

Barthes’ framework of pleasure thus represents a distinct model in understanding the “personal and intimate experience [of] television” as an extension of the audience as an “active producer of textuality and knowledge” (Ott 2007b: 303-6). The elements of *plaisir* and *jouissance* suggest links to the conception of ‘entertainment experience’ introduced in Chapter One in its cyclical system of individual knowledge, motivations and effects (from Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld 2004). The importance of Barthes’ notion of pleasure is inherent in its shift to “readers in their differences away from the central, universal notions of pleasure” (Fiske 1987: 230) to understand their affective engagement with any given text through aspects such as immersion, identification and emotion. The illusory ‘everyday’ is therefore not only a factor in the construction of formats and their interpretation, but also in their reception as entertainment. From this perspective, the pleasures and meanings of ‘reality TV’ have the capability to be as multiple and perpetually produced as its viewers and their acts of viewing. Therefore, research of these interpretations requires an open and reflexive methodology for the thesis case studies in order to reflect the process and experience of reading for pleasure.
CHAPTER SIX

In their own words

“It is not the search for (objective, scientific) Truth in which the researcher is engaged, but the construction of interpretations, of certain ways of understanding the world, always historically located, subjective and relative”
(Ang 1996: 46)

The previous chapters have examined several shifts of paradigms and discourses as a growing framework to understand ‘reality TV’ through this research’s distinct perspective of audience entertainment, with Chapter Four in particular outlining several ‘reality TV’ studies in relation to audiences. In addition to the theoretical frameworks for textual analysis and pleasure, an essential feature in this thesis is a qualitative research methodology for the inclusion of industry and viewer responses. The combination of theoretical analysis and empirical research has been minimal in previous commentary, and often centres on analysis of programme content. As stated earlier, Hill’s (2005; 2007) audience studies combine quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the viewing experience of ‘factual entertainment’ programmes but through predetermined definitions of the genre and researcher interpretation, with findings concentrated predominantly on generalising statistics drawn from surveys. The design of this research expands the scope of Hill’s study by emphasising respondent narratives of their ‘reality TV’ viewing experience through ideas of pleasure and interpretation, triangulated with industry perspectives, in order to understand the entertainment of ‘reality TV’ through engagement and construction.

In broadening the consideration of ‘reality TV’ to include industry and viewer responses as well as programme analysis, various abstract notions and paradigmatic assumptions need to be identified. Most importantly: what is meant by the term ‘viewer’? As discussed in Chapter Four, ‘the audience’ has been traditionally assumed to be a scientific and “proper object of study whose characteristics can be … accurately observed, described, categorised, systematised and explained” in order to reveal an objective truth (Ang 1991b: 103). In this context, the term audience suggests a palpable, unified group of individuals passively watching television. However, this is problematic due to the dispersed and diverse nature of viewers, the range of programmes available, and the varying levels of engagement in the activity
of watching television. Methodological difficulties reside in “the impossibility of identifying the boundaries of audience, texts, and contexts” (Erni 1989: 31) and particularly for questions of experience and subjectivity. Although television rating figures provide statistical accounts of television audiences, this is merely a numerical count of television sets being switched on or off. Ang argues that an audience is not simply an aggregate of viewers of a particular programme, but also to be regarded as “engaging in the practice of watching television” (quoted in Morley 1992: 184). Similarly, Fiske contends that the television audience as an “empirically accessible object” does not exist, and alternatively should be recognised as a multitude of processes of viewing that are diverse between and within individuals (1989: 56). These arguments arise from within a constructivist paradigm in which audiences are “constructed through particular discursive practices” (Morley 1992: 178). This shift in consideration of audiences is essential for this research to understand the multiple possibilities in responses in subjective narratives of television experience by viewers in both cognition and pleasure. Therefore, further clarification is required in the definition and representation of audiences in research methods.

The previous chapter explored a theoretical basis for examining construction and reception through post-structuralist discourses. These frameworks acknowledge the possibility for polysemy and privilege the role of the viewer, and therefore to maintain theoretical and empirical paradigmatic consistency require the design of this research within constructivism. This approach is essential to avoid theoretical and methodological inadequacies in contradictions between where meaning is found and the expectations of ethnographic practices (Nightingale 1993: 166). From this perspective, to acknowledge the fluidity and construction of meanings in texts also requires the acknowledgement of multiple meanings constructed by viewers, without pre-ordained ideas of ‘correct’ readings by the researcher to compare with viewer responses. This is in contrast to conventional or positivist strategies where research is undertaken with predetermined assumptions or hypotheses, which are then proven or refuted by respondents. In doing so, this strategy may “miss what is most important to the respondents” due to its fixed approach (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 164). Post-positivist or constructivist research allows a flexible process without preponderancy of salience, reflecting the impossibility to “pursue someone else’s emic construction with a set of predetermined questions based solely on the inquirer’s etic
In their own words

construction” (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 175). As such, in order to understand audience perception of and engagement with ‘reality TV’, the emphasis of this research strategy uses a phenomenological approach to highlight the various experiences and narratives of the respondents.

This contrast in research priorities results from fundamental paradigmatic differences between conventional (positivist) and constructivist (post-positivist) research designs. Conventional claims of a single, independent reality that can be studied objectively are rejected by the ontological relativism of constructivism, which claims multiple realities are socially constructed through the process of communication (Berger and Luckmann 1971). This is consistent with the impossible discernment of ‘an audience’ in the possible multiple responses to television, and as such allows research emphasis on the subjectivity of respondents. This is further highlighted by the paradigm’s subjective epistemology, in which it is only through the interaction between the researcher and respondents that data can emerge (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 37). Fundamentally, the difference between the conventional and constructivist paradigms is that the latter emphasises informational strategies and outcomes, rather than statistical findings. From this perspective, the ontological and epistemological bases of the paradigm are linked, where the nature of realities can only be known through the process of inquiry. A dialectic of iteration, analysis, critique, then reiteration and so on leads to the emergence of ideographic understanding, in which findings are the literal creation of the researcher and researched during the inquiry process, and the exposure of contexts gives meaning and existence to the research and outcomes.

Firstly, fieldwork research was conducted within natural settings, as opposed to the controlled environment of conventional approaches. In doing so, the experience of respondents as industry professionals or viewers is understood through their contexts. A natural setting is required of the relativist ontology as multiple realities are dependent on the time and context of the respondents, as social and cultural beings. Ang argues the study of media audiences as “not an innocent practice” and “does not take place in a social and institutional vacuum” (1996: 45). As a result, research must be undertaken in the same context in order for results to retain relevance and transferability (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 175). This also allows for scope in the inquiry
and observation of normal occurrences of responses, as opposed to artificial conditions of conventional research that constrain the parameters under scrutiny. In this research, interviews took place in a neutral setting, such as the office or meeting room of industry respondents, or a mutually agreed space such as the home or a university meeting space for viewer respondents. The “familiarity of the location” is extremely important to establish a sense of openness and acknowledge the respondents’ own contexts for valid responses (Geraghty 1998: 147). In particular, the context of the home as a site of viewing is essential in establishing valid and contextual responses from audience participants. All interviews were audio recorded with a small digital voice-recorder, which was placed between the interviewer and respondent, and supplemented by minimal note taking by the interviewer for reiteration or requests for respondent clarification.

Secondly, this design utilises the human as primary instrument, as both researcher and analyst, with the ability to be “observers, categorisers, and processors (on both propositional and tacit levels) of many forms of data” (Guba & Lincoln 1981: 150). Conventional approach hypotheses explored in ‘detached’ research instruments such as questionnaires underlie the need for objectivity. However, as discussed above, this also presupposes the scope of inquiry and therefore limits the possible range of responses. The potential of the human as research instrument lies in the ability for responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, immediacy and opportunities for clarification and exploration (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 193-4). In addition, this acknowledges the presence of the researcher as part of the shared research context in a ‘partial’ position with the research (Ang 1996: 42, 46). This approach means that the interaction with respondents could be reassessed, modified and verified as the research uncovers further diverse areas of importance to the inquiry. These are elements of an emergent design where the processes and outcomes are continuously shaped and tested as the research progresses. Guba and Lincoln describe the methodology type as “iterative, interactive, hermeneutic, at times intuitive, and most certainly open” (1989: 183). The responsive and adaptable nature of the human as research instrument allows for the parameters of the research to be negotiated through the interaction between the researcher and respondents. This process is described as a hermeneutic/dialectic circle which is interpretive and contrasting in order to reach a level of consensus, identified by Guba and Lincoln through three
further key elements in sampling, engagement and grounded theory (1989: 149), to be addressed later. However, the emergent method remains “substantively unpredictable” in what might be discovered within the defined parameters of the research where the outcomes are reliant on the input of the participants (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 254-5).

The design aspects of setting and research instrument reflect ethnographic techniques or ‘ethnographic methodology’, and have been demonstrated in previous television audience research such as Morley (1980), Ang (1985) and Buckingham (1987). These studies are often framed as ethnographic in their analysis of the “complex ways in which people interact with television, of their relationship between television and other aspects of domestic life”, and the meanings produced by viewers in relation to programme content and experience (Allen 1992: 129). The promise of an ethnographic methodology resides in its premise: “if we want to find out about audiences, why not ask them?” (Geraghty 1998: 141). However, Nightingale argues that the term has been appropriated from traditional anthropology definitions through connotations of “cultural, community-based, empirical and phenomenal” elements (1996: 113). Similarly, Seiter maintains that ethnography is used “very loosely to indicate any research that uses qualitative interviewing techniques” (1999: 10). Therefore, while this research does not claim to be termed ethnographic, it does utilise the techniques of observation and interview to understand everyday experiences, as a discursive practice to reconstruct “people’s experiences of media use into larger social and cultural narratives”, rather than revealing audience ‘truths’ (Erni 1989: 33). In this way, it subscribes to Ang’s claim that ethnographic work should act as “a reminder that reality is always more complicated and diversified than our theories can represent” (1996: 52).

Interviews are the main qualitative method in this emergent strategy for research of both industry and audiences. Designed as semi-structured and in-depth, respondents are invited to describe and reflect at length on their experience of ‘reality TV’ in either production or viewing. The emphasis in this approach is to gain understanding and information through subjective narratives of interpretations, rather than statistical or generalised results. The open structure of the interviews is a unique method to allow respondents the freedom of expressing their understandings, experiences and
pleasures “in their own words” (Hall 1986: vi; Lull 1990: 18). This also places emphasis on the respondents’ “power of knowledge” in relating their experiences and interpretations to the researcher, subsequently shifting the asymmetric relationship of interviewing to privilege the knowledge of the interviewee (Czarniawska 2004: 48). In privileging the respondent, this relationship results in the interviewer asking more questions and the participant providing more answers and information through the description of their perspectives and experiences (Spradley 1979: 67). For example, this asymmetry or imbalance is highlighted through the interviewer expressing ignorance in order to encourage further responses and assuring the respondent of the importance of their views (Spradley 1979: 57). In this way, the respondent is invited to be a “collaborative partner in the sense making and interpretations” arising from the interview (Gubrium and Holstein 2001: 112).

Although television viewing is considered a social event, focus groups are not the sole strategy in this research. Although contended as a useful strategy for discussion, Hoijer warns against assumptions that “focused group situations are replications of what goes on in front of the television screen” (1990: 34). A respondent is more likely to tend towards conformity in a focus group and allows the possibility for imbalance in participation (Morgan 1997: 15). For this research, interviews as either individual or in a group were therefore determined as a result of recruitment, where friends, housemates, partners or siblings self-recruited together, and therefore this grouping also reflected their normal viewing configuration. However, the social activity of television viewing is maintained through the interviews where personal interviews provide the opportunity for respondents to share individually and at length about their experiences of ‘reality TV’ with the researcher. Additionally, the groups of already-connected participants avoided imbalances that could result from artificially constructed focus groups and allowed for an intimacy and openness between the group respondents.

Sampling of respondents in this study is purposive in order to interview television viewers and professionals who have specific interest and experience in the programmes and genre under investigation, rather than attempting to obtain a social cross section. Purposive sampling emphasises gathering information to achieve understanding, and in this way, the sample is selected to ‘serve a purpose’ for the
aims of the research, rather than fulfil statistical randomness (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 178). Patton (2002) defines several types of purposive sampling, including the selection of extreme, deviant, typical, critical, politically important or sensitive cases, or sampling for maximum variation. Each type is a strategy to maximise relevant information in a smaller sample by selecting information-rich cases within the research contexts, as a compromise between the need for in-depth data and the ability to generalise. Within a constructivist paradigm, Guba and Lincoln recommend maximum variation sampling to provide the “broadest scope of information” (1989: 178). This strategy aims at “capturing and describing the central themes” across the data variation, and highlights the emergence of any common patterns as well as documenting unique responses (Patton 2002: 235). The sample choice in this research specifically excludes viewers who are indifferent to or not in favour of ‘reality TV’ programmes, and therefore reduces the ability to generalise findings or test hypotheses on viewing. However, these outcomes are not the aim of the research; rather, to understand ‘reality TV’ viewing in its engagement as entertainment emphasises the necessity of input from those who identify and take pleasure as ‘reality TV’ viewers. The only extra information sought in the sampling of viewers was sex and age group in order to establish a balance in gender represented, and to reflect the 18-49 age range that is acknowledged as the core demographic of ‘reality TV’ viewing (Hill 2005: 35; Andrejevic 2003: 176; Spigel 2004: 3). Classifications such as gender, age and occupation are used as tags for each audience quote by Hill in her 2007 audience study, and consequently encourage a critical view that such responses are a product and generalisation of these categories and ‘reality TV’ engagement. Labels and details of social categories were unnecessary within the phenomenological approach in this research as each viewer’s responses are sought as individual in their subjective knowledge and experiences.

Interviewees in this study self-selected to participate through responding to recruitment advertising. For both audience and industry respondents, contact was initially made through emails in social networks of colleagues and peers, which were chain-referred or ‘snowball’ distributed via appropriate target organisations and formal social networks. ‘Snowball’ sampling as a method of recruitment initially identifies and targets relevant respondents who then subsequently nominate and direct participant recruitment onto their own networks (Patton 2002: 237). Secondary
advertising for viewer participants was planned through online ‘reality TV’ forums, such as TV Week online, however the response to the initial emails proved sufficient for the recruitment goals of twenty-six viewer participants. Potential respondents were invited to request further information in a Plain Language Statement regarding the purpose and nature of the research, as well as measures for privacy and confidentiality. Voluntary self-selection was made from this information through consent forms. Contact details were also available to potential respondents for any clarifications or further questions regarding the research. The consent form required the signature of respondents in order to indicate their understanding of the research information and their consent to participate in the project, and once this was received, interview times were mutually arranged with the respondent.

The interview process design allows an extended engagement with industry and viewer respondents in order to explore and verify their perspectives on ‘reality TV’, which is linked to the authenticity of the research outcomes. Where conventional research approaches emphasise objectivity so that the validity of the design and outcomes is an isomorphism with the controlled setting as an external reality, the constructivist ideal of ‘realities as constructions’ requires a prolonged engagement in order to “overcome the effects of misinformation, distortion or presented ‘fronts’”, and to help understanding of contexts (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 237). Researcher immersion in and understanding of the inquiry contexts establishes “rapport and build[s] the trust necessary” for meaningful engagement with respondents (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 237). In addition to the natural settings discussed earlier, this is achieved through a series of in-depth interviews with respondents. Ethnographic methods require a flexible interview approach, but focused through a “research agenda” in order to be more considered than a conversation (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 152). The use of an interview guide (see Appendix A and B) provides an outline of areas to address, not necessarily in a predetermined order, and allowing space for new directions to arise and be pursued from the respondents’ answers. The guide is phrased as open-ended including topics to be raised and ‘probe’ areas, so that the respondent can answer at length on their views and experiences with minimal direction from the interviewer. The discussion areas are constructed from the main concerns of the research established in the previous chapters, but also flow naturally from information introduced by the respondent.
In their own words

(Hammersley & Atkinson 1997: 152). In particular, viewer respondents were prompted on the Barthes’ *S/Z* code areas in order to ascertain the individual readings of narratives that will later inform the analysis of the screen texts and micro-transcriptions (in Appendices C to F). This interview method for television audiences equally “gives the viewer time to activate the mental representations of the programme created in the cognitive structure during viewing” and “allows the viewer to formulate the reception in his/her own language and structuring of the programme” (Hoijer 1990: 46). In this way, the interviewer must be an active listener in order to interpret and reflect during the interview, and to reassess the interview methods and structure so that “both questions and answers” are discovered from respondents (Spradley 1979: 82).

Viewer respondents participated in a series of interviews to view and respond to four case study episodes. This engagement provided the opportunity for participants to clarify their responses, and the internal triangulation of the multiple streams of information by the researcher. Limited time was a factor for industry professionals so this only allowed for one face-to-face interview, but through the rapport gained in this meeting, these respondents offered extended contact through phone or email for any clarification or further questions. As part of this research’s emergent design, the interview guide was developed and refined as the research progressed. For viewers, questions of definitions and significations of ‘reality TV’ were reiterated between interviews to gauge differences in response following the experience of the case studies and their consideration of ‘reality TV’. The interview guide for the industry respondents was also adapted and developed in order to reflect the particular professionals connected to a case study programme, with questions specifically related to elements of the format. Alternatively, the British respondents were recruited due to the dominance of the UK in the ‘reality TV’ market to provide insight into the ‘reality TV’ phenomenon more generally, and thus required a different emphasis in the interview guide. Overall, the viewer interviews aim to gain understanding of how respondents engage with the programmes. In particular, areas such as expectations of narratives, format characteristics, emotional connection and awareness of construction were probed, in addition to a general view on ‘reality TV’ and its connotations. The industry interviews aim to gain understanding of the perspectives of ‘reality TV’ production, including areas such as motivations, the
importance of entertainment and audiences, as well as a general view on ‘reality TV’, its terminology and significance, introduced in Chapter Two.

The typical progression of an interview commenced with initial greetings between the respondent and interviewer in order to establish a sense of rapport, and the provision of a ‘project explanation’ or briefing about the research by the interviewer to reiterate the Plain Language Statement and focus the session on the importance of the respondent’s views (Spradley 1979: 59). Permission to audio record and take notes from the interview was also confirmed with the reassurance of anonymity of respondents, or as otherwise agreed with industry participants. The viewer respondents were then presented with a choice of episodes of the four case study programmes to be viewed and afterwards discussed. The input from the viewers after watching these programmes was based in the idea that “what the researcher sees on the video is not necessarily what the common viewer sees” (Eco 2005: 240), highlighting the phenomenological experience of viewing ‘reality TV’. Although the chosen episodes were selected for the research in order to gather the interpretations and responses by various viewers on specific programmes, and to include a range of styles and Australian network productions, their viewing and subsequent discussion encouraged wider narratives of ‘reality TV’.

Respondents were initially prompted in the interviews with the open ended statement: ‘tell me about this episode’ or ‘tell me about your experience in television’ in order to start discussion in a loose manner to allow for rich descriptions (Kvale & Brinkman 2009: 135). Dichotomous questions limit expression in only requiring a ‘yes/no’ response and so were used sparingly through the interviews. The interviewer’s role as an ‘active listener’ required the respondent’s narrative to be constantly assessed as to its relation to the research and areas to be pursued or clarified further. Probing or ‘follow-up’ questions were used in this case to allow elaboration of perspectives without limiting the scope of the answer, such as ‘can you give further examples of …?’ or ‘what do you mean by …?’ (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 150). Questions were phrased in a descriptive form, focusing on ‘what’ and ‘how’ prompts to “elicit spontaneous descriptions”, with the inclusion of ‘why’ questions in order to gain a subjective explanation or reasoning from the respondent (Kvale & Brinkman 2009: 133). Other cues from the interviewer encouraged
respondents to continue talking such as body language through nodding and eye contact, or silence to leave a pause for the respondent to “associate and reflect” (Kvale & Brinkman 2009: 136). Visual aids were also employed as needed in viewer interviews with stills captured and printed from the case study episodes as a means of prompting or evoking different expressions of reaction or understanding (Rose 2001: 193-4), such as themes, emotions, issues, representation or interpretation. In addition, participation observation and unobtrusive note taking recorded behavioural and verbal reactions while viewing, and specific terms or phrases used in the interviews (Lull 1990: 177). This information was added to the fieldwork data in the form of ‘field notes’ that described the situations, interactions, participation and reflections (Crang & Cook 2007: 51). The notes were also triangulated during the interview for follow-up questions or probes on their experience of the episode. At the end of the interview, the respondent was asked for further collaboration in the research process through a ‘debrief’ to prompt for anything further they would like to add to the interview, giving the opportunity to “deal with issues he or she has been thinking or worrying about” in the interview (Kvale & Brinkman 2009: 129). All respondents were also asked at the conclusion of every interview to confirm the forwarding of interview transcripts for their review and verification, and prompted for the scheduling of the next interview where applicable. The transcript is part of the “crucial and inescapable” process of ‘translation’, where the respondents “translate their experiences into explanations for the researcher”, which are then translated by the researcher into written representation (Nightingale 1996: 111-2). In addition to prolonged engagement, this process of verification contributes to the credibility of the methodology as devices to avoid distortion and establish rapport (Guba & Lincoln 1985: 301).

Further depth in this research design is also gained from persistent observation to identify salient elements to the enquiry and explore these in detail. Isomorphism is achieved then through the satisfactory representation of the respondents’ construction, again linked to the focus on the respondent’s ‘emic’ perspective as the phenomenon of interest, and not the researcher’s ‘etic’ views. In this way, constructivist designs adapt conventional research elements of ‘quality’ to assert their credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Guba and Lincoln (1989) outline measures such as peer debriefing, negative case analysis and
In their own words

progressive subjectivity for the researcher to identify, test, and monitor the emergent design. In addition, the technique of ‘triangulation’ or cross-checking aids credibility through reconciliation of multiple data “relating to the same phenomenon but deriving from different phases” such as participant groups or strategies (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 183). For this research, the perspectives of both industry and audience are triangulated in analysis, and audience responses are gained through observation, discussion and visual aids. The findings are also compared to previous literature on ‘reality TV’ audiences in order to highlight the variety of responses in examining the phenomenon through the framework of entertainment. The hermeneutic/dialectic process requires the simultaneous collection and analysis of data so that the inquiry can be adapted and verified as research progresses. This allows for grounded theory as a method of “explication and emergence” (Charmaz 2008: 408), where hypotheses are derived not only from the data, but “systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research” (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 6). Through the practice of respondents progressively establishing and critiquing their response constructions for the possible emergence of some level of consensus, the findings are then joint constructions between the researcher and respondents. In this way, research outcomes are grounded by these constructions in the “continuous expansion and refinement” of the inquiry (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 208), in addition to continuous re-assessment of methods. These findings are detailed at length within the case study chapters through the incorporation of transcript quotes to draw together the diversity and intersections of the respondents. The entire transcripts are not added as Appendices due to their lengthy and dense state, which would exceed the constraints of the thesis word limit. More utility was found in the ‘snapshot’ quotes from viewers in the case studies, and the inclusion of episode micro-transcriptions (in Appendices C to F) that combines the breakdown of production elements in narrative construction with their reception and identification through viewer responses, using the framework adapted from Barthes’ S/Z outlined in Chapter Three.

Ultimately, this research methodology is designed to acknowledge and understand the diverse responses of those who either produce or watch ‘reality TV’. It can not furnish the ‘truth’ of the engagement or entertainment of the genre. It includes actual producers and viewers, however it can not deal with all producers and viewers. The
research method gathered diverse and lengthy narratives from its participants but these would be meaningless without organisation as case studies. As a result, this research aims to provide a snapshot of the in-depth ideographic and multiple interpretations afforded by its inquiry and outcomes in a series of four case studies to thoroughly outline the constructions of respondents from both industry and viewers, as well as the construction of the specific programmes. For this reason, this analysis of ‘reality TV’ formats reflects Erni’s judgement of ethnographic research methods cited earlier in having “more to do with the discursive reconstruction of people’s experiences of media use in larger social and cultural narratives than with the ‘real’ uncovering of certain ‘truths’” about the audience (1989: 330). By drawing together the various streams of information, as part of progressive development and engagement, the case studies are joint constructions or ‘co-structured’ as a means of representing the research findings to the reader in order to understand the contexts and constructions uncovered, explored and challenged. Tripp defines this as a process of discussion and negotiation where both interviewer and interviewee have an active role in creating and translating attitudes and views raised through the interview process (1983: 33-4). The qualitative collection of multiple streams provide rich information and findings can be characterised as Geertz’s ‘thick description’ (1993: 6), which acknowledges and clarifies the basis of the research in conditions, selection and analysis to make it “possible for the reader vicariously to experience it” as a quality of transferability (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 181). The open and evolving nature of the interview, its prolonged engagement and subsequent verification emphasise the development of a representation of narratives from the respondent. In emphasising the detail and variety of the research, the possibility for generalisation or claims of ‘truth’ is replaced by ideographic interpretation to recognise the details and reflect on the contexts of the inquiry. In particular for the viewer respondents, the expression of personal tastes and preferences “depends on the communicative context in which such an utterance takes place” (Turnbull 1998: 89). The validity of the findings is thus based in making visible their contexts, and how these have been constructed and reconstructed. As a result, the hermeneutic/dialectic process utilised in this research will produce a reflexive, thick description that acknowledges its strategies, contexts, narratives and representations, for both researcher and respondents. As Turnbull puts it, what we then have is a
series of narratives and interpretations (1990: 6) that will be explored in the case studies.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Bondi Rescue

‘For the first time, cameras have been given unprecedented access to these elite watermen’
(Bondi Rescue 2006)

Bondi Rescue was first broadcast in 2006 on the Ten Network. Initial success of the format resulted in the extension of the pilot series from eight to thirteen episodes, with an average of one million viewers (Clune 2010). The format is an original production by Sydney-based company Cordell Jigsaw to capture the work of the professional lifeguards at Bondi Beach each summer. As emphasised in the above quote from the pilot episode voiceover, the series promises an intimate and unique portrayal of the everyday happenings of the lifeguards. The pilot was met with some trepidation by its critics, applauding its combination of “drama, sun, surf, simmering local tensions, glorious human stupidity” and a legendary “band of characters” while cautious about the intrusion of a camera crew into the critical work of the lifeguard patrols and rescues (Farrer 2006). In particular, critic Michael Idato identified the engaging qualities of the beach and lifeguards, but also that the need for “robust source material” would be an ongoing crucial factor in “building and sustaining the drama without overplaying the reality” for audiences (2006). Although the dramatic rescue scenes were seen as essential to its television appeal, an emphasis on information and education was equally important in gaining access to the lifeguards for filming. The format was originally conceived by one of the Bondi lifeguards, Ben Davies, who had previous television experience and pitched the idea to companies after working through a busy summer at Bondi Beach. His impetus, influence and role as producer was essential to the lifeguards’ approval for the production, allaying concerns of representation due to his knowledge of and proximity to the Bondi lifeguards (Casey 2006; Clune 2010).

The local success of the pilot series led to international sales, mainly to Europe and Asia, as a capitalisation on the attractive export qualities of the Australian beach lifestyle and lifeguard characters. This appeal also saw the introduction of Australian formats Surf Patrol and Deadly Surf by the Seven and Nine Networks respectively. These ventures were seen to be “riding on the coat-tails” of Bondi Rescue’s success
Bondi Rescue has maintained a balance between continuity and variation with several shifts in its content over its five series from 2006 to 2010. The second series in 2007 included the first female lifeguard in the professional squad, while retaining a core group from the first series as ongoing characters for the format. A 2008 production transplanted some of the lifeguards to Kuta Beach in Bali as help and guidance for the local lifesavers, however this proved an unsuccessful gamble for the format. Only three of the eight episodes were aired, with its removal due to “soft ratings” of an average 650,000 national viewers (Casey 2008). Media criticism cited its enticement of “exciting, life-and-death stuff” as too minimal amongst the “blokily dull” elements of the Sydney lifeguards within the foreign environment (Galer 2008). However, the 2009 return of the format to Bondi Beach reinstated its audience popularity, having influence in the creation of “a new wave of junior surf lifesavers” in clubs now overflowing with members (Weston 2009). The ongoing appeal of Bondi Rescue is reported to lie within the “mix of larrikin humour and genuine heroics” (Byrnes 2010) that sees the format continue its high ratings and production, as well as being one of Australia’s “greatest TV exports” to over fifty countries worldwide (Clune 2010). It is this combination of content, production and representation style that makes Bondi Rescue an interesting case study in Australian ‘reality TV’, particularly where there has been a waivering and reestablishment of its appeal as the format develops.
**Episode description**

The chosen episode for this case study was broadcast on March 31 2009 with an OzTAM rating of 1.504 million viewers in the major cities in Australia, and a ranking of seventh in the most watched programmes that week (OzTAM 2009). The version screened to viewer respondents had been recorded from its television broadcast, however the commercial breaks had been removed resulting in a total runtime of 22 minutes. The episode introduces three narrative strands, including two rescues in dangerous conditions, the relationship between lifeguards Kerbox and Maxi as ‘master and apprentice’, and the annual Ironman challenge, which are divided across the episode as ① ② and ③ respectively in Figure 7.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Scene Description</th>
<th>Characters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Preview: this week Opening titles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Start of the day: Training for Ironman challenge</td>
<td>Kerbox/Maxi Whippet/Tom/Bacon/Reidy/Chappo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>① Dangerous conditions Backpacker rescue Girls rescued off rocks</td>
<td>Bacon Kerbox/Hoppo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>① Dangerous conditions (cont’d) Girls rescued off rocks</td>
<td>Kerbox/Hoppo/Bacon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>② Surfboard ding</td>
<td>Kerbox/Maxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>② Ironman challenge Pre-race Lifeguard rivalries</td>
<td>Whippet/Bacon/Harries Reidy/Chappo/Tom/Hoppo/Maxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>③ Ironman challenge (cont’d) Run, swim, start of board paddle</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>③ Ironman challenge (cont’d) End of board paddle to race finish</td>
<td>As above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Preview: next week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7.1 Bondi Rescue episode structure**

From this broad breakdown, certain structural points become apparent. The three main narratives are not strictly intertwined, instead the stories stand alone in the episode, with each resolved before the next is introduced. However, various enigmas about the Ironman challenge and the relationship between Kerbox and Maxi are planted at the start of the episode (segment 2), and are reinstated as the episode proceeds.
progresses. The only division within the main narratives is achieved through the insertion of commercial breaks. The episode centres on a select group of the lifeguards as central characters, listed in Figure 7.1, to set up relationships and rivalries with only minor input from other lifeguards. The combination of the rescues, surfboard, and Ironman narratives suggests a conscious mix of drama, humour and action. These stories are introduced at the outset as an initial enigma to the episode before the opening titles (segment 1). The stories are then linked throughout the episode with the active presence of a voiceover, supplied by Australian television personality Andrew G, and an almost constant soundtrack of ambient music. The events and characters are captured by a series of camera crews either in the lifeguard tower or on the beach, as well as cameras attached to the front of their rescue boards, beach vehicles and jet-skis to depict the lifeguards either within the action taking place, or through ‘talking head’ scenarios. At the conclusion of the episode, a final enigma is introduced as a preview of the next week’s episode (segment 9) and encourages further viewing by audiences.

**Viewer response**

The following viewer responses are sourced from the qualitative interviews conducted for this research, outlined in Chapter Six. In accordance with this methodology, the information from these interviews is used here as personal narratives on the experience of the case study episodes. On the whole, viewer respondents commented positively on their experience of watching *Bondi Rescue*. Some respondents disclosed that they already watched the format, either as part of their weekly viewing, or inadvertently while ‘channel surfing’ or as background while doing other tasks. Other respondents were aware of the programme due to advertising but had never watched a full episode.

Initial responses on enjoyment of the case study episode varied between positive and indifferent:

“It’s nice, it’s a happy show, by the beach”

“I thought I wouldn’t like *Bondi Rescue* very much but I kind of enjoyed that. It’s kind of stupid, like the characters and the names, it’s really set up … but it was entertaining.”
“It was probably a little better than what I thought it would be, I actually enjoyed it, it made me laugh”

“Bondi Rescue, it’s not brilliant but it’s easy to watch and mildly entertaining, so it’s a good show to just have on if you’re not doing anything else”

“I personally like Bondi Rescue and watch it anyway … there’s a different requirement on you as a viewer … and I prefer the Bondi Rescue style”

“I enjoyed it because it was lighthearted, well, that episode is, other episodes can be more full-on”

“I enjoyed Bondi Rescue… the competition was good, and the human side of it”

“The storylines were interesting and the characters in Bondi Rescue were kind of interesting, they were funny blokes”

However, some viewer respondents also criticised these same elements of story and character.

“I expected it to be pretty corny … just from the ads I had seen, they have the voiceover on the ad and it’s so over the top”

“I didn’t find Bondi Rescue very interesting … I prefer to watch them rescuing people. Don’t really want to watch them doing an Ironman”

“A bit repetitive… it’s like someone is in the surf and they get them out… it’s a bit ‘beefcakey’ and the blokes aren’t that bright on it, I don’t get much from that”

“A bit disposable”

Often initial responses of enjoyment would be clarified through explanations of relevance or connection to the viewer’s own experience or knowledge. It was common for viewer respondents who commented positively to have found a personal point of significance from the programme.

“It raises awareness about beach safety and things like that… I generally like it because of the first aid content”

“I do love the sun, it makes me happy … Bondi appeals to me on those grounds”

“The competition bit: I like to see people do healthy, fit sort of things, so the competition part I found enjoyable… I think because I like games, and it was interesting to see them going hard, trying to do their best”

“It’s people’s lives they’re talking about, and you kind of care. There’s been episodes of Bondi Rescue where I’ve cried, so I get very emotional with it, I like it because of that I guess”
Similarly, it was possible for a lack of relevance to negatively affect viewers’ experience.

“I can’t relate so much to Bondi Rescue because I’ve never been involved in that, and don’t really have an interest”

“I wasn’t that excited because it didn’t relate to me. There wasn’t as much drama because I don’t care”

“I guess maybe if I was more into the world of Bondi Beach and stuff like that I might want to find out more about those guys but it doesn’t particularly appeal to me and my lifestyle. But I can easily see how you could get drawn into it and want to see how the characters go”

Respondents commented on the prominence of the narrative in the episode, particularly in the ‘mix’ of the stories. This ‘mix’ is part of the production process to be discussed later in the industry perspective.

“A series of climaxes, it was set up we’re going to have this and then these, and some rescue and someone getting their board damaged”

“Bondi Rescue kind of lulls, and ins and outs, there’s a bit of drama. It’s more like life, there’s more in and out, there’s funniness, there’s sadness, so in that way it reflects life a little bit better”

“It was so well put together, it actually from the start highlighted that there would be a big race that they have to win. And how it started out with a young guy and the old master and all that crap, but it was telling a nice little story, and a bit of characters come in and out”

“Quite nice little packages, and well structured and tight”

“It almost felt like they said in this episode we need a rescue, we’ll start it out with the young guy and the old guy, have him rescue someone then we’ll have a race with this rivalry going there and the old guy wins. I didn’t think they had rigged the race, but it just seemed like it was really choreographed the whole thing”

“It’s structured in a way, they have the jokey fun bits and the rescue bits, and it’s quite spread out so there’s a balance of all different elements in it”

One respondent noted that they preferred the narrative layout illustrated in Figure 7.1 where each story was resolved before the next was introduced.

“They just look at [stories] separately … the stories by themselves worked well, at least it’s less frustrating”

The different focus provided by the Ironman challenge was a point of comparison for those viewers who were familiar with the format.

“This one seemed to be more about the lifesavers, a little bit more about what they do, you saw them rescuing people, but it was almost like that
was a subtheme to everyone else, with the race and mucking around, and the surfboard, so it was more building their characterisation”

“With other episodes I’ve seen, they seem to do more rescuing type of things, and more interaction with people on the beach. But the competition gave that one a different focus”

“Focus more on different characters than on what they’re actually doing … It’s funny, it was never like they were just going about their job and being filmed, it was more about them being filmed and doing something specific”

Although the representation was considered to be realistic, the verisimilitude of the narrative created a talking point. One viewer acknowledged the situation to be “real enough”, but at the same time there was an awareness of the format requirements, and that it would be unlikely to show footage of “where everyone’s in between the flags and everything is good”.

“There were obviously bits of the race that were quite boring, it was just watching. They didn’t ramp it up, it didn’t feel like it was forced to be slicker… It struck a really good balance to me”

“It’s definitely edited to create that, to build a story”

“It’s trying to say this is what it is really like, but then they just do what most shows do which is choreograph little stories instead of… maybe it was a slow week, maybe nothing happened. Why not show that?”

“Bondi Rescue was OK but the editing makes it a bit dramatic, but I guess that’s what happens”

“You almost get the impression with Bondi Rescue that they’re trying to make it a bit ‘wow, what’s happening here!’ … but that’s not suspenseful at all, it’s more about comic value”

“Obviously they film a lot and then cobble it together to make a story”

Similarly, the viewer respondents described the premise and subject matter of the format in various ways.

“Just watching guys have fun, mucking around, being heroes, saving the pretty girls”

“I just wonder how they come up with new stuff for every episode, at the end of the day it’s only a beach, there is only a finite amount of things that can happen so they have to keep it going somehow to develop the story”

“Bondi Rescue is always same-same. This one had the race in it but they’re usually the same. The race was a bit more interesting”

“You need a story to entice you to watch it. I’m not going to just watch people being rescued”
The idea of a ‘story arc’ was mentioned in some interviews, where the combination of narratives and the overarching characters throughout the series provided a balance between short rescues and ongoing appeal.

“Having seen a lot of Bondi Rescue, I reckon there is a journey”

“There is a story arc that does go through them where you find out more about them … I think they’re very accessible stories”

“More story on this one than any other episode I’ve seen, where they’re just about drowning or rescues”

However, this narrative style also caused concerns in the ongoing creation of the format and how it was constructed into an episode.

“It didn’t feel like a real day in the life of a lifeguard, didn’t feel anything of what it would be like; the long hours of just sitting around doing nothing, waiting, it just didn’t have any sense of that”

“The worst side of it is probably the predictable nature of it. Sometimes they do something different, like the lifesaver race was good, it was a bit of a take on the whole saving people side … but you’ve got the tourists that don’t swim between the flags, they’re not good swimmers and they get caught in the rip, and they have to save them and that sort of stuff”

“It’s more post-production and it’s like this is what we got, how are we going to compile it to make a story?”

“A little bit more random because of whatever activities are going on, on that day, but that’s where in post-production I guess they have to decide how much banter they will have and how many rescues”

Interestingly, the mix of the narratives between rescues, lifeguard-focused stories and the Ironman race was a point of difference in viewer responses to the episode. Some found the race interesting because it provided insight into the characters of the lifeguards, while others found it boring and inconsistent with the format’s usual narratives about rescues.

Viewer respondents considered the issue of reality and the construction of the television format with particular reference to the representational style and content of the programme. While the ‘everyday’ nature of the characters and events was apparent to viewers, there were also concerns about how this subject matter was then converted into a television format. This was a particular issue in regards to the definition of reality in ‘reality TV’, and how this specific format related to that idea.

“It’s obviously very constructed, but it feels less so because there were boring bits in that show”
Those activities would happen with or without the cameras”

“It was really well constructed; you wonder how they did it because to me it looks like a script, not just said. I didn’t get the sense that they’d just filmed it and said what story can we tell? It felt like the other way around”

“It didn’t seem like it was being constructed, that was the people who are there, so that’s what they have to work with”

“A fly on the wall show, because they’re just looking at everyday life. Whether people play up to the camera is an issue, but at the end of the day you’re just watching people going about their ordinary lives”

“It kind of cheapens it because it doesn’t feel that real. Even though I’m sure, you know they were clearly rescuing those girls, and they were getting hammered by those waves, it clearly was real but it just didn’t seem to feel that real. It just seemed staged a lot of it”

“They’ve caught it as how it really would have been, not the camera is in their face and they’re acting for it”

“I have a feeling it’s scripted, it’s not, but I have that feeling; they’re creating drama. Not the actual rescues themselves but the story around it… to weave stories around these events”

“It just felt so fake, like they had tried to create this tension just for the episode … Like all the little things they had set up, I mean they set it up well, that’s kind of what I liked about it”

The presence of the camera within the ‘reality’ of the lifeguards was also an issue for viewer respondents in relation to the perceived authenticity of the format.

“Seems like when they were talking, I suppose once you stick a camera in someone’s face they’re always a bit unnatural, but it just felt like they were acting or trying to act a bit, rather than being themselves”

“I guess they aren’t pretending that there are no cameras there or anything like that; they are interviewing them”

“People play up to the camera, so it’s not really real. And I suppose people have the expectation that it is completely real, but it’s not real, the second you put a camera in front of someone it has some impact on how they act … and it’s only a couple of spots in that show that it’s pretty obvious that it’s just them, like when they got to the end of the race and they’re completely stuffed”

“They were all entertaining, they weren’t looking into the camera on purpose I don’t think, they were just sort of like the cameras weren’t there”

The presence of the production was also noted in other aspects of the episode.

“I don’t think there would have been much editing there that would change it, with the board on the rocks or stuff like that; they all have just
played out as they were. But if you look back over all the footage they would have, sure they’ve taken and snipped and edited things”

“The drama with the music on Bondi Rescue: it built up over the race to really big music to get you excited and stay on your seat. And around the edges they have all those surfing swirls and stuff like that”

“They do add to the drama in how they edit it and the music in the background. Like I noticed the music at the end of the lifesaver race, the hero music”

In particular, viewers responded to the inclusion of the narration through voiceover.

“I got the feeling that they were trying to make a story out of nothing … the events were pretty trivial or they dress it up or stretch it out too much”

“I thought the narration was really interesting, his language was really emotive and he created the drama”

“It seemed like it didn’t match, the types of words that he was using and what you were seeing, whether or not it was trying to make you think something else or create some emotion when maybe there wasn’t any”

Viewer respondents also discerned particular cultural or symbolic references within the episode in regard to the characters and the portrayal of the beach. This included the dominance of the lifeguard as a specific character type:

“all white, Anglo males”

In juxtaposition to the absence of dominant females:

“a distinct lack of women”

“I thought there would be females though, I thought there might be the classic female trying to get into the male dominated world, but there wasn’t”

“They had one [a female lifeguard] once, but I don’t know where she went”

Some viewers made reference to the Anglo-dominance of the lifeguards within the context of 2008 race riots on the Sydney beach of Cronulla, with the particular detection of a small semic detail.

“the valorization of the white, Anglo people at Bondi”

“One of the boys in Bondi Rescue has the tattoo of the Southern Cross which these days is connected with the Cronulla riots”

One respondent also found comparison to another television programme as a source of reference:
“It kind of feels like Baywatch, the same style as Baywatch. They always have a few different stories going on”

It is interesting that this reference contrasts a ‘reality’ format with a fictional drama series. The subject matter, character types and story structure are considered similar and therefore not problematic for the viewer to compare the programmes regardless of their different production styles.

A primary cultural reference for viewers was the representation of ‘Australian-ness’ within the format.

“Very Aussie, Bondi Rescue they were very Aussie”

“Extreme Aussie characters”

“Definitely that kind of heroes of Bondi and that Aussie icon … you’ve got your lifesavers who are very stereotypical Aussie, and they put it on Bondi Beach and you can’t get more Aussie than that. And then they have the mateship thing, so it’s a very Aussie show”

“It very much plays up to that perception of what being Australian is: what we do in summer, get caught in rips!”

However, some viewers found this characterisation almost excessive in its representation. This also led to questions as to the international market for the format and how it could be understood in other countries as a portrayal of Australian people and lifestyle.

“All those nicknames and how they spoke, but I guess that is how they are … It just seemed a bit ocker, a bit over the top than what I would want people seeing of Australia”

“Trying to show off the Bondi lifestyle, it almost seemed a little bit like it was just for export: Australia as Bondi Beach, and designed as much for an international audience as the local”

“They obviously sell it overseas because it is obviously quite a marketable kind of story and the characters … I reckon that show would do better overseas than here, that’s my impression, people would be more into it. It’s a huge tourist destination”

“ Seems like it would be marketed more outside of Australia, it’s presenting Australia as the whole beach culture”

There was also specific reference made to the display of the body as part of the beach culture.

“I’ve definitely seen an episode of Bondi Rescue where they zoom in on people on the beach who are attractive”
“There was a lot of eye candy, like the guys running around in Speedos…I felt a bit pervy at one stage”

“I thought there would be more focus on girls on the beach in bikinis and there wasn’t, which was good. I did expect there to be males wearing not very much which there was, which was good!”

This particular aspect of the format was expanded further with the aid of a screenshot regarding the use of the board cams, to be discussed later.

There was also a point of difference for viewers in the informative nature of the programme, outlined earlier as important for gaining the involvement of the lifeguards. While some viewers found the educational aspects part of its appeal, there were also concerns that the informative element could be lost within the dramatic representation of the subject matter.

“To show what happens and what was the problem, where are the rips and why and how to recognise that. There’s no real educational element to it”

“Always baffles me because I think there cannot be enough warning about dangers, like don’t swim there…so it can bring out the worst in people”

“It’s hard with the rescues, you think it looks serious and dangerous sometimes…but I’m sure that’s part of the whole appeal of the show, people watch to be entertained by that”

“Good if they include that [water safety] in the programme and explain to people how dangerous it is…I see a benefit to people watching that”

“An educational aspect as well. A lot of them are entertainment based, but that one is educational as well, swimming across rips and stuff like that”

“I like it because I like going to the beach so I watch it to see where are the rips and that sort of thing”

In addition to the narrative and production of the format, viewers also commented on the central characters of the lifeguards.

“Always the legends who get the people back safely, I suppose that is the purpose of the show”

“The guys are the stars and it’s just the odd victim passing through”

“Everyone is an idiot and the guys are legends”
This element of the format was often discussed as part of the engagement for viewers and their interest in the programme.

“I think why you get into this show is because you get to know the people, I think in terms of ‘reality TV’ that’s what I like, I like to see the people, and engage with the person”

“You could follow it like a sitcom and you could enjoy particular characters. You would follow it a bit more because you’d like to see what happened to them maybe, follow their journey”

“It’s [the nicknames] an element of the show that contributes to being what it is, and that familiarises them, it makes them more familiar. And you get to see more about them and how ambitious they are”

“With the recurring characters from Bondi Rescue, I could see how that would be interesting because you want to see how they go and the long arc stories might draw me back instead of the completely episodic stuff”

However, the reputation of the format was a point of concern for some viewers in how the everyday lifeguards and their actions were now being moulded into a popular form.

“They have become celebrities in their own right, those guys”

“I don’t know if making someone whose job is so important into a product is a good thing”

Viewer respondents also created links between the representation of the characters to knowledge or experience of Australian cultural stereotypes and masculinity.

“They’re just so blokey, you know Robbo and Hoppo and Maxi. I just didn’t like the whole image. They all come across like men’s men, not weak people, they want to be tough. Something about it annoyed me, there was a bit of the meathead mentality about them”

“Seemed like nice jocks … you’re not sure if it’s their true personality, they probably put it on a bit and I’m sure they could be wankers … but they seemed quite affable and typical Australian blokes, and exactly the type of people I would expect to be lifeguards. But they seemed nice enough”

“You wonder if they were names they came up with for the show, or maybe it’s a cultural thing, all lifesavers have a tag name”

“There’s a rawness in those guys … it’s a blokey show, it’s a blokey thing, so you wouldn’t expect their behavior would be too much different”

This representation made various impressions for viewers on the constructed or authentic portrayal of the characters.
“All the same … they even look similar, they’re all tanned and blonde … they all have the same personalities, and how they make fun of each other”

“I don’t think it’s showing the responsibility, or the responsible side of them, because they’re just hamming it up for the camera, and mucking around”

“Would I hang out and have a drink with them? Probably not, but they’re mildly amusing and that episode in particular was quite entertaining”

“I didn’t really like the guys very much, I just thought they were all tossers, maybe unfairly … but some of them just seemed like idiots… I just didn’t like the macho stuff very much. They didn’t seem that concerned about people, given that they are lifeguards, it seemed a secondary matter”

“Quite likeable, they are all those Aussie jocks. So they are quite lucky that there are characters like that, and using the nicknames too”

“Sounded like they were having fun, maybe putting it on a bit for the show, but you can’t really tell what they would be like in real life – they could be like that!”

In particular, these character types were discussed in terms of their portrayal of ‘Aussie blokes’ and mateship.

“They were pretty blokey, and the banter and that sort of thing, and the ocker nicknames”

“Just lighthearted banter, the sort of stuff you like to see. The thing that did pop up was the camaraderie, those little asides and banter highlights the camaraderie they have as a group. If you made it more clinical, you wouldn’t know that they work that closely together … you can see that they get on and look out for each other”

“I think the ‘matesy’ things are hilarious and how seriously they take it … I guess that sort of shows how ocker and ‘boysy’ they are, like mates, cheering each other on. That’s something quite endearing too, that mateship kind of stuff. They’re obviously a team … concerned about each other, and know each other, and appreciate each other’s strengths, but can take the piss as well and a bit of banter”

Interestingly, a different episode of Bondi Rescue was often referenced in terms of the character portrayal by viewer respondents who were regular viewers of the format. This episode was entirely focused on the discovery of a dead body off Bondi and the unfolding events where a lifeguard had to hold the corpse on the back of a jet-ski while waiting for the police.

“Really interesting, and the way the guys all supported each other and looked after each other I thought was really nice”
“I remember the episode about the dead body on Bondi Rescue. They didn’t show the dead body, but it still quite affected me, it was quite full-on. More possibly because Bondi Rescue lets you in a bit more, it also lets you feel a bit more, because I didn’t have my defenses up. I was thinking how did that happen? It turned out to be probably a suicide and I felt that that felt real”

“That was awful… And that was what was so impressive, because they all have so much fun and they all rib each other, they were such a tight support group and they knew exactly what to do … and the other guy there just kept talking to him and supporting him through it, and as soon as they came back they were just in there and supporting them”

Overall, viewers’ responses varied when asked if they would watch further episodes of Bondi Rescue.

“I have watched several episodes. I think it’s on when I’m cooking dinner … I wouldn’t go out of my way to watch it either. It would just be if it was on and there was nothing else on that was more interesting. It’s not like my ‘must see’ television viewing, but I wouldn’t mind watching it”

“I really don’t care and I don’t connect with the characters, has no relevance in my life, if I was to watch it would be because nothing else is on or I have nothing to do around the house”

“I don’t mind all those ones that are about different real jobs or people, but they’re not the ones that I’ll tape or sit down to watch; if they’re on that’s ok, if I miss three weeks and watch one it doesn’t matter”

“You wouldn’t tune in to watch the Ironman contest, you tune in to watch rescues”

“You can just sit down and watch it if you have a bit of spare time”

In particular, the contained nature of the episodes in combination with continuing characters and location influenced how respondents would choose to watch the format.

“If you miss an episode it doesn’t matter because they’re individual”

“You can dip in and out … you don’t need to watch it all to get the premise”

“We don’t watch every episode, it’s more if you catch it sort of thing. But you see the same people over and over”

“You have the same guards, but it’s new situations and scenarios so that’s what keeps an interest in it”

As outlined in the methodology for the research, a series of screen shots was used in most viewer interviews to ascertain personal meanings or signification from the
format. This particular input reflects the process of reading through the focus on a single frame to explore in more depth the production of meanings by the viewer. The series of five frames from Bondi Rescue shown below were referenced to areas such as subject matter, production techniques, narrative and characters.

![Bondi Rescue Frame 1](image)

**Figure 7.2 Bondi Rescue frame 1**

It was common for the image in Figure 7.2 to evade the notice of viewers during their interview screening. As part of the opening title sequence (segment 1), some viewers admitted they might ‘tune out’ from the detail during such familiar conventions of television programmes. Others engaged more with the detail presented in this frame as a source of discussion about particular aspects of the format, as a thematic introduction or as “branding”.

“The iconic flag image, helicopter, drama at the beach”

“I saw that too, that image of ‘2500 rescues in 1 year’, but then they don’t really ever talk about that… Obviously they do a lot, and it’s busy and hard work but you got no sense of that and how many. 2500 is a lot, but you didn’t really learn much about that”

“I don’t really remember that, and that’s funny because it’s the kind of thing I usually pick up on because I like stats and to learn stuff… It puts it into perspective I guess, what they’re doing it for and why they have created the TV show because there’s no point in doing a show where only one person is rescued a year”

“Hawaiian beach kind of thing on all their entries and exits for ads, it’s all the hibiscus flowers and jellyfish, that whole sepia tone… it’s beachy and happy, and you know that it wants to be serious about the rescues, but it’s almost as if it has to be made more palatable”

“I didn’t notice this one, I did notice they had facts in the credits about various things but I didn’t notice any detail”
Case study: Bondi Rescue

Figure 7.3 Bondi Rescue frame 2

The image in Figure 7.3 was part of a series of freeze-frames in the introduction to the Ironman challenge (segment 6) and highlighting the various character narratives involved. This particular frame signified the production of the event as well as the deliberate development of character interest for viewer respondents.

“They seemed to repeat it a lot just in case you have forgotten he always came last and had to clean the toilets. But I guess if you haven’t watched this before you could still kind of follow the show”

“He was quite nice that guy, quite jovial and a bit of a larrikin, although they all seemed larrikin-like, but it was gentle teasing. It’s funny to think of a lifeguard being last again because they’re all incredibly fit! I couldn’t do it; running in sand, swimming in the sea is really hard!”

“That setup was good. It shows the race and the competitors but with the personal battles and stories you have six points of interest in the race rather than just who is winning”

“I liked Tom because he was the underdog and he was older and you wanted to see if he was going to beat the young guys and he had a real name and a nice smile. I liked how they did that because I didn’t know the characters so it kind of introduced them and made me think about who was winning and whether Tom was going to come last and all that type of stuff. So I like how they did that”

Figure 7.4 Bondi Rescue frame 3
The image in Figure 7.4 was also part of the pre-race footage for the Ironman challenge (segment 6). The editing in this segment highlighted a number of signs that spectators on the beach were holding, although this particular quick frame caused many viewers to question the notoriety of the format and its effect on the ‘everyday’ of Bondi Beach and its lifeguards.

“You could be really cynical and think it was someone from the show holding that … they obviously have fans … a bunch of girls and a bunch of lifeguards running around half-dressed, it’s not really a big surprise”

“I thought of course they love it, with all that dark and cold, I can imagine watching that in Sweden would be a breath of fresh air, like having it on in winter here. I like that they’ve put that in, it’s saying ‘we know we’re being watched and now people are coming here from the show’”

“I remember when this was on … I presume that fans would come knowing that they are filming and wanting to get on TV … maybe they had been given them, I don’t know, I’m a bit cynical. But I remember seeing it at the time and thinking ‘what the hell?’ Like what people really write signs and go along and do that? Maybe, and from Sweden as well”

“A little plug for themselves … there are external forces, the environment is starting to change because the cameras are there”

“It’s internationally known and the lifesavers and their budgie smugglers are well known, and I’m sure there are many tourists who would have that on their list to go to Bondi”

**Figure 7.5 Bondi Rescue frame 4**

The use of the board-cams in *Bondi Rescue* was a significant element for many viewer respondents. The image in Figure 7.5 was often part of a recurring discussion in the interview as to how the action and lifeguards were captured by the production, and the subsequent use of this footage. For the case study episode, the board-cams were used in both the rescue scenes (segment 3-4) and the board paddle section of the Ironman challenge (segment 7-8).
“You got a real close-up of the people on the boards and you could see, I was really surprised like when they had the girls on the boards and that guy was facing the wrong way, it made it better in a way being right on the board. Otherwise you wouldn’t feel as close, it wouldn’t feel as real because you’re not right there. But I thought that was good, I was surprised by that. I just can’t believe that people would ever agree to be on it, like to have their image on there. I wouldn’t want to, especially those guys, they looked pathetic when they got caught in those waves”

“The girls and ‘boob-cam’! … But the board-cam was good, like during the race you could see how hard they were working … I like the board-cams, that is what you want to see, what they’re thinking or doing, what their perspective is because they’re the ones that are rescuing people”

“She’s the only one I’ve ever seen that looks quite scared. Usually they just look a bit tired or whatever, but she looked quite scared. And you appreciate how hard their job is … that makes it a bit more reality for me, actually seeing what they’re doing rather than just from the beach”

“It puts you more in the zone. It’s good, they could have chosen shots where it was more of the girl, and I thought there was definite potential to get some more lecherous shots, but I thought it was OK. You were in the zone, felt like you were experiencing it more, in the rescue and the race. I’d feel awkward trying to do your job and having a camera everywhere. They have obviously invested a lot in the programme”

“The board cameras were good, but there was something that seemed a little bit too slick about some of the production … there was one point where it didn’t seem to quite mesh up, like there had been some serious cutting. Clearly the board shots were during the rescue and there were some other shots externally like the guy crashing through the waves but they didn’t link up. So clearly at some point they have gone to get some stock footage of whoever running out into a wave, so there was the ultra realistic shots of during the rescues and then other times you weren’t sure whether it was actually happening. That’s the cynic in me”

This last viewer respondent references a production technique that is described by the producer as the only constructed element in filming the format, to be discussed later.

The final image in Figure 7.6 is taken from the preview to the next week’s episode (segment 9). This frame was situated within viewers’ experience of ‘cliff-hanger’ endings in television formats in order to entice further viewing, while the subject matter advertised also appealed to viewer interests and experiences.
“The end is quite good because you have that shark attack for interest, and even though you know it is sensationalizing, that has obviously happened so it’s interesting to see how they covered it”

“It was a hook in, a shark attack, you’d definitely watch that. It was a pretty good hook. Although I know that in the back of my mind, if you watch next week it would be just a two second segment with all the fluff and filler around it”

“They would want you to tune in again, and blood and guts, I would tune in again! … Growing up in Australia that’s a big thing … and although it doesn’t happen that often, I guess it’s enough that it has a legendary status, a shark attack. And I think people like that kind of drama, I certainly do, where there’s a bit of suspense of someone, not being hurt, but I’m one of those people who would slow down where there’s an ambulance for a sticky-beak. I guess it’s slightly macabre … it’s partly saying I’m glad that’s not me and look what can happen to people”

“The reason I might pause and watch it a little bit is because I’d seen the ads with the right fifteen seconds of the most interesting bit, I might think that’s a strange story and I might flick onto that. So the ads for next week can convince me to have a look”

Overall, the variety of responses to this episode of Bondi Rescue highlighted the extremely personal experience of the format. The combination of narratives and characters was a source of appeal for viewers, or at least made it more palatable in comparison to similar ‘reality’ formats. These responses provide an interesting insight in relation to the industry perspective of the format’s production.

Industry perspective
The interview discussion undertaken with producer Rick McPhee offered an insight into the industry’s practice for ‘factual’ formats such as Bondi Rescue. McPhee described how the idea was first brought to their attention by lifeguard Ben Davies.
who is also a producer for the programme. The year before Bondi Rescue production commenced had been a “record year on Bondi Beach” with twelve resuscitations, and the production company Cordell Jigsaw agreed with Davies’ detection of the possible drama that “Bondi just delivers” (McPhee 2009). McPhee describes Bondi Beach as a “magical content-providing location” due to its size, appeal and demographic of local and tourist patrons supplying “huge variety”. Part of the format’s success is attributed by McPhee to its appeal to younger viewers in the 8-15 year-old age bracket, which has reflected a “successful formula” that “their parents won’t mind watching as well”.

It is important to highlight that McPhee does not label Bondi Rescue as a ‘reality TV’ show. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, the ‘observational documentary’ style used in Bondi Rescue is not in keeping with the industry understanding of ‘reality TV’ as depicting a constructed situation. In filming Bondi Rescue, the production team “don’t actually change anything, [they] just follow what the lifeguards do” as they go about the everyday situations involved in their work on Bondi Beach (McPhee 2009). The filming takes place over an average three to four month period over summer, as the busiest time for the beach due to the weather conditions and patronage. The production coverage can range from one or two crews on any given day, with additional crews if the beach is busy, who are “literally waiting to see if something happens” (McPhee 2009). This is a crucial element in the ‘factual’ style of the ‘reality TV’ genre where constant presence by production crews is necessary as “you never know what’s going to happen” (McPhee 2009). McPhee notes that there would always be some footage recorded on every day, even when “nothing is happening”, which provides an opportunity for crews to record stock footage for montages to “try to use what’s happening to provide some sort of content”. All the footage from the beach is logged by the location producers and then mapped out at the production office, with “about 500 stories by the end of the series” (McPhee 2009). From this arrangement, the stories are selected for episodes and edited into rough cuts for executive approval. In this way, footage is selected on the basis of its appeal within an episode and in relation to other stories, rather than necessarily temporal continuity across the summer, and usually planned so that “there was a story of a day” in order for the episode to reflect a rounded episode
The story selection reflects the viewer responses to a narrative ‘mix’ that is consciously produced to have “a bit of humour, a bit of drama, a bit of character, a bit of human interest, to mix it up” (McPhee 2009). McPhee states that the rescue stories are essential for the production as “you have to have a rescue in a show” due to the title promise of the programme. However, even though some rescues may be highly dramatic, others can “in some ways [be] less interesting than some of the other stories”, so a balance is needed in this planning stage in order to “create a rounded episode that’s got a bit of variety in it” (McPhee 2009). This sometimes is achieved through thematic episodes that have focused on a particular event, such as the drowning episode mentioned by viewer respondents or through the combination of rescues, character, and light interest stories.

The observational style of the production resists the construction of stories for the programme. While ‘character vignettes’ were trialled in the second series, these were found unnecessary for the format, as it took the focus away from the beach where enough character information could be reflected in the interaction of the lifeguards and “how they relate to each other” while working (McPhee 2009). In addition, there are few “set up, preplanned, predetermined events” for the production, based only around busy days such as Christmas, New Year, Australia Day, and the annual lifeguard race. As a result, the production relies on a regular shadowing of lifeguards by its camera crews in order to capture the events taking place on Bondi Beach. Where this rule is slightly stretched is in regards to the recording of rescues. Crews on the beach can miss some rescues due to the lack of coverage. In the circumstance that a crew has only missed the start of a rescue, the lifeguard in question is asked to “run into the water” at a time afterwards in order to present a complete representation of the rescue that is then edited for linear coherence. This is a specific issue mentioned in the viewer responses regarding the authenticity of the footage, but McPhee argues that this is the limit to the production’s construction of the ‘everyday’ actions for the programme.
Interestingly, the presence of the camera is slowly becoming more familiar to the lifeguards so that they are more comfortable with its observation. McPhee argues that “they don’t actually forget it’s there” but have also learnt ‘presenter’s tricks’ in order to give “a full comprehensive answer to something” due to the experience gained of production requirements. In addition to the camera crews on shore, the action of Bondi Beach is also covered by small, water-proof cameras attached to the boards and an underwater camera operator. Although problematic for the production, the board-cams create more impact in rescue footage as “you get to see exactly what’s happening” and the “fear and emotions and relief” (McPhee 2009). The underwater camera operator is described by McPhee as a ‘waterman’ like the lifeguards, and from his vantage point “he sees people with the lifeguards, he can read the ocean, the people, he knows exactly what’s going on”. This has also resulted in situations where “he’s actually saved a couple of people because he’s been the closest and got out there first” (McPhee 2009). Together, the combination of cameras is a warranty of coverage across the beach for the production, as McPhee concedes there is “nothing more heartbreaking than a great rescue and no coverage” in an observation-style, ‘factual’ format.

Further essential elements of the format have been discussed by producer Ben Davies and executive producer Michael Cordell at the 2010 Australian International Documentary Conference and in various media interviews. As a source of identification for the audience, the format is described by Cordell as a celebration of the “Australian beach culture” (Poole 2010). Davies echoes this perspective in his view that “when you’ve got tanned and taut bodies involved in rescuing thousands of people on one of the world’s most famous beaches, it’s a no-brainer” in its potential ratings success (Nicholson 2008). In addition, Cordell detects that there is “much more than the dramatic events that happen on the beach” in the importance of the character “story arcs”, similar to a soap opera focus (Poole 2010). This is reflected in Davies’ perspective of Bondi Rescue as not just a “reality-based rescue series”, but also an “engaging documentary” on the lives and events of Bondi Beach (Nicholson 2008). Cordell acknowledges the particular ‘reality’ style of Bondi Rescue as a “strange dance” with the audience where the production dislikes “pretending before every ad break that someone’s about to draw their last breath” and the need to change the ‘hooks’ to include “a laugh or a nice moment” to avoid repetition (Poole 2010).
In an interview with The Age (Kalina 2008), Cordell expands on this relationship with the audience where “people smell a rat ... [if] you’re exploiting people and being untrue to what happened”. It is this balance between the observational style and its engaging qualities that Cordell describes as “storytelling” (Poole 2010).

### Analysis

Drawing together the responses from viewers and industry, there is evident variation and similarity between the experience of watching and producing Bondi Rescue. In particular, elements of narrative, character and cultural references are central to the construction and reception of the case study episode.

The industry’s perspective on the production of Bondi Rescue highlights the importance of variety for the format so that, rather than focusing solely on dramatic rescues, a more holistic depiction of both the characters and events is represented in order to create engaging television. This is particularly evident in the production choices of episode construction in terms of narrative. The role of the ‘mix’ is a deliberate strategy of which many of the viewer respondents were aware and commented on in their interview. This combination of stories within the episodes is driven by the production for narrative coherence in the appearance of the ‘story of a day’, rather than chronological continuity between events, but can also be recognised as a ‘cobbling’ together of events by viewers. The breakdown of the narrative progression for the case study reveals the structure of enigmas and their development through clinches to the various resolutions to new stasis throughout the episode, as illustrated in Figure 7.7.

From this breakdown, the three narrative strands are separately contained, each with a complete progression before the next narrative is introduced. The commercial break placement within the progression of a story thus acts as the only narrative suspension, placed within a clinch moment as an encouragement for viewers to remain with the programme during the break. While the version screened to viewer respondents had the commercial breaks removed, the exit title screen remained as a cue to its placement. Also prominent is the use of cliffhanger moments at the start and end of the episode with both acting as enticements for further viewing, for the
current and next episode. While this is an intentional production technique that viewers are also aware of, their placement and intriguing subject matter was agreeable to viewer respondents, and conformed with their television expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preview: this week</th>
<th>Cliffhanger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Opening titles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Start of the day:</th>
<th>Stasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training for Ironman challenge</td>
<td>Enigma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dangerous conditions</th>
<th>Incident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Backpacker rescue</td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls rescued off rocks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commercial break**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Surfboard ding</th>
<th>Stasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New stasis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ironman challenge</th>
<th>Stasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commercial break**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ironman challenge (cont’d)</th>
<th>Clinch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Run, swim, start of board paddle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commercial break**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ironman challenge (cont’d)</th>
<th>Clinch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>End of board paddle to race finish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preview: next week</th>
<th>Cliffhanger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Figure 7.7 Bondi Rescue enigmatic structure**

The concentration in this episode on a select group of lifeguards (outlined in Figure 7.1) suggests a direction by the production in the combination of narrative strands so that viewers are familiarised with these characters for interest throughout the episode, regardless of whether they were regular or new viewers. The representation of the lifeguards in particular drew on specific cultural and symbolic references for Australian audiences that contributed to their response to the characters and format overall. In order to examine this representation by the production in both narrative and character, as well as the possible production of meanings by viewers, a section of
the case study episode of segments 4 to 6 has been transcribed in detail and annotated using the five codes from Barthes’ *S/Z* (see Appendix C).

In addition to the broad narrative progression outlined in Figure 7.7, the micro-transcription highlights the variety of narrative clinches apparent in the episode as narrative development to stasis resolution. In particular, the start of segment 4 illustrates the ‘exposition’ clinch often used in ‘reality’ formats where the narrative has been suspended by a break and therefore is reinstated to remind the viewer of the situation that is being continued. The narration provided by the voiceover contributes to the use of clinch developments through orientation, snare or equivocation on the events taking place. Some viewer respondents found this technique to be a distraction from the footage, where the narration was seen to deliberately heighten or stretch the narrative. As a result, goals, partial or full answers are provided regularly through the actions of the lifeguards in the progression of the narrative to a new stasis. This representation indicates that the episode narrative is finely tuned by the production in order to draw out the action and interest as much as possible with the tight balance of Cordell’s view of not misleading their audience, noted above.

The micro-transcription also highlights semic and action elements that contribute to both possible cultural references and symbolism for viewers. The selection of camera shots in segments 4-6 focus on particular streams of action by the lifeguards in their rescues, joking, surfing, guidance, assistance and competition. This reflects the cultural stereotype or icon of the lifesaver that embodies “dedication, self sacrifice and humanitarianism” as well as the “free-wheeling, hedonistic surfer” (Jaggard 1997: 185) and is acknowledged by viewers and the production in *Bondi Rescue*. In addition, there are prominent actions of witness and commentary where, as part of its observational style, various characters are either portrayed as looking on or engaging with the camera to present their view of the events taking place. This also aids the narrative progression as an orientation or abstract of the situation that is privileged for the viewer. The sense of the action in the episode was also heightened for viewers through the use of board-cams, discussed earlier. Their fixed position on the front of the rescue board results in their representation of the lifeguard actions in slightly blurred vision and abrupt movement.
The semic detail of Bondi Rescue is directly related to the beach and lifeguards. The representation of the surf, sand, beach bodies and surfing all contribute to a larger notion of location based on an ideal image of Australia and lifestyle: “classless, matey, basic, natural” (Fiske, Hodge & Turner 1987: 55). This kind of beach imagery prevails in Australian media and art as an “evocation of innocence, freedom and community” in an “idyllic, open and pleasurable space” (Price 2010: 449). Viewer respondents referenced the appearance and language of the lifeguards in terms of a cultural stereotype identified with “sun-bronzed physique, the masculinity, the cult of mateship, the military associations, the hedonism and the wholesomeness of the beach” (White 1981: 157). This is apparent in Bondi Rescue through the use of nicknames, their joking nature, their rivalry, service and camaraderie within the iconic beach location of Bondi. The representation of the lifeguard characters suggests a perpetuation of these cultural ideas within the ‘reality TV’ style that simultaneously reinforces the stereotype as ‘real’ (Price 2010a). This is also linked to cultural ideas of ‘Australian-ness’ understood by viewer respondents in the traits and actions of the lifeguards, and the beach location. This representation thus reflects a symbolism beyond the apparent detail of the programme to a cultural myth of the beach. Although documenting the events and characters in an observational style, the premise of the format relies firmly on this cultural reference as a source of identification and pleasure for its viewers.

Although providing a range of responses from the viewer interviews, it was apparent that a sense of pleasure in the Bondi Rescue episode was closely linked to viewer interest or experience. The cultural myth of the beach and lifeguards was a source of identification for viewers in engaging with the format, aligning with the representation or recognising its portrayal of ‘Australian-ness’ as plaisir. However, this plaisir was also conditional on the viewers’ response to the format’s production, where interest in the narrative and its construction was reliant on its subject matter and impact. In addition, the plaisir of Bondi Rescue crosses into the realm of jouissance for some viewers in a complete immersion within the ‘world’ of the format. The connection provided by identification is thus taken a step further through viewer ‘play’ with the format through curiosity and emotion as a ‘fictive identity’. The board-cams and talking head commentaries are particular opportunities for viewers to imagine their proximity to the events and characters through the footage.
As a result, the ‘illusory everyday’ resides in this combination of cultural myth, characters and observational style as a dramatic package that provides appeal for viewers in *Bondi Rescue.*
CHAPTER EIGHT

Border Security

‘The men and women that patrol here are literally at the front line when it comes to protecting our country from drug runners, illegal immigrants and potential terrorists’
(New border for real TV 2004)

Border Security: Australia’s Front Line (Border Security hereafter) has had a dominant and at times contentious role in Australian television since its initial broadcast in October 2004. The in-house production by the Seven Network in Sydney is part of a raft of ‘factual’ programming that includes formats such as The Zoo, The Force and Airways. The format follows the work and investigations of Australian Customs, Immigration and Quarantine in air and sea ports and mail centres around the country. While the Australian programme has been successful in sales as a series to Europe and Asia, and as a licensed format to the USA, the idea is not necessarily unique to Australia. The template is referenced to a New Zealand series that gained audience interest in a late night slot (Price 2005) and then subsequently tailored in relation to various formats of similar subject matter to produce “a formula that fitted for Australia” (Marks 2009). The rhetoric in the quote above highlights the promotion and ongoing appeal of national drama that has maintained high audiences throughout its nine series to 2010.

The continuing popularity of the programme evidenced in national ratings has been a source of commentary throughout the format’s production. As early as 2005, Border Security attracted large audiences across Australia and, as a result, competed with other strong contenders across the commercial networks:

“At 7.30pm each Tuesday, upwards of two million people watch Border Security on the Seven Network and its affiliates. This is an astonishing audience for a relatively low-key, local television program. On city figures, Border Security is the third most watched program in Australia ... include regional audiences and Border Security outrates these lavishly hyped Hollywood blockbusters as well as Australian Idol, Big Brother, and everything else” (Price 2005)

As a result, Border Security is often referenced in relation to the yearly ratings ‘war’ between the Seven and Nine networks, where Seven’s specific brand of ‘factual reality’ programming is a strong contender with its competitors. This popularity also
saw media criticism latch onto dominant ideas in its content, particularly of security, xenophobia, and intrigue, where “in a terror-filled world, the program’s success illustrates the potency of tapping into people’s latent fears” (Price 2005). Simultaneously, it has been argued that its drawing power included its ‘factual’ style involving “honestly told stories about real people’s lives” that “leaves the viewer wondering if they would allow themselves to be filmed at their worst” (Meade 2005). It is precisely this combination of subject matter and style that has seen continued criticism of Border Security in television media. As the programme developed, its ongoing appeal is attributed to audience need “to be distracted and entertained” as well as “reassured that we are safe in these ‘troubled times’”, with its presence and popularity seen as a ‘barometer’ of an “increasingly cautious and xenophobic Australia” (Kalina 2006a). Its regular audience of around 2 million viewers across Australia provided a “sterling demonstration” that reflected more “the era we live in than the show’s intrinsic quality”; of resembling a “public relations exercise” as “reality TV that seeks to transform some complicated and politically loaded themes into diverting entertainment” (Middendorp 2006). This type of criticism has continued in tandem with its ongoing production (Ziffer 2006; Harvey 2006; McLean 2006; Murdoch 2006; Brady 2006; Williams 2007; Meade 2007; Meade 2009a; Vickery 2009a; Hardy 2009), highlighting the appeal to viewers of local stories that represent everyday people and situations, located within a national security ideology and heightened by dramatic action.

Additionally, it is the choice of subject matter in the work of government agencies that has been the source of specific commentary of the format. The initial production of Border Security can be seen to coincide with the immigration policy of the Howard government and the ‘alert, not alarmed’ ethos. Specifically, the production of Border Security was only possible due to the Customs, Immigration and Quarantine agencies having approval over what was broadcast, which Bob Burton argues is tantamount to being a “government-controlled” program (2007: 195). He questions this relationship and the subsequent representation in the television format of how the agencies and their work are portrayed, in addition to its popularity and content choices as a forum to help “marginalise dissenting point of view” (Burton 2007: 195-6). Alternatively, the programme is touted in an agency newsletter as continuing to “shape positive community perceptions of the work of Australian
Case study: Border Security

“Customs” (Palmer 2007: 28) and has also fuelled an overwhelming interest in employment with the different agencies (Lawrence 2008). It is this polarity of opinion, contentious subject matter and representation, and its ongoing ratings success that positions Border Security as a significant case study in Australian ‘reality TV’.

**Episode description**

The episode used for this research was broadcast on September 15 2008, with an OzTAM rating of 1.813 million viewers in Australian major cities, and a ranking of fourth in the most watched programmes that week (OzTAM 2008). Similar to the previous case study, the episode screened to viewer respondents had been recorded from television broadcast, but with the commercial breaks removed for a total runtime of 22 minutes. The episode consists of three narrative strands involving the investigation of a passenger with minimal luggage at Melbourne Airport, a passenger suspected of contravening his visa at Sydney Airport, and a suspect package at the International Mail Handling Unit. These are interwoven across the episode, and labelled ①, ② and ③ respectively in Figure 8.1. Each narrative segment highlights a select part of the whole strand, with its division reliant on a point of suspense where the narrative then shifts to another strand or commercial break before revealing the next events. This progression is in direct comparison to the previous case study in Bondi Rescue as the narratives all resist resolution until the final stages of the episode, seen in segments 10, 12 and 13 in Figure 8.1. This intertwining also necessitates the repetition of narrative information in order to reinstate the events and characters involved at each return, and linked by montage sections of quick edits and voiceover to orient and summarise the situation.

The observational style of the format is evident in the handheld camera movement between characters and the use of natural light. This footage is contrasted with the ‘talking head’ moments with the officers where they comment further on the investigation taking place. There is also a constant track of ambient music throughout the episode that rises and falls according to the narrative, and can be used as a linking device or as an emphasis to events taking place. Two preview sections are used at the start and end of the programme (segments 1 and 14) in order to draw attention to the
events that will follow and to promote the next episode respectively. This particular
episode is different to others in the format in that all three narratives resolve with a
‘guilty’ result. This is not always the case across the entire series as noted by some
viewer respondents and will be discussed later in relation to the production’s use of
‘false positive’ stories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preview: this week</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Title screen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>① Light luggage</td>
<td>Arrival to agitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>② Visa</td>
<td>Detection to interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>③ Package</td>
<td>Detection to investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>④ Light luggage</td>
<td>Agitation to police check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Commercial break</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>③ Package</td>
<td>Investigation to can opening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>② Visa</td>
<td>Interview to verification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>① Light luggage</td>
<td>Police check to outburst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Commercial break</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>② Visa</td>
<td>Verification to admission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>③ Package</td>
<td>Can opening to outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>① Light luggage</td>
<td>Outburst to search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Commercial break</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>② Visa</td>
<td>Admission to outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>① Light luggage</td>
<td>Search to outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Preview: next week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8.1 Border Security episode structure**

**Viewer response**

Viewer responses to the chosen episode of *Border Security* provided the most
contrast and debate of the four case studies. In this way, the respondents reflected the
media arguments outlined earlier in a polarised view between benefit and harm, and
are presented in this case study as narratives of their own experience of the episode,
as outlined in the research methodology. Some respondents declared that they
already were viewers of the programme, while other respondents were aware of the
format but had chosen not to watch it due to opinion or lack of interest. While this
case study emphasises those that enjoyed watching *Border Security*, the narrative of
negative experience will also be highlighted as a prominent perspective in the
interviews. This diversity of response reflects the more personal basis to the viewer
experience of ‘reality TV’ where all respondents volunteered as ‘reality TV’ viewers,
yet had very clear opinions in their viewing choices.
Viewers who responded positively to *Border Security* related to particular elements to qualify their experience.

“I found *Border Security* more interesting than enjoyable. Just some of the processes that they go through with the mail and things like that”

“I guess the stories in *Border Security* were good, I enjoyed them. I don’t have much experience with that kind of thing, so it is an interesting side of the world I don’t see”

“I like *Border Security* because it’s fun to watch and you see the bad guys getting caught”

“I enjoyed *Border Security* because it’s silly. It’s just really over the top and stupid”

“*Border Security*, it’s the drama I think, as I said during the show, I get a bit emotional for some of them. It’s a bit painful”

“I like *Border Security* because it’s one of those interest type shows, it’s not something you see every day”

“From an emotional intelligence point of view, I found that quite interesting, but I don’t know, I just found that a bit more informative and interesting and enlightening than the stereotypical cringe worthy reality TV”

“I enjoyed *Border Security* … just interested me more. I enjoy travel … it surprises me what some people try to do. I’ve got a few friends in Customs so it’s interesting to see what they do”

“I like *Border Security* because that’s real, it’s what happens every day and you actually see a job, what they do”

“I think the idea of justice being served, there’s some sort of pleasure in it, they’re doing the right thing for the country”

Some respondents expanded on these areas of interest in the experience of watching *Border Security*.

“Probably being exposed to something that you wouldn’t know anything about otherwise. Usually it only takes a couple of episodes to get a pretty good feel, after that, it doesn't change too much. But it’s good to get that different aspect of a job that’s probably a lot more interesting than an accountant or something”

“I’ve only seen it a couple of times, but I found it interesting seeing people’s reactions and people lose it at the airport staff and that sort of thing. And I was commuting at the time so it was an interesting contrast”

“To see them on the frontline dealing with some of those things and some of them had really good knowledge of the processes and systems that are used by the departments. And also they, some of them I find are
quite perceptive in reading the situation and quite open and frank in what
they thought, and that sometimes they were just making a hunch that
they believe someone is lying because of something”

“The postage stuff was interesting, but I guess that would be a pretty
boring show if it was all about postage. And not enough of the dogs, I
like the dogs at the airport. It could have had more of the dogs”

Interestingly, two formats concerning the work of detection dogs have been aired
since this viewer response, possibly due to the popularity of Border Security. Both
formats on the Seven and Nine Networks entitled Dog Squad and Send in the Dogs
respectively are screened as already-produced programmes from other territories.

Alternatively, there was a range of responses from viewers who found the experience
uncomfortable, negative or repetitive.

“I’ve gone off Border Security a bit. It’s just the same thing, there’s the
drug mule, there’s the old couple who don’t quite know about which
food you should declare, and there’s the dodgy package that gets
scanned. A few variations but it’s all pretty much the same”

“I didn’t really like the Border Security one … I found it really repetitive
and hard to watch. I felt it was just bringing out the worst, the people
watching it would start thinking the worst of those people”

“I found it really uncomfortable watching Border Security, I felt kind of
dirty. I just felt I shouldn’t be watching … I just got this negativity and it
was palpable, and this is one of the most popular shows on television”

“Border Security was sort of an uncomfortable feeling watching other
people go crazy, but that’s the most interesting bit unfortunately”

“I think it’s a really tight premise, and I don’t think it’s got more room
than ‘you’re here for the wrong purpose, we suspect you of this, or this
parcel is dodgy’, and I don’t think it has any more room to move than
that”

“I didn’t like that one at all, and I thought it explains so much about
what’s going on with popular opinion”

“I just think it’s such a dull idea for a show”

“Border Security made me feel a bit cringe”

“Just preyed on people’s emotions and took advantage of people in a
really vulnerable situation”

“I see a danger to that show … I don’t feel there’s a benefit to Border
Security”
In particular, some respondents who had a more negative response commented on the accountability of the production in creating the format.

“I want the producers to have a bit of responsibility not to appeal just to our lowest common denominator, our lowest common base, like a rabble, I don’t want television to be that kind of rabble mindset”

“I just wonder who works on Border Security, who produces it and how do they feel good about themselves? And how do they think that anything good is coming from that? But then I’m obviously coming from my own mindset about how I feel about it. But that’s how I feel about these kinds of shows, I don’t understand, it’s just a waste of resources and a waste of time”

“More and more I think about it, the producers should just be slapped around a bit and told ‘come on!’ I feel like they know what they’re doing, and they know they’re appealing to the lowest common denominator and they shouldn’t”

It is interesting that the term ‘lowest common denominator’ appears in these comments. As ‘reality TV’ viewers, these respondents are using the terminology of wider media criticism, as seen in Chapter One, as part of their argument against this particular format but do not include themselves within this category.

Regardless of whether viewers had favourable or unfavourable experiences of the episode, the theme of the format was prominent in responses.

“They’re suspicious on Border Security”

“Based all on negativity, getting people out of the country”

“Border Security seems a bit exploitative, it seems like they make a big point of scanning every piece of mail that comes in and it seems really like a propaganda type of thing, the government saying ‘we’re onto people’. It’s really serious, sort of like an ad, ‘don’t do this, be careful’”

“I guess it could potentially give you some insight into the Customs officers’ way of thinking and their mentality”

“We were looking from the perspective of at the foreigner”

“It was crossing a line, where these people have gone from normal citizen to potentially being arrested for something and that process isn’t really a public event”

Viewers often commented on the role of Border Security on television, and specifically their own classification of the format as entertainment or informative.

“Border Security I think it’s the most dumbed down, it’s not even supposed to be entertaining, it’s supposed to be informative. It comes
across as wanting to be documentary and giving you the insider view, and it’s none of those things. In fact, I think it’s a bit insulting”

“If there’s any benefit it’s teaching people that want to cheat border security, it teaches them how to do it!”

“I don’t think they should make it as, I just don’t think it should be entertainment. But it is entertaining to an extent. It’s funny in a stupid sense that I can’t really put my finger on”

“Racially profiling equals entertainment?”

“Border Security it just so caters to the … I’m not sure how to articulate it, it tries to be funny. Every episode, it always has some crazy, angry person. Always, and they always have something to hide. One I have seen, the person was just crazy and angry, but you know”

Many viewers made reference to the place of the format on a commercial network and how this affected their sense of the production, in addition to comparisons to other programmes and cultural factors.

“I’m not surprised that Border Security is Channel Seven … and when I look at the formatting and the content of shows like Today Tonight”

“It’d be really interesting to see the ABC do Border Security though. It would be a very different programme”

“It’s like commercial current affairs: it’s not current affairs, and that’s not an accurate representation, hopefully it’s not”

“It’s chicken and egg with its audiences too. I mean Seven primes that kind of thing for the audience by having things like Today Tonight”

“I think to myself what is the difference between Border Security and, say for example, if Four Corners did something on people smuggling. And I think it comes back to your balance thing, you’d hope they would be more balanced and more critical. There doesn’t seem to be a lot of criticism or trying to be objective about the situation and maybe that’s the difference. It’s not a critique of the situation; it’s an expose, because maybe the people think this is what goes on”

“Border Security is trying to do that whole Law and Order … it has that type text across the top”

“It’s all very official, and like 24 … that kind of style and it just comes across as naff”

“I’ve seen very briefly bits of the US or UK one and they are real, like smuggling people into the country and stuff like that. But with land borders you can probably have that kind of exciting border security whereas Australia is a bit more limited”

“It was almost like an advertisement for them, they never show them making mistakes or anything like that. It was all when they do their jobs successfully”
“Particularly because of our politics, and I know *Border Security* was around during John Howard time, and I know the border and boat people is an issue in Australia. And I didn’t feel that *Border Security* was in context, and I felt that if you’re going to have a show that’s so volatile, I wish you’d contextualise it a bit more, show that there’s a thousand people who are from other countries or have darker skin that don’t do anything bad. I want them to contextualise it”

The choice of subject matter for the programme and its representation encouraged several responses to its political and cultural portrayal in regards to viewers’ own opinions.

“I feel that *Border Security* is being really framed and targeted at playing on people’s fears … the demonizing of the people outside”

“How bloody typical, it’s the one from Peru that’s got the cocaine in it. Can you get any more stereotypes in this show!”

“At times I thought they were blatantly racist and I can’t believe that that can be on television. Like the package from Peru, that was all he said, and the declaration was in Spanish so he couldn’t understand it. It just made me think Australia 1940s, and I couldn’t believe that that was the case now”

“It gives you the impression that there are all these people trying to get in, and all these things getting smuggled in, no wonder there’s this sense of fear around in Australia. There’s us and we have to protect ourselves and our borders, it’s just perpetuating that idea, it makes me feel sick”

“It’s just the inherent racism behind the rhetoric of ‘we’re trying to protect our borders and these are the people that we want to keep out’”

“It’s almost to me that it tries, and it’s a funny thing to say because it’s real, but it sort of reinforces a lot of stereotypes and trying to reinforce that we’re keeping the bad people out”

“It definitely did drum up that fear and that more emotional response that people would definitely have to something like this. So the show does play its part. It’s perpetuating stereotypes and it’s causing people to think there is a problem where potentially there is no problem”

In particular, a number of viewers commented on this stereotype portrayal as a binary representation.

“To me, it’s showing that ‘us and them’ attitude”

“It felt like more on *Border Security* it was being framed, this is us versus them”

“They kept using the word ‘normal’ all the time and it got me really cranky. Is that the Anglo middle-class tourist?”
It feels like the ‘bad people’, the interviewers were all white, the ‘bad people’ are all from different racial background … in Australia there is a lot of racism and I guess that I worry it’s playing into that”

“Border Security is more about good versus evil. Occasionally you’ll get people who have made honest mistakes or you might see a Customs officer who is dealing with a really obnoxious person, so then you get attached to them, like they’re having a really hard time or this guy isn’t going to see his wife because of some stupid mistake or something like that”

Engagement with the programme was described in relation to its relevance for the individual viewer. Respondents often discussed at length their own experiences of these agencies either in Australia or other countries in relation to the episode.

“I can relate, and the people that I know that have been stopped by border security … I worry that there’s this racial thing, a racial profiling thing at the border”

“The Border Security thing, it just doesn’t interest me. Maybe I don’t feel like I need to protect myself, I don’t feel like the ‘us and them’ thing so much”

“It feeds into something that a lot of people think about, and fears as well which can be powerful. Maybe people might watch it and feel a little bit safer afterwards. I wouldn’t, I feel disgusted, but I’m not like those people. I’m not saying it’s a good or a bad thing, just that it would tap into that after spending the day hearing about scary things, I can understand why people would like that”

“I’m interested in people and I like to see how they respond to things and why they do what they do. It’s all about people so if you get a better understanding of why people respond to things as they do, for me I feel it’s slightly beneficial”

“I like to learn something and I felt on Border Security I did learn something, not that it would ever have any impact on my life”

“These guys could potentially bring in x amount of drugs which my kids could be using down the track so it mattered more, so it was more of a social issue … if they bring in those drugs they could be on our streets, that’s a current matter and something that is important to me that it doesn’t come through. If this guy who has potentially done something wrong, and he is in Australia, he could be our next door neighbor, so it relates to you a bit more, and that mattered to me more. So I was more anxious to find out what the result was”

There was particular reference to the information presented in the episode and how this could be read or used by viewers.

“If it informs someone not to do that, that might be something that would be beneficial, but it doesn’t feel like it’s helping anyone by watching it in any way. It just feels like it’s making society more suspicious by watching it”
“From watching a few episodes of Border Security, I have thought if I ever travel again I will be careful about fruit and wood and things like that, because obviously they do take it very seriously. But that’s nothing you can’t get from reading an entry card anyway”

“Today we learnt how to pack drugs more effectively; you could take it that way. You could watch them all and have a how-to list of smuggling”

“It seems like a good instruction manual of how to cheat Customs”

There were varying points of view regarding the construction of the programme. This was often framed in relation to its observational style and the idea of reality in its representation.

“Border Security doesn’t feel real to me, in a way. And I guess it is real, but it doesn’t feel real. It feels so constructed”

“Not as contrived as others”

“Very stylised reality, sort of the reality TV that’s not real”

“Everything is so obvious and it just seems silly to me; I know they’re all real workers but they seem like caricatures to me. I’m not saying it’s not realistic because in a way it seemed to me of all the shows the least choreographed in a sense ... That is clearly real people and real problems, but the way they present it is to break it down and show it in certain ways and it might be choreographed in its own way. Like they might know that that guy had a warrant because they looked at his passport, but I guess for the viewer what does that matter, it’s still interesting to watch the way they do it”

“So it’s reality because it’s showing what has happened in real life, but there’s always that need for drama... it would be awesome to be that guy who opened the can and found cocaine, but they’re not going to show him when he’s not finding those things”

The presence of the camera crew within the everyday work and locations of the government agencies raised several questions for viewers about its effect on the events taking place.

“It’s like are they more likely to take a harder line because the TV is there, or if the TV wasn’t there, would they consider things more and discuss them or whatever”

“[The activities] would go on without the camera”

“I thought that girl was trying to start something that she didn’t need to, the one with the Vietnamese man. I thought perhaps because she was on
camera she was doing things a bit differently to what she would if she was off camera. She was trying to get him to calm down and when he did she still kept going like she was trying to start something. Possibly not, but that’s how I saw it”

“I think people play up on camera because they think that if they make themselves look more hard done by, or they can manage to get a rise out of other people on the show, the audience will sympathise with them … I guess in some cases it would work in their favour but then in Border Security these people are trained to see right through that sort of thing”

“You’d like to think that it’s only a certain subsector and maybe they too play up to the camera, or behave in a certain way for the cameras. But from my experience, they’re so intrusive and because they’re in that position of supposed power, you tend to tell them a lot more and you feel intimidated even though you’re not guilty”

“Border Security, that’s probably the one that isn’t influenced as much by the cameras but I still put it in the same category as not feeling like reality … maybe that says more about the way they produce it too, so it’s not just the people in the show and whether they are being real and themselves, it’s the way they chop it up and produce it, and it doesn’t feel very real to me”

The element of the post-production editing was a strong concern for viewers in how they received the episode.

“Imagine how much footage they would have taken, and they only got three things out of it”

“Seemed to pick and choose from around the country, you’d think they’d have a lot of stories that come through. It felt a lot more like it was constructed, they could really pick what they chose out of all they filmed”

“It’s like television on crack, amp ed up … it’s constant drama”

“I think they’re well edited, they don’t seem to hang or linger on any stories for so long that you get bored. And good cutaways like when they open the can. It’s that suspense factor that keeps you hanging on, that you sit through the commercial break, to stop you from channel surfing thinking I would like to know what’s in that can”

“They do sensationalise it a bit with the way the guy opened the can, that sort of stuff is what’s it’s all about trying to create the suspense, it’s creating an interesting story that gets you in. So it’s pretty obvious what they’re doing but you still keep watching”

“In some ways, it almost misrepresents Customs in a way. Say for the guy with the cans, he would go through hundreds and hundreds of parcels and find one little thing. So they would have a lot of material to work with and cut down. There would be so many people going through the airport and they might find just one thing that’s interesting. So obviously it misrepresents Customs a bit, makes it sound as if they have
a lot more busts than they actually do. So they can be selective to show their most interesting cases”

“You think how much they do take out for the show”

“I did think for Border Security, what are we not seeing here. But I didn’t think that what we were seeing was as constructed, but it definitely had the ability to pick and choose what they put in the show”

In particular, there was an interesting contrast between viewers who were familiar or unfamiliar with the format in regards to the choice of stories within the case study episode.

“It’s been constructed in a certain way, I’ve seen other episodes of the show and that one is different in that not everyone that they show is guilty of something. This one all three of them have done the wrong thing, whereas in other ones it’s not always like that. I think that gives you a different perspective on what goes on, and this one just shows you that they’ve all done something wrong”

“There must be so many people going through there every day and they’re not going to show the people that there wasn’t anything wrong with them at all. So we’re going to see the bad, because it’s not going to make great television where a person turns out to be innocent”

A common point of response was the specific story editing involved in the episode where the stories are intertwined with elements of repetition. It is interesting to note the acceptance of this technique as usual to viewers from their knowledge and experience of similar formats that also use this particular style of narrative.

“I think with Border Security, I know it’s a bit of a slightly different environment, but when I’m watching it usually with the ads, it does get a little bit frustrating with how much they repeat. And I understand that they’re trying to catch people who only come in half way through the episode, but when you’re watching the whole thing, you do find that repetition … the dragging out, like you probably want to get to the end quicker, so it can be frustrating from that point of view”

“Border Security annoyed me when they show you the bit you want to see and then they go to an ad, but all TV shows do that, and that’s what they do to make you stay and watch the ads and come back to watch more”

“With Border Security, obviously there’s a lot of repetition, drumming in certain facts and repeating key statements. Especially that guy from Vietnam, they kept repeating the same comments over and over again, you saw him take his pants off a few times, just to portray him in a certain light”

“I do notice they replay a bit of what happened, like they replay a bit of what was shown before the ad, so you’re really not getting much TV viewing if you look at it like that. In a half-hour show if you take out all the ads and take out all the repeats, there’s probably only two minutes
that are proper viewing. But it doesn’t bug me because I know they all do it, and if they didn’t I think it would be a little boring because there’s no anticipation, and no wondering about what’s going to happen”

“I don’t like how they stretch things out; I want to know straight away. They always chop and change in Border Security and leave it just when you’re hanging, they go to something else so you’ll keep watching because you want to know what happens to the person. You want to know straight away. It frustrates you but then that’s the thing that keeps you watching as well”

“I could really dispose of the first 20 minutes of the show and not be that upset. And all that editing makes me more likely to flick through because I know there’s nothing in the middle section that I’m going to miss particularly”

“I wonder if they didn’t do it, would people switch off? It wouldn’t hook people in as much? It definitely dangles things and makes you want to find out what happens, without questions but because you’ve seen the end of the story you want to see, would you not watch?”

The narrative element within the episode was discussed at length by many respondents in regards to how they received this construction. This in particular reflects the Barthes model of reading and the various components of the enigmatic code.

“They build up suspense, to keep your attention for the next bit, because they just showed that block about the can, and by itself you’d think OK, but they keep you watching by switching between … I find the switching back and forth annoying because they replay a whole section at the start again, you think yes, yes we’ve seen that. You can see why they do it, because that’s the most interesting bit so far and now this is what is going to happen, and for the people who have just switched it on”

“The can opening, who would have thought you could be gripped by a can opening? … That definitely works for me. I am so easily hooked on things like that but that just comes back to a personal thing, some people couldn’t give a shit, but I want to know what’s in there. Maybe that’s because I’m a bit nosey. But if I start watching something I will rarely ever change the channel, I like to see it to the end I guess. The scene changes definitely make you want to see what happens next, like last night the same thing, they have that red flash on the screen so you think it’s drugs and then they change to something else. That does compel me to keep watching the episode”

“Telling you what’s coming and what’s happened all the time, there’s always something more, more, more! I don’t like that”

“I think it’s the suspense of how the story is, and how they drag it out and try to drag you towards a conclusion”

“It was all about building things up, like when they opened the can and then it goes to a break”
“By cutting to and from each story it keeps it interesting, you have to wait for the end to see the outcome of a story”

“You watch it and it’s like you see a glimpse at the start of the episode to get you hooked in and you want to find out what’s happening, and it’s like a drama unfolding … you think did they go to jail, did they get charged with anything, are they back on the street?”

“They show everything at the end anyway on Border Security, they show you what happened”

The subject matter and the narrative familiarity of Border Security was described as a formula by many viewers, and this played a significant part in their expectations in viewing the episode.

“With Border Security, you’ve seen one drug bust, you’ve seen them all”

“With the bits I’ve seen of Border Security, they always seem to have some crazy upset foreign person and always interviewing someone who may or may not be here on the right visa conditions. I guess it seems a little formulaic. It seems to be one story at the x-ray machine, one interviewing immigration story, and one Customs story; that seems to be the general formula to it. And whether after seeing two seasons worth of it you might have seen enough x-rayed box stories that you can deal with. But I did enjoy it”

“It’s all pretty much similar things, which I guess is what happens a lot in these shows. There’s no one writing a script so they generally do the same things day to day, they have a few dramas, but the focus is usually on the same kind of thing”

“With Border Security it follows a bit of a, there’s a bit of a structure that these kind of shows will roll out; the same with like the New Zealand cop one, that they have three or four things that they are talking about and they are intertwined and they build the drama, so I think it’s a bit of a classic structure”

“I’ve seen it before and that one is so similar, it has a real formula to it. I haven’t seen that many episodes, but in every one you have one difficult person who they are trying to manage who potentially could be violent, don’t know, the other guy was just placid and nice and an interesting story of why and how he was doing, and then there’s some other diversionary thing like luggage that could be dangerous, drugs or a bomb or something. Always the same, I haven’t seen that many, but enough for it to seem that way”

“It is really formulated, and even though that’s real stuff, I actually hate the way they present it. It annoys me that they can’t just tell the one story. I guess they’ve done their research, but what’s wrong with just telling the mail story from start to finish and then the other guy from start to finish? It treats you like an idiot because it jumps around and I know it’s trying to suck you into watching it because you want to find out what happens but then it tells you again who this person is and
what’s going on and treats you like you have an attention span of a few seconds, and that infuriates me”

This last response directly contrasts the industry perspective of *Border Security* audiences, to be discussed.

In particular, viewers referred to the editing style and narrative construction in their negotiation of the episode.

“It’s building up, you’re suspicious of the person from the beginning. This person is suspicious, look at the way they’re acting. And it follows through, this package is suspicious, this is why. So it slowly reveals through the whole episode to the point at the end where you find out what happens to them after. It doesn’t let up – it’s suspicious from the word go”

“Particularly when they kept coming back to that guy who was obviously, the Vietnamese man, every time they came back to that story, they kept showing him being quite aggressive and strange things. They showed that a few times; lifting his shirt, slapping the table. And that brought up to me, I could see that I was being messed with as a viewer; to not like this person, and I didn’t like that”

Some respondents commented further on their experience in regards to other production choices in *mise-en-scene* and soundtrack.

“Seems the kind of clichés, and zooming into the guy’s hands, sort of felt what are they doing? Focusing on the officer and the guy being interviewed about working, they kept focusing on their hands and interesting camera shots up close to their face. Maybe to show that he look nervous or maybe, I’d be really nervous with a camera up in my face! The music definitely as well, comes in at key points as sad or scary or whatever; really dramatic to say ‘we’ve found something on this guy!’”

“I really felt like I was having my buttons pushed on *Border Security* really obviously, the way they were looking at people, the camera angles, the way they kept showing certain things. I guess when they’re filming in there, it’s quite closed in, it’s quite suspicious by its very nature”

“I hated the text, because it made it look like a report. So it made it look like it was factual and the use of words like officer and protection and trained, just made it sound like it was based on procedural fairness, and it’s not at all”

“I don’t even know if they used music in *Border Security*, I guess they did. And they use all the typing to create that sort of clinical environment I guess you’d call it. And those target things and overlays, so they create that, they used music and that type of stuff to create the mood that they want you to feel”
“Sets up all of their people as guilty, from the way they are edited to the choice of music, the camera angles, everything. It was most obvious in that”

Discussion by respondents regarding the characters in *Border Security* focused on their representation between being ‘everyday’ and constructed into a television format.

“Like that girl dealing with that guy, I was thinking how would you deal with that every day? That’s the worst job in the world. Why would you go back and do that day after day?”

“I think that adds to them looking less professional and it may not be the case, again it might be the editing. But I kind of get the sense that it’s just, we don’t like you, we’re going to keep you here until we work out how we can get you into trouble”

“I think that’s more a voyeurs approach to it. I couldn’t say with the guys on the wrong end of Customs, they’re obviously portrayed to be the bad guys and that sort of stuff, so I didn’t really relate to them, but I was more intrigued to find out what happens to them, but not from a positive way at all. You sort of hope that justice happens in the end whether that be that they get in trouble or they are found innocent. And you’re drawn to the Customs people, and their story and supporting them and finding out how they do their work. It’s not as emotional, it’s more an interest in what they do and how it all happens, rather than an interest in their personal stories”

“We saw a lot of the Vietnamese guy because he was being so theatrical. So they focused on him because of the drama and look how ridiculous this man is and he’s obviously doing the wrong thing, or there’s something creepy about him. Whereas the other guy who was here for his family, who I kind of felt a bit sorry for, we didn’t see as much of him because he wasn’t displaying anything. So yeah, he was doing the wrong thing but it wasn’t all that TV-worthy if you know what I mean. So I think they really like to … dramatise and make people look like they’re bad people”

This was also linked to the portrayal of the characters and the effect of this representation on their engagement with the programme.

“I guess in *Border Security* you don’t have anything that involves you in the lives of the people that work there. So you weren’t seeing a nicer aspect of the people working in border security. You didn’t actually get to know them at all, everyone was depersonalised on that show. Even the dominant players were depersonalised, you didn’t get to know anyone on that show, on any level”

“It was all through the officers as mediaries … the point of *Border Security* is not to engage with the person and to go ‘get them out of my country!’ … The only people you really get to see in *Border Security* in [that] way is the Customs officials”
“There’s no opportunity for anyone in *Border Security* whatsoever for them to say what they think in this environment and people are listening to what they say. They asked the guy from Malaysia and he said something at the end, but the other guy didn’t get to say anything at the end, and I really felt like he could say much after having experienced that”

“Obviously the officers are able to say their little bits to the camera, so it’s a very one-sided commentary”

“I feel sorry sometimes for people in *Border Security*, and I feel sorry for the Customs officers as well”

“You don’t seem to learn anything about the officers, it’s just about people that present themselves and the cases. It feels like a lesson that whole show, like this is what can happen to you, this is what is happening every day, we’re watching and keeping you secure from all these bad things that are coming in. Feels like a lecture”

In particular, viewers commented on the nature of the format in representing the large agencies across Australia and the choice of characters and their portrayal.

“I don’t know in *Border Security* if you ever see the same person twice. There’s so many staff on any given day that would be the case. It’s just whoever gets the crazy people, but they seem to handle it pretty well”

“Do they have recurring officers in *Border Security*? Like is it always the same guy in the warehouse or it just depends on who gets the story? I’m not sure that the personality of the Customs staff particularly matters to the story, if they haven’t actually selected them as being the photogenic, comfortable in front of a camera people. If it is just taken from whoever is working that shift then I thought they were quite good and seem reasonably comfortable making sure it’s clear what is going on and telling their part of the story to the camera. But I don’t know whether there are some Customs officers who have opted out of being filmed entirely”

“You see whoever really. Although that doesn’t matter to me, I enjoy watching it anyway. So I think in *Border Security* it’s more each individual story that I enjoy”

“They clearly focused on some of the staff and the things they had to say, but they weren’t the key element, it was the subject matter”

The variety of responses by viewers to this episode provided diverse opinions as to whether they would continue watching the format.

“Definitely not … I wouldn’t watch *Border Security* because it would just make me feel yucky, and not in a beneficial way”

“Some nights on TV it’s just *Border Security* or variations of same on every single channel, and I’m just as likely to turn it off because it doesn’t interest me”

“Sometimes I watch it, not regularly … if nothing else is on”
“It’s not like it was something I would tune in, and not television I would normally choose to watch, but it’s certainly the type of thing while working I wouldn’t mind having on. It’s not the type of thing I would actively switch off, there is nothing that annoys me about it”

“I feel good from watching Border Security. To a sense where there’s people out there protecting the country and they’re trying to make it safe for us all. At the end of the day, you’re like check that guy, find the drugs, but it makes you feel good, they’re doing their job. Like that other show The Force, you appreciate the job they do, you appreciate what they have to put up with”

The contained nature of the show was a significant element to some respondents in their consideration of viewing Border Security.

“I do like though when I’ve seen Border Security, it has generally been when I’m flicking through and you see some crazy person and you think I could stay on this one for five minutes and see how this resolves because this person looks crazy, so I can flick through and come back to work out what is going on, but it’s not something I would watch the whole half-hour. I like to see a bit and then the resolution of the story, I don’t have to follow it the whole way through”

“I think that’s why Border Security is quite good with ratings, because people can miss an episode and there’s no affect. It doesn’t really matter … when it doesn’t matter that you didn’t watch the episode before. If you’re just flicking the channels, it’s like oh yeah, I’ll watch that”

“You could not watch the next episode and see the next one after that and it doesn’t make a different … It’s just half an hour of entertainment, you can take it or leave it”

“It’s obviously a different episode every week with people coming through the airport … it’s something interesting and stimulating than just mind-numbing. So that would be what would grab my attention. Again, I wouldn’t kick myself if I missed an episode of Border Security but if it’s on I’m happy to watch it”

“You could miss five weeks of Border Security and they’re still x-raying boxes and still crazy people so it’s kind of throw away TV which is kind of why I would be more likely to flick”

This consideration was questioned by viewers in relation to their own opinion of entertainment and value.

“You either watch shows like Border Security and that’s just pure entertainment, you might learn a little bit … well, hopefully be inspired not to smuggle drugs. So if you were thinking about doing, maybe that show might have an impact on your life. But those shows are just entertainment, which is fine”

“What it appeals to is not really nice. You don’t really learn anything, you just watch it to watch other people get in trouble … watch other people suffer”
“It’s that depersonalised, I really couldn’t get into Border Security on any level. I guess that’s how I rate a programme, I didn’t feel there was any kind of redeeming factor in me watching it”

“I have to admit it is entertaining. I found it funny, but I wouldn’t go out of my way to watch it, but it’s amusing. I just wish they told it in a linear manner rather than jumping around all over the place. I don’t know why I hate that so much but it just really annoys me”

“Even though it’s necessary, Customs that is, it’s not very pleasant to watch. We don’t have to watch it, you don’t have to put it into people’s living rooms”

“Border Security I’d watch again if it was on, and it does catch you in some of those little stories. You get intrigued”

The series of screenshots used in a majority of the interviews provided further responses as to how viewers experienced the format in more specific detail. These illustrated more symbolic readings and cultural references within the surface elements of the episode.

![Image](Figure 8.2 Border Security frame 1)

Many viewers recalled the first screenshot (Figure 8.2) clearly as the opening of the episode (segment 1). There was considerable comment on the use and content of the text in how it introduced the programme.

“That’s the start, that’s the introduction to the show. And I think that sort of starts to build some of the suspense, and the drama of how important their job is … that sort of makes it feel like there’s thousands of those things happening every day, whereas the reality is there’s thousands of instances, but we got three. So I think it is trying to build some tension and drama behind what they do. And why it’s so important that they do what they do”

“That screen, it makes them sound like war heroes or something. It’s like it’s so over the top. They’re checking parcels … they’re looking at people’s luggage. It’s their job and the only reason they do it is because they get paid”
“We don’t get to know those men and women in this show. It’s not like their lives were particularly on the line in this episode either. It’s kind of ramping it up, you know protecting Australia’s border. From who? The hoards? The ‘yellow peril’ or the ‘reds under the beds’? I don’t know, this very Australian psyche of don’t let anything in!”

“I thought what is that? And it made it feel to me, I was torn between does it make it feel like a documentary or that show 24?”

“It’s very black and stark. And I don’t like that typeface”

“‘These are their stories’, it’s like that show Law and Order”

“That’s so dramatic! That sets the scene of what can happen and I like how they use the font and how it looked like it was typing in like a report, that suits what they’re doing … so again, it’s like a bit of marketing and creating a brand out of what they’re doing. That’s kind of what I expected to see on there but I did like how the words come up where they are and who the officers are, and at the end they use that writing to show you the result of each story”

A screenshot was used to represent each of the three narrative strands in order to prompt respondents to comment further on the story as a whole or the details of the image. The frame in Figure 8.3 is taken from the light luggage strand in segment 5 and provided various triggers as to character and narrative representation as well as production choices.

Figure 8.3 Border Security frame 2

“He’s got his arms crossed, not looking at the camera, he’s pissed off obviously. He’s defensive as well, and it’s alienating. I don’t want to watch someone being defensive, you kind of think does he really want to be watched?”

“I was a bit amused by him. His antics amused me, I just chuckled at him. And you could sort of see he was dodgy, but he was putting on quite a good entertaining show, and could see from this still that he was hiding something, he’s very defensive and he’s looking away, he just looks like he’s hiding something. So that all adds to the feeling that there is something else going on here”
“I actually got a bit sick of him, because they replayed the same bits over and over again. I got a bit sick of him and I prefer to watch more emotional ones, like the visa guy … He was amusing but it was so repetitive that I thought it was enough”

“I wonder how agitated he would have been without the camera. The effect of the cameras on any of the passengers … how unobtrusive is it, this one there would be a guy with the camera walking around and he gesticulated to the camera and was interacting with it, so it might have been a bit of cause and effect on their behaviour”

“I think people necessarily behave differently when you’ve got a camera on you. It’s just human nature, you’ve got that self-consciousness, you just do behave differently. But him more so than most people, he was a bit extreme”

“His body language, it’s very much a shot of looking in on the outsider, how it’s framed. But I’d really like to know his story, we just got this one snapshot of him, no context”

Figure 8.4 Border Security frame 3

The portrayal of characters and the role of the production within the ‘everyday’ space of Immigration were prompted by the screenshot in Figure 8.4, taken from the visa strand in segment 3.

“I could tell with the Malaysian guy when he was lying, he had a different tone in his voice. I could tell when he was lying and when he said about his wife and child you could tell he wasn’t lying about that and when they were cancelling his visa you could tell he was telling the truth then as well. So I do like picking that out and being a super sleuth … And trying to tell when he was lying, it makes you feel like you’re part of the whole process, you saved the world because you got it right. I mean I don’t watch a show like this and at the end think ‘excellent, I can go to bed now, I can get on with my life’. But I suppose at the time if you get it right, you feel a bit chuffed that you know what a Customs officer knows”

“Was that a two-way mirror? Because it would be a bit intimidating talking and having a camera there. It was in the room too during the interview. They focus on him asking the questions really closely. I
wonder how that affects the interview? Do they go ‘oh just repeat that. That bit where you stuffed up and said you were working on weekends. Could you just say that again?’ (laughs) ‘We didn’t get a good angle on that one’. That looks like a police interview too. I quite liked that scene, I hope they haven’t influenced a guy’s visa getting cancelled, but that seems quite real even though the show’s quite silly and a bit dumb, that sort of interaction does feel quite real because it’s such a serious thing”

“It looks a bit like a prison. And it looks like he’s wearing one of those jumpsuits with his orange shirt. That looks like a jail. And the perspective from which we see it, we’re on the side of the interrogator”

“I think the way they’ve set up the room and stuff like that, it’s very much trying to make it look like a police drama with the investigation and the interviews. It’s all very serious and trying to take some of the outside influences away, he’s just in a room, just him, and it’s all about his story. Like how they’ve framed this shot, and set this up, it’s taken away all the outside and it’s just focusing on him … So it’s a lot more simplistic, different paced compared to the others to change it up a little bit”

The screenshot in Figure 8.5 represented the third of the narrative strands from segment 6 regarding a suspect package. Viewers commented on various aspects of the image in its detail as well as the characters and narrative overall.

“This was the cans, when I first saw this dude he looked like he was just out of school and I did think it must be a really boring job looking at that all day, scanning mail. I can’t imagine doing that all day so when you see something that would be really exciting!”

“It’s so industrial, it’s so technology … it’s kind of alienating in a way, they’re all wearing gloves, they’ve got the yellows on. It’s quite boring, whereas I can see that some people might find this interesting, they need to make the x-ray much more interesting. To me it’s really boring, it’s like oh there’s a blob on there and apparently that blob is drugs. It’s so industrial”
“That’s Bill. This was interesting because this was more fact based, and analysis, and talking about how it’s supposed to be beans, so it should look like beans all the way through it. So you sit there thinking that’s really interesting how they look at all that stuff. Not probably the most suspenseful part of it all but it was interesting. And the other one Kane, this is like where Kane brings in the expert Bill, and you can tell Kane is a bit of a junior boy here because he’s brought in Bill. So I think that added more weight to it, because they’ve got two people looking at it, rather than just one”

“I was surprised by how young they look … I guess drugs are something that we all want protection against. So you don’t mind them keeping out the drugs, as opposed to kicking out that man”

“They were really good, maybe they filmed it a couple of times, because no one delivers their lines that well. Imagine if I had to talk, even if someone was interviewing me about this with a camera now, I couldn’t say it perfectly the first time, but he delivered his lines like ‘this is the best catch I’ve ever had’. It’s really natural and easy, maybe it took a couple of takes. But in a way that doesn’t worry me as much because he’s just telling you what he’s doing, it’s not affecting the outcome or influencing what he’s doing. It’s just he’s found something and telling you about it. So maybe if he stumbled over it, it’s ok if he repeats it. As opposed to they create the situation or that sort of thing. They didn’t make a big deal about the characters, like I was saying before, they introduce them but that was it”

The use of text to resolve each narrative strand in the episode was illustrated by the final screenshot in Figure 8.6 taken from segment 13. This resolution was noted by many respondents, with comments also on the particular content of the narratives involved.

Figure 8.6 Border Security frame 5

“So that’s the ending of that story. I think it gives a bit of conclusion, I don’t know if that was the real footage of him being taken away … but it doesn’t really matter. But it gives you a bit of conclusion to it, you see that justice is being done. And it does wrap it up for you nicely, if they didn’t tell you in that screen and just said he got arrested on two charges you might think so what. So it gives you a bit of satisfaction”
“This bit at the end, it’s good that they do this sum up at the end, although then you know you don’t have to watch the whole show, you could just come back at the end if you missed some of it. But shows do that anyway, like any type of show, they wrap it up and then they leave you hanging with that extra bit at the end about what happens next week so you keep watching. So this is a very documented way of doing that and it’s quite nice because then you know what happened to them and you know they are behind bars or community-based stuff or whatever”

“I did think a 12 month community based order was an anti-climax for so much drama. He can’t have done anything that bad. But it does give you a good conclusion. And they have that for each story, like that drugs one was still under investigation. It was almost disappointing, you want to hear them say they busted a giant drug ring worth $5 billion”

“That winds up the stories really well because you are intrigued to see what happens, and it’s simple and easy and tells you what you need to know. That does too remind me of the interspliced montages of cars and planes and it’s kind of weird. Just trying to give it context I guess, but it’s really prevalent. I guess it breaks up the show a bit”

“They have that type of shot for each ending. So it’s like ‘we’ve done our job, look what we’ve done’”

Overall, the variety of responses to this episode of Border Security reflected the highly subjective process of choosing and viewing a television programme. Not only did the positive accounts illustrate the possible pleasures of viewing the format, but the negative responses also highlighted the intense engagement that can take place in viewing ‘reality TV’ programmes.

**Industry perspective**

Executive Producer of Border Security, Lyndal Marks, states that she loves factual programming because “you can’t mess with it” as opposed to “manufactured” reality formats (Meade 2009b). In a personal interview, Marks detailed the production process of Border Security in how it is filmed on location and then shaped into its broadcast form. She sees the format’s success in its “high level of production” that “gives the show interest and entertainment as well as the factual content” (Marks 2009). In order for the format to be possible, Marks emphasises the trust that is crucial between the production and the agencies involved for access. Part of this relationship is certain protocol undertaken in security checks on all crew, the presence of a staff escort whenever filming is taking place, and an arrangement where all stories must have cleared any legal proceedings, and episode approval by
the agencies. This approval process is part of an assurance that “the factual element is pure, that the information is accurate” as well as verifying that no sensitive information is broadcast (Marks 2009). It also seeks to protect individuals so that a story that has resulted in legal proceedings can not be aired until trials and appeals have been completed. In addition, signs are posted at airports to indicate the presence of the production so that “passengers aren’t going to suddenly be reacting differently” as they are aware of the possibility of a camera crew, and can indicate if they do not wish to be filmed. Crews move between locations where access is possible and negotiated with the agencies, or alternatively, the production can be advised by the agencies of possible stories unfolding or coming up so that crews can be assigned accordingly.

Marks categorises the filming of *Border Security* as a “fishing expedition” where it is possible to “get no stories in five weeks or five stories in five minutes”. In this way, *Border Security* requires the possibility for longer production periods in its budget to allow extra filming as there can be no predetermined timeline to gather enough stories for a series. As a ‘factual’ format, *Border Security* ascribes to a “fly-on-the-wall” observational style which Marks describes as ‘pure’ in its content and portrayal where timelines are not altered so that the “story starts when the passenger arrives”. Events are recorded as they “uncurl, unwrap and unravel” with no interference by production crews in that “they don’t re-record anything” and “will never ask for something to be done again” (Marks 2009). The only time Marks states this is allowed is with the individual officers in their talking head moments in order to amend ‘fluffed’ lines or where they say “something that they realise is incorrect protocol”. She states this footage is used as a “story-telling technique for the audience” also giving the officers security in avoiding breaches, and so can be more flexible. The use of these pieces by the officers is seen to offer ‘the facts’ to viewers concerning the job and expertise. The production provides consent forms in various languages and recording stops if a passenger indicates to the crew that they do not wish to be filmed. However, a story can be broadcast regardless of consent if the individual is found guilty after completing the various legal processes, which can take from “two months to two years or more” (Marks 2009).
Recording may provide ‘A’ stories of detections and busts, but can also provide ‘B’ or ‘C’ stories such as character pieces, where a passenger may act up without the possibility of illegality, or ‘false positives’, which follow an individual under suspicion but then are cleared following agency investigation. Marks believes these stories are important for the format to illustrate the process and “give validity to the stories that are for real”. Similar to the production of Bondi Rescue detailed in the previous chapter, the ‘mix’ of an episode is key to the format, however in addition to the combination of stories, this applies to their editing and weaving within the episode for Border Security. Overall, Marks categorises the format as a “mystery show” in following the events as they unfold as “a great guessing game for the audience” with narratives suspended across the programme. This is a deliberate choice by the production where the resolve of the A and B stories will happen in the “fourth segment”, and the resolve of the C story “if it’s a minor quarantine story might happen in the third segment” (Marks 2009). The inclusion of ‘false positives’ is often offset by a story involving a discovery of illegality so that “the audience feels that they’ve been rewarded for watching”, and the ‘mix’ composition ensures a “rollercoaster of emotions and a mix of people” for each episode (Marks 2009). In addition to the suspension of resolution, the editing process divides narratives at ‘reveal’ moments in order to create “cliffhangers at the end of each part of the story” in order to maintain audience interest (Marks 2009). Although acknowledged as a technique, Marks argues that this is still portraying “exactly what’s happening” as part of “trying to make the most entertaining factual show as possible”. This ‘mix’ is an element of what she terms as the ‘production value’ that also involves the inclusion of music and voiceover to add drama. Although Marks admits this can be seen as editorialising, she claims this is not problematic as “the facts are still there” but also provides a range of emotions and stories, and “therein lies the entertainment”.

Marks argues that the ‘factual’ nature of the show is not insulting its audience because the production is aware that “the audience isn’t stupid, they know they’re watching something that’s true” in Border Security. She argues that the format is thus not aligning itself to either highest or lowest common denominator; rather, they are “simply stating the facts”. She attributes the fascination with the show to “watching human nature at its worst” and the portrayal of “the anatomy of a lie”,
with the emphasis placed on the ‘reveal’ to engage audiences (Marks 2009). The emphasis therefore is on the lack of construction in its recording of the subject matter, as opposed to ‘reality’ formats that involve manufactured situations. It is this “lack of pretence” and the ordinary “stars” of the agency officers that the production believes appeals to audiences, in addition to its message of “reassurance” in uncertain times (Koch 2006).

**Analysis**

There are distinct contrasts between the perspectives of the production and the viewer respondents in relation to notions of entertainment, real, and ‘factual’. The content and style of *Border Security* is received as ‘factual’ but viewers are also aware of the nature of this representation in the ‘production value’, which Marks explains give the programme its entertainment qualities. There was no indication that viewers questioned the veracity of what was filmed by the production, with some further concerned about the ‘reality’ of what was being presented in *Border Security*. However, it was the production choices in the construction of the episode that encouraged responses as to engagement with the format. For some viewers, the combination of the ‘factual’ and entertainment elements was problematic due to personal opinions about the subject matter, while others enjoyed the format due to this representation. It is interesting that both viewers and the industry refer to each other and terms such as ‘common denominators’ in reference to this particular format. While Marks argues that *Border Security* does not insult its audience and has a wide appeal, viewer respondents directly observed the production in general to be divisive and insulting in the representation and style of the format.

The construction of the narrative in the episode provides interesting insight into the production and reception of this type of ‘reality’ format. The familiarity of the intertwined narratives by viewers reflects the formula described by Marks in the ‘mix’ and editing of stories. The enigmatic progression in Figure 8.7 illustrates the establishment of the three stories in the early part of the episode, followed by segments of various clinch developments, to a new stasis resolution in the final parts of the episode.
The deliberate clinch devices are further illustrated through the micro-transcription of segments 6 to 8 in Appendix D. The repetition of events as an orientation was a familiar technique in television formats for the viewers, who saw it as a possible source of frustration while still accepting its role as an element of the genre. This is achieved not only through the direct commentary of the voiceover, but also in quick montages of locations and related action in order to re-establish and orient the viewer between the narrative changes. The use of ‘cliffhangers’ is also considered by the production in the clinch moments of suspension where a narrative strand is delayed by a commercial break or story switch. The micro-transcription illustrates the precise timing of these suspensions as a ‘reveal’ moment in the progression of the narrative, where a can is about to be opened, the truth of a passenger’s story, or the sudden shift in mood is deferred for a period of time so that the viewer continues their interest in

Figure 8.7 Border Security enigmatic structure

The deliberate clinch devices are further illustrated through the micro-transcription of segments 6 to 8 in Appendix D. The repetition of events as an orientation was a familiar technique in television formats for the viewers, who saw it as a possible source of frustration while still accepting its role as an element of the genre. This is achieved not only through the direct commentary of the voiceover, but also in quick montages of locations and related action in order to re-establish and orient the viewer between the narrative changes. The use of ‘cliffhangers’ is also considered by the production in the clinch moments of suspension where a narrative strand is delayed by a commercial break or story switch. The micro-transcription illustrates the precise timing of these suspensions as a ‘reveal’ moment in the progression of the narrative, where a can is about to be opened, the truth of a passenger’s story, or the sudden shift in mood is deferred for a period of time so that the viewer continues their interest in

Figure 8.7 Border Security enigmatic structure

The deliberate clinch devices are further illustrated through the micro-transcription of segments 6 to 8 in Appendix D. The repetition of events as an orientation was a familiar technique in television formats for the viewers, who saw it as a possible source of frustration while still accepting its role as an element of the genre. This is achieved not only through the direct commentary of the voiceover, but also in quick montages of locations and related action in order to re-establish and orient the viewer between the narrative changes. The use of ‘cliffhangers’ is also considered by the production in the clinch moments of suspension where a narrative strand is delayed by a commercial break or story switch. The micro-transcription illustrates the precise timing of these suspensions as a ‘reveal’ moment in the progression of the narrative, where a can is about to be opened, the truth of a passenger’s story, or the sudden shift in mood is deferred for a period of time so that the viewer continues their interest in
the narrative development and resolution. It appears that this style of narrative is more influential in viewer engagement than the characters portrayed where appreciation was common however there was little meaningful connection described, possibly due to the lack of reoccurrence or context across the series. The characters therefore are more important in relation to the progression of the narrative with specific actions of investigation and insight that invites viewers into, and divulges the detail of, these situations.

These dominant actions, in combination with semic and referential readings, can be seen to result in viewers’ overall symbolic responses to Border Security. Ideas of authority, suspicion and division were described in relation to details involved on the screen and in reference to viewers’ own knowledge or experiences. The notable detail of officer titles with first name only in captions balances familiarity with position. In addition, locations, uniforms and language all serve to emphasise the authenticity of this portrayal as an ‘ordinary’ world and highlights the status of the officials in their processes and knowledge. This portrayal was juxtaposed with the subject of their investigations, and thus often received as a binary relationship of ‘us and them’ specifically related by viewers to camera framing and narrative choices. The progression of the narratives through detection, investigation, insight, evidence and resolution promoted a theme of suspicion to viewers, who either refused the portrayal as a negative response, or incorporated it as part of their interest in the format.

It is specifically this question of ‘buy-in’ that contributes to viewer responses of Border Security as a positive or negative experience. The plaisir of the episode resides in viewer acceptance of its representation of the ordinary work and people of the government agencies, and the subsequent ideology represented in its portrayal of border security. The ‘reassurance’ of the episode is a pleasure that viewers expressed in seeing the result of these measures in a familiar narrative form, simultaneously reinforcing political and cultural values of protection. An element of schadenfreude can also be identified in the pleasure in watching others’ misfortune (Spears and Leach 2004: 338). Here the entertainment stems from the idea of these events happening to ‘them’ on screen and not ‘us’ watching. As the stories play out, viewers are guided to follow the deviance or simplicity of those under investigation and can
Case study: Border Security

observe the passenger’s possible humiliation, cunning or naivety, safe in their distance as a spectator through television. The disparity of viewer responses illustrates an interesting element in the jouissance of Border Security. While this bodily pleasure can be identified in the ‘fictive identity’ that viewers describe in taking part in the unravelling mystery of the investigations and the proximity to an unknown ‘world’ in their everyday, the potency of the negative responses suggests an anti-jouissance. Viewer experiences of disgust, sickness and discomfort suggest a bodily revulsion to the format and an immersion in the episode regardless of pleasure. The ‘illusory everyday’ is therefore located in this combination of authenticity and construction in the ‘factual’ style of the series that is crucial to viewer engagement with its representation.
Family Footsteps

“Scores of people have already applied for only four chances to be part of a trading places-style ABC documentary series that would see ordinary people dropped into bizarre fish-out-of-water situations” (Bradley 2006a)

Family Footsteps poses interesting questions about ‘reality TV’ in comparison to the two previous case studies. Although described in the quote above as a documentary series, the programme’s style and construction reflect the amoebic nature of the ‘reality’ genre. The premise of the format creates a cultural experience for young Australians through travel to their migrant family’s homeland. The participant lives as a ‘local’ for two weeks with the help of a mentor and host family in order to experience what their life might have been like if their own family had remained there. Participants travelled to Ghana, Cambodia, Peru, India, Egypt, Armenia, Tonga and Uganda. Independent production company December Films produced two series of four episodes for ABC broadcast in 2006 and 2008, with later repeats on cable television. Although it is not as high rating as the previous case study formats, it was considered successful for the ABC where the initial series “pulled solid ratings” at a time when ABC documentary and factual programming “were shining lights in a poor ratings year” (Meade 2006).

Commentary about the format swung between labels as “the best kind of reality TV” (Devlyn 2008a) and a “unique television documentary series” (Being a multicultural city 2007). The use of ordinary people as participants within an unusual situation reflected the construction normally considered as ‘reality TV’ but without the “exploitation or ritual humiliation” of other formats (Devlyn 2008a). Instead, the contained “physical, emotional and spiritual journey” of the ‘sliding door’ experience (Englund 2006) provided “vitality, richness and originality” to the genre in a style “best described as an observational documentary” (Bradley 2006b). The format is argued as “particularly apt for Australian viewers” (Schwartz 2008) because of the high proportion of migration within the population, and also because the breaking points are “recognisable to any world traveller as a combination of jetlag, exhaustion, homesickness and culture shock” (Dwyer 2006). These “inner as well as literal
journeys” in combination with engaging participants were critiqued as producing an “intriguing, surprising series” (Bellman 2006a) with both entertaining and informative qualities.

The initial media coverage surrounding the format doubled as publicity, in its promise of a “riveting exploration” of cultures (Devlyn 2006), and a participant call in seeking individuals who “must have either been born in Australia of migrant parents or came to Australia when they were very young and have never been back to their parents’ homeland” (Being a multicultural city 2007; Bradley 2006a; Devlyn 2006; Reality TV plays migration what-if 2006). The relative success of the first series in 2006 saw thousands respond to casting calls for the second series in 2008 (Schwartz 2008). However, the participants for the format were carefully chosen by the production company in order to reflect diverse and unfamiliar territories and engaging stories, to be discussed later, and it would appear that these choices were essential to its general response as an intriguing series (Mascarenhas 2006). The participant as the central character in the “journeys of discovery” undertakes a complete dislocation that highlights the “blurred lines between cultural and personal identity” (Dwyer 2006). Comparisons were made with the popular genealogy series Who Do You Think You Are, screened in Australia on SBS (Newsome 2007), and local papers also picked up on the personal stories of residents who were selected (David 2006, Darwin mum 2007). Interestingly, the duration of the format in hour-long episodes and the limitations of a two-week shoot for the participant were seen as drawbacks to the potential of the series (Mascarenhas 2006, Elsworth 2006) and these were also common threads in the viewer respondent criticism. It is the combination of the amoebic genre style and centrality of journey and character within a public service broadcast remit that makes Family Footsteps a significant case study within Australian ‘reality TV’, as a relatively unknown but engaging format.

**Episode description**

The episode for this case study was first broadcast on September 11 2008 on the ABC. Although ranked well below the highest rating programmes of that week at 97th, this particular episode had an audience rating of 654,000 viewers (Knowfirst
2008). The version screened to viewer respondents had been recorded from the ABC broadcast, with no commercial breaks within the programme and a total runtime of 52 minutes. The episode focuses solely on the ‘journey’ of its central character, Laetitia, who is from Darwin and half-Tongan. The episode represents her experience in Tonga and subsequent return home as divided in Figure 9.1.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Preview/Titles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Packing/Arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘Challenge’ performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Return/Debrief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 9.1 Family Footsteps episode structure**

This narrative structure has similarities to elements of Propp’s morphology (1968) or Campbell’s ‘monomyth’ (1993), described in Chapter Three, as a ‘quest’ progression that follows “the adventure of the hero” through its various stages of call, trial and return (Campbell 1993: 35). This ‘journey’ format as a familiar contained narrative arc is easily recognised by viewer respondents as a common element in ‘reality’ formats to the point of cliché, to be outlined later. Laetitia’s personality and reasons for travelling to Tonga are established in the introduction (segment 2) in juxtaposition to the culture of Tonga and character of Kasa, her Tongan mentor. The development of the episode (segment 4) follows the various duties, rituals and values that Laetitia encounters as she lives with her host family and the introduction of a personal challenge of a Tongan dance. This dance becomes the climax to the episode in her ability to master the choreography and perform in front of the community and her extended family (segment 5). The episode resolves with her return to Darwin and a ‘debrief’ with her mother about her experience (segment 6) and an epilogue of her later reflections (segment 7).
This structure is framed through an observational style as ‘fly-on-the-wall’ for the appearance of minimal interference on the events taking place. However, there are two production elements that are common across episodes; the limitation of what participants can take on their trip, and the cultural ‘challenge’ that the participant must perform, such as cooking or dancing. In this way, the participant is seen to be immersed in the life of their mentor with a final performance to reflect their cultural experience. In this episode, Laetitia is positioned as the central concern of the story through the use of ‘talking-head’ moments throughout the episode where she verbalises her thoughts of her experience. Some of these monologues may also be used as voiceover, in addition to an omniscient narrator who guides the story and explains cultural information. There is also use of music through either the ‘world-music’ style theme or music from the episode’s culture as an evocative soundtrack.

**Viewer response**

The majority of the viewer respondents in this research were not aware of and/or had never watched *Family Footsteps* prior to their interview viewing. This is not an issue for the research as participants responded to the format as self-confessed ‘reality TV’ viewers and therefore were describing their own perspectives on the experience of watching the programme, as outlined in the methodology.

Overall, respondents described *Family Footsteps* as an enjoyable and interesting format.

“I really like *Family Footsteps* … I had seen it before, I think that was the only one from that series I’ve watched”

“Interesting, I think, and it had bits of humour which was nice, and bits that were touching and sentimental”

“It was nice and I thought it was respectfully done”

“It was interesting, and I like the longer element to it”

“I liked in *Family Footsteps* seeing where she was from and the information, seeing her family, seeing how it turned out, seeing what she did to honour the family, learning about different traditions. I liked all of that one and I really had to stop myself from crying. That was really nice and very special. Was that an hour? It didn’t seem it”
Respondents compared this informative element to genre conventions of documentary.

“Didn’t seem as much like a reality TV show … more documentary”

“I particularly found *Family Footsteps* more informative and more of a documentary in the way it was presented and you learn about Tongan culture and what they do on a day-to-day basis, and obviously following her as she retraces the family and the way of life and trying to imagine how things would be if the family had stayed there”

*Family Footsteps* was a bit more engaging mentally”

“It was interesting about Tonga, it taught you a bit about it, it was more of a documentary style, so I enjoyed it, but I got a bit bored with her story”

“It felt more documentary style because you’re actually learning something and it’s an unfamiliar scenario and you are learning about their lives or whatever”

“To me, that’s more documentary than reality TV. I wouldn’t see that as a guilty pleasure”

Some viewers described how they enjoyed the focus on a different culture.

“It was about the culture. I really enjoy that, I think some reality TV has a bit of a tendency to be mind-numbing … but *Family Footsteps* I particularly enjoyed because I think there’s real learning in it and for me it’s interesting”

“To see that the whole community still wears their traditional dress, and you look at our lifestyle and think wow, we are so removed from that. And everything matters … It was very family oriented, they did everything together I liked that. And I liked seeing how they made her special in the community, and they involved her in everything”

“I really liked seeing all the hierarchy of Tongan life and the different things. I found that really fascinating”

“It was a nice kind of show, all the invisible codes they had, like at the dinner table, I thought wow, I was wondering how that happened in that society. I guess it’s anthropological thinking, how that’s going on”

“It was interesting learning about Tonga because I know nothing about it. I didn’t even know where it was situated near Australia. So it was interesting learning about that culture”

In particular, some respondents situated the format within larger themes of Australian multi-culturalism and migration.

“I like *Family Footsteps*, I thought that was really good, particularly in Australia. There’s a lot of people that come from somewhere else and don’t have that connection back to where they’ve come from”
“I think it’s quite an interesting programme for multi-cultural Australia, it’s quite interesting because we all come from somewhere else and to see where; it’s nice to see how much she really liked it and got out of it”

“Family Footsteps I liked more than I thought I would. The format for that was good, yeah, I liked it and I liked her story in that … the Australian was in a very different position in that one, so I really liked the Australian as other in that culture”

As many respondents had no prior knowledge of the format, there were several comparisons made to other programmes and its location as an ABC broadcast as part of viewer expectations or observations.

“I thought it [would be] like that Find My Family thing, where they find their long lost relatives”

“Family Footsteps is less about ratings and more about the ABC culture which is more to inform and educate the public, I don’t know. I find those kind of programmes a bit more worthwhile”

“Can you imagine if Channel Ten did it? It would be like Wife Swap. It’d be absolutely disrespectful”

“Family Footsteps reminded me of Australian Story. I really felt a similarity there”

“I expected it to be like a similar programme about family history, there were similarities. I didn’t know much about it … I was thinking more along the lines of that other one, I thought it would be more about going to see her family. Not so much living with another family and actually living their life”

“I would compare it more to that other one they do, Who Do You Think You Are. It’s much more the style, much more engaging in that other culture, but it feels like an ABC semi-documentary than a reality TV show”

This common comparison to documentary is an interesting feature to viewer responses and will be discussed further in the analysis section.

Some respondents used the term ‘journey’ in relation to the narrative of the episode.

“She’s taking us on a journey”

“I hate to use the term journey. It’s such a cliché term now in reality TV. I hate it when they say that”

“I got the feeling that it’s a bit more of a journey, it could have been a scripted journey, but it appeared more natural, but it’s not natural at all, but that’s just the feeling of it. I’m a sucker for a journey”

“It wasn’t about a build up, it was more about everything that happened along the way”
“I quite liked the journey, the whole process”

Viewers commented on the representation of the story as part of their engagement in relation to the format and its content.

“Very honest in its depiction of things, it showed everything”

“There was probably a lot more content to play with, and it’s a longer show”

“I felt like you did get an insight into what day-to-day life would be like, which I don’t think some other shows can do”

“Trying to engulf them in the culture then. It was OK, but it just seemed a bit drawn out”

“Actually living what they do every day, and it was funny that she thought that she could cope with it if she moved back there, because I don’t think she would. It would be different as a special honoured guest as opposed to what she actually is, which is bottom of the family by the looks of it. So that was a funny bit”

“Actually live their life, I think that’s so much more important than if you just went to Tonga for a holiday, there’s no way she would have seen all that, the real Tonga. She would have seen the five star accommodation Tonga, and she wouldn’t have learnt about what her mum did, and her grandparents, and it was nice she got to see her granddad, and where he was buried. That was a sad bit, there were so many, with her sister”

Commentary on the episode duration was a specific element of one viewer’s response in their engagement with the narrative.

“If I think about it, it took me till about halfway through to really be interested. So I think something like Australian Story where it is shorter, it tends to grab me straight off the bat, and it feels much more genuine. So I felt the second part of it for me was more, you started to see how she felt and was reacting and tearing up, whereas the first bit was just setting it all up. It’s incredible how you can just dismiss something”

Viewer engagement also extended into specific aspects of the narrative in terms of the culture of Tonga portrayed or as questions of the episode where viewers sought more information.

“To me, it’s just showing me something that happens that I might not get to see otherwise and see how, because it’s quite fascinating, how do you react when you go back”

“I was thinking I wish they’d gone into some things a bit more, or it would be nice if it kept going and you saw the mother go over there and a whole family reunion or something. That had me wanting a bit more, but again that was an interest to me so I wanted to see more”
“A lot of unanswered questions. Like why did her mum never go back? Or why has she never gone back? … I got the sense that she didn’t want her to go back, like she was worried. And I would really love to know watching that, whether she thinks it’s an accurate portrayal of her time there. I would be interested in that sense of how much they show”

“I thought with *Family Footsteps*, right at the end, I thought I wonder if they’ll have a bit at the end, where they go back and visit later on, because I would be interested to see how she was after that experience, when she’s had a bit more time to reflect on how it all went. But I did like how they waited a little while and now she was engaged and how things had changed”

The documentary style acknowledged by many respondents divided opinions as to the authenticity or construction of the episode. Some commented they thought the representation had minimal influence by the production.

“I suppose I could see straight away it was the ABC so you think it’s going to be different to the kind of show where they send naughty kids to other countries, you know like sensationalising, where you try to get conflict… it didn’t try to derive conflict, it was just generating more a personal learning experience for her”

“I liked the way, the camera was very, and the programme was seemingly, other than giving her one backpack at the beginning of it, it didn’t really impact on her journey, they probably were but it didn’t feel like they were pacing the story I guess. Of course they were in the background but it was natural and much more you didn’t feel they were pushing the story”

“You kind of trust it more. You know it hasn’t been edited to make you feel a certain way. There’s no dramatic music, it’s just pleasant”

“I got a lot more of that genuineness in *Family Footsteps*”

“That would kind of happen if the cameras weren’t there … she said she’d always planned to go with her sister and most people I know who have come from other countries do plan to go back”

“It just seemed to flow with *Family Footsteps*; there were no ads, no repeating what just happened which is annoying. It just seemed to all flow through. You didn’t really know what day it was except for Sunday because of church. There was nothing over the top, no embellishments, no words down the bottom to distract you, it was just how it is, which was really good. It was like a mini-documentary”

“It was almost like they facilitated her to go home and see her family and were a fly-on-the-wall a little bit more”

“While it was contrived, it almost wasn’t forced. Like maybe some of the other ones where it’s a situation, they don’t engineer it but you know what’s going to happen. This one she is put in a situation and however it turns out, it actually does turn out”
Alternatively, other respondents were aware of the production premise and techniques that constructed the situations and episode narrative.

“It was probably still quite staged, it’s a TV show, although they’re not scripted they’ve obviously got a guide on how things need to be”

“It’s pre-designed, the story is there”

“She would not have gone to Tonga and met that family and done that dance without the TV show”

“Taking someone to something that isn’t a real part of their normal life, it’s setting it up”

“I see documentaries as quite different, this kind of blurs it a bit too much for my liking”

“They kind of manipulated it a bit and set up the situation”

“It was all quite staged, they had a standard template there, so you meet the people first and the family. And again they would have selected her because the portrayal was she was very much into flaunting the rules, and so going back to a traditional way of life and had to get up early and abide by dress standards … So they would have tried to create that contrast and tension ultimately, but each of the stages, so there was that and then she got used to the way of life and then you have the uncle and her family and the contrast with her sister, and she had the dance and then reflecting that back to her mum at the end”

“I got the feeling in *Family Footsteps* that they tried to create a situation that there could be controversy or issues and you saw how she overcame those problems and issues, so that was entertaining. Those awkward parts were entertaining”

“I guess they have to create things for them to do and tell them, but to me it takes away from it… It just seemed so many times in that, there were these things that they had created clearly for the show, the producers had worked it out and talked to the family and asked them to do things. There’s nothing wrong with that, but why pretend it’s not like that?”

“You know the whole thing was edited to make it run really smoothly … I guess it’s the overall finished product. I don’t think they misrepresented that girl on *Family Footsteps*, I think they gave a fairly honest perspective of her journey through a very short time in a foreign environment”

“I’m sure if I thought about it I’d think it was interesting that there was a dance at the end and build up to something, all that stuff I could tell. But at the same time it was quite a nice journey and it was quite nicely done”

“They showed you all the good parts of her experience, and you don’t know maybe she had struggles, and maybe bits where she really missed her kids. You don’t really hear about it all, it was more about what a good experience she had”
“I was more interested in Tonga and the people and the customs, and to me it clearly tried to weave her into all of that, quite deliberately so it could tell you about the place, which was good, I thought it was interesting but in the end I would have preferred if it was a documentary rather than trying to have all this tension around her dancing. It was a bit over the top”

Some viewers commented directly on how they felt the episode and format had been constructed for television.

“I just found the whole premise that she was going to insult everyone and that was the big worry a bit annoying. It just felt a bit contrived, like they were trying to create, and it felt like she was being put up to do these things, like talk to the family and say let’s make up lots of stuff that she can do. I don’t think with a foreign guest they would make them wait on the nobility, but I don’t know anything about Tonga. All those things seemed a bit contrived, and it would have been more interesting if she had just went and saw what life was like, I don’t know, I’m just anti-reality where they create stuff. There was that really strange bit where it was almost like a Survivor episode where they said she could only use their backpack. That was the only bit where they directly and quite obviously interfered with it. I’m sure they produced a lot of it, but I thought where’s that come from? I thought that was really strange, obviously trying to get her to pack inappropriate clothes or something. It was a bit weird”

“Not that it was contrived, but it’s still an unrealistic situation when it’s such a short period of time, so you wonder that they get introduced into the different culture but what it can actually achieve in that period of time? Whether or not the situation is actually representative of what could happen or would happen in real life, maybe if they made it a bit longer, as the mum said the honeymoon period would be over in a month and that’s true, what would happen if you stayed there for a year and everyone stopped being so nice about being from Australia and not knowing about how things work. That would have been interesting, but I guess it’s more of a show about just the initial differences of that time”

Responses regarding the elements of the backpack and the dance will be expanded on later in relation to screenshots from the episode.

Viewers provided much detail about the portrayal of the central character Laetitia and her experiences.

“It was interesting how she felt she didn’t fit in here, she wanted to see if she fitted somewhere else, if you’ve got the two things competing. And I guess it says something about Australia, are we cohesive enough?"

“You got a sense that she got something out of it, she developed and learnt something”

“She was a little bit, I don’t know, I felt like the rules weren’t as, they didn’t go into a lot of details of the rules but it didn’t seem like they
were that scary or constantly worrying if you’d done something wrong, maybe they chopped it up a bit”

“I think they tried to give you a glimpse of who she was, like with the introduction gave you some background to her life and then her interacting and getting ready, maybe that was a bit of her personality as strong-willed and doesn’t like to take orders, maybe that was just building the tension but it was trying to show a bit of her character. And then as it changed, or didn’t change as the case may be. It sort of did at the end, she was still as stubborn, but it was very different to how she would have acted in Tonga. But you do feel that with the one-on-one, or the comments she made to the camera that was probably the best insights into how she was thinking at the time”

“I thought she’d not fit in as much as she did, like she would be more confrontational and not accepting things, but she seemed to go OK”

“I think she was just being herself, but then you don’t know … she was pretty normal, she was doing her thing, but I didn’t like the way it influenced it”

“I thought there was no way that she was going to be able to survive, I thought she would really struggle with having a particular place and there being hierarchy and rules. But in the time that she was there at least … she didn’t seem to struggle as much, but I wonder how she would go all the time”

Viewers described their experience of the central character as identification.

“It would be interesting in other ones, but it’s highly dependent on the person. If I identify with the person and how open they are with their experience and things like that”

“I guess it took me a little bit longer to warm to her because I thought she was being really rude to her mum”

“They chose a good subject so it was easy to have a connection with her”

“It really focused on her and pulled you to her and didn’t distract you or take you to any other relationships”

“You could identify with the character … you saw the whole reason she was going, what she got out of it all, and to see if she was emotionally changed at the end”

“She was just nice, and she was from Darwin, so I thought I just want to go back there! But if she was from Broome and she was going to China, neither of those have any relation to my life, so maybe it wouldn’t have been as interesting. But she was a nice person, and she was really trying, and it was interesting to see how when she first got there, she only had that short skirt and that wasn’t right, even after her mum had told her. And her mum was so funny”
The use of ‘ordinary’ people in the format provided a point of argument for some respondents as to how they engaged with the characters and the production choices.

“I think there was like with *Family Footsteps*, you can sometimes capture a raw honesty that I don’t think you can recreate through actors. Maybe it’s just because I know it’s reality and a real person, but if I was watching a TV show, say *Packed to the Rafters*, I don’t think I’d be sitting there hoping it all turns out alright for them as much as I would with a reality TV show. Maybe it’s just you pick up on that rawness and honesty of the emotion or it might be the fact that it is, you know, reality television, so it’s a real person and not an actor”

“You would expect for her to make *faux pas* and you don’t really care if an ordinary person does that”

“I think there’s a bit of untrained-ness about the general public, and they will blurt out things, and I think that’s part of the entertainment”

“She [Laetitia] would have approached them [the production] I’m guessing. They would have said we’re doing this show and apply. And they would pick the certain personality types that would fit the show I guess”

This last viewer response details a specific production technique in casting to be discussed further.

When asked whether they would want to watch more episodes from the format, viewer responses varied between issues of the content and programme duration.

“I felt like I could take out of it what I wanted and be critical”

“Even though I found the subject matter interesting, because of the long winded nature of it, I’d be less inclined to watch it”

*Family Footsteps* I’d watch that, but it makes me cry too much. [It] would be the lower end, like the nicer end of reality TV for me”

*Family Footsteps* we’d maybe watch it if was on … because it’s kind of something I would tend to watch”

*Family Footsteps* was pretty long, that felt like a long episode”

“I’d like to see some other ones, I still don’t know that much about Tonga, but at least it was nice to see the clothing and some of the different traditions that they had, like the pig as an offering and they were very traditional in their religious beliefs, and how conservative they were… I would watch some other episodes I think, see some other countries and different cultures”

“That’s definitely a show I’d like to watch again. Really enjoyed seeing the journey and finding out how she went and seeing how she changed and what her perceptions were before she went, and I felt bad for her when she did things wrong. It was really nice and special. A nice story”
These responses were often qualified by a sense of relevance and interest from the episode in relation to viewers’ own lives.

“One of my best friends is half-Tongan, so I remember thinking I need to watch that to have a look, so see about Tonga. And she goes back there sometimes, so it was good about the dancing and the food, all that stuff was really good”

“We’d had couchsurfers who had been in Tonga and they spoke about a lot of that stuff, so it was actually interesting to see it play out”

“I don’t think I would have related to it as much if I hadn’t been to Vanuatu. But they’re so similar and that’s the only reason why I could see some of their traditions, and houses and everything that they did. And the land and the lifestyle was so similar to Vanuatu and very similar with the family as well, and how they rank people”

“I like travelling so that’s possibly why … because it’s learning about a different culture”

“I’m more used to that environment where you have seniority purely on the fact that you are older. You do what someone says almost regardless, you just do it. So I didn’t find it different so much”

In particular, some respondents commented on their own background and applied the format experience to their own life.

“Everyone has a past of where they’re from. It would be nice if everyone got to do that, to go back to where their family is from. I’d love to go back to Malta and England and Africa and see where mum grew up, and where she went to school and how she used to climb trees to get coconuts and paw paws and mangoes and stuff like that. I’ve often thought that, how nice it would be to do that type of thing. It would be nice to do your own little journey with your own family”

“I found it interesting because it was a totally different culture but also a little bit similar to my background I guess. So like the hierarchical, everyone has their place, is a bit like Chinese culture”

“I went to Scotland and that was interesting to me because I saw the little towns where my family was from, this little two house town in the middle of Scotland and I thought I know why they came to Australia. This place must have been awful in the winter! It was winter when I was over there and I was thinking that might have made a six-month boat trip to Australia seem alright”

These aspects of premise and interest were highly important to viewers as to their engagement with the format.

“I always wonder what it would be like to be 1st generation and I always think that must be really difficult so it was interesting to see”
“It was more enjoyable … you learn a bit more about things, I think, watching that style rather than watching people who basically I think just want their fifteen minutes of fame”

“I think the key to reality television is for it to be relatable. Even though we’re not from Tonga, you can imagine yourself being put in that context, a daunting other culture and not knowing what to do”

“Maybe if it was going to a place I was interested in, because I liked learning about Tonga, that was fascinating, but it was just too drawn out, and she wasn’t that interesting because of that focus on the insults”

In particular, some viewers commented on the connection they made with the episode and its central character, and how this affected their engagement.

“I cried when she was at the grave, it was really sad. So it was more real I guess”

“The fact that it was a story about a real person and it wasn’t dramatised, it was just real and what she did, and it showed the bad things, and what she did wrong and how she felt about it, and how the family reacted and how she was really conscious not to offend anyone. And she wanted to fit in at home in Australia or in Tonga. It was really hard not to cry, but it was good though”

“It’s funny when you watch these shows, or absolutely anything on television for me, the reason why I cry a lot in films is that I tend to attach myself, or relate or think about something about myself in there or an experience. I suppose I watch that and I think she seemed really accepting of it, but I wanted to know more about what she thought of the hierarchy and the way it all worked”

“She seemed like a really open person which made it easy to get a sense of that. It did pull your heartstrings a bit, like when she didn’t want to say goodbye and she was a bit torn”

“I think I’m one of those people, I can get so drawn into things, whether it’s a film or whatever, sometimes I feel like I’m in it. There’s a real honesty in what was going on, obviously it’s been made for television, but you could see some of that raw honesty”

The screenshots for Family Footsteps used in a majority of the interviews provided further detailed responses from viewers about specific elements of the episode. These were taken from across the episode in order to reflect different aspects of the narrative and premise.
The image in Figure 9.2 illustrated the narrative stage of Laetitia packing for her trip (segment 3), which was observed by viewers in relation to the element of construction within the format, and the portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship. References were also made to other ‘reality’ formats in relation to the introduction of the backpack.

“I was thinking your mum is telling you that they don’t wear something, just Google it. But she really didn’t believe her mum, and I was thinking you will need a long dress. And how she just had to use the little bag, that was quite funny because they she didn’t have all the clothes and you wonder if that was a ploy to make sure she didn’t have the right clothes when she got there by the producers”

“It was interesting that her mother was trying to give her advice and she wasn’t listening”

“That I thought was more like reality TV shows, it was a bit like Survivor that you’ve only got this little case to take, they could have told her that before … it was a bit obvious too. And the whole thing about the clothes, the girl knew what people wear over there and she didn’t pack a long dress. It was pretty obvious she did that on purpose”

“Was that imposed by the show? A bit more of an artificial thing to generate some action out of her in having to repack … and it came in a postbag when the camera crew is just standing there”

“That was hilarious, if only she knew what she should have taken. Did they send that backpack to her? Or the production gave it to her? She should have listened to her mum about what to pack, because mums know best!”

“I thought that was hilarious, watching her obviously having to cull what she thought she could put in her suitcase into a little bag … Maybe that’s a good example of where the producers have tried to put something in that format, quite possible she could have taken a suitcase and that would have been alright, but it was more about watching her reaction, and having to fit into that bag and what she would have to cut, and what she didn’t bring that would have been appropriate and she had to borrow clothes and buy things as well and that was nice too, because it showed
how hospitable they were. So I guess that might have seemed a bit more
the way in which the producers intervened and structured the series
because that almost is bit like The Amazing Race when a package just
arrives out of nowhere”

“I did like the mother-daughter relationship, I thought that was nice. Her
mum was funny, she was telling her what to do and clearly knew that
she would have problems. And with the bag was clearly an influence
from the show”

Figure 9.3 Family Footsteps frame 2

The image in Figure 9.3 was an animation sequence used at both ends of Laetitia’s
experience (segments 3 and 6) to mark her travel between the countries. This was
seen as both informative and transitional by respondents.

“That was good actually because I was thinking where is Tonga? So it’s
there, I couldn’t quite remember where it is and I’m usually quite good
with my countries… I thought that was good, you need that at the
beginning to show where they are going”

“Just show in relation to where she lives in Australia, and that was good
because I didn’t really know where Tonga was… I’m not very good with
geography. They did it at the start and the end”

“I interpret it as a break, a transition thing. But I think if it was one of
the other places you mentioned, like Uganda, I would think where is
that? So it could be useful, how far away it is, where exactly it is. But
somewhere like Tonga which you know a bit better it was just like there
she goes”

“That was good, it gave that perspective. I wonder how she got there, it
was Air New Zealand, so to New Zealand and then up maybe. I thought
that was good because it gave it context, otherwise I hope I’m not alone,
I wouldn’t think a lot of people would really be sure”

“It’s transitional, from being in Darwin and going there, signposting
what’s happening”
Figure 9.4 *Family Footsteps* frame 3

Figure 9.4 was taken from the final performance of the dance that Laetitia learnt during the episode in segment 5. This image was related to the experience of her character in the episode by viewers, but also was questioned as to its construction by the format.

“The dancing, my friend has always done Tongan dancing so it was nice to watch. I really liked watching her learn it and explain about the movements and how it reflected where they were, and the greasing them up and putting money on them, I thought that was interesting. I wonder where that came from? That was quite funny. Lovely outfits and lovely to watch them teach her and her learn, they were so supportive of her, it was really nice, they were really trying to help her be welcome but still challenge her”

“This was her dance. I wondered during the show did they speak to them and say when should she come, because we want her to do something, or did they do the fundraiser so that… that was my questions during the show. I thought how fortuitous, hmm”

“It was nice for her and she found it affirming, and everyone came up to her, and she showed her mum”

“She was so worried about it, maybe over-exaggerating a little bit about bringing shame on the family and all that”

“It was good to see as obviously her mother wanted to learn more about it and with the little kid there it is obviously part of their life to learn… It’s obviously very traditional and I wouldn’t mind knowing a bit more about how it evolved”

“I felt so nervous for her, but they were all so happy. She looked so happy and that was really nice. The whole head thing I thought ow, that would be so sore. But it was really nice how they stuck heaps of money on her. That was her challenge and you could see how proud she was that she had done the dance”

“I thought that was nice, the dance, that she joined in and all that. But I didn’t like the fact it created this, with the girl saying we’ve got this idea that you join us in the dance to raise money. It felt a bit suss… It was an
interesting scene, it was good thing for her to have to do something that was within her culture”

**Figure 9.5 Family Footsteps frame 4**

The representation of the culture and family relationships was a common theme for respondents in regards to the image in Figure 9.5 from segment 4. There was often a recollection of the *ta’ovala* mats and *kafa* ‘big sister’s hair’ as part of her outfit and its signification of tradition and respect.

“That was nice, they gave her the best outfit in the house. It was really interesting to see how they lived, and how they lived on the verandah and those kind of things. That was interesting seeing how they live there with the weather, did they say 80% humidity? I thought oh my god! That’s hot and they have to wear long skirts”

“That was her special dress for church? That was nice they did all that for her and ironing her special dress. That was really nice and she really enjoyed it too, the significance of it all and she appreciated it … I remember about the big sister’s hair”

“Not sure about the hair. She went along with the traditional dress well, she didn’t flinch at the thought of someone else’s hair”

“Is this the hair one? I was a little bit grossed out with the hair. But that’s again, they did everything special for her because she was a guest. If she was supposedly the lowest rung in the hierarchy, how much would she have actually liked it?”

“It was probably the first time she put on the traditional dress, so it could have been a sign of acceptance or something like that, that transformation thing”

“It was a nice sort of thing with their traditional belief where it’s such a close knit family and it is like wearing a part of the body as part of your outfit. It was a very foreign concept to me but it was quite nice how they put a lot of effort into these rituals”

“I thought that was nice the way they dressed her up, but again they didn’t need to have the voiceover saying something like they’ve shown respect for her by dressing her in these outfits, and you think is that really the case or have they said can you dress her up in the traditional
clothes? I don’t know, maybe I’m too cynical. It took away from the documentary style a bit”

**Figure 9.6 Family Footsteps frame 5**

The image in Figure 9.6, a ‘talking head’ moment with Laetitia, was a common feature in the episode, and specifically in segment 4. Respondents commented on the use of this element as well as semic details within the frame. It is interesting that viewers often referred to this technique as talking *to* camera, whereas technically this would require the subject to look straight into the camera such as the ‘video diary’ of *Big Brother*, rather than the ‘talking head’ style directed to the side of the camera frame represented in Figure 9.6.

“I found that really interesting in this one, to keep hearing about how she felt and how she was doing”

“She did have bits to camera. I liked how she talked to the camera, and you can tell she was confident in her voice and the way she articulated and just talked, because she’s a radio presenter, that’s what she does. So she was quite happy and confident in front of the camera, which was good because it made it easier to watch”

“The sign saying welcome home, that was nice, and it was quite delicate how they made those leis … And it was good to see what she was thinking, and they often showed her talking and they showed it as well, in reality like when she said she was feeling emotional then they would show her in that situation feeling emotional. So it gave more sense of her experience, which you need. What we do as humans is quite internal, how we are looking on the outside can be completely different to on the inside so that’s important”

“They did have a lot of her talking to camera but I’m not sure how much it added to it … but I think it did need that, her talking”

“One thing I noticed though, and I’m not sure at what point they did it, they are obviously in the same clothes and they’re talking about many things that happen but then intersperse it. So for me, I wonder when they were talking about that, or how much editing was done to make it in that situation so they can talk about it. It’s a bit like the *Masterchef* thing
where they talk about the whole season which they cut in so it looks as though they’re talking about it straight away, but they’re not”

“That’s where it felt more like a documentary than my traditional belief of stereotypical reality TV which is just where people live their life in a contrived situation. So this one because she did often talk to the camera and express how she was feeling, what her observations were and what she thought of the overall situation. I found that more interesting than just watching people snipe at one another, or even console one another, or open up to someone else, you get the bit of their reflections then, but I found this was more interesting and it probably was a bit more targeted. The producers probably came up with questions they thought would be more interesting and I’m sure they cut some of it out and edited it. So in that respect I felt it was more of a finished product as a rounded package, rather than just watching people 24/7 and just seeing the highlights I guess”

“There were quite a few times when she was talking to camera, and like I said before she seemed to be in the outfits from the events that just happened so then, what are the relatives doing then? That’s the thing, they tried to create this atmosphere that she is just doing what she’s told, but they’re clearly interviewing her. And quite a few times it seemed to be prompted. It’s not like she just comes up to the camera and starts talking, they’re asking her questions and she’s answering them. And they’re getting the reaction that they want, prompting certain things. They’ve even got her in front of the sign, and it comes down to that whole thing where it pretends to be reality, that’s what annoys me; it’s not because they’re creating things and interviewing her and that sort of thing”

This tension for viewers between the documentary style authenticity and the construction of the experience and format is an interesting response in relation to the motivations and techniques of the production itself, and illustrates the amoebic nature of the genre.

Industry perspective
In a personal interview, Family Footsteps series producer, Tarni James, described the style of the series as ‘structured documentary’. The format evolved from an original idea called ‘Live Like A Local’ where a participant was challenged to “pass themselves off as a local after a period of time and a period of education” for a prize (James 2009). The development process adapted this initial premise to connect the participant to a family cultural link, resulting in the overarching question of the format: “what would my life have been, if my parents had not migrated?” (James 2009). This combination of elements is described by director, Sean Cousins, as putting “some meat on the bones” of what is “notionally a reality show” where “you
have real people engaged in real emotional journeys where they are challenged and overcome adversity and learn something about themselves” (Christopher 2006). Producer Tony Wright adds that the embrace of Australian culture by migrant generations means that there can be little knowledge of their background and no previous experience of their “ancestral roots” country (Reality TV plays migration what-if 2006). In this way, the original challenge remained but the motivation was based in narratives of experiencing and understanding cultures in order to surprise participants and “challenge the ideas they have about their country of origin” (Devlyn 2006). The “clearly identifiable elements” in the show were a deliberate choice by the production for a format structure and the possibility for sales to other territories if successful (James 2009). So while the programme has the representation style of documentary, the challenge provides a manufactured element resulting in a description as ‘structured documentary’.

The challenge element was retained so that there would be “some element of risk, some element of jeopardy” (James 2009). James identifies this in the three areas of the mentor/host family placement, the limitation on the participants’ baggage, and the final challenge performance. The immersion with the host family, and in particular with the mentor, was a strategy so that the participant was “living, working, eating, drinking, shopping” in their given culture (James 2009). To this end, the participants also were not allowed to take a camera or mobile phone so that they were constantly “in it, not looking at it” or “chatting or thinking about home” in order to “experience a life as it might be” (James 2009). The device of the backpack, introduced in the second series, is described by James as “simply a visual way” to restrict their packing as part of the programme, while the challenge performance contributed an “element of pass or fail” in order for the participant to “prove they could live like a local”. The reconnection with the parent at the resolution of the episode was equally as important for James in order to address the main relationship of the format, and to see if any shifts have resulted from the experience in poignant reconciliations, understanding, or appreciation.

In its emphasis on the participant, casting was the “most important stage” in the production of Family Footsteps (James 2009). While the casting call involved a general advertisement for dual heritage, the production had certain parameters in
mind for possible participants. The participant needed to be “slightly disconnected with their culture” so that the “exploration would lead to something new for them”, as well as an unusual location for unusual stories, in addition to being articulate about the experience as “the eyes and ears of the audience” (James 2009). The casting search for the first series originally started in community groups and ethnic newspapers, but the production team quickly realised this would not be conducive to find their ideal participants, described by associate producer Sophie Meyrick as having “an internal, emotional journey to go on” (Christopher 2006). In this way, the commission by the ABC gave the production a certain amount of freedom in these choices to tell different stories, as opposed to the commercial imperative of audiences that may have required a more safe or popular ‘drawcard’ of locations.

The actual production of the series ran “on a shoestring” with few facilities and a small budget, resulting in an unique experience of documentary production where they were “in a place, you stay there, you live it, you eat it, you work it” (James 2009). Similar to the intended experience of the participant, the crew would also be dealing with the location in order to source its needs for the production. Being ‘on the ground’ with a two person camera crew with the participant during the experience meant that the production was alert to changes and developments regardless of planning (Schwartz 2008). James describes the participants as “being confessional right in front of us” so that the use of ‘talking heads’ was effective in gaining their perspective on the experience without the need for a ‘video-diary’ input. In this way, there was resonance for audiences in the “shared experience” with the participant on a “journey that the audience would like to take if they could”, and it is this resonance that James argues *Family Footsteps* taps into, amplifies and screens. In particular, the production in Tonga for Laetitia delves into the richness of the culture. The host family were cast because their daughters were a similar age to Laetitia, and because of their very traditional lifestyle. The younger daughter Kasa was chosen as Laetitia’s mentor after the initial selection of elder Nooka, who appeared “a bit unwilling”, however the production realised it would have to let both daughters and cousin Iona “participate to whatever degree because that’s what the culture is” (James 2009). Similar to the recording process of the previous two case studies, James states the crew were “still looking for the story” while shooting in Tonga. It appeared to be “all too easy” for Laetitia in this lifestyle, however it soon
emerged that she was struggling to fit into her cultural experience and so this became the focus of the episode. An extra difficulty for this particular episode was in a camera fault during the family’s farewell to Laetitia resulting in no footage of what James describes as the “most heart-wrenching, emotional farewell you could possibly ever imagine”. While this was replaced in the episode with a still photograph of the family with Laetitia, it obviously could not reflect the experience of the family’s indication of how special and close Laetitia had become to them, and even with explanation caused some offence when screened to the family (James 2009). This is indicative of the unpredictable nature of documentary style production, with minimal camera use and the choice not to re-record events for authenticity, but alternatively also illustrates where the situation created by the format can not be re-created.

**Analysis**

The combination of documentary and construction stands out as the overarching theme of both the viewer and industry perspectives for *Family Footsteps*. This perception is highly dependent on the stylistic techniques used in the format and the subsequent reception of these techniques as familiar television conventions. The narrative element of ‘journey’ is particularly apparent where the events represented follow a recognisable and uninterrupted progression through introduction, development and resolution around a central character as ‘hero’, unlike the previous two case studies. The breakdown of the *Family Footsteps* episode narrative (see Figure 9.7) illustrates this straightforward progression where the majority of the representation is dedicated to the developments of Laetitia’s experience of Tonga. The dance performance works as a climax to this journey as the final challenge of her visit and an expression of her new relationship with her culture. She is then able to return to her home to reunite with her mother and reflect on this experience in a new stasis, with a cliffhanger-type ending posing the question whether she would return to Tonga.

Laetitia’s character is central to the content and progression of the episode’s narrative. She acts as the mythic hero who undertakes a quest into an unknown adventure through the series of incidents as complications and struggles in order to achieve a goal in connecting with her Tongan culture and then return home. The
micro-transcription of segment 3 and the start of segment 4 in Appendix E illustrates the shift from stasis to incident, followed by the clinch developments of Laetitia’s experience. Viewer respondent narratives have been used to demarcate the variety of S/Z code readings within this section of the episode. Two narrative incidents can be identified in segment 3 in her packing for the trip and arrival at the Mafileo family home in Kolonga, working as an escalating removal from Laetitia’s initial stasis ‘normality’. The preparation act of packing and its subsequent limiting through the backpack provides further cues as to the relationship between Laetitia and her mother, and emphasises Laetitia’s lack of knowledge of Tongan values in dress and hierarchy. In this way, it prepares the possibility for Laetitia to be highly challenged or even fail in her visit. The arrival in Tonga signals a further incident in the realisation of her new state with the family, and her reflections on their welcome ‘ceremony’ as beyond her expectations. The juxtaposition of her life in Darwin to her host family in Tonga symbolises a transition into an unknown realm, further emphasised by the omniscient voiceover that questions her ability to adapt to the culture. Laetitia’s first family meal signals a progression into a series of clinch developments where her experiences are represented mainly through orientations to the various situations, and equivocations of her making mistakes within the cultural norms. This pattern dominates the representation of Laetitia’s actions as she fluctuates between being outside and within the ‘rules’ of social events, dress, church, and work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preview/Titles</th>
<th>Cliffhanger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>Stasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Packing/Arrival</td>
<td>Incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Developments</td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Return/Debrief</td>
<td>New stasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>Cliffhanger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 9.7 Family Footsteps enigmatic structure**

The resonance of Laetitia’s character is reflected in both the viewer and industry responses as essential to the construction and engagement with the format. In particular, the way she is characterised in the earlier segments 2 and 3, her Australian
traits of stubbornness and independence will be challenged in the cultural hierarchy and rules. The opposition of her character to the conditions of her challenge emphasises the jeopardy of the episode where she struggles with her new role and etiquette in Tonga. Although some viewers found this emphasis mildly questionable, the narrative involved in and constructed by this production choice highlights the effort of her experience in a coherent and dramatic form. Additionally, the resonance of her character provides a link to audiences in emotional response to her experience. Although removed from Laetitia’s heritage or experience as viewers, the first person narration of her journey encourages an emotional connection as her experience progresses. The viewer is invited to share in the tears, laughs and trials of her challenge, which are expressed in an open and articulate way by Laetitia and the apparent honesty of her narration contributes to the engagement offered to viewers in sharing her emotions and triumph.

Although the episode follows a familiar narrative progression, its production is more aligned with the construction of ‘reality’ formats than traditional notions of documentary. The choreographed elements of the backpack, the mentor and the dance performance shift the narrative from simply recording events to a pronounced manufacturing of situations. The ‘reality’ is therefore what takes place within the format ‘world’ and in relation to these choreographed moments. As a result, the sense of documentary outlined by viewer respondents is related to the semic and cultural codes within the episode. The micro-transcription illustrates numerous points where information about Tongan culture is introduced, either by characters in the action or omniscient voiceover. These explanations reflect an informative element to the format where the culture is highlighted in relation to its unique and different qualities for the participant. The conventions of ‘talking head’ moments, and the use of Laetitia in voiceover in addition to the omniscient voice, provide further cues to a documentary style as a commentary on the events that have been captured by the camera crew. Mise-en-scene qualities such as camera movement and use of available light also reflect a ‘fly-on-the-wall’ production style that suggests the unfolding of events regardless of the camera. These are specific choices by the production in order to represent a documentary style, even though the situation of Laetitia with her host family and the challenges of her trip result solely from the premise of the format, and have been edited with soundtrack into a quest narrative. Producer Tarni James
describes this as where they “know the structure, but we’re looking for the story” suggesting a balance between the constructed and impromptu elements in the production. Interestingly, the invisibility of the crew is momentarily destroyed as Laetitia is woken early for her first church service, as transcribed in Appendix E. In her sleep deprived state she turns to the camera and moans ‘I hate you people’, as Nooka proceeds in her duties to get her up and dressed appropriately for the morning. In this small moment, Laetitia shatters the constructed ‘reality’ and provides a reminder of the camera crew following her.

It is in the performance of documentary style that the pleasure of the episode can be located for viewers. As described by the production, there is a resonance in the experience of seeking identity and culture for Australian viewers. Viewers engaged with the personality of Laetitia as an ‘ordinary’ person and her honesty throughout her foreign experience. This identification reflects a plaisir in both the situation and characters portrayed. Some viewers also found further avenues for identification through their own experience with Tongan or Pacific cultures as a source of pleasure in the episode, or through the informative elements to learn about Tonga through a personal story. Beyond this surface level pleasure, jouissance is also apparent for some viewers in Family Footsteps through their narratives of ‘play’ with the episode. Responses often highlighted a need for further information, of asking questions of the episode where there was a lack of explanation, to reflect a ‘drifting’ in the format world. Some viewers also commented on their connection to the programme through their own experiences or wishes of a similar trip in order to understand their own background. This suggests a kind of role-taking in their viewing to imagine their own experience of the situation. This jouissance was further present in the emotional affect for some viewers while watching the programme by crying with Laetitia at her grandfather’s grave and her reflections on her trip to Tonga. This connection is linked to the progression of journey where the narrative is focused solely on Laetitia, her background, experience and return, in addition to the ‘raw honesty’ represented through her commentary. The subject matter of identity and family performed through a dialectic of ‘home and away’ encouraged viewers to engage with the narrative in a purely subjective manner, in addition to its informational qualities. The illusory ‘everyday’ is evident in the entertainment of Family Footsteps in the combination of the cultural experience and its narrative progression. The immediacy
of the ordinary events and characters in addition to the documentary techniques provides a sense of authenticity and accessibility to the narrative. However, the illusion remains in the influence of the structure and arrangement of the production to provide a rounded, engaging story. These qualities provide possible pleasures for viewers in the affirmation of the experience and also in a deeper emotional response and identification with the character of Laetitia.
CHAPTER TEN

Nerds FC

“What happens if you take 14 nerds, who have never touched a football in their lives; coach them for three months ... then let them play a professional team in front of 25,000 people? We’ll find out when we turn boys into men, mice into lions, nerds into athletes, and proudly present the football team, Nerds FC”
(Nerds FC 2006)

Nerds FC was first produced in 2006 by SBS Independent in conjunction with Grundy (now part of Fremantle Media) as an adaptation of the original Danish format FC Zulu. The series was part of the SBS schedule in the lead-up to their coverage of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, which would include the Australian national team after a long absence (Browne 2006). The format premise involves the creation of a soccer team from self-confessed nerds who are trained by professional coaches in order to play an A-League team, as explained in the above quote used in the opening titles voiceover of Nerds FC. This is an “almost exact translation” of the same opening voiceover from the Danish version (Jensen 2009: 176) and the minimal change in the adaptation is indicative of the format’s production overall in Australia. The original format, FC Zulu was broadcast in 2004 on the Danish ‘youth-skewed’ cable channel TV2/Zulu, where it “quickly became a cult hit with audiences” (Jensen 2009: 167). Although the Australian version retained the same format in regard to narrative progression, editing and fly-on-the-wall observation, Jensen argues that the Australian version was “slightly more serious, competitive and melodramatic” than the “more comical, satirical and ironic” Danish original, which targeted a male, youth audience with a humorous take on the national sport and cultural references. She states that this gives the Australian version more “universalistic appeal than FC Zulu” due to the emphasis on the narrative challenges and development of the nerds across the series (Jensen 2009: 178-82).

This element of the format was dominant in its local media coverage, where the series was described as a “welcome respite from the usual suspects of the reality fad” (Kalina 2006b). Its difference to the ‘reality’ programme norm in its “eternal optimism, refreshing attitude and likeable players” (Gadd 2006) was a source of
praise in the format’s approach and portrayal as it “avoids sneering at their nerdishness and the nerds turn out to be more likeable than the average reality show contestant” (Murphy 2006). The structure of the format shifts the emphasis of the ‘reality’ challenge in its lack of internal competition, eliminations or cash prize to the abilities and characters of the nerds in learning new skills and becoming a team (Connolly 2006), and therefore was argued to replace humiliating or ridiculing elements with “a remarkable journey from ineptitude to enthusiasm” (O’Regan 2006). As a result, the overall story is grounded in a narrative arc of “underdogs making good and finding strength and friendship” (Bellman 2006b). This representation is also hugely dependent on the portrayal of the nerds where although the format places them into a contrived situation outside of their comfort zone, “they always seem to be in on the joke” (Nguyen 2006). The “self-deprecating humour and sense of irony” displayed by the nerd participants throughout the series is another shift from the ‘reality TV’ norm so that the viewer is “laughing with them, not at them” (Magnusson 2006).

Much of the media coverage surrounding the first series focused on the enthusiasm of the nerd characters in order to tap into the programme’s atmosphere of goodwill, with some local Sydney press highlighting their own residents taking part (Nerds show true grit 2006; Back to reality for Astro Nerd 2006; Sullivan 2006). Critics predicted the affirming and humorous portrayal of the subject matter would be highly appealing and relatable for audiences (Houston 2006), particularly in its representation of “Aussie predilections: our affection for the underdog, our religious devotion to sport and our love of taking the piss” (Molitorisz 2006). Some of the underlying messages of the programme have also seen the first series used in schools to “spread an anti-bullying message” (McManus 2007). However, it was also correctly assumed that ratings success would be dependent on the sport and network profile in Australia (Hassall 2006). Following the first episode’s figures of 304,000 (Murphy 2006), the ratings for the series remained in a steady band of 200,000-300,000 viewers, below the average for popular SBS programmes (Zubairy 2010). Nevertheless, this relative success for the first series on SBS resulted in the production of a second series in 2007 and subsequent DVD releases. Although not as widely watched as the other case studies, it is the positive and light-hearted representation of the contrived ‘reality TV’ situation, as well as its adaptation from
its Danish source for SBS programming, that informs its choice as a case study for Australian ‘reality TV’.

**Episode description**

The episode selected for this research was originally transmitted on April 21 2006 on SBS. The version screened to viewer respondents was from a broadcast recording of 25 minutes, and did not include commercials as the transmission was prior to SBS’s introduction of advertising. This episode is the second of the eight episodes in the series, and involves the presentation of uniforms to the team, a team building challenge and the election of the team captain, structured as shown in Figure 10.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preview: previous week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Title sequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Profile: Tim Weston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Training in uniform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Team building challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Profile: David Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Team building (continued)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Raft challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Leader discussion and vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Preview: next week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Credits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 10.1* Nerds FC episode structure

The eight episodes of the series make up the larger narrative arc of the nerds’ development towards their final match through training and a series of challenges highlighted in the individual episodes. In this way, the series has similarities to the ‘quest’ narrative, described also in relation to Family Footsteps, in its progression from call, trials and return in Campbell’s ‘monomyth’ (1993) as the nerds develop through the individual episode challenges towards the overall climax of their final match to finish the series. Each episode commences with an orientation of the previous week before re-establishing the format premise in the title sequence (segment 1) as well as profile features of the nerd characters (segment 4 and 7) of their passions and specialties. These profiles are often filmed within the home or work of the nerd character and consequently provide a change of pace in the episode from the challenge or training segments. Each episode is a reminder of the overall narrative goal, but the individual story strands are all resolved within the programme.
before a preview of the following week (segment 11). Segment shifts are often marked by transitional techniques, either through an animated soccer ball bounce or an image wipe screen (see example in Figure 10.4).

The visual style of the format draws on observational techniques so that the action appears to be unfolding in front of the camera, however there is also the occasional sighting of a camera crew in shot. This was often observed by viewer respondents, and its effect on their engagement will be discussed later. The ‘fly-on-the-wall footage’ is interspersed with ‘talking head’ interviews with both the coaches and nerds as to their views on the events taking place. A music soundtrack is present throughout most of the episode, and in particular for montages used to highlight the team training and (lack of) skill.

**Viewer response**

Overall, viewer interviewees described *Nerds FC* in terms of its entertainment qualities. Many respondents had not watched the series before, although most had some knowledge of the format. Their responses are presented as personal narratives of their experience of viewing the episode, as outlined in the research methodology, and reflect a predominantly positive response to the format.

Initial impressions of the episode centred on its representation of humour.

“Just funny, just really laughing at them, it was just a funny show … didn’t really have to think about that one, it just made you laugh”

“*Nerds FC* was just quite humorous seeing them get out on the field and particularly when they put on their jerseys and a few comments about feeling debonair and classy or something, one of them said something about feeling really smart, that was pretty funny”

“I think because it’s people who are just so obviously going to struggle with something. And there’s something funny about seeing people doing something completely out of their range, their skills and their depth. And it probably shouldn’t be funny, but they know it’s going to be funny too, so you’re laughing with them, not at them”

“It was just really funny, their behaviour and antics is just amusing … and I think we like to laugh at other people tripping over their own feet”

“Just cute and funny … I just love the *Nerds* series, I’ve seen it before”
“I thought they were endearing, their personalities were endearing. It was amusing, it was comical. I guess from my background with sports I found it funnier”

There was often a discussion of expectations by viewer respondents who had no prior experience of the format.

“I have to admit I thought Nerds FC would just be a bit stupid, I just thought what a dumb idea but that was pretty entertaining. It was just funny … That I expected to be a bit boring and not enjoyable but I thought it was good”

“I thought that Nerds FC would just be annoying, it would be one of those stupid reality shows that I don’t like, and I really did think I wouldn’t like that one. I guess that was in it but it was enjoyable, it was done well and not over the top. It didn’t have ads either so it didn’t do all that repeating stuff”

“I had heard a little bit about it, but I hadn’t seen it before, so I was keen to see it and get my own sense from what everyone else was talking about”

Some initial responses also addressed its ‘reality TV’ qualities and considered its value within the genre.

“I would rate Nerds FC up there as one of the more interesting ones [reality programmes], but probably for different reasons, that was just funny and entertaining”

“Nerds FC stands out as a good reality TV show, as what reality TV shows should aim to be. It’s not really putting anyone down, it’s just people having fun. Whereas other reality TV shows are generally quite negative”

“It was funny and I like that reality TV style, so that was good. And I didn’t think it was as kitsch as some of the other Australian ones I’ve seen. I like the premise of the soccer game, and as Australian we are pretty crap at soccer. So I liked it”

The idea of ‘journey’ was described by some respondents in relation to the narrative of the episode, or their observation about the series premise.

“I found it was just really loveable, it was just a very loving portrayal of this journey they were on”

“I think the fact that you know that they’re on a journey. And you know that it’s going to end up being, whether it gets better or not, there seems to be the potential for some real friendships to develop and a real camaraderie, you get that feeling that, because they’ve come from a place that’s already linking them … you kind of think that they’re actually going to get on really well, and there’s going to be some really fun sort of times as well, and just curious to see where their journey goes. I mean I have seen other episodes of it, but I don’t think I saw them all, but you definitely want to”
“It really gave me the impression that we were seeing them build and make their team, and that was one aspect of it, next week you’ll see another aspect”

“The fact that you’re seeing the start of the journey and you want to see that through to the conclusion”

“I want to see whether they get to the end and if they improve. I want to see if they are just inherently uncoordinated or if they make it, and also I’m sure there’ll be some kind of emotional growth and journey as well as the physical coordination, and I think that’s always intriguing to watch”

The format structure to introduce, develop and resolve a certain goal within a set number of episodes was a point of discussion for some respondents.

“It’s obviously a whole season of the same group of people and the same event. As long as they capture that and finish that off, it has a semi-end, that’s fine. I don’t like it if it’s too open, left open at the end, but then again, you don’t want it to be really scripted or contrived so they make a false ending”

“I prefer a story where they’re going to an end point. And not necessarily a competition like Nerds FC, it isn’t going to eliminate people but it has a goal. I don’t watch any of the ones that just go on and on, the ones that I would watch are ones like Nerds where there is a set time or it’s going to an end point”

This was a specific element in terms of continued interest in the format in relation to the challenges and development of the nerd team.

“Nerds FC you just watch it to see what happens next, in its own way it’s more like a sitcom I guess, just see who’s going to do what funny and how it’s going to develop and that sort of thing. So that bit at the end is quite a good link to grab you in, because who cares what happens, to the nerds especially, but you think I’d like to see what happens next”

“I think there’s some kind of, like any kind of story, that there’s a progression of ideas and that there’s something that’s continuous and that obviously there’s the link every week because they’re obviously still in it, but that idea that they’re improving and achieving things along the way is good. To actually see that achievement and I think that they, you just know that, because they’re so bad, that they’re going to get better and they’re really going to be amazed by their own abilities”

“From one episode you don’t get the same sense that they’ve grown or you’ve seen a change in them other than they had fun and couldn’t believe they did it”

“I think it would be quite interesting to see how they turn out in the end, and also to see the first episode to see how they started”
While some viewers commented on the frivolous concept of the format, overall their experience was one of entertainment and being engaged with the characters and situations.

“I’m sure if you stuck with the programme and saw them all develop at the end I’m sure it could be everyone would bond and it would be quite nice, but just all the shots of them in that episode, it was like here’s the uniforms, here’s the teambuilding, here’s the captain. It was really … because essentially someone learning a sport isn’t that fascinating unless you’re doing it”

“The good parts of it are when they come out with these comments which are hilarious but they’re not intended to be hilarious. They just say something and it’s instantly funny but it’s not planned at all or scripted”

“Seems to be less about soccer though. It’s the premise but it’s all the situations that are humorous, like the team building and next time is the team song. Maybe it changes as the series goes on, I don’t know, but it seems more situational than the soccer process”

“Are they trying to put them into situations to show off their nerdiness? And other situations where their skills won’t help them, and also where their skills will help them. So these two extremes in these situations, they create these situations to make good television”

The question of the construction of the format provided varying responses from interviewees about whether they felt this added or detracted to its ‘reality’, however there was a strong acknowledgment of the creation involved in the series.

“They’d obviously worked out what they were going to show in that episode, you felt like they were trying to build up to something”

“It’s contrived for TV … these guys know what they’re getting into, they’ve seen reality TV, they know what it’s about”

“You get the feeling there’s a lot planning, prior planning, this is what we’re going to do, this is where we’re going to take them”

“It is more constructed, but that doesn’t make it less real”

“The raft exercise, it was obviously crafted in a way so that the audience warms to it. It does have that comic element and even the coaches found that rafting funny”

“It is taking people and putting them into situations that they would never ever be in. So I think their reactions are pretty real but the situation is extremely scripted and thought about and artificial”

“The way they tell the story, it’s quite clearly set out as a story and choreographed”
“It’s clearly a process that they are on, so there’s a natural progression of things that they move along as a team and with uniforms and to become a team and get a leader. There’s steps and it doesn’t seem like they’ve just put the camera on and let it happen and then tidy it up a bit and show it. It’s been put together to fit what they’ve planned”

“Nerds FC didn’t seem real to me, they’ve obviously picked these people, whereas for me, it’d be more interesting to do something about who those people are in real life”

“Nerds FC is a fabrication, like they have constructed those events … so I think it’s easier to like Nerds FC that way, to make a show that’s more appealing”

The issue of the presence of the camera and the constructed situation in relation to the nerds’ portrayal and performance was a common discussion point for respondents.

“They are playing you a bit and I guess that’s the thing with reality television and people’s personalities, so if they’re not playing out a character, they would play themselves up a bit because they think that’s what people want”

“I thought at the start that they were playing up their nerdiness, I mean they are nerdy dudes, but I think for example when they’re in front of camera I thought they were playing up their nerdiness a little bit”

“I suppose with Nerds it has that thing, that because it’s all edited and it’s not documentary … that they sort of choose what you think of characters, how they presented David as the leader … I think with that one they choose a lot more what you view and shape your opinions more”

“If you’re not thinking about that while watching it, it is seamless, but I always think about how they have got them to act it and that loses that reality element to it”

“It more tries to be fly-on-the-wall type stuff even though it’s probably not. But they don’t interact with the camera as much or didn’t seem to be. They have lots of cuts where they were talking to the camera”

“In a way, it seems realer, even though it’s quite clear that they’ve set up these things for them to do, it just feels like they were probably more like being themselves”

“The nerds were in an out of character situation anyway, so they wouldn’t have done what they were doing. So you can’t expect them to act naturally when it wasn’t a natural situation for them”

“I can’t imagine it’s scripted, with the subjects, they just say what they want, what they perceive themselves. They were clearly asking them questions and they just responded”
In particular, some viewers responded to certain production elements in the construction of the format.

“Those bits where they show an event and then they have the person talking about it afterwards. That always stands out to me, even in Nerds FC they were in the bit where they elected the captain, they showed him and then the others talking about it. He was saying that he took over a bit and I felt that they were taken after things had happened and they had asked him to talk about that”

“At one point when the nerds were doing their walk across the rope, they had like dufus music on, and then quite stirring music when the captain was making his first speech. So it was jazzed up a bit to get certain emotions. But it doesn’t stand out to me all the time, just sometimes”

“The music was unbelievable, it was really noticeable I think when the captain was being elected, and it made it a big deal but it really isn’t. And then he started giving his speech, the music was a really noticeable part of that”

There was also an acknowledgement of how the format could have been constructed in relation to its audience appeal.

“I liked the concept, it was contrived but they were more open about that, as far as I know they weren’t trying to win prize money at the end, so it wasn’t like a situation where you grab a group of people and trap them together and make them upset, it was just like these guys might have some fun if they played soccer. And they didn’t seem to be taking advantage of them, trying to make them do horrible things or whatever. It was something that their kids could watch as well in twenty years, and not be horribly embarrassed”

“The way they set up with Andy and the other guy sitting on the outside, part of you is laughing with them, because they’re laughing at the same thing you’re laughing at. It’s the same with the rafts and things like that, they’re setting it up to help you, they’re mirroring your reaction to what they’re doing”

Perceptions of the SBS network were used by some viewers to relate their experience of the episode.

“I thought it was American, but it’s not. It’s good it’s Australian, it’s from SBS which surprised me but it makes sense because they show the soccer”

“It wasn’t Channel Seven or Ten quality, well not quality, I thought that was better, but Channel Seven and Ten do all that, they’ve got names and borders and hundreds of repeats, they put a lot of effort into the presentation of it. This was just as it is, and they’ve cut and pasted and done it so it’s still really good, but you actually saw the show instead of seeing repeats”
“That would bother me if it was more like a Channel Seven kind of thing, but I think you’re more confident in that it’s a SBS and independent type of production”

There were also comparisons made between *Nerds FC* and other ‘reality’ formats.

“*Nerds FC* is difficult to classify because it’s really a competition that people have got into, not so much like *Big Brother* or *Survivor* where people are kicked off, it’s more that they are taking people into a different environment, I guess you could say it’s not reality, it’s just something different”

“*Beauty and the Geek*, I don’t like them. They’re nerds but they’re different nerds. They weren’t putting them down in this one, with the geeks they were putting them down all the time. It is putting them down a bit but not like *Beauty and the Geek*, that’s a hideous show. Australians as a whole don’t tend to put each other down like that”

“Comparing *Nerds FC* to something like *Beauty and the Geek*, I think these are more genuine nerds than the others are, because they show them in their own homes and what they do, they might play up a bit but they are more genuinely nerdy”

The characters of the nerds were a dominant part of viewer responses to the episode.

“I think they tried to get a diverse range of characters and personalities, and they try to delve into that … and they ended the show with that guy as the leader and another guy was the group clown or whatever”

“You were there for the ride and it was all fun. I liked how you got to know the nerds, it was nice to get to know them, they’re all so cute. They’ve got their little things that they obsess about and do. And they came out with the funniest comments too. I really like their sense of humour”

“They’re enjoying themselves and having a good time. I’m sure it’s scary for them at some points when they’re challenged with something new and have to go beyond what they thought they could do before, but they’re held within it and they signed up for it as well, they’re there because they want to be”

“The whole thing of them being normal guys who were trying something new, challenging themselves with something new and just the cute little geeky things they say, and they’re so un-sportsmanlike, not that they are unfair as a criticism, but they’re not built as sportsmen. And I think it’s lovely that they have all their passions, like their sideline things like *Star Wars* and cars, it’s all a bit wacky”

“They’re all quite good at talking, I guess the ones they focus on come across really well, like they are passionate, a bit like an actor I guess, if someone started interviewing me on camera about what I like to do I might struggle to talk about it, but they came across really well”

“The nerds I quite liked because they were just quite likeable people, they were just nice and harmless and funny, because they were just silly”
In particular, the nerd characters and their representation were compared to viewers’ experience of other ‘reality TV’ characters.

“The nerds, they’re nice. I think the difference is when people are just talking about themselves and the competition and their strategy, that’s a bit boring. With the nerds, they’re talking about the team or the things that they love or are interested in, so it’s still not them going on about how they’re going to get ahead and stay in the competition … They don’t backstab each other”

“That’s why we like them more, because everyone else puts themselves up for it and it’s highly narcissistic, egocentric people that you just end up going ‘Ah, just shut-up about yourselves!’ But when they’re talking about themselves, they’re actually talking about the things they are interested in and it’s almost like they don’t exist inside that. They’re so engrossed in the things that they love”

There was specific reference made to the question of whether the format’s intention was to laugh at or with the nerds, and the effect of this on their viewing experience.

“I think the laugh is kind of at their expense, well I’m not sure, I feel like I’m laughing at them a little bit. Even though there’s something endearing about them, but I wonder if they know that, or what they’ve got themselves into, or if they think it’s quite funny and they’re just comfortable in their own skin?”

“Even if you’re like these shows are exploiting people who maybe aren’t quite switched on or whatever, but they really seem to enjoy their own nerdiness, they kind of enjoyed that. They were enjoying that, so then you feel ok to enjoy that”

“You’re not ridiculing them, but laughing more at the situation, and they’re laughing at themselves, so that makes it a bit better. They ham it up, you can see them mucking around and exaggerating”

“I think a lot of the time in these shows, the producers try to pick out the most humiliating moments, but with Nerds FC they laugh at themselves, so it’s not humiliating. And I think that’s why it’s endearing, they can be clutzy or whatever, or love their little painted statues, and then laugh at themselves. That’s why it’s endearing rather than cringeworthy. And also I think one of the things that makes nerds nerds is that they don’t have this image that they have to uphold … they’re so natural and that’s why we can really enjoy who they are, because you know that what you are seeing is who they really are”

“I think there is an element of laughing at them because they’re not particularly good at sport, but by the same token, I am assuming that they enjoy the experience, they put themselves out there, they would have assumed I hope that we are laughing with them and not at them”

“It’s a hard one because you don’t want to laugh at someone and put them down, but they’re out there, they’re on the show, they have to deal with what comes with being on TV. None of them at all looked offended. And, I don’t know about the process of how they got on the
show, but they’d have to screen them to make sure they were ok with being on it and the pressure and all that”

“They were laughing at themselves, surely if they’re laughing at themselves you can laugh at them as well. It makes a difference. I think some of them would be, you could see it as putting them down and not wanting to laugh, but if you put yourself on a reality TV show, you’ve put yourself out there, and you are going to be laughed at and talked about and if you can’t handle it, don’t go on the show”

“Even though we laugh at them, I think it’s still affectionate”

This response was linked with how viewers defined the production’s portrayal of the nerd characters.

“Everyone on the show seemed pretty happy, they didn’t go out of their way to humiliate anyone. The nerds all seemed pretty happy to be there. They’d obviously chosen to do it and they didn’t sound too cheesy, they weren’t interviewing them to sound bad. It wasn’t like get all the worst sound bites and put them together, to make them look obnoxious or stupid. I think they do that a lot with other shows”

“It still seemed quite a caricature about [the nerds], it felt like not enough information about this person if you’re going to make me want to be interested in them”

“They’ve obviously got good people, like the right group of people to do it who completely live up to that stereotype really well”

“There are so many, and you’re a little bit captured by the editors in what they want to show you. You got little glimpses of people like the team captain and they showed you his behaviour, but some people you didn’t see as much, so that was a bit tougher”

“You got more of an insight into David, because he was a stronger character, and I don’t know if he, for me, he’s probably not the most likeable. There were some there that were making me laugh that looked quite quiet and maybe if it had been the episode where you learn about them, I may have felt a bit more connected or a bit more interested in those individuals”

“I kind of liked in *Nerds FC* that you got an insight into a couple of them, rather than just watching them all interact, and that made me want to watch more because some of them seemed more quiet and I wanted to know what their quirk was. So I thought that was interesting, and then I wanted to know more about how they picked them, and why it was them”

“They were nice enough people, and I’m sure with that kind of show because it’s a continual one, you get to know the characters, and you’d end up getting annoyed by some and you’d like others more, that’s how it is with that”

“Clearly there is a few personalities that got a lot more airtime than other ones, like there was a guy near the end who I thought I hadn’t seen much
of the whole rest of the time, the goalkeeper doesn’t get much time. So clearly they’ve got some personalities that make more interesting television”

Some viewers commented on the programme’s form as a contained series, and not a format where one episode could be watched individually.

“Nerds FC would be a commitment for a season, you’d have to watch it all”

“If you were going to watch something like Nerds FC, you have to watch every week to get the full story”

“Nerds FC you feel like you'd have to watch every episode to see the progression of stuff, whereas others are just every week”

However, some respondents acknowledged that the nature of the format meant it was not essential viewing, and therefore would watch it again “if it was on” but not necessarily plan to watch it from the schedule.

Overall, viewers described the humour and journey of the format as reasons to continue watching the series.

“For me it was comic value that made them interesting rather than any suspense”

“I would really like to see the last episode and see how they go against Victory, and it would be dependent really on what they do, but just to see how the nerds develop. The other teams must hold back a little bit … I wouldn’t mind seeing a bit more football in it”

“They’re so cute. I’m interested to see what happens next, about their team song, bless them. And how the development of it goes then, will it work out because they now have a team captain?”

In particular, some respondents related personal details in how they connected with the programme.

“You’re almost a bit envious of what they’re going through. And you want to be part of that journey with them, so you want to watch it. It’s sort of a bit odd, I watch other shows and I think, say hypothetically Australian Idol, I could never do what they do, and I wouldn’t want to do what they do. But with these guys I would love to do what they’re doing, they’re having fun and really enjoying it so you’re sort of happy to go along with it, and emotionally attach yourself more to them because you could imagine yourself in their spot”

“In some respects their behaviour, you can relate to them very well, they’re not fake, they’re not perfect, they’re not fantastic at what they’re doing. And so in some ways you can relate to them trying something new and really sucking at it, but giving it a go and having fun, so you can really relate to them. Whereas you watch other TV shows and
they’re really fake and you know that your personality is nothing like their personality and what they do, but I sit there and watch that and think I could do that, I could fall over, I could be part of that, and if you met those people you wouldn’t feel out of your depth, like they just seemed like nice, normal people that have no pretension or anything like that. So I think that makes it very easy to relate to them and be interested in them and what they’re doing. Because really they just want to improve, it’s simple, they’ve been thrown together, they’ve got a goal, and they’re going to work on it without too much fuss or hype”

“I liked Nerds FC, it reminded me of sports at school. Everyone sucks and no one wants to play”

Some viewers noted that their connection with the characters was an important part of their experience of the programme.

“I think because that one was more looking into people’s characters more, they were interested in their personalities and what they did and where they’ve come from … And talking to them closer to camera, and their name and they’re talking to the camera about what they’re doing … So you connect with the nerds in that way”

“They were either chosen or been asked to take part in something that is out of their comfort zone and it’s completely different. So I think there’s that natural respect for them from the very outset because they’re trying something new and you’ll give them the benefit of the doubt and you’ll appreciate everything they’re trying to do”

“Their little stories draw you in even more to know about them as people, and I guess that’s what makes you interested … you form a bond or a link or something with them, with something you recognise or appreciate or whatever, whether it is something in their personality or something that they do that you do, so with any of these shows when it first starts they’re all on an even playing field and it may just be the way they look or the way they speak that kind of grabs you, then the more they delve into them personally you attach to them”

“I often have unanswered questions. So like I said about how did they choose them, and how do they feel about being in it, and what do they think they’re getting out of it, and what have they been offered to get out of it? So I have all sorts of other questions”

“I don’t think you watch this show because you like soccer, I think you’re watching it because you like the people and what they do, and how they think and all those things. They show just enough to let you realise that they are terrible at soccer”

However, other viewers explained their connection to the programme solely through its entertainment qualities.

“I wasn’t really engaged as much … because there weren’t any cliffhangers. I wasn’t waiting for anything to happen but it was more fun. The guys seemed really happy to be there”
“I’d take these shows as light entertainment. I don’t really read too much into it all, you just watch it and tune out or zone out a bit”

“It’s not taxing, it’s enjoyable. You don’t have to think about it. It is pretty light entertainment I suppose you’d say it’s pretty relaxed”

“Just the comic value, like the raft; they couldn’t make that up. That was just so bad, these guys were saying that they are smart but what the hell were they doing? It was the strangest thing I’ve ever seen. You kind of expected that what the first team built is what most people would do, it made sense, but that second one, how could that happen? And to me that was good, it was just so weird, and really funny. So for me the humour, and that was the focus, it was funny to keep you into it, maybe you’d also want to see them improve a bit more for some satisfaction, but the humour was really good, so you would enjoy watching it again”

“I didn’t connect to anyone, it was just fun. I wasn’t laughing at them, just laughing with them”

“I was laughing because it was just so funny, and fun and they’re going to succeed, and they’re going to get better and grow as people, they’re not getting kicked off, they’re the team. They’re only going to get better. And it would be interesting to see how they go in their final game, and see if these guys who had absolutely no soccer skills can compete, and it’s something they probably have never experienced, because they’re probably sitting in a lab, or in their room painting, or building a car in their garage, and they’re not overtly social. So it’s a good social experiment”

A series of screenshots from the episode were presented to respondents in most interviews in order to prompt further reflection on their experience of the Nerds FC episode. These were chosen to illustrate various elements of the episode narrative, techniques and characters.

**Figure 10.2 Nerds FC frame 1**

The first image in Figure 10.2 from segment 3 stimulated discussion on the construction of the uniform presentation in the episode and the techniques used in its narrative representation. The visible product branding from this segment was also observed by many respondents.
“I did notice this because it was in slow motion when they came out and I thought, sometimes I wasn’t sure whether they were taking the piss or not. Because all the nerds were quite earnest and it seemed like they were having fun but I didn’t know why they had to slow it down. And I also remember thinking they are very obviously sponsored by Nike, it’s all over the uniforms. It was a bit distracting how they slowed it down but it didn’t make me feel uncomfortable or anything I guess”

“Not contrived, but structured for the entertainment of the show, whether they are told they all stand somewhere and run out or whether it was natural for them to do, and I think it was the former. But it’s an entertainment show so it doesn’t really matter much to me”

“That was one time where I thought in my cynicism, they got Andy Harper to stand out and call them out, and it would have been like alright Andy are you ready, guys are you ready to come out. But maybe it’s just the subject matter, it didn’t seem to matter. It didn’t make it feel any less real because what they’re doing is not capturing someone in their normal environment or trying to, it’s them on a reality show so it doesn’t matter”

“With their new team outfits, people do love watching the transformation, the transformation of the house or the transformation of the person, and all the lovely shots of the Nike footwear, I did notice that on the outfits. Might have been a bit of sponsorship there. It didn’t feel like it transformed them to me, they just looked a bit silly. I don’t know, they just looked a bit uncomfortable, even some of them saying how great they felt, they still looked a bit like deers in the headlights”

Respondents also commented on the representation of the nerd and coach characters in this scene and how this affected their engagement.

“I felt excited for them when they got their uniforms, bless their hearts. They were so excited opening their bags and seeing what was in there, and I've got 13, and I've got a prime number, it was so cute … I don't ever feel in Nerds FC like they're taking the piss and they're trying to make them look stupid. They know they've got their limitations, they're not putting any high expectations and they're just giving them a chance, and giving them that uniform makes them feel like a real team. I think that the coach in the photograph here, I think he is a better role model than the other guy, he seemed to laugh a lot more at them in the raft building thing and that kind of stuff, I didn't like him as much. But with the main coach he seems to be almost like a Little League coach where they know a certain level the kids can go to and beyond that isn't possible to get, so he's kind of nurturing as well and he clearly, or the directors, have got them running out of the change rooms like players do. So they're doing everything to get them feeling like a team, which is awesome, I really like that. And even in the locker room and they have the uniforms hanging up, making it feel special and realistic as well, because you have people like me who enjoy it and those who play it and can see they're taking it seriously as well”

“I thought it was nice that they were so excited that they got uniforms. Maybe perhaps feeling part of a team, a sporting team, is something they haven’t done as a kid or something, I don’t know. They seemed to have
some real honest joy, I feel like when they came in and reacted that was a more honest reaction”

“This was so funny, running out, they still don’t look like soccer players, but they look better. They were so proud of them, the coaches were so proud of them. And it was really funny when they were getting ready. The coaches were ok, they know what they’re doing, they’re funny and nice and they don’t put them down, they were good value”

“I think it was a bit of excitement, it was a bit of a moment as they ran out, so they built it up with the change rooms and finding their uniforms and having them run out past the camera, I think it was one of those triumphant moments, a bit of a milestone for them … I saw that as a bit more of a defining moment for them. So I sort of understand that, I could relate to that feeling, what they’re all feeling”

“This was another big highlight for me because I found that hilarious to see their reactions to the sporting outfit. Some of them mentioned that they had been on school teams before but to hear the comments like debonair or they felt trendy and more cool, again it’s like a different way of life, and it was hilarious seeing them get out there”

The image in Figure 10.3 illustrated the profile segments 4 and 7 within the episode involving individual nerds and their interests. Respondents commented on the significance of these segments to their enjoyment of the episode.

**Figure 10.3 Nerds FC frame 2**

“With this one where he’s talking about his hobby, I guess they focused on different nerds each week. This must have been his week to talk about his hobby, him and the warhammer guy, to explain how he was a nerd and how he fitted on the show. They obviously set these bits up, it seems like he was having a great time. I remember thinking all these magazines on the floor he must be like oh my god, that’s all my magazines, and had to clean them all up after the shoot. I was thinking it must be really painful for him to have them all out like that, but with that and his cars it all seemed pretty realistic, it looked like it happens. It gave you a bit of information”

“I think those bits were good to get to know the people, and what makes them tick. And I think they enjoy showing off the thing that they are so obsessed about. They love it so much, they’re so proud to show it off”
“I suspect that will happen with all of them across the series. But I think it’s good and interesting, and gives you background”

“I liked these back stories of characters, I thought they were good. It was just watching them, it kind of seemed real about them and what they liked doing. It didn’t seem fake at all, he really liked that stuff. I mean it was fake in one sense because they got him to put all his magazines around him on the floor, and it’s really obvious that they’re just trying to show how crazy he was. But it was just like an interview and information about what they’re like that was different, I’ve never really been into cars and painting statues. They were quite good cuts because it would just cut to this little story about one character out of the blue but it seemed to fit really well and it was interesting. That was really well done”

The specific profile of David Smith and his passion for cars encouraged many viewers to describe their own ideas of the nerd stereotype and whether this was consistent with the representation of nerds in the programme.

“The tend to think of what their definition of nerds was, of these people. You have a certain impression or thought of say the maths guy or the warhammer stuff, but they brought it into people who have a real love for something, borders on an obsession. See I can relate to having a passion for a car, maybe not collecting all the magazines and reading through it all”

“I thought it was interesting because I don’t think that is in itself nerdy. But when he said something about how, for want of a better word, how anal he was about them, and he keeps them and does this and that, I thought actually maybe you have just crossed the line for me. But I did think the whole time I wonder what a nerd really is, because a nerd for me is someone who is good with numbers or something, a mathematician, not someone who can fix a car because I think that’s a pretty cool skill”

“This one is the car lover who became captain. It’s quite an array of tools, I didn’t notice that when I first watched it. I guess that provides a context, to see his passion and obviously he spent a lot of money on his hobby, which tends to be the case in automotive hobbies. It’s funny, he almost didn’t strike me as being a nerd but that’s just in the environment he was, he did come across as more confident than the others, and I don’t know, for some reason I don’t regard car enthusiasts as nerdy as the guy who paints figurines for example, that struck me more as a nerdy introverted stereotype”

“He seemed more normal but pretty obsessed about something. But they’re all probably pretty obsessive characters. They seemed to have a broad definition of nerd. I liked how he was talking about losing his right arm or his favourite car and the practicality of it came out, and in the end he wouldn’t be able to do much work on it if he only had one arm”

“I was surprised, and for me he didn’t really fit this nerd mould at all. He’s got this really interesting skill and he’s a very personable, likeable
guy who showed as we saw a lot of leadership qualities, etc. So when they got to this bit I was really surprised he wasn’t some physics nerd or Star Wars nerd or whatever”

Viewers also made reference to their connection with the specific character of David.

“He was interesting, I didn’t like him as much, but I did like these parts where you found out more about them”

“He would be the type of person that would annoy me, but I did like the cars he has done up. Those bits, I suppose they do that for all of them over the series, so you learn what their background is, I don’t really care, but it’s good to see what people do, and what their hobbies are. Everybody has a hobby so it was interesting to see what people like”

“I think it’s because he’s more of an obsessive nerd, one who takes that ‘I like cars, they go fast’ to it has to be everything and I have to know everything about this part of a car. But I actually think he’s a bit of a toser, I don’t know, just his personality. Like the leadership, I would already predict that his leadership style will piss off some of the other guys”

“That’s the leader, the captain. And I thought it was interesting, he seemed annoying to me, I don’t know if I would like him to be my captain. But at the end of the day you need someone to tell you what to do, as a captain, he was that kind of person. That was them showing what they are interested in, I guess with those I felt like they were choosing the people’s most extreme personality traits”

Figure 10.4 Nerds FC frame 3

The image in Figure 10.4 was one of the transitional techniques used in the episode between segments 8 and 9. Interestingly, many viewers could not recall its use and this encouraged discussion of the semic detail in the frame or to reflect on their viewing habits.

“This one, is this where the ball kept coming out at you? I don’t know if I remember this, but I did notice the ball bounce out and thought that was a bit annoying. I don’t know if that was for ad breaks, so I don’t know why they did it, maybe just for editing, making it easier to watch the show. It was like a cartoon ball wasn’t it? I was thinking why are they doing that, I know I’m watching a show about soccer”
“It’s got their logo … and sponsorship”

“I remember the bits that came across between segments, I remember this but I don’t remember what was shown, I kind of switched off”

“I think we get so used to these kinds of transitions, we just tune out”

“I don’t remember this bit, I guess they did cut from lots of different stuff, but I don’t remember the transitions. I do remember they seemed to have lots of cuts like where they were being hit in the head with a ball or in the groin or whatever. And that was kind of funny, just to reiterate just in case you had forgotten they are really hopeless”

“Like a transition thing, I didn’t really notice them. One thing I did notice and this isn’t part of this, is quite often this ball would just pop out from nowhere and I found that, obviously it suited the style of the show, but actually when I first saw the ball I thought it was an actual ball. I found it more distracting than complementing the style of the show, obviously they’ve put it in, but if I was producing it I probably wouldn’t use that effect. It just seems like television and any kind of visual media entertainment has become so embedded in society and we tend to watch so much of it that a lot of these effects happen subliminally and you don’t really notice it”

The ‘talking head’ technique used throughout the episode, as illustrated in Figure 10.5 (segment 9) prompted several respondents to talk about their opinions of the characters.

![Figure 10.5 Nerds FC frame 4](image)

“So that’s Phillip. I don’t think I remember seeing, oh I do, he was talking about something at the end ... And one good aspect of Nerds FC being SBS it was quite multicultural”

“I remember he said something and I remember it was entertaining, but I also felt a little sorry for him. I thought he was real nerd, poor guy was trying to be a bit funny, so I had some sympathy for him”

“There’s definitely some guys that they don’t, maybe they do in later episodes, but I don’t really remember Phillip. Is he the one that had the Star Wars figurines? No. But they had different nerds talking to camera. I like that, and I like that sort of thing taking a snapshot and getting one person's perspective. And also it's not leaving it up to you as the viewer
just to have your own take on it, it's like in a book club and everyone talks about it and you get to hear different perspectives, and getting a different perspective from someone involved is really good. And also it helps you to see how they are coping in the whole process, especially in this situation with something out of their comfort zone, so it's a bit different”

“This one does have captions so I guess it’s helpful to know their names at least. The bits where they talk to them like this, it just makes it very obviously a reality TV show. Like in the Big Brother room, where they go in and talk, or The Biggest Loser you see on the ads where they cut between the person talking and the event. It’s a bit of before and after thing, that person obviously got through it ok if they’re talking about it. I only noticed it a few times especially in Nerds but I guess that makes it more effective, and you can find out, because sometimes people are hard to tell apart so it makes it easier to see them all”

“Obviously this guy has a nerdy sense of humour, they can be a bit cheeky and a bit of a smart arse sort of thing”

“The character development is pretty important to that show. Getting to know each one, their personalities”

“They put up their names every time they show them. By the end of episode you know who a few of them are like Nick and David Smith”

There was specific reference made to the presence of the camera in the shot and what this meant to their reading of the ‘reality’ of the show.

“It’s interesting seeing the camera in the background, it reminds you that it’s just a show. Maybe that should be something that they have to do in all reality TV programmes, show you a camera so that people realise that everyone acts differently when there’s a camera around and no one can ever be themselves. So it doesn’t matter how much reality you think it is, it’s not at all. And they’re trying to be funny and they’re trying to be liked, everyone would”

“They did have their names up, I didn’t really remember that. I like seeing the camera person in the background. I thought that was better because then you thought they were filming two at once, so it’s not just one thing at a time, they are filming simultaneously. That made it seem more real. I guess they did put their names up each time they talked to camera to give more of an idea about the characters”

“I like how you can see the production guys, that was cool. You get to see behind the scenes, you know it’s actually happening, not set up. I like that, and there were a few shots where you could see the production people. Was he the one talking about after the raft? That was annoying, you’re no MacGyver! I used to watch that”

“It seems more honest in a way to me, because clearly there are a lot of cameramen hanging around in the background, rather than hiding”
Figure 10.6 Nerds FC frame 5

The final image in Figure 10.6 was taken from the preview (segment 11) at the conclusion of the episode. Viewers discussed whether they would watch the next episode based on this cliffhanger-type preview.

“I guess the next on Nerds FC thing was a bit cheesy, but it did make me want to watch them, because I do like singing and dancing, and they look like they’re having fun. I don’t know if it was really necessary to have that banner down the bottom, they could just say next week, but it makes it easier to point out. It works, it made me want to watch it”

“Nexts on Nerds, oh yeah, that looks funny. That makes you want to watch it next time to see how bad they are, or be surprised that they’re good”

“That was a good link because they did somewhat pick the best bits, like the guy trying to sing and his voice broke”

“They’re all really into it, singing his heart out. That’s part of the draw card”

“That looked funny, how they need a good team song and cut to the Star Wars freak singing some love song, and you could also see they were really enjoying it. They were having a ball, they probably said to them to go crazy or whatever, and enjoy yourself and that seemed to work, because that was comical, you were watching that thinking that would be worth seeing because it’s just so over the top”

“Next on Nerds FC, it looks like they are Young Talent Time gone wrong or something. I probably wouldn’t be desperate to watch the next episode, but I think you clearly see that there's more teambuilding and they're going to sing their song. When I saw it on the TV there was a little bit more information; if someone just gave me that and said ‘do you want to watch?’ I’d say no from that photo. But from the trailer on the episode I would, it looks like they have fun and it's a good experience”

Viewers also commented on the content of the episodes in relation to their own expectations of the format.

“I thought they were being really creative in taking it from just being a sports show and developing as athletes, if you can say that, but they
were being quite creative in not just showing the sporting elements but also in producing a theme song. It can just be another way to fill the series but also rather than just pure sport and physical recreation, they do other creative things as a team. And with a few goofs, like one of them sings off key and they all laugh, so in that way it was more that cooperative type of show than others. And I guess in using those kind of activities to spice it up and add some different features to the show, you have to be creative and interesting in creating content. Just training the team would get a bit stale after a while”

“I thought that the singing was a little out of the confines of soccer. I think the team building was ok, and I guess with the team song I think of AFL players and how they sing together, but I thought that could have been a small part of the team building and it could have looked more at giving them the soccer skills they need. Because that’s the whole point, but maybe that’s not the point for the show”

The perspectives from the viewer respondents highlight the positive representation of the characters and format challenge while also emphasising the construction of the ‘reality’ programme and how this affected their engagement. These narratives provide an interesting juxtaposition with the perspectives from the production of Nerds FC.

**Industry perspective**

Series producer, Asif Zubairy describes Nerds FC as “one of [his] favourite shows to make” and that “it was nice to make something that [he] would watch”. In a personal interview, Zubairy related the experience of adapting the show for Australia and the specific attitude that surrounded the production. Zubairy was signed on as producer following the format’s licensing by Fremantle Media from its Danish creators. As a marketable commodity, a format license often provides what is termed the production ‘bible’ that details the techniques and choices for the creation of the programme, as discussed in Chapter Two. However, in the absence of a comprehensive ‘bible’ for Nerds FC, a member of the Danish production team was sent out to assist the Sydney production (Zubairy 2010). Zubairy states that he “kind of got it” already after watching the Danish version and from his own knowledge of soccer and youth-skewed programming, and that the input from the Danish team provided a ‘best practice’ for the format’s production and the “ethos of the show, which is slightly different to other reality TV” in its innocence “to the point of being sweet, and almost naive”. This ethos is equally evident in viewer responses to the
structure of the format in lack of eliminations or voting and the overall positive atmosphere of the programme.

The series was planned in two months prior to filming using the structure and subject matter of the original Danish format. Although Zubairy notes that often format adaptation requires a localisation, no changes were needed in the format’s structure of scenarios and challenges for the Australian nerd team. However, he also argues that the look and content achieved was better than the original, which can be linked to the comparisons made by Jensen (2009) in its ‘universalistic appeal’. The various scenarios that were set for the series were “seemingly random” however their use was “tied in with their performance on the pitch” to develop new skills in a more interesting way for television, as well as learning to play soccer (O’Regan 2006). The casting call provided “a field to choose from, but it wasn’t huge” and was designed to ascertain “whether they could play or not” as well as introduce the format idea to potential participants (Zubairy 2010). It is interesting to note that the casting call for the second series of *Nerds FC* in 2007 attracted about 300 students (McManus 2007) as an indication of the success and appeal of the initial series. Although partly casting for ‘looks’, the personalities of the nerds in their interests and intelligence proved to be highly useful for the format in terms of dialogue and content. The profile segments focusing on individual nerds were also directly adapted from the Danish original where Zubairy argues they were “just very lucky with some of them” being entirely dependent on the characters in the cast. Additionally, the casting of coaches was uncomplicated within the “small, very enthusiastic community” of soccer in Australia, but it was also important that they understood the premise of the show in developing a team rather than aiming for a “boot camp” style of training (Zubairy 2010). The central concept of ‘nerd’ was broached “quite gently” as part of an explanation of the show’s difference to not be exploitative or humiliating, however this was not problematic for the participants who “seemed OK with it” (Zubairy 2010).

*Nerds FC* producer, Charles Stewart, describes the format as “a journey of discovery” for the nerds as they are exposed to new situations and challenges (Magnusson 2006). Zubairy comments specifically on the narrative arc of the series that contains less “jeopardy” than more commercial formats, however, the audience
can follow their progression and identify with them as they develop from their initial state of ineptitude towards the conclusion in the final game. In this way, it was important to record as much footage as possible of the nerds at the start of the process as it was “something that [they] were never going to be able to recreate” (Zubairy 2010). Although this means that the first episode is “full of sight gags basically”, the footage was referenced in later episodes as a reminder and ‘yardstick’ of their development (Zubairy 2010). Explicit references to ‘journey’ within the programme were avoided as Zubairy believes it “sounds scripted” due to its familiarity in ‘reality TV’ conventions. As a result, the nerds were never prompted to comment on this part of the experience but contributed enough in their own dialogue so that audiences could “think and imagine how much the boys [had] changed and developed” (Zubairy 2010). The positive nature of the experience for the nerd characters is also reflected in their continued contact as a group after the show was completed (Zubairy 2010).

Zubairy describes *Nerds FC* as a “perfect reality show” for SBS in a “modern idiom” of programming but also “an ethical show”. However, he also argues that its structure is not ideal for a commercial format because of the absence of eliminations or voting as an “audience buy in” (Zubairy 2010). While there is possible engagement in the narrative arc and the characters, it is argued that the lack of direct public involvement in the progression of the format affects audience investment and consequently ratings. However, Zubairy maintains *Nerds FC* as a good example of a different ‘reality TV’ ethos that is “quite noble in its intentions” but also produced with a “commercial eye”, achieving a particular look, humour and entertainment. The format is described by SBS programmer Jane Roscoe as a good example of a “lovely hybrid” of the best of documentary and ‘reality TV’ that is “authentic and real” but also constructed for a “great narrative and lots of drama” (Fenton & Leo 2007).

**Analysis**

Of the four research case studies, *Nerds FC* is the most suited format to the industry use of the term ‘reality TV’. Furthermore, viewer respondents understood the role of construction in designing the overall and specific situations of the characters, but also
responded to the ‘reality’ of their reactions. It is also interesting to note the acknowledgement by both industry and viewer interviewees of the positive nature of the format in comparison to similar ‘reality’ formats, located in both the representation of the characters and the avoidance of familiar negative strategies. This introduction and development of the characters is central to the progression and viewer engagement with the series.

The overall narrative of the series involves the development of the nerd team working towards their final game. This is choreographed through a series of stages divided between the eight episodes. In this way, the episodes are part of a larger enigma that is re-introduced at the start of each episode as the ‘world’ of the format. Additionally, each episode involves smaller contained narratives of the various challenges and development the nerds undertake. The breakdown of the case study episode (see Figure 10.7) reflects the overarching narrative in the cliffhanger opening, after which the episode focuses on smaller narratives of the team challenges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preview: previous week Title sequence</th>
<th>Cliffhanger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Stasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Uniforms</td>
<td>Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Uniforms</td>
<td>Incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Profile: Tim Weston</td>
<td>Suspension/Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Training in uniform</td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Team building challenge</td>
<td>Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Team building continued</td>
<td>Incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Team building continued</td>
<td>Clinch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Raft challenge</td>
<td>Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Leader discussion and vote</td>
<td>Incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Preview: next week Credits</td>
<td>Cliffhanger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10.7 Nerds FC enigmatic structure
Case study: Nerds FC

These are introduced through separate enigmas and incidents, and unfold as contained stories within the overall progression of the series towards the final game. The completion of these challenges leads to a new state of stasis for the nerds, and these new states are continually built upon as they progress as a team and individuals within the episodes and series overall. The addition of individual profiles provides a suspension from the events in the episode, but also acts as an orientation to the characters. Figure 10.7 illustrates the four small narratives of the case study episode in nerd progression of uniforms, team building, rafting and election of captain, with the addition of two character profiles. In this structure, the characters provide the focus for the episodes as they develop through the challenges, as well as the introduction of their interests and passions as nerds.

The micro-transcription of segments 6-8 of the episode in Appendix F illustrates the dominance of semic detail and action in order to orient and drive the narrative. The enthusiasm and teamwork of the nerds is dominant as they tackle the challenges set by the format. This is also linked to the performance of the nerds as characters within stereotyped ideas. The team building challenge highlights their intellectual ability in juxtaposition to their earlier display of sporting inability. This representation shifts the focus from emphasising the importance of physical ability to a more positive and holistic development of the team that represents both their strengths and weaknesses. The inclusion of team building exercises provides an interesting view of the team’s development as opposed to continual footage of soccer training. The common use of ‘talking head’ interviews interspersed through the episode provides wider perspectives on event representation. The ‘reality’ and documentary technique provides a subjective point of view, away from the action taking place, as a means of expanding the narrative clinches and characterisations. There are several uses of the technique illustrated in the micro-transcription, which highlights the leadership action of David and the other nerds’ perspectives on his behaviour, as well as various reflections on the team building challenges.

The characters of the nerds and their coach are central to the format premise and audience engagement. The drama and aspiration of the episode, and series overall, rely on the nerd stereotype and their lack of sporting ability, coupled with their own personalities and traits. While the nerd characters may not encapsulate the Australian
sporting stereotype and values, their enthusiasm for the challenge and engaging personalities encourage connections with viewers in their new experiences and development as a personal and group journey. Jensen describes a lack of knowledge about soccer as “rather normal” being a ‘developing code’ in Australia (2009: 180). She compares this approach from Nerds FC to the Danish original where soccer is the national sport and therefore is a substantial part of the format’s humour. The goodwill of the format towards the nerd characters, and the good-natured participation of the nerds corresponded between the production description by Zubairy and viewer responses. The inclusion of profile features provides insight and depth in their characters as a link for the audience to possible identification or emotional response. Coupled with their progression through the episodes towards the final goal of the format, this link with the characters becomes essential in creating jeopardy for viewers, in addition to the aspirational goals of new skills and teamwork.

The viewer responses emphasise a plaisir of identification with the characters and recognition of the ‘journey’. The contained series of eight episodes provides an encouragement to view the whole progression in order to see the team’s development and resolution. A further plaisir can be appreciated in the positive ethos of the format, where viewers are simply watching a structured development of the team without overt humiliation or audience interactivity. This also leads to a possible jouissance in the bodily reaction of laughter. This was common amongst the viewer respondents where their initial reaction was related to their enjoyment through entertainment and humour. Due to the format’s ethos, this entertainment is not necessarily based in schadenfreude but rather through the enthusiasm of the characters within their challenge, as a possible role-taking for viewers in imagining their own experiences or reactions.
PART THREE

The Illusory Everyday
CHAPTER ELEVEN

The illusory everyday

“It is more constructed but that doesn’t make it less real”

The above quotation from a viewer respondent in relation to *Nerds FC* highlights the eternal dialectic of ‘real’ and construction for ‘reality TV’. We believe that the people and events involved are authentic, however a sense of ‘real’ is contributed by elements of verisimilitude, and heightened through the production choices in dramatic stories and characters. It is in the combination of authenticity and verisimilitude that further understanding can be gained as to the production and engagement of ‘reality TV’. The approach of previous commentary on ‘reality TV’ as ‘trash’ in relation to a positivist ‘real’ is shifted in this research by the triangulation of the four key issue areas outlined in Part One, with theoretical perspectives and qualitative interview input. As a result, multiple interpretations and pleasures are located in the fundamental basis of reality TV within an ‘illusory everyday’: a constructed narrative of entertainment. This framework expands the notion of the genre through examination of the interplay between the case study screen text, its production and viewer responses. Further narratives of pleasure are provided by the viewer respondents in their interview opportunities to speak at length on their own choices in ‘reality’ programming and how the case study episodes correspond to their ideas of the genre. This process suggests the subjectivity of the amorphous genre for viewers, but also highlights the connection between the industry and audiences in the construction of the ‘everyday’ for television, and its particular qualities as entertainment.

Amoebic ‘reality TV’

Previous examinations of ‘reality TV’ using objective notions of television representation provide limited explanation of the construction and reception of the ‘everyday’. Hill’s audience study classifies ‘reality TV’ according to its perceived actuality in a more literal category of factual and non-fiction, where ‘real’ or authenticity is based in a format’s connection to actual events or people (2005: 54). She argues that the element of performance provides viewer judgement of a ‘criterion of truth’ where the “more entertaining a factual programme is, the less real
it appears to viewers” (2005: 57; 2007: 143). While this conclusion is linked to the research focus on audience ‘critical viewing practices’ and attitudes to information, authenticity and ethics in ‘reality TV’ (Hill 2005), this specific scope of inquiry discounts the role of entertainment in audience engagement as part of these viewing practices that negotiate format construction as an ‘illusory everyday’. The literal classifications used by Hill in relation to factual or non-fiction television as connotations of truth, objectivity and fact equally neglect their increasing signification as

“not a pure and absolute state where truth exists and can be tested, but rather, … a muddy area with blurred and permeable boundaries sustained by unspoken agreement among those creating and consuming it to act as if the people and the statements they make are different to those in explicit fictions and are effectively ‘telling the truth’ as they believe it” (Bonner 2003: 3-4).

This definition reflects the principles of the amoebic genre introduced by this research in the recognition of cultural conventions of verisimilitude discussed in Chapter One. To claim objectivity in television is to overlook that “everything which is seen on the TV screen arrives there after a complex process of mediation involving many people and institutions and a great deal of technology and artifice”, and to ignore the naturalisation of representation conventions (Graddol 1994: 136). Hill’s conclusions of audience value in and assessment of the ‘truthfulness’ of formats is based in a framework of ‘factuality’ in which ‘reality TV’ is perceived by viewers as a “waste of time”, and admits that a reflection on entertainment with viewers “might find different evaluative connotations, although the social stigma of reality TV is strong no matter what framework it is situated in” (2005: 175; 2007: 97). Hill argues this “low cultural status” of ‘reality TV’ acts as a source of shame or embarrassment for viewers regarding their television preferences (2007: 210). This classification corresponds with taste distinctions introduced in Chapter One, and persists throughout academic and general media commentary, and amongst viewers.

The viewer respondents self-selected to participate in this research on the basis of their interest in watching ‘reality TV’. In this way, a self-declared enjoyment of ‘reality TV’ alleviated the potential for embarrassment in the research’s aims of understanding the pleasure of ‘reality TV’ and the importance of the viewer experience of entertainment. The viewer respondent input reflects the multiplicity of
their engagement with the ‘reality’ formats, and interestingly the adoption of ‘lowest common denominator’ discourses where viewing caused displeasure, primarily with *Border Security*. The employment of this critical position suggests a more complex relationship of taste and judgement based within the subjectivity of the individual viewer, as opposed to a binary of entertainment/information or lightweight/worthy. The combination of these qualities in the amoebic genre highlights the relocation of ‘reality TV’ understanding from moral hierarchy criticism to subjective narratives of production and reception, and provides greater insight into the genre, television narrative and pleasure.

While the discussion of terminology in Chapter Two illustrates the industry’s labels for the genre, and the choice of case study episodes reflects the researcher’s broad conception of ‘reality TV’, the question of genre definition was also posed to the viewer respondents. The problematic nature of the ‘reality TV’ genre is reinforced by the viewer respondents in their own classifications.

“[It’s] ordinary people’s lives a lot on television. They’re all quite constructed; it’s not just watching someone go about their life. It’s not just following me around a house all day, doing my boring things … it’s life fast, it’s chopped up, it’s ready to go, it’s easy to digest, don’t have to think that much about it”

“So the label is like a genre, but it’s not representative of reality at all. It’s just another type of show which films potentially real stuff but breaks it down to a digestible story, and creates the story sometimes”

“What I think of as typical reality TV is that whole elimination process to an outcome”

“Reality TV for me is untrained actors, unscripted. Contrived or not is not relevant”

“I think there are two types of reality TV: there’s one like *Nerds FC* with a journey over things … and then you’ve got ones like *Border Security* and the cop ones and *RPA* and all that, which are really light entertainment, so that if they’re on you’ll watch them but you don’t get sucked in and you could walk away from it. There’s no must have television. Whereas the other ones I think can be very addictive and I think that’s why they can be so popular because people can get drawn in. And over a season you want to get the conclusions and the journey, and their relationships and see them grow, and how’s it going to end and all that sort of stuff. And I prefer that sort of reality TV a lot more”

“That rawness, it’s real people, and it’s spontaneous and unpredictable. And from a production perspective, it’s not staged, you don’t know
exactly what’s going to happen, you don’t know exactly how things are going to pan out”

“I think reality TV used to mean the really structured like Big Brother, those shows where it is putting people in unreal situations. I think it’s now changed into things like Border Security and Bondi Rescue where there are reality aspects of it, but whether or not it is portrayed in the true sense of what actually happened, or that there are aspects of manipulation”

“There’s different types of reality television for me, there is this kind of style that I see as reality, as filming real people, obviously it’s not quite real because there are people walking around with cameras but it’s realistic situations so to me that’s more reality TV”

“People competing against each other seem to be the main theme in reality TV. Eliminations and things like that”

“I guess they all seem to have different focus, different aspects of life or work or something that is happening. Or they set up things like Big Brother, the whole thing is contrived, it’s only the relationships or the people responding to things that can be termed as real in that situation, because it’s not at all a reality that anyone else would live in”

“That it’s based on something real, rather than fiction. That’s it’s based on either real lives or real experiences, or real topics. Rather than fantasy or a script. Even though some things are scripted, it’s designed to be unlike a scripted piece, is what I get the feeling. Although I do acknowledge that sometimes there will be scripted things”

“I think based in ‘real life’ with ‘real people’, not actors … and I know there is narrative involved once they edit it together, but it’s not a written down narrative, piece of drama or whatever, there’s not preordained sort of fictional characters”

These overarching responses to ‘reality TV’ reflect the cultural category noted in Chapter One: “reality TV is a genre because we treat it as one” (Mittell 2004: 197). While the individual definitions may not reflect the industry terminology, they provide a variety of subjective perceptions of ‘reality’ on television while still mindful of its inherent construction. Pleasures such as identification, aspiration, and jeopardy are broadly recognised in the personal preferences of ‘reality TV’ viewing, further detailed in the case studies. The dialectic of the ‘illusory everyday’ results in the combination and perception of television styles between informative and entertainment. Pleasure is possible in the observation of everyday people or events, but also in the coherence and familiarity of narrative progression, and the relevance and identification with the format subject matter and representation. Barthes’ distinction of plaisir and jouissance is important as the point where the ‘everyday’
and its television illusion combine in the amoebic genre of ‘reality TV’. These pleasures only exist in the meeting of the screen text and the viewer, and so the production of formats relies on the elements of jeopardy and aspiration for viewer engagement with the programme representation of narrative and ‘everyday’. In this way, viewer expectations and individual experiences inform their interpretation and entertainment in the format.

Fiske argues that ideas of “jouissance and affective pleasure require an intensity of viewing and a loss of subjectivity that do not accord with television’s typical modes of reception” in a literal understanding that questions television’s ‘orgasmic’ qualities (1989: 71). However, the case studies have illustrated the bodily pleasures possible for ‘reality TV’ viewers in “that moment when my body will follow its own ideas – because my body does not have the same ideas as me” (ce moment où mon corps va suivre ses propres idées – car mon corps n’a pas les memes idées que moi) (Barthes 1973: 27, own translation). It is the construction of the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’ that has the capability to tap into viewers’ knowledge and experiences for relevance and interest, but also to captivate and engage in a different way to other television forms. The responses from viewers on their ‘reality TV’ choices overwhelmingly emphasise these qualities; however, the individuality of these factors would result in a diverse range of ‘reality TV’ programme choices by the viewers. In other words, although the responses point to a definable range of features that contribute to viewer programme preferences, viewer subjectivity would result in an individual specific range of programmes that are linked to pleasure, which correspond to their own preferences in multiple factors than could be gleaned from gender, age or class.

“Reality TV is more immediate to our own situation so we can more easily rank ourselves against it. See where we are, what we think about the other people, how they’re thinking, how we would react. And we know that that situation could happen”

“Basically they must be relevant, I don’t just watch them to fill in time, I’ve got to feel like I’m getting something out of it to watch it. And I don’t mind it, I think there’s a place for it, because it’s not a documentary, it’s got a bit of light humour, you don’t have to think too hard, you can just sit back and enjoy it, if you learn something that’s good”

“It doesn’t have to be something I’m specifically interested in. I’m generally a task-oriented kind of person, so if I’m watching television I
want it to be useful to me. I prefer to be informed, but it doesn’t have to be, you either watch it for being informed or entertainment value”

“You’re just interested in other people’s lives and other human relationships. It is a bit voyeuristic, you like to sit back and maybe not laugh, but you do pass judgements”

“I don’t mind if it’s contrived … you’re aware of it but that doesn’t really matter. What really upsets me is when they are making people out to be worse than they are. And that I think is really exploitative and horrible … I think we just like watching other people embarrass themselves, we feel better about ourselves by watching other people look bad”

“It’s that human factor where you know it’s real people and it somehow makes a connection to something in you, which I don’t think normal television can always do. You might think I’m a bit like a character but I think it’s just the real factor”

“It’s an interesting story, and it’s edited in a way that’s interesting, but there’s also that added bonus that it actually happened so therefore it’s more shocking or dramatic, or you’re more emotionally connected to it because it’s real”

“I like the fact that they are real people and that you are getting involved in their lives and seeing a snapshot of their life”

“Reality TV, it’s looking at something people can relate to. I really enjoy them, but as I said, it’s things that I either would have wanted to have done myself or really enjoy watching”

“I do like the story element, getting to know people and where they’re from and seeing what they’re striving for … I like that whole journey cliché. As much as some of them are quite cheesy, and I like some characters better than others. Like seeing them achieve things in that regard”

“You can be inspired, or feel an emotion or learn, those different aspects depending on what show you watch. And then there’s always the pure entertainment throw-away value of them as well”

These viewer responses illustrate the multiple qualities of the ‘illusory everyday’ in the amoebic genre. The viewer cohort equally acknowledged the informative and entertaining, or authentic and simulated elements of formats. These perspectives suggest that, more than solely text-based understanding, they are also informed by cultural conventions of television production and viewing. As ‘reality TV’ continues to evolve in television broadcast, it is arguable that viewers will continue to develop their interpretation strategies to further engage with the genre.
**Dialectic awareness**

The acknowledgment of the variety and construction of ‘reality’ formats by viewer respondents reflects its production intentions by the industry, highlighted in the qualitative interviews. It is this connection between the motivations in constructing narratives of jeopardy and aspiration, and the resonance and play by audiences, that defines the essential relationship of ‘reality TV’ and the ‘illusory everyday’. The multiple input of industry practitioners illustrates the specific techniques and designs that are used in order to appeal to its implied audience. The ‘everyday’ is trawled and constructed into a celebratory performance of banality and excess. Similarly, as described above and in the case studies, this illusion is the fundamental feature in viewer engagement through identification and pleasure. However, it is not a simple equation. Pleasure in a ‘reality’ format is related to the construction of the ‘everyday’ but the extent of this engagement is dependent on the individual and their different preferences and experiences. As one respondent explained:

“It isn’t real, like whenever you watch it, it is choreographed … it really is like a sitcom plot, and doesn’t have much value to it, but it can be entertaining so there is a balance … I’ve got an expectation of it that it should be real but I don’t think it is … it doesn’t feel real”

Responses from the viewer cohort illustrate an awareness of the constructed nature of television programmes, and in particular the narrative packaging in ‘reality TV’ through journey or strand progressions, which was balanced with their engagement in the format ‘world’. Pleasure in the formats was equally based in their acceptance of the format’s verisimilitude and arbitrary ‘rules’. For example, Laetitia’s experience in *Family Footsteps* was described by some viewers as far-fetched in the requirements of the format for a cultural challenge, while others saw this as a transformative journey of her character. Alternatively in *Border Security*, some viewers identified with the portrayal of the agencies while others remained outside the format ‘world’ by questioning possible agendas in the representation. This multiplicity of responses by viewers reflects the liminal nature of the ‘illusory everyday’ where the ‘everyday’ becomes stretched and ambiguous through its televisual representation. This liminality also acts as a transitory state of becoming that is present in the amoebic genre as an evolving and open space of narratives that are “not quite fact or fiction” (Price 2010a: 453). The pleasure for viewers here is the negotiation of the ‘illusory everyday’, not as a question of deciphering what is
authentic or fake but rather the liminality allows for a playful engagement in its constructed jeopardy and aspiration from the ‘everyday’ which can encourage possible entertaining or informative qualities.

In combination, these engagements with ‘reality’ formats illustrate the essential relationship between the industry and audiences. Independent director David Mortimer explains this process in the attribution of programme popularity and status within the production having “absolute sense of what the audience relationship is with the subject”; where the ‘everyday’ content and its representation can have a “huge effect on how successful shows are” (2009). The central role of ordinary people or situations has the potential to engage with viewers on a level of intimacy that stretches beyond a simple equation of ‘real/unreal’ to a more emotional connection in pleasure (Kavka 2008). However, the potency of this engagement is contingent on the framework imposed by ‘reality TV’ production either in design or editing, where if the ‘rules’ of the format “aren’t completely arbitrary or if they’re not silly” then the audience has the opportunity to engage with it “as an entertainment vehicle” (Zubairy 2010). So, as one viewer notes at the start of this chapter, the premise of Nerds FC is highly constructed yet they did not find this less ‘real’ than other ‘reality’ formats. Alternatively, some viewer respondents questioned the authenticity of the character or situation representations in Border Security and Bondi Rescue regardless of their industry type as ‘factual’ formats that aim to capture events and people in actuality.

Shifts in audience tastes are instrumental in developments to ‘reality TV’ production and vice versa, best exemplified through the responses of viewer respondents to Australian formats of Big Brother and Masterchef.

“Big Brother when I did watch it, and probably when it was new and interesting, you just weren't sure what would happen, there was almost a voyeuristic element to it. Just getting to see these people do whatever, and I can't really explain that because now I wouldn't watch it at all if it was still on, because it got boring and tired. Initially it was just the freak value, just that different-ness about it”

“I reckon [Masterchef] was a new wave of reality where it wasn’t about shooting people down and making them feel crap. It was about actually having a conscience about it, and help and supporting them through it”
These responses are echoed in media commentary on the evolving genre where the demise of the Australian *Big Brother* production heralded the irrelevance of “brand loyalty” and a change in the popularity of other locally produced ‘observational reality’ formats (Walsh 2008). It has been argued that the 4.946 million viewers across Australia for the final episode of the inaugural *MasterChef* series is indicative of a shift in audience tastes for “positive, uplifting reality shows” with subsequent developments in other Australian productions (Vickery 2009b). This reported shift is reflected in this study in the timing of interviews with viewer respondents in 2009 reinforcing this perspective of changing ‘reality’ format tastes. The more ‘uplifting’ or ‘positive’ elements of the chosen case study formats were affirmed in viewer expressions of pleasure or resonance, such as the goodwill and personal improvement of *Nerds FC*, the emotional journey of Laetitia in *Family Footsteps*, or the larrkinism and service of the lifeguards in *Bondi Rescue*. This is in direct contrast to Hill’s argument that viewers commonly relate negatively with participants in ‘reality’ formats “rather than identification and shared interests” (2007: 198). This type of engagement is reflected as just one feature in the case studies through possible *schadenfreude* displayed of *Border Security* or *Nerds FC*.

However, the shift documented by *MasterChef* in Australia is also illustrated in the broad reception to format elements. The ‘new nice’ as a “pop-cultural phenomenon that no one saw coming but everyone is emulating” (Bodey 2010) is directly related to the audience rating success of the Australian *MasterChef* and illustrates the audience influence on industry production. The ability for a quick production turnaround in ‘reality’ formats discussed in Chapter Two means that productions can adapt to their audiences, sometimes even enlisting direct feedback through online avenues connected to the format. Both the viewer and media commentary illustrate the industry perspective of the connection between format and audience in a cycle of production and consumption based on viewing preferences of ‘reality TV’, described by executive Helen Bullough (2009) as a “triangle of viewer, show, channel”. The portrayal of the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’ must therefore tread a fine line in its appeal to audiences within contemporary cultural interests and tastes, as well as in the construction of the ‘illusory everyday’ in a plausible, but not improbable, format ‘world’.
Interestingly, both the viewer and industry interviewees refer to the idea of an ‘implied producer’ or ‘implied viewer’ respectively. The industry packages certain aspects of the ‘everyday’ into formats for potential appeal, while audiences refer to a production ‘them’ as a group behind the content of their television screens. Both imply a distance, however, this ‘implied’ status is expanded in the triangulation of the individual reflection of production goals and techniques with viewer responses to episode construction and reception. While the case studies reflect the possibilities of overlap between production and viewer perspectives, such as the resonance of Laetitia’s character in *Family Footsteps* or the goodwill of *Nerds FC*, there are also points of difference such as the production intentions and the negative responses to *Border Security*. In particular, the range of responses in relation to *Border Security* emphasises the multiplicity of Barthes’ post-structuralist framework in meaning production and pleasure, where the same screen text provides greatly diverse narratives of viewing experiences. The variance in the viewer experiences of the case study episodes reflects the entirely subjective reasons, pleasures, and interpretations in the process of viewing ‘reality TV’.

Equally, the chosen episodes reflect various format representations of the ‘everyday’ that have the ability to tap into viewers’ knowledge and experiences of the content and genre styles through expectations and engagement. In this way, the viewer cohort provides a snapshot of some of the possibilities of responses to ‘reality TV’, and the choice of case study episodes act as a snapshot of Australian ‘reality’ production. The diverse responses in these case studies reflect some of the many elements present in ‘reality TV’ production or engagement and the multiple levels of consideration offered by the ‘illusory everyday’ to format approach, such as content, form, construction, appeal, and resonance. While the industry terminology relates to technical qualities between formats as ‘reality’ or ‘factual’, viewer definitions indicate a broader understanding of the genre at work. Recognition of the shifts in subject matter and styles reflects the evolving nature of the genre; an amoebic fluidity that will continue as viewers change their preferences and pleasures in ‘reality TV’ formats. The four case studies in this research reflect different aspects of ‘everyday’ people, situations and themes, with varying styles and approaches in their narrative construction. However, the entertainment value remains highly dependent on the individual viewers who are encouraged to take pleasure in the representation
offered by the industry production. It would appear from the viewer cohort that the levels of construction are understood as inherent and therefore the appeal lies more in the way the representation of the ‘everyday’ engages with their own interests as a means of entertainment.

**Everyday entertainment**

The recognition of ‘reality TV’ as amoebic relates directly to its construction and reception as entertainment. Moving away from a comparison with documentary frees ‘reality TV’ from the label of ‘trash’, and the implication that producers and viewers represent the lowest common denominator. Personal narratives are offered in order to reflect the diversity of responses that recognise the nuance of production and the polysemy of formats and pleasures. Ultimately, the amoebic nature of ‘reality TV’ shifts the focus back to entertainment; a term impossible to define in any specificity. Both the continual evolution of ‘reality TV’ production and the multiple responses from viewers illustrate the ongoing changes and diverse forms that entertainment can take within this amorphous realm of television broadcasting. The case studies within the research frameworks of post-structuralism, phenomenology and constructivism illustrate the connection of the individual in interpretation and pleasure that links the narrative format to viewer engagement. The ‘everyday’ represented in ‘reality TV’ is an illusion, but it is an entertaining narrative that is designed to connect with the experiences of viewers as a source of pleasure. This is best encapsulated by a viewer respondent:

“It definitely has to be an element of drama ... you have to be connected to it or be entertained by it ... you have to get something out of it, you don’t just watch reality TV for the sake of it … it’s a form of entertainment, it wouldn’t be a successful TV show if it wasn’t entertaining”

This response captures the central argument of Part One by presenting the genre as entertainment achieved through narrative jeopardy and audience aspiration. This representation of the ‘everyday’ corresponds with that argued by de Certeau and Bakhtin in Chapter Three where pleasure results from the performance of banality. The qualitative data gathered in the industry and viewer interviews informs the analysis of the case studies, and the genre as a whole, as a site of multiplicity in subjective perceptions and interpretations. In these perspectives, entertainment is not necessarily discredited as mere diversion, but rather a fundamental part of format
construction and reception. The combination of informative and entertaining television techniques and content is therefore not necessarily a ‘dumbing down’, but a liminal space for the ‘everyday’ to be performed for viewer engagement. In this way, entertainment in the constructed narratives of the ‘illusory everyday’ is essential in the triangular relationship between the industry and audiences through ‘reality’ formats. The viewer searches for pleasure through play with the construction and representation of events and characters as a means of diversion or validation.

The ‘illusory everyday’ of ‘reality TV’ is therefore a mirage – a hopeful illusion of an ‘everyday’ that is easily identifiable, resonant and subjective. Although audiences are aware of their physical presence in front of a television, and the techniques used in television production and representation, ‘reality TV’ acts as a form of escapism into another so-called ‘reality’: one that is familiar but foreign, ordinary but dramatic. The subjectivity of the television narrative is important for audience identification in that its appearance of the ‘everyday’ is inextricably linked with understood conventions of television verisimilitude. Therefore, the illusion is not a fallacy or deception, or even a ‘trashing’ of documentary values, but part of a Baudrillardian simulation of a reality that had no existence except as portrayed on television, and embodied by audiences as an illusory ‘reality’. Ultimately, the ‘illusory everyday’ is a product of “good story-telling” (Bullough 2009) in which the drama built from the ‘everyday’ content provides sources of connection for viewers through pleasure in content and form that draw heavily on television entertainment conventions. In this way, the framework of the ‘illusory everyday’ remains more closely related to ‘reality TV’ than other established television genres. Although all television is mediated, the difference lies in the amoebic form of ‘reality TV’ as a shifting combination of styles that requires the conscious construction of narrative and character development as a source of pleasure for the viewer within its represented ‘everyday’. The ‘illusory everyday’ therefore provides a framework for the acknowledgement and understanding of the play that is essential in viewer engagement with ‘reality TV’ in negotiating the mirage represented for subjective resonance and pleasure.
Conclusion

In the early days of this research, I was asked what I would do if ‘reality TV’ ceased to exist while I completed my study. I remember being undaunted by this question; firstly, as the concern had been raised many times by the general media and was yet to be realised, and secondly, should the prediction finally come true, it would provide further indications of the connection between industry and viewer, where audiences inform the production of programmes by their popularity. However, the demise of ‘reality TV’ remains only speculation as it continues to be dominant in television production and viewing. The many shifts and trends that have occurred during my study have encouraged my consideration of the changing genre and its amoebic properties. Over the three years of this research, new ‘reality’ formats have been trialled, some have been cancelled, and many others have become or continued to be popular programmes. It has been an interesting period to explore the genre in Australia with the termination of *Big Brother* in 2008, the ratings heights of *Border Security*, and the emergence of the *MasterChef* phenomenon in 2009, to name a few. Audiences continue to shift in their viewing preferences and the industry continues to respond, and vice versa.

This thesis set out to understand Australian ‘reality TV’ through audience pleasure in the constructed illusion of the ‘everyday’. This argument addresses a discernable gap in previous literature by including the individual experiences of viewers and the industry in entertainment. Previous assumptions about ‘reality TV’ production and reception have been challenged in the shift from ‘reality’ as ‘factual’, as truth, or authentic. The thesis has also examined the link between audiences and the industry in the construction of ‘everyday’ narratives on television. This research centralises the notion of entertainment as equally important to the production and reception of ‘reality TV’, and the case studies triangulate industry and viewer narratives as a way to cross check and understand the construction and engagement of the ‘everyday’ as multiple and nuanced. Throughout the duration of the research, the topic description of ‘reality TV’ in social settings has resulted in varying responses. Those who enjoy ‘reality’ formats often begin to divulge their own opinions and preferences, as if the imprimatur of research had encouraged a safe space to talk about their relationship with the genre. Those who have no regard for ‘reality’ programmes presented a kind
of defensive morality, often using the discourses of ‘trash’ and ‘lowest common denominator’ to distance their interests from the genre and question its worth. However, this is a gross oversimplification and does not reflect the variety of responses to ‘reality TV’. Both ends of this spectrum, and its many permutations in-between, are valid within the perspective of subjective engagement. In focusing on the pleasure of ‘reality TV’ in Australia, and the possibilities for displeasure, this research has explored the many narratives that contribute to this spectrum as ideographic and highly dependent on context.

The journey of this research has involved the collection of narratives. It has taken me back to London and the BBC as the site of my initial interest in ‘reality TV’ to capture a sense of the global phenomenon. It has also traversed between Sydney and Melbourne to understand the position of the Australian industry and its complexity in terminology and technique, and into the homes of viewers to share experiences of enjoyment and interpretation. It has also collected narratives of television criticism, genre definition, narrative theories and audience studies, theoretical and qualitative frameworks, and television programmes. In this way, the journey has presented many challenges in the constant refinement of the research arguments through discovery. The resulting combination of narratives has reflected ‘unconventional’ research approaches in constructivist and emergent design methods and strategies. And yet, it is this very combination that has led to the outcomes of the thesis. Rather than a sole focus on text analysis of ‘reality TV’ representation, Likert scale audience surveys, or a theoretical exposition within the criticism norm of the television moral hierarchy, this thesis has sought to challenge the textualist, realist and audience assumptions of these positions, as discussed in Chapters One, Two and Four. The multi-faceted approach in the consideration of the many narratives of both texts and respondents has explored the perceptions and pleasures of audiences, and the connections between production, texts and audiences in an amorphous genre. In this paradigm, the researcher is a *bricoleur* in adding “different tools, methods and techniques of representation and interpretation to the puzzle” (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 4). An ‘unconventional’ approach is also reflected in the deliberate format and chapter order of the written thesis. Rather than a conventional outline of literature review, methodology, analysis and conclusion, the progression of this thesis reflects
the emergence and process of the argument as a series of stepping stones towards my development of the ‘illusory everyday’ framework as a major conceptual outcome.

The ‘illusory everyday’ forms the thesis title premise as an outcome of my research in the extension of genre, production and viewer understanding in relation to the exploration of the multiple, constructed narratives of pleasure both in and from ‘reality TV’. The discussion in Chapter Eleven of the framework highlights the amoebic, dialectic and entertainment qualities that have been essential to the development of the thesis argument based on the exploration and understanding of the different narratives of pleasure. These narratives have emerged through the specific strategies of the research, both in text analysis of construction in genre and production, as well as the eliciting of texts from industry and viewer respondents. In this way, the qualitative method of emergent design strengthened the research process through refinement in the entire progression of discovery and exploration.

The thesis argument has developed in the movement of an outward spiral from a starting point in repositioning the genre to broaden the terms of analysis, emphasise entertainment in its consideration, and establish its amorphous nature as amoebic. From here the three aspects of industry, text and audience are similarly re-evaluated so as to explore the emerging issues of production motivations and conventions, narrative construction, and audience interpretation and pleasure. The perspectives arising from these areas informed the choices of theoretical and empirical frameworks for the case studies in post-structuralism, phenomenology, constructivism and ethnographic methodology. The participant responses from both producers and viewers were combined as the focus for the analysis of construction, interpretations and pleasures of the four chosen Australian formats, as well as contributing to the earlier discussions of genre, industry, production and audiences. In this way, the narratives of pleasure in the thesis are not only those constructed within the formats themselves by the industry, but also those of the viewer respondents in their discussion of their viewing experiences of entertainment.

The process of emergent design consequently became a significant tool for this thesis, in which understanding was achieved through the progression of exploration and analysis as an iterative strategy to refocus the inquiry. Rather than commencing with distinct hypotheses of ‘reality TV’ to be verified or rejected by the empirical
interviews, the research focus of the subjective experiences of entertainment provided a growing and changing space for investigation. The constructivist strategy of the adaptable and intuitive human research instrument in the “prospect of not knowing what it is [the researcher doesn’t] know” (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 175) allowed the development of this space to explore how entertainment contributes to the construction and engagement of ‘reality TV’ and the experience of its producers and viewers in the case studies and qualitative interviews. Turning points were encountered throughout the research hermeneutic/dialectic process that contributed to the project’s outcomes, outlined in Chapter Six. In particular for example, the initial interviews with industry professionals in London provided a solid basis to an understanding of the genre’s production and market as entertainment, in combination with the DVD reference of a forum recording between industry stakeholders, media commentators and academics at the University of Westminster. The disparity of terminologies and motivations that emerged from this exploration informed subsequent literature searches and interviews with Australian industry professionals. The diversity of viewer responses also contributed to research discoveries in the multiplicity of interpretations and pleasures, providing rich descriptions and perspectives on the case study episodes and the genre overall. Using Sless’ metaphor, this research is situated in an elastic ‘landscape’ that is influenced by the position of the researcher and can “stretch and distend” through the introduction and presence of the various thesis narratives in shared and different negotiations (1986: 129). As opposed to conventional research approaches, this image emphasises the research ontology of “relativity of position” (Sless 1986: 129) in the social construction of realities through communication where “everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men [sic] and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world” (Berger & Luckmann 1971: 33). I have maintained the presentation of ‘reality’, ‘everyday’ and ‘reality TV’ in inverted commas throughout the thesis to be consistent with this paradigm as a reminder of their polysemic and socially constructed state. As I discussed in Chapter Six, this ontology is coupled with epistemological subjectivity that highlights the interaction of the researcher within the ‘landscape’ as the source of outcomes in understanding the nature of these realities. In this way, the research has adopted Ang’s statement that rather than a search for objective truth, this ‘unconventional’ or post-positivist research paradigm engages in the “construction of interpretations, of certain ways of understanding the
world, always historically located, subjective and relative” (1996: 46). Therefore, the methods and outcomes of this thesis are aspirational and ideographic interpretations of ‘reality TV’ understood through the triangulation of the various theoretical and qualitative narratives.

### Story-telling and narratives

For Barthes, narrative is “international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (1977: 79). This perspective emphasises the fundamental experience of story-telling – a core element of this thesis – as a narrative of its specific research process and the construction of interpretations from the many theoretical and qualitative narratives. In this way, the thesis creates information in these interpretations, rather than generalisations, in the navigation of alternative discourses of television, narrative and audience research. This approach cannot furnish the ‘truth’ of ‘reality TV’, or a profile of ‘reality TV’ viewers, and this is not its aim. The construction of interpretations is more akin to the “discursive reconstruction of people’s experiences of media use in larger social and cultural narratives” (Erni 1989: 330). As Turnbull states, as a researcher I am “never simply an observer but always actively engaged in the construction of meaning” and therefore by agreeing that what this research provides is an interpretation, “we can look for ways to assess the value of that interpretation” (1990: 6). As a result, the thesis has provided broad but nuanced perspectives on the phenomenon of ‘reality TV’ in its production and reception as narratives of pleasure.

The narratives of pleasure within the ‘reality’ formats have also been explored as deliberate constructions by its industry, either designed or post-produced for programmes. The selection of narrative theories discussed in Chapter Three illustrate the variety in how the construction of coherence and verisimilitude can be explored through formal, structural and post-structural paradigms, as well as the various televisual conventions (such as narration, soundtrack, casting and editing) that are combined to construct the ‘everyday’ into coherent and engaging narratives. These elements were featured in the industry input as part of its entertainment appeal, such as the narrative ‘mix’ of *Bondi Rescue* and *Border Security*, or the journey design of *Family Footsteps* and *Nerds FC*. Importantly, the format narratives are represented
as being told by those within the programme: uniformly in the case studies through the convention of ‘talking heads’. In this way, the events taking place in the episode are narrated by those involved, which conveys an immediacy and intimacy to the narrative. ‘Reality’ formats are consequently constructed as first person stories (Dovey 2000), and in combination with the techniques used in production in the case studies, these create narratives of drama, humour, intrigue, achievement, emotion and surprise within the ‘ordinary’ people and situations portrayed. As a result, jeopardy has been identified in this research as one of two essential elements within ‘reality TV’ production and reception in this representation of the ‘everyday’. Without harnessing the dramatic, challenging and suspenseful possibilities of the raw footage or format concept for the characters and situations, the format risks not engaging its potential audience due to its tendency towards banality. ‘Reality TV’ therefore depends on appealing and coherent narratives through causal and temporal design, and also on unpredictability in its relation to the ‘everyday’. This observation was confirmed through the viewer respondents in their commentary on their enjoyment of the case study formats and the genre overall. Elements such as character journeys, and narrative suspense and resolution played an important role in the viewer cohort’s reported experience in which the dramatic stories became a source of engaging entertainment. The adaptation and employment of Barthes’ *S/Z* and *The Pleasure of the Text* perspectives therefore contributes a framework to explore these diverse constructions and interpretations of narratives and the importance of pleasure in individual reception.

These narratives of pleasure from the viewer respondents are a significant contribution to a more holistic understanding of the appeal of ‘reality TV’. Rather than focused within preordained research issues, the responses from the viewer interviews have established the main concerns of entertainment, negotiation and interpretation in the research. This is consistent with the relative ontology and hermeneutic process of the research in the development of the thesis argument as “information is proffered or as new constructions are located and analysed” (Guba & Lincoln 1989: 255). The discussions by viewers reflected the multiple and individual interpretations and pleasures of the case study formats as to their enjoyment and negotiation. However, an element of unpredictability became apparent regardless of the respondent’s self-recruitment on the basis of their enjoyment of ‘reality TV’. The
viewer narratives in each of the case studies reflect a complex intricacy in the personal engagement related by each respondent. Therefore, it is important to capture and express this input “in their own words” (Hall 1986: vi; Lull 1990: 18) as fragments of their larger narratives regarding the case study episodes, and perspectives on ‘reality TV’ as a whole. Key aspects of identification and resonance emerged as nuanced and individual within the phenomenological approach of the viewer as related to their own knowledge and experiences.

As outlined in Chapter Six, interview arrangements as individuals or in groups within viewer homes were also essential in eliciting these narratives as a reflection of the social experience of television within natural and neutral research settings. However, this method was ‘unconventional’ in that the group arrangements were elected by the respondents with the ‘snowball’ recruitment of partners/friends/housemates/siblings, rather than randomly assembled by the researcher as a focus group. This approach provided a strategy to avoid problems of individual dominance, ‘group pressure’ and artificial agreement, outlined by Hoijer as weaknesses in the focus group method (1990: 34). The self-arranged interview groups reflected the common viewing arrangement for the participants, including a pair of friends who specifically meet weekly to watch their favourite television formats. In this way, the interviews were more conducive to differing and extensive perspectives, as well as reflecting the social activity of television viewing. Whether as part of a group or an individual interview with myself, these settings were mindful of the ‘social constitution’ of the television experience where the internal “thoughts, feelings, and actions” of the individual are created in relation to others either personally or culturally (Lembo 1990: 119). This is also consistent with the research’s subjective epistemology, in that the outcomes of this research are created because of its process, rather than a conventional paradigm of external observation. As a result, the social and the personal are not constructed as a binary, but rather reflect the multiplicity in the confluence of text and viewer in the acts of viewing, imagining, discussing and sharing, as part of the ideographic and context-dependent nature of these narratives.
Entertainment and pleasure

My exploration of narratives of pleasure in this thesis highlights the “entertainment imperative” (Kilborn 2003: 102) of ‘reality TV’ in both its construction and reception. The combination of industry input with narrative analysis reveals the equal role of entertainment in ‘reality TV’ construction. The case study chapters have illustrated the journey narrative or soap opera style of intertwined strands as deliberate production strategies to create appealing programmes for audiences, in addition to other techniques described above. Viewer responses were triangulated through cross checking to reflect intersections with industry input in this regard with awareness of narrative progressions and how this helped their engagement with the format. It was interesting to note that narrative repetition in formats such as Border Security provided both frustration and pleasure for viewers in the negotiation of this familiar narrative structure dominated by suspended enigmas. Similarly, elements of characters, situations and challenges were common areas of discussion between the industry and viewers in the engaging qualities of the case study formats, both designed and received for pleasure. It is this distinction of entertainment as an important element in construction and reception that is significant within this thesis. Rather than subscribing to the moral hierarchy discourse that compares and criticises ‘reality TV’ to documentary as ‘trash’, the role of entertainment is essential to a broader understanding of the production and engagement of ‘reality TV’. Documentary and entertainment are both part of the amoebic genre as styles and techniques that can be used in the design and production of ‘reality’ formats, and in this way the representation of conventions that are negotiated in the process of viewing by audiences for interpretation and pleasure.

The discussion of enjoyment was the central issue in the viewer interviews. However, even though the participants identified themselves as ‘reality TV’ viewers, this did not guarantee pleasure in each of the case study episodes. The case study chapters reflect a diverse range of responses as to personal impressions, tastes and experiences. The combination of these narratives has allowed the exploration of pleasure as entertainment in interest and resonance in the appeal of ‘reality TV’ programmes. This aspect of viewer engagement is identified as aspiration, the second of the two essential elements in ‘reality TV’ production and reception, and
significant for entertainment within the specific role of the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’ representation. The immediacy of ‘reality TV’ content to the viewer’s cognition of their own ‘everyday’ was vital in their engagement with the case studies. However, this kind of reception cannot be uniformly defined as homogeneous across the viewers sampled as the interview outcomes of these experiences within the methodology are subjective, personal, multiple and shared. In this way, identification and resonance emerged as significant to television engagement as a nuanced experience within the phenomenological approach of the viewer; situated within their own knowledge and experiences. In addition, viewers also related displeasure to personal tastes or opinions, and in the rejection of the format premise, content or representation. These positive and negative responses from the viewer cohort highlighted the importance of entertainment in their engagement with the case studies, and the location of interpretation and pleasure within their subjective and shared experiences in the multiplicity of Barthes’ post-structuralist frameworks.

Entertainment has therefore provided significant insight into the phenomenon of ‘reality TV’. Within an amoebic genre, television entertainment is not a binary of documentary but rather a specific grammar of production techniques and conventions for viewer cognition, as well as a subjective experience of viewers. In this way, aspiration and jeopardy are essential in the representation and reception of the ‘everyday’ in ‘reality TV’ as coherent, dramatic, interesting and resonant narratives of pleasure. Format subject matter of ‘ordinary’ people or events encourage an immediacy, relevance and comparison for viewer respondents, where “we are less engaged by fictional characters and their destiny than by social actors and destiny itself” (Nichols 1991: 5). As a result, pleasure is not reserved solely in the voyeurism of ‘reality TV’, but also in the validation and playfulness of the representation of the ‘everyday’. Therefore, the ‘illusory everyday’ framework identified in this thesis is important in the dialectic extension of the genre’s understanding as amoebic in the construction of the ‘everyday’ as narratives, and its negotiation by viewers for entertainment. Within this perspective, the binary of fiction and fact in television is problematised as an inappropriate heuristic, specifically for ‘reality TV’ in the essential triangular connection of industry, format and audience. Qualities of authenticity and truth are consequently replaced by the conventions and cognition of television simulations of verisimilitude. In this way, the narratives of pleasure in both
the production and reception highlight the importance of story-telling and entertainment in ‘reality TV’ as an ‘illusory everyday’.

Further work

Over the progression of my research, the concept and explanatory utility of the ‘illusory everyday’ has been tested through application and adaptation to a variety of broader fields in peer-reviewed conferences and publications (Price 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010a, 2010b, 2011 forthcoming). These opportunities became part of the project’s emergent design, where developing thesis ideas were presented within public forums as a source of feedback and revision in reframing the thesis stance, and for addressing its adequacy within various contemporary research areas. Interestingly, the thesis concerns found further relevance in addition to television studies with the extension of the ‘illusory everyday’ and ‘reality TV’ into Australian studies, media and communication, and critical and cultural research discourses. In particular, the national agendas of early conference presentations on television and Australian studies helped to develop a tangent in the representations of identity and culture for the thesis, and suggested further questions about how these portrayals are constructed and appeal to audiences. Many further peripheral applications continue to emerge, as the varying issues of the thesis and the ‘illusory everyday’ have potential for exploration in areas such as popular culture, audience identities and cognition, and ‘unconventional’ research in post-positivist methodologies.

In addition, avenues for future research directions have emerged from the project strategies and outcomes. The role of entertainment remains relatively under-analysed in relation to cultural studies, possibly due to its undefinable subjective state. The input from both the industry and viewers in relation to ‘reality TV’ has provided a wealth of information as to the construction and reception of entertainment in ‘reality TV’. In this way, the methods of ideographic narratives of pleasure have further potential to contribute to exploration of the notion of entertainment in a range of areas of enjoyment as well as television, and to understand engagement and pleasure as negotiated in multiple, personal and shared ways. The narratives provide broad and nuanced perspectives through the chosen qualitative strategies that would not have been possible through the conventional survey method with preordained
salience. This method of qualitative audience research has particular significance for industry practice. Ratings figures are the industry’s primary resource to gauge “audience taste” and engagement through the measurement of audience size, share and composition (Ang 1991: 46-8). Although audience members can be regularly recruited for input to discuss their views of specific programmes, this is often in randomly chosen groupings and the controlled environments of marketing or production offices. Although this method may be less time-consuming for companies, Hoijer argues it also relies on assumptions that these focus groups “are replications of what goes on in front of the television screen” (1990: 34). The method used in this thesis of in-depth, semi-structured, self-recruited interviews explores viewer interpretation and provides specific narratives of their engagement in pleasure or displeasure, as opposed to an implied status in ratings figures. Although more labour-intensive, these research strategies create information-rich findings that have greater potential for understanding in the sharing of experiences with the researcher.

Although devised here in relation to the exploration of ‘reality TV’, my strategy of the ‘illusory everyday’ also has possible further use for understanding of the production and appeal of other hybrid genres. For example, the growing popularity of ‘mockumentary’ and the use of documentary conventions in scripted sitcoms such as *The Office* or *Modern Family*, the inclusion or combination of dramatisation with actual footage in documentaries or feature films, or even the increasing use of amateur footage from mobile phones within news reports signal the increasing amoebic nature of television forms. In particular, previous research on *The Office* and mockumentary have raised questions on the use of factual and entertainment aesthetics and conventions in the “newfound contradictions” of television production, and the negotiation of authenticity, performance and pleasure by viewers (Mills 2004: 70-1; Roscoe & Hight 2001: 186). The ‘illusory everyday’ addresses this perspective by recognising the complexity of amoebic genres in production and reception as a shifting liminal space, without subscribing to hierarchies of worth. In this way, the narratives of industry and viewers establish wider understanding of motivations, negotiation and pleasure, particularly relevant in the increasing “function of television now ... to entertain, first and foremost, and if information can be provided in an entertaining way so much the better” (Bonner 2003: 22). In addition, the ‘illusory everyday’ as hopeful mirage is a reminder of the mediation
and representation of television in creating verisimilitude and the limitations of literal genre labels. The framework potentially locates understanding of terms and forms such as docu-drama and mockumentary in their production qualities and techniques, rather than within a scale of truth or value; as well as in the multiple dimensions of viewer engagement, pleasure and interest.

Ultimately, the idea of the ‘illusory everyday’ returns to issues first raised in the Introduction of the nature and representation of ‘reality’ on television, and the problematic label of ‘reality TV’. These important questions of “actuality and the epistemology” of the genre unanswered by Hill (2005: 9) are re-evaluated in my thesis through the use of ‘unconventional’ research paradigms that consider the social construction of realities as multiple and subjective. As a result, the ‘illusory everyday’ acknowledges the socially and televisually constructed ‘realities’ on television, and their subjective coherence through the multiple realities of viewers, as highly dependent on the specific techniques and grammars of production and the cultural cognition of these conventions. While the ‘illusory everyday’ can be theoretically located within the construction of formats or the amoebic genre, its realisation occurs in the ideographic moment of coalescence from producers and viewers in their narratives of production and engagement. The ‘illusory everyday’ therefore remains a liminal site that will shift with both the future ‘reality TV’ trends of constructed entertainment narratives, and the multiple interpretations and pleasures of its viewers.
Bibliography


“Being a multicultural city, Gold Coasters have plenty of family history stories to tell”. 2007. Gold Coast Bulletin. 9 July.


over their social effects on willingness to censor”. *Communication Research* 35(3):382-397.


Fenton, Andrew, and Jessica Leo. 2007. “Viewers seek a new dose of reality”. The Advertiser. 28 July.


James, Tarni. 2009. Interview by E. Price. Melbourne, 20 August.


Jermyn, Deborah. 2004. “‘This is about real people!’: Video technologies, actuality and affect in the television crime appeal”. In Understanding reality television, edited by S. Holmes and D. Jermyn. London: Routledge.


Kalina, Paul. 2006a. “Tales from the front line”. The Age. 5 October.


McManus, Bridget. 2007. “Nerds know the score”. The Age. 7 June.


Murdoch, Alex. 2006. “Escapism on TV a reality lesson”. Courier Mail. 1 July.


Poole, Mark. 2010. “AIDC 2010: Bondi Rescue”.


Sless, David. 1986. *In search of semiotics*. Kent: Croom Helm.


Turnbull, Susan. 1990. “Locating the responses: Girls, the media and the challenge to ethnography”. Unpublished manuscript. Media Centre, School of Education, La Trobe University.


Williams, Garry. 2007. “Low-profile shows boost Seven trashy TV’s reality check”. *Sunday Herald Sun*. 2 December.


Videography


*Dog Squad.* 2010-. Television programme. Seven Network, Sydney. (From *Dog Squad*. TV One, New Zealand.)


*Modern Family.* 2009-. Television programme. ABC/20th Century Fox, USA.


*Send in the Dogs.* 2010-. Television programme. Nine Network, Sydney. (From *Send in the Dogs*. ITV, UK.)


*Survivor.* 2000-. Television programme. CBS, USA.


*The Zoo.* 2008-. Television programme. Seven Network, Sydney.

*Who Do You Think You Are?* 2008-. Television programme. SBS, Sydney.
Audience Interview Guide

- Tell me about this episode. Did you enjoy it? Why?
- Were there any aspects you didn’t like? Why was that?
- What expectations did you have of the episode? How were these fulfilled?
- Would you want to watch the next episode of this programme? Why?

Prompts: characteristics of format
characters: participants/experts/hosts
location
narrative progression
references, messages, meanings

- How did you feel connected to the programme (if at all)?
- How does this episode make you aware of it being a TV programme (if at all)? Does this affect your experience? Why?

- Overall, what do you think about ‘reality TV’?

- What does the term ‘reality TV’ mean to you?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?
Industry Interview Guide

- Tell me about your experience in television.
- What do you think are important motivations for programmes?
- How do you think the expectations of audiences play a part in programmes?

Prompts: format development
    entertainment vs factual styles/values
    motivations for production
    specifics on particular format production factors

- How do local factors play a role in formats? What other factors do you think are important?

- Overall, what is your view of ‘reality TV’?

- What does the term ‘reality TV’ mean to you?

- Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix C

Bondi Rescue transcription

Transcription of segments 4-6 of Bondi Rescue case study episode.


Executive Producers: Michael Cordell and Nick Murray.
Sydney: Cordell Jigsaw.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIO</th>
<th>VISUAL</th>
<th>ANALYSIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>[BEACH]</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|           | **LS:** KERBOX and HOPPO with swimmers **hit** by waves | SEM: emotive music  
ACT: rescue  
SEM: beach/surf |
| VO        | In the middle of a dangerous rescue  
Hoppo loses his swimmer in pounding swell. The waves keep pushing them towards the rocks  
If Hoppo and Kerbox can't push through they'll be swept against the rocks. | ENG: clinch - exposition  
CUL: surf language  
SEM: rescue board  
SEM: board-cam  
ENG: clinch - snare |
| VO        | **[TOWER]**  
**MCU:** KOBY and BEN **observe** with binoculars | ENG: clinch - orientation  
SEM: uniforms, binoculars  
ACT: witness/commentary |
| BEN       | Oh, there's another one right on the head | ENG: clinch - orientation  
SEM: uniforms, binoculars  
ACT: witness/commentary  
CUL: code language |
| KOPY      | Yeah, um, Central to Rhino. They're getting pounded out there. | | |
| VO        | Just minutes after his last rescue, young Bacon backs up  
Hoppo, Kerbox and their three rescue victims are still trapped. | ENG: clinch - partial answer  
SEM: nicknames |
| VO        | Finally, Hoppo makes headway.  
But Kerbox is going backwards | ENG: clinch - partial answer  
ENG: clinch - orientation |
<p>| KERBOX    | Go through here! | | |
| BACON     | Do you want to give me one? | | |
| KERBOX    | Yeah | SEM: bikinis |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VO</th>
<th>Bacon gets a lucky break between waves and races to safety. But Kerbox is still caught. With his back against the wall, he makes a decision few other lifeguards would even consider. He turns his board towards the rocks.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS: Swimmer <strong>clammers</strong> onto BACON's board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS: Two boards <strong>ride</strong> next wave.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG: clinch - partial answer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS: BACON <strong>paddles</strong> away.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG: clinch - partial answer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS: KERBOX pulls swimmer back on board. <strong>Hit</strong> by a wave. KERBOX <strong>turns board around, watches surf.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KERBOX We're gonna go straight through there [CAPTION: We're gonna go straight through there]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS: KERBOX points to rocks KERBOX <strong>watches</strong> surf behind him. [CAPTION: Don't worry]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG: clinch - goal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWIMMER Up there?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KERBOX Don't worry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS: Pan across wave to follow KERBOX's board as <strong>rides in</strong> on wave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS: Swimmer &amp; KERBOX <strong>ride</strong> wave, surrounded by spray.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT: surfing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[end music: beats &amp; bass]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOBY [laughs] Did you see that? Straight up the rock! That was unreal!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[TOWER] <strong>MCU: KOBY laughs. Looks</strong> through binoculars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[BEACH] LS: KERBOX <strong>steadies</strong> board as swimmer stands up on rocks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG: stasis ACT: joking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEARDY Who was that? Hoppo?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS: KERBOX <strong>holds</strong> board, swimmer walks away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KERBOX <strong>grimaces</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEN That was solid. KERBOX <strong>stands up</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUR: language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOBY Box. Lucky he didn't hurt himself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOBY The old seadogs, Hoppo and...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEN Don't worry about them. They pull their weight.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[TOWER] <strong>MCU: KOBY and BEN</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEN Don't worry about them, there's almost 80 years between them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEARDY Don't worry about them, there's almost 80 years between them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT: joking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO A tourist from Canada watched the drama unfold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[BEACH] <strong>MCU: Tourist</strong> talks to camera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT: witness/commentary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOURIST But he timed it perfectly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And he just rolled right over the top of the rocks. The girl got up like she got off a ride. She knew she just cheated death, is what it came down to. Like he seriously put his life on the line to rescue those girls, there's no question about that.

MCU: TOURIST talks to camera

LS: Pan across wave to follow KERBOX's board as rides in on wave

KERBOX [laughs]

MS: KERBOX and HOPPO talk to camera

HOPPO Every tough one I get, I end up Box with me. We both seem to cop the hard ones together

ACT: commentary

KERBOX I was quite happy to see Bacon arrive actually. I reckon I punched over 15 waves and I was going 'mate we're going nowhere' and then Bacon goes 'can I take one for you?' Get her!

ACT: joking

[music: guitar]   SEM: emotive music

VO For a man who's spent a lifetime surfing, there's nothing quite as special as a brand new surfboard. The former pro-surfer has selflessly lent it to Maxi during his lunchbreak. He might be a young gun lifeguard, but he's still got a long way to go as a surfer.

ENG: stasis

VLS: Surfer rides wave

ENG: surfing

LS: KERBOX rides wave

ENG: enigma

CU: KERBOX waxes surfboard

VLS: MAXI tries to surf. Falls off board

ENG: incident

CU: Hole in surfboard

SEM: damage

MAXI It's not my fault, no it's not funny. I'm laughing because he's going to kill me.

ENG: clinch - abstract

SEM: southern cross tattoo

TERRY I was there when he said to you, 'whatever you do, don't... what?'

ENG: clinch - exposition

CU: AZZA laughs

MAXI Don't ding it But it wasn't me!

CUL: surf language

MCU: TERRY profile, shakes head. 12YO in BG

12YO He was on the wave, and I tried to get out of the way, but I couldn't get out fast enough.

TERRY looks around, grins

ENG: clinch - partial answer
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VO</th>
<th>But being the one riding the wave, it was Maxi's responsibility to avoid a collision.</th>
<th>MCU: MAXI, looks around, laughs</th>
<th>CUL: surf etiquette</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TERRY</td>
<td>Don't blame the 12 year olds, just say I dinged your board. Sorry.</td>
<td>MCU: TERRY profile. 12YO in BG</td>
<td>ACT: guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXI</td>
<td>But I'm bummed because I know it wasn't my fault. Look, they're just going. Probably don't even have a job, can't even pay for themselves.</td>
<td>CU: MAXI, Zoom to ECU, then MCU</td>
<td>LS: 12YO walk away and wave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12YO</td>
<td>See ya Maxi!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEARDY</td>
<td>Max, please let me be there when you break it to him.</td>
<td>MCU: BEARDY</td>
<td>ACT: joking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Back from lunch, Kerbox has no idea what's happened.</td>
<td>MLS: KERBOX walks towards camera</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - equivocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITCHY</td>
<td>Kerbox, I'm sure really wouldn't be worried about the value. But it's more just Maxi's careless attitude. He just likes to tear into things. And ah, that's what's happened here.</td>
<td>CU: ITCHY, [CAPTION: ITCHY]</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - orientation ACT: commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KERBOX</td>
<td>Brand, spanking new surfboard.</td>
<td>MS: KERBOX stares. Zoom to CU</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - partial answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXI</td>
<td>The kid's out there. We'll go get him. C'mon lets go. We'll go get him. Terry let him go because he was young, he was like 12 and he goes he doesn't have any money to pay for it, and I go he could come up here.</td>
<td>CU: Hole in surfboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KERBOX</td>
<td>Get this, my brand new surfboard</td>
<td>MCU: KERBOX. Enters and shakes head</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXI</td>
<td>The thing is, the last thing you said to me, whatever you do, don't ding my new board</td>
<td>MS: MAXI holds surfboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KERBOX</td>
<td>[laughs] I don't believe it!</td>
<td>MS: KERBOX shrugs and walks away</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - ambiguity ACT: joking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOPPO</td>
<td>The way you're going, you might not even have a job. Eh? What am I going to do?</td>
<td>MCU: HOPPO grins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXI</td>
<td>That's a deadset good ding.</td>
<td>ECU: MAXI turns around, SEM: damage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KERBOX</td>
<td></td>
<td>ECU: pokes at hole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEARDY</td>
<td>So yeah, pretty devastated really. It's not new anymore.</td>
<td>MLS: KERBOX with board</td>
<td>ENG: stasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box, can I borrow your board? Oh sorry, it's damaged!</td>
<td>MCU: MAXI laughs and hangs head</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| VO | But a few days later, Maxi may yet have a chance to redeem himself. It's the lifeguard's annual Ironman challenge. The gruelling race starts with a run from Bondi to Tamarama, followed by a swim leg to Bronte, then a board paddle all the way back to Bondi. | VLS: Bondi coastline | ENG: stasis |
| | | SEM: location | |
| | | [ANIMATION: tracks race legs on map] | ENG: enigma |
| | | CUL: location | |

| MATT | You can buy a ticket here, buy a ticket and you get nominated a lifeguard. You have the option, you can either take this lifeguard home, or you can take home one of the many lovely prizes that are up to offer here today. | MS: crowd at barrier | ACT: commentary |
| | | MS: MATT talks on PA | |
| | | MLS: Tracks around crowd to sign: 'Corey I want ur babies!' | |
| | | MCU: HOPPO holds girl, laughs | |
| | | MS: Boy waves sign 'You can do it Brad!'. Girl gives thumbs up | SEM: signs |

| GIRL | He wants Whippet. | MS: pans between GIRL, WOMAN and |
| | | | |
| WOMAN | Oh, I've heard a lot about Whippet today. I've heard he might win | small boy | ENG: clinch - snare |

| GIRL | Uncle Rye | |

| WHIPPET | I just want it to be over and done with so I can have Macca's and a beer. | MCU: WHIPPET jumps | ENG: clinch - goal |
| | | CUL: McDonald's | |

| VO | Bacon's on a bet to race fully clothed. But hot favourite Harries is not impressed. | MS: BACON jumps and punches | SEM: race outfits |
| | | MS: BACON's jeans, tilt up to face | |
| | | MCU: HARRIES shakes head | |
| | | MCU: BACON, pan to HARRIES | |

| HARRIES | Mate, what are you? An Ironman? You're a boy then. Fourteenth year I've done it. And you say as a rookie you'd want this as an honour. | MCU: BACON | ENG: clinch - goal |
| | | ACT: joking | |

| TOM | Fourteen years and you're still using Ray Martin's hairstylist | Pan to TOM, laughs | CUL: Ray Martin |

258
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Action/Description</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HARRIES</td>
<td>I can't believe it's not butter. [laughs]</td>
<td><strong>MCU:</strong> HARRIES strokes hair, laughs</td>
<td>ACT: joking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>It appears a relaxed event, but pride and bragging rights are at stake.</td>
<td><strong>MS:</strong> MAXI kisses costumed lifeguard <strong>MLS:</strong> sign 'Sweden loves Bondi Rescue' <strong>MS:</strong> REIDY and CHAPPO head to head</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - equivocation <strong>ACT:</strong> competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPPO</td>
<td>There's only one thing tonight to beat Reidy.</td>
<td><strong>MCU:</strong> CHAPPO rubs hands together</td>
<td>SEM: freeze frames, B&amp;W, captions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>[music: fast paced] Can Chappo again dominate Reidy?</td>
<td><strong>FREEZE:</strong> BG to B&amp;W [CAPTION: Chappo must beat Reidy]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REIDY</td>
<td>I'm feeling that Chappo is going down tonight.</td>
<td><strong>MCU:</strong> REIDY raises eyebrows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Or is it third time lucky for the pretender to the throne?</td>
<td><strong>FREEZE:</strong> BG to B&amp;W [CAPTION: Reidy never beaten Chappo]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAXI</td>
<td>New blood is coming through boys, so you better watch out!</td>
<td><strong>MCU:</strong> MAXI points at camera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>After all his gaffes, can Maxi prove he's made of the right stuff?</td>
<td><strong>FREEZE:</strong> BG to B&amp;W [CAPTION: Maxi lots to prove]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOPPO</td>
<td>There's a couple of things up my sleeve.</td>
<td><strong>MCU:</strong> HOPPO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Will the old dogs teach the young pups a lesson?</td>
<td><strong>FREEZE:</strong> BG to B&amp;W [CAPTION: Hoppo has he still got it?]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATT</td>
<td>You're favourite to come last tonight, how do you feel about that?</td>
<td><strong>MS:</strong> MATT pats TOM on the back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOM</td>
<td>It's standard. It's usually the way it goes.</td>
<td><strong>FREEZE:</strong> <strong>MCU</strong> TOM. BG to B&amp;W [CAPTION: Tom last again?]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Will Tom win the booby prize and clean the toilets for another year?</td>
<td><strong>MCU:</strong> HOPPO stretches, tilt up <strong>MS:</strong> HARRIES slaps face <strong>MCU:</strong> DEANO rubs hands and jumps</td>
<td>ACT: competition <strong>CUL:</strong> 'break a leg' saying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATT</td>
<td>[on PA] Ok guys, on three. I hope one of you breaks a leg.</td>
<td><strong>MS:</strong> Pan across lifeguards jockeying at starting line <strong>MLS:</strong> from back. Lifeguards prepare to start</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On three. One two</td>
<td><strong>LS:</strong> Lifeguards start running</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Go! [bang]</td>
<td><strong>MLS:</strong> from back. Lifeguards run Tilt up as they run away from camera</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[cheering]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[music ends]</td>
<td><strong>TITLE SCREEN:</strong> BONDI RESCUE</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - suspension</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Border Security transcription

Transcription of segments 6-8 of Border Security case study episode.

Broadcast 15/09/2008. Seven Network.

Executive Producer: Lyndal Marks.
Sydney: Seven Network.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIO</th>
<th>VISUAL</th>
<th>ANALYSIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>[sound: scan]</td>
<td>Swipe screen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|       | [music: emotive beats] | MLS: Sniffer dog *sniffs* parcels  
|       |          | MLS: Parcels *move* along conveyor  
|       |          | CU: Parcel *moves* across screen  
|       |          | MS: Parcels *appear* out of scanner  
|       |          | ECU: Gloved finger *presses* back button  |
|       | [sound: electronic typing] | [CAPTION: International Mail Handling Unit]  
| VO    | At the Sydney Mail Centre, officers have intercepted a suspect package from Peru.  
|       | Talks under VO. **Leans to pick up package.**  
|       | CU: Gloved hand *picks up* package from scanner.  
|       | ECU: Scanner screen.  |
| KANE  | So I've just had this one opened by Australia Post. And we're gonna see what we see inside. Whether it's consistent. There we go. There's a number of cans in there.  
|       | MLS: KANE and BILL with parcel at counter.  
|       | CU: Gloved hand *opens* box, *removes* paper.  
|       | MCU: KANE and BILL  |
| VO    | So far the contents of the package show nothing of real concern, but Officer Kane knows from experience that often what appears to be normal, can be the most suspicious.  
|       | CU: Gloved hand *removes* cans from box.  
|       | MLS: KANE and BILL talk under VO.  |
| KANE  | It's always good to re-x-ray them, individually. We get the whole package but we can zoom in on one, compare it to another, have a look at them. From the x-ray image I remember two of them looking a little different to the other two, so these two are on this angle, the couple of cans here. Might weigh them as well, see if they're similar weights.  
|       | CU: Two cans on counter. Pan/Tilt to MS KANE and BILL. **KANE sorts** in package  
|       | ECU: cans  
|       | MLS: BILL and KANE walk with cans. Stop at scales desk. BILL *weighs* can on scales.  
| VO    | Officers Kane and Bill  |
 weighed each can to see if the weight tallies with that indicated on the label.

**KANE**

That's way over. You'd expect with a packaging mistake, if it was anything, it would probably be less than what it's declared to be, or what it's said to be. This one is 600.

And it's also way over, so.

An error in what's declared as the weight of the contents and what's actually coming up on the scales, just indicates to us there's something not quite right.

Might have been tampered with, especially considering it's a lot more than what it's said to be on the package.

Next step, we'll have a look at the x-ray image of these two individual cans.

There seems to be some inconsistencies, there's an uneven mass inside, particularly this can you can see there.

**BILL**

This should be beans, it should be more, there shouldn't just be a big block of something there. There should be something more loose.

**KANE**

Yeah, you'd expect it to be like discernable chunks

**VO**

There are now more than enough reasons for the officers to take the cans to the

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECU:</strong></td>
<td>can label '570 g'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CU:</strong></td>
<td>can on scales. Scales tally to '650'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENG:</strong></td>
<td>clinch – partial answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEM:</strong></td>
<td>evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CU:</strong></td>
<td>can on scales. Scales tally to '650'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENG:</strong></td>
<td>clinch – partial answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEM:</strong></td>
<td>evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CU:</strong></td>
<td>can on scales. Scales tally to '650'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENG:</strong></td>
<td>clinch – partial answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEM:</strong></td>
<td>evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECU:</strong></td>
<td>can label '600g', blurring of can details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MS:</strong></td>
<td>KANE at scales desk. Weighs can on scales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENG:</strong></td>
<td>insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECU:</strong></td>
<td>can label '600g', blurring of can details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MS:</strong></td>
<td>KANE at scales desk. [CAPTION: Kane Customs Officer] Looks between scales and off camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENG:</strong></td>
<td>clinch – equivocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CU:</strong></td>
<td>Gloved hand weighs can on scales. Scales tally to '650'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MCU:</strong></td>
<td>KANE looks at scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CU:</strong></td>
<td>Gloved hand places cans on scanner belt. From above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACT:</strong></td>
<td>investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CU:</strong></td>
<td>Two cans from side. Disappear into scanner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MLS:</strong></td>
<td>KANE at scan screen. Points at scan image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACT:</strong></td>
<td>insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECU:</strong></td>
<td>Scan image of two cans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEM:</strong></td>
<td>evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MS:</strong></td>
<td>BILL holds can. Talks off camera. KANE behind looking at scan screen. [CAPTION: Bill Customs Officer] BILL points at screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEM:</strong></td>
<td>job title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECU:</strong></td>
<td>Gloved finger points at scan image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEM:</strong></td>
<td>caption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VO:</strong></td>
<td>ECU: Gloved hands hold can and points to label.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACT:</strong></td>
<td>commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KANE</td>
<td>CU: Gloved hands open can with opener.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACT: investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU: Gloves open can with opener.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENG: clinch - suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>LS: Passengers wait in queue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECU: Passport handed across</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCU: Passengers wait in queue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECU: Passport stamped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCU: Officer at counter, tilt to Immigration sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>MS: PASS#2 at desk. Talks off camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[CAPTION: Immigration, Sydney Airport]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>A business man seems to be having a very long holiday in Australia, and Immigration is concerned that he might be here to work illegally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUL</td>
<td>PASS#2 crosses arms. Pan to MCU PAUL on other side of desk. PAUL notes on paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUL</td>
<td>I can’t understand why you would be here on a holiday visa when you have a business to run at home. You have a wife at home, do you have children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#2</td>
<td>Yes I have. One is in Manchester studying Biotechnology. And one is with my wife, he is 12 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUL</td>
<td>That’s right, but I communicate with him every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#2</td>
<td>When it's a family member, we help out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUL</td>
<td>But as a family member, you would appear to be doing some assistance to their business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECU: PASS#2 crossed hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUL</td>
<td>ECU: Notebook, writing has been blurred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#2</td>
<td>CU: PASS#2 smiles, looks down</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

263
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PASS#2</td>
<td>I assist them, but I don’t gain anything out of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUL</td>
<td>Ok, so what days would you, what days would you visit the shop?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#2</td>
<td>I would just visit on a weekend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>The passenger insists that he is not being paid for his assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUL</td>
<td>Hi, my name is Paul. I’m with Immigration at Sydney Airport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#2</td>
<td>The police are assisting the passenger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>And if their stories don’t match this businessman will have a lot of explaining to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAUL</td>
<td>Hi, my name is Paul. I’m with Immigration at Sydney Airport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>The police are assisting the passenger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#2</td>
<td>The police are assisting the passenger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SEMs and ACTs:**
- **SEM:** music, sound, location, caption, camera movement, language
- **ACT:** investigation, commentary, orientation, goal, clinch
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1 Are the police coming to arrest me?</td>
<td>MCU: JODIE profile [CAPTION: Are the police coming to arrest me?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE Hey?</td>
<td>JODIE leans over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1 Are the police coming?</td>
<td>Pan to PASS#1, arms crossed [CAPTION: Are the police coming?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE Maybe, why would the police come for you though?</td>
<td>SEM: captions of PASS#1 ENG: clinch – equivocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1 I don't know.</td>
<td>SEM: captions of PASS#1 ENG: clinch – equivocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE Well, you just asked me if the police are coming for you.</td>
<td>SEM: camera movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1 Maybe the police come to get me, to take me.</td>
<td>ENG: clinch – jammed answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE People don't normally ask that unless they're in trouble with the police.</td>
<td>Zoom into MCU: PASS#1, crossed arms, shakes head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1 Yeah, I don't know I do something wrong.</td>
<td>ENG: clinch – jammed answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE What have you done?</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - snare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1 I don't do nothing wrong.</td>
<td>Pan to MCU JODIE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE You haven't done anything wrong?</td>
<td>ACT: insight ENG: clinch – goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1 No.</td>
<td>MCU: PASS#1 yawns and fidgets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE I still have some concerns like, he's carrying on a bit and it could be a diversion tactic. So that's just something that we'll assess a bit further. I think you're in trouble with the police. We think the police may want to speak to you so we're just checking.</td>
<td>CU: JODIE talks to camera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1 Ah, doesn't matter. Doesn't matter, police come and check me.</td>
<td>MS: JODIE and PASS#1 at counter. JODIE points at PASS#1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[CAPTION: Ah, doesn't matter] [CAPTION: Doesn't matter, police come and check me] PASS#1 reaches for items on counter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE</td>
<td>Yeah. So you can just wait, you can sit down, because you're not going anywhere. Ok?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1</td>
<td>How long mate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JODIE</td>
<td>I can't tell you, the police will get here when they get here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: slam]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS#1</td>
<td>I'm very upset mate. Ok? I want to go home mate, call the police.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: scan]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[music: format sting]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Title screen: Border Security Australia's Frontline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Footsteps transcription

Transcription of segment 3 and start of segment 4 of *Family Footsteps* case study episode.

Broadcast 11/09/2008. ABC.

Series Producer: Tarni James.

Melbourne: December Films.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIO</th>
<th>VISUAL</th>
<th>ANALYSIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laetitia has completely ignored her mother's advice on packing for Tonga. But she's about to discover, she'll be travelling light.</td>
<td>SEM: theme music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU: Hands sort piles of clothes.</td>
<td>ACT: preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CU: Hands pack item into case.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>I don't think your suitcase is big enough to take all your stuff.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Dear Laetitia, please find enclosed a backpack [laughs]</td>
<td>MS: LAETITIA reads letter. Stops and bends over laughing. ENG: Incident 1 - Packing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>What, what what?</td>
<td>Pan to two shot with MUM. SEM: backpack - SYM: light travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Into which everything you take must fit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>Oh my gosh.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Wow! Oh my god, look at this. I've already packed my suitcase [laughs]</td>
<td>MLS: LAETITIA and MUM. Tilt to case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>[laughs]</td>
<td>MLS: LAETITIA and MUM. LAETITIA opens backpack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Well, let's have a look.</td>
<td>MS: LAETITIA packs items into backpack. SEM: mother/daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>What, you're going to squeeze everything into that?</td>
<td>Tilt and zoom to MCU on pack. ENG: clinch - orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Yup, it's going to fit. I'm going to make it fit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>Oh, that's ridiculous. No, you won't need bikinis there.</td>
<td>MLS: LAETITIA and MUM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Mum, I've got shorts to wear on top of them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>You can't wear bikinis in Tonga. They put people in jail.</td>
<td>MCU: Hands pack items into backpack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Oh mum. Stop it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>They do, that's indecent exposure. Oh, get out of here! You're not fitting all of that in Laetitia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>I've got heaps of room left.</td>
<td>MLS: LAETITIA and MUM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>[sighs]</td>
<td>LAETITIA continues to pack items into backpack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>[clears throat]</td>
<td>MCU: LAETITIA looks down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>Are you going to go to church while you're there?</td>
<td>ACT: stubborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Um</td>
<td>MLS: LAETITIA and MUM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>Neck to knees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Wasn't planning to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>Well, neck to ankles actually.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Neck to... get out.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUM</td>
<td>No, nobody ... you go to jail for not going to church too.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Mum, stop it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| MUM      | This is one child who loves to learn the hard way. So it's frustrating, if she just simply became a Tongan girl and said 'yes mum', and did as she was told or did as she was expected then life would be a whole lot simpler for everybody. | MCU: MUM talks to off-camera. | SEM: talking head |

| LAETITIA | Hmmm                                    | MS: LAETITIA looks off-camera. | CUL: Tongan culture |

**[sound: horn call]**

VO And so Laetitia heads to the Pacific island of Tonga. Will she submit to their disciplined way of life? Or will she disgrace her family?

**[ANIMATION: zoom out from starred Darwin on Australia map, and pan to starred Tonga on map and zoom in]**

**[music: Tongan song]**

**[sound: waves lapping]**

**[sound: plane taxiing]**

LAETITIA [in VO] It was really amazing coming in on the aeroplane. And then seeing the ocean and then all of a sudden Tonga. And you know, feeling this is my nanna's land, this is my pa's land.

I'm a bit worried about stepping into a situation where I don't know what's expected of me and I'll be like a spanner in the works.

**[VLS: Queues at Immigration. [sign: 'Non-Tongan passport holders']**

Vo Kasa's family eagerly

**MS: LAETITIA walks on tarmac with bag. Pan with LAETITIA.**

**VLS: Plane turns**

**MS: Laetitia in queue. Fans herself with passport.**

**LS: FAMILY wait on verandah.**

**MCU: NOOKA and**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laetitia's arrival in the village of Kolonga.</td>
<td>[music ends]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>There she is. [sound: car engine] [sound: car door shut]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Hi!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Hello!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>I'm Laetitia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Nooka.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Nice to meet you too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Hi!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KASA</td>
<td>Hi, Kasa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Hi Kasa, how are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Oh, sorry Laetitia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Oh thankyou, thankyou. Oh thankyou!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Mum Salipa, your new mum!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Thankyou!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>And your new father, eh? Poppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Thankyou for letting me stay with you. Oh look!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oh thankyou.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What a huge house. Where should I sit? Anywhere?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Tongan seating arrangements are strictly prescribed. A high ranking person will normally sit above everyone else. But Laetitia is a foreign guest so this occasion causes some confusion. [sound: muffled talking] The family decide to honour Laetitia and sit on the floor. Laetitia not wanting to be left out, joins them. As eldest daughter,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KASA profile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MCU: Hands <strong>hold</strong> flower lei, pan to another flower lei.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abrupt tilt and pan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LS: Car pulls up. LAETITIA <strong>walks</strong> over to house. Pan with LAETITIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACT: introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MS: LAETITIA <strong>hugs</strong> NOOKA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KASA <strong>walks</strong> to LAETITIA. They <strong>hug</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CUL: Tongan culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEM: leis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NOOKA places lei around LAETITIA's neck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KASA places her lei around LAETITIA's neck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>They <strong>hug</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>MCU:</strong> from behind LAETITIA, SALIPA places lei around her neck, they <strong>hug</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POPPY steps back. POPPY steps to LAETITIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POPPY <strong>hugs</strong> LAETITIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LAETITIA <strong>points</strong> to wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CU</strong> pan across sign 'Welcome Home Laetitia'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>LS:</strong> LAETITIA <strong>walks</strong> into house, the FAMILY shuffle around room to sit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LAETITIA sits on a chair on side of room. Zoom into <strong>MS</strong> on KASA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEM: sign - SYM: hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEM: house and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MS: LAETITIA <strong>smiles</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zoom out to <strong>MS</strong>: SALIPA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tilt to POPPY sitting. Pan to <strong>MLS</strong> of FAMILY sitting on floor. Pan to LAETITIA who sits on floor and moves onto mat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Line(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nooka</td>
<td>Nooka takes the lead as mistress of ceremonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Laetitia, on behalf of our family, we welcome you to your Tongan new family. For this moment I would like to let father Poppy to take a lead a prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>[prayer in Tongan]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: family singing in Tongan]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laetitia</td>
<td>[in VO] I was really emotional. The song that they were singing, it's so familiar. I don't even know where it's familiar from. And they just sing so beautifully and it just was such an amazing welcome. It changed everything being here and just seeing this wonderful family. I don't know what to expect anymore, it's all so much bigger than I thought it was going to be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poppy</td>
<td>Through Jesus Christ, amen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Amen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laetitia</td>
<td>I just want to thank you guys for having me here, and I'm sorry that I don't speak Tongan. It's such a shame I should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An L: FAMILY sit on floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>LAETITIA: Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>KASA: Maybe I will show you the house? Yup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>LAETITIA: Ok.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>[laughs]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MCU: LAETITIA profile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ACT: introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>CU: KASA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Zoom out to MLS on KASA and LAETITIA stand up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>[dark screen]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>[light flashes as fluoro light blinks on]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>LAETITIA: Oh how lovely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>MS: KASA and LAETITIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>KASA: Ok, this is your room. Oh, it's a big spider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>[sound: mat hitting bed]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>PAN between KASA and LAETITIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>SEM: camera movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>KASA: Yeah, wherever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>SEM: spare room - SYM: hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>LAETITIA: Oh is the whole room mine?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>KASA: Yeah, for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>LAETITIA: Oh wow!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>LS: on LAETITIA from behind KASA. LAETITIA puts pack on bed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>VO: Laetitia immediately addresses her greatest fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>CU: pack on bed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>LAETITIA: And Kasa, I wanted to say to you, if I insult you or insult anyone from just being clueless like just tell me off. Especially culture wise, if I misunderstand and do something stupid…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>MS: KASA shakes head.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>ECU: LAETITIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>KASA: No, that's alright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>LAETITIA: … then just hit me and tell me so that I don’t…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>KASA: Cos you're still learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>LAETITIA: Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>KASA: Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>[music: guitar]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>MCU: LAETITIA walks around table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>CUL: Tongan culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>VO: Tonight, Laetitia is honorary head of the table, relegating Poppy to a lesser position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>CU: LAETITIA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>MCU: LAETITIA walks around table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>ENG: clinch - orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>CUL: Tongan culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>KASA: This is a Tongan chicken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>VLS: Family along table to LAETITIA. Zoom to MS: KASA presents dish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>SEM: food and family meal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Traditionally, the daughters serve everyone else before they can sit and eat. Unknowingly, Laetitia invites Kasa to join her at the table.

KASA Can I sit over here?

NOOKA Oh no, get up.

KASA Laetitia says I have to eat.

NOOKA Are you sure?

KASA And I have to eat right now.

LAETITIA Yup.

NOOKA Elder sister Nooka is a stickler for the rules. [laughs] [talking in Tongan]

KASA See what they’re doing, I’m still talking they bang my head.

VO Laetitia is learning how easy it is to make a mistake. And she’s about to make another.

Tomorrow is Sunday and she must attend church.

But she’s only brought one short skirt.

LAETITIA I’m an idiot! [laughs] Should have packed a long skirt! It’ll be alright. Ok [sighs] It’ll be alright. The most annoying bit is mum told me.

[music: theme]

NOOKA Laetitia?

VO Laetitia’s first night’s sleep in Tonga is about to be rudely interrupted.

NOOKA Good morning!

LAETITIA Morning. Oh, I hate you people!

VO Elder sister Nooka is a stickler for the rules. [laughs] [talking in Tongan]

KASA See what they’re doing, I’m still talking they bang my head.

ACT: against rules

CU: LAETITIA sorts in pack on bed.

Tomorrow is Sunday and she must attend church.

But she’s only brought one short skirt.

LAETITIA I’m an idiot! [laughs] Should have packed a long skirt! It’ll be alright. Ok [sighs] It’ll be alright. The most annoying bit is mum told me.

[music: theme]

NOOKA Laetitia?

VO Laetitia’s first night’s sleep in Tonga is about to be rudely interrupted.

NOOKA Good morning!

LAETITIA Morning. Oh, I hate you people!

VO Elder sister Nooka is a stickler for the rules. [laughs] [talking in Tongan]

KASA See what they’re doing, I’m still talking they bang my head.

ACT: against rules

CU: LAETITIA sorts in pack on bed.

Tomorrow is Sunday and she must attend church.

But she’s only brought one short skirt.

LAETITIA I’m an idiot! [laughs] Should have packed a long skirt! It’ll be alright. Ok [sighs] It’ll be alright. The most annoying bit is mum told me.

[music: theme]

NOOKA Laetitia?

VO Laetitia’s first night’s sleep in Tonga is about to be rudely interrupted.

NOOKA Good morning!

LAETITIA Morning. Oh, I hate you people!

VO Elder sister Nooka is a stickler for the rules. [laughs] [talking in Tongan]

KASA See what they’re doing, I’m still talking they bang my head.

ACT: against rules

CU: LAETITIA sorts in pack on bed.

Tomorrow is Sunday and she must attend church.

But she’s only brought one short skirt.

LAETITIA I’m an idiot! [laughs] Should have packed a long skirt! It’ll be alright. Ok [sighs] It’ll be alright. The most annoying bit is mum told me.

[music: theme]

NOOKA Laetitia?

VO Laetitia’s first night’s sleep in Tonga is about to be rudely interrupted.

NOOKA Good morning!

LAETITIA Morning. Oh, I hate you people!

VO Elder sister Nooka is a stickler for the rules. [laughs] [talking in Tongan]

KASA See what they’re doing, I’m still talking they bang my head.

ACT: against rules

CU: LAETITIA sorts in pack on bed.

Tomorrow is Sunday and she must attend church.

But she’s only brought one short skirt.

LAETITIA I’m an idiot! [laughs] Should have packed a long skirt! It’ll be alright. Ok [sighs] It’ll be alright. The most annoying bit is mum told me.

[music: theme]

NOOKA Laetitia?

VO Laetitia’s first night’s sleep in Tonga is about to be rudely interrupted.

NOOKA Good morning!

LAETITIA Morning. Oh, I hate you people!

VO Elder sister Nooka is a stickler for the rules. [laughs] [talking in Tongan]

KASA See what they’re doing, I’m still talking they bang my head.

ACT: against rules

CU: LAETITIA sorts in pack on bed.

Tomorrow is Sunday and she must attend church.

But she’s only brought one short skirt.

LAETITIA I’m an idiot! [laughs] Should have packed a long skirt! It’ll be alright. Ok [sighs] It’ll be alright. The most annoying bit is mum told me.

[music: theme]

NOOKA Laetitia?

VO Laetitia’s first night’s sleep in Tonga is about to be rudely interrupted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>We have to go to the morning services.</td>
<td>Sheet. Pan with NOOKA, places clothes on chair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Church begins at dawn and elder sister Nooka enforces the routine.</td>
<td>CU: placing clothes on chair. Tilt up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>What time is it?</td>
<td>LAETITIA smiles and nods. Pan to CU: NOOKA smiles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: rooster call]</td>
<td>SEM: camera movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Alright, ok, that's why it's still dark [laughs] So this is the normal time we get up, like about ten to five? Right, cool. Ok.</td>
<td>LAETITIA in bed. Nods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>Alright, ok, that's why it's still dark [laughs] So this is the normal time we get up, like about ten to five? Right, cool. Ok.</td>
<td>LAETITIA hides under sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Ok, get ready.</td>
<td>Zoom out as NOOKA walks out. LAETITIA hides under sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>This is not the relaxed island lifestyle that Laetitia was anticipating.</td>
<td>CU: LAETITIA hides under sheet. Zoom out to LS LAETITIA looks out from bed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Laetitia?</td>
<td>MS: NOOKA in doorway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Nooka lends Laetitia clothes to ensure she dresses appropriately.</td>
<td>CU: feet slipped into sandals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long black skirt and traditional woven kiekie.</td>
<td>ACT: within rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KASA</td>
<td>You look like a Tongan girl right now.</td>
<td>MS: from over NOOKA's shoulder as she ties the kiekie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOOKA</td>
<td>Yeah, Tongan lady.</td>
<td>MS: KASA in doorway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAETITIA</td>
<td>You look beautiful.</td>
<td>Pan to LAETITIA. Tilt down and up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: church bell]</td>
<td>VLS: in dark, bell is rung. SEM: early morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: muffled voices]</td>
<td>MLS: from behind, walking with KASA, LAETITIA and NOOKA. SEM: church bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VO</td>
<td>Although Tonga has never been colonised, Christianity plays a central role in every community on the islands.</td>
<td>MLS: POPPY sits in pew. VLS: NOOKA and LAETITIA sit in pew.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kasa's family is</td>
<td>CUL: Tongan culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

274
among the devout few who attend the very first church service of the day at 5.30am.

LAETITIA [in VO] Mum told me how the bells would ring for church and I thought that she was full of shit. But it does happen at five in the morning.

*VLS:* from outside at back of church.

*MS:* LAETITIA with NOOKA as she shares hymn book and sings.

*ECU:* LAETITIA and NOOKA profile.

*CUL/SEM:* religion

*SEM:* Aussie language

ENG: clinch - orientation
Nerds FC transcription

Transcription of segment 6-8 of Nerds FC case study episode.

Broadcast 21/04/2006. SBS.

Series Producer: Asif Zubairy.
Sydney: SBS Independent/Grundy(Fremantle Media)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>AUDIO</strong></th>
<th><strong>VISUAL</strong></th>
<th><strong>ANALYSIS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[sound: wipe]</td>
<td>[at training ground]</td>
<td>SEM: transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[music: comical]</td>
<td><em>VLS:</em> NERDS in huddle with coaches</td>
<td>SEM: location, uniforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANDY</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alright guys, we've got you looking like a team, we have to start</strong></td>
<td><em>ENG:</em> enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>getting you behaving like a team.</strong></td>
<td>SEM: music - emotive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Because football at it's very essence is a team game, that's the beauty of it.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Our success as a football team is not going to be the result of eleven individuals on the field at once. It's going to be the result of us forging a very strong team unit.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>And so to that end, to accelerate the process of team building, we're going to send you on a very specifically designed team building exercise.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[NERDS laugh]</td>
<td><em>MS:</em> ANDY from over NERDS shoulders</td>
<td>ACT: coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MCU:</em> ANDY profile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MCU:</em> PHILLIP, DAVID and TREN'T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MLS:</em> NERDS in huddle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MS:</em> ANDY in profile</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MS:</em> ANDY from over NERDS shoulders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MS:</em> ANDY in profile.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Clasps hands together</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MS:</em> pan across group of NERDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>CU:</em> DAVID in profile, pan to ROBIN and TIM K, smiling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MS:</em> JOSEPH smiles, NICK gives <em>thumb up</em>, pan across NERDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANDY</strong></td>
<td><strong>I would like to invite you now through the archway,</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>onto the team coach for Nerds FC's team building exercise.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Off you go, the team building starts now.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NERD</strong></td>
<td><strong>Go team!</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[music: rock]</td>
<td><em>VLS:</em> NERDS walk towards archway</td>
<td>ENG: incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>LS:</em> [fast speed] NERDS walk beside team coach</td>
<td>SEM: fast motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MS:</em> [fast speed] NERDS walk towards archway</td>
<td>SEM: music - emotive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>MS:</em> NERDS climb onto team coach, pan to aisle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>CU:</em> DAVID profile with laptop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>CU:</em> from behind</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*CUL:* computer game
NERDS, same game on laptops

VLS: [fast speed] coach crosses bridge

LS: [fast speed] coach approaches and stops, with CU on tyre

MS: NERDS jog off coach

CAMERON G'day guys. We're going to be doing some stuff around team building.

I suppose while today is not necessarily going to be focused on playing soccer, I think you'll find some of the things that we do today, while quite different from that, will really emphasise some of the things that are really important for you guys in terms of working together as a team. Shall we get into it? Alright, good on ya.

MS: CAMERON from behind, towards NERDS group

MLS: NERDS in group, pan to MCU: CAMERON profile

[CAPTION: Cameron Team Bonder]

SEM: name captions

ENG: clinch - orientation

MS: NERDS group

MLS: NERDS in group

MS: CAMERON

CUL: language

DAVID Lets go guys.

[ROBIN cheers]

ROBIN and SOM dance. ROBIN claps and jumps.

[act: enthusiasm]

[sound: wipe] [blurred wipe] SEM: transition

[music: comical]

LS: NERDS in line, from behind CAMERON

SEM: music - emotive

CAMERON OK guys. Our first task is called the cable walk. Your starting position is from this boundary here and your goal is to get the entire team from this point to that point over there. Your time starts now,

good luck guys!

MS: NICK and TIM W, pan across to SOM and ROBIN

CU: cables attached to tree, marker line on ground

MS: SOM, ROBIN, TIM K and TRENT

VLS: NERDS at cable walk from behind CAMERON. CAMERON points to start and end.

LS: track into NERDS group

DAVID I have a plan.

[sound: NERDS talking] to MS on DAVID, points to start

MCU: MILAN profile watching

ACT: leadership
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Scene Descriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JOHN</td>
<td>I think I can balance, but I don't think I can hold other people.</td>
<td><em>MCU: JOHN profile</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID</td>
<td>We need to get to that rope over there.</td>
<td><em>MLS: CAMERON, walks to start. Pan to NERDS on cable.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: NERDS talking]</td>
<td><em>ACT: teamwork</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID</td>
<td>Just edge forward in your own time.</td>
<td><em>MLS: DANIEL steadied by DAVID on cable, track to profile</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When you're ready Dan, get your balance.</td>
<td><em>ENG: clinch - equivocation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DANIEL</td>
<td>Oh, shh, no!</td>
<td><em>MLS: feet on cable.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: NERDS talking]</td>
<td><em>MCU: DAVID from behind NERDS, track to focus on DAVID, NERDS point and put hands up.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[in VO] I think I kind of took control there, mostly because nobody else seemed to be standing up and putting out ideas. There were a few people who said ideas but nobody seemed to say lets get on with it.</td>
<td><em>MS: ANDY and MILAN watching</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*MCU: DAVID 'talking head' [CAPTION: David]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SEM: talking head</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[sound: NERDS talking]</td>
<td><em>MCU: TIM K, ROBIN and SOM watching</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>MS: DAVID steadied by JOSEPH and DANIEL on cable</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>ACT: teamwork</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*MCU: PHILLIP 'talking head' [CAPTION: Phillip]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SEM: talking head</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILLIP</td>
<td>Today David on the tightrope exercise he did display a lot of the leadership characteristics that we'll be needing.</td>
<td><em>MCU: DAVID walks along cable</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SEM: talking head</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIM W</td>
<td>I don't know if actually thinks this, but it seems that he feels his place is in the front.</td>
<td>*CU: TIM W 'talking head' [CAPTION: Tim]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JACK</td>
<td>He has the loudest voice and is obviously born to give orders, [in VO] which is what we need, you know, someone to whip us into shape.</td>
<td>*CU: JACK 'talking head' [CAPTION: Jack]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>CU: DAVID looks away, balanced on cable.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SEM: transition</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SEM: talking head</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SEM: talking head</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SEM: transition</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SEM: music - emotive</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My greatest passion is cars, specifically classic cars. I love them. I've been collecting car magazines for six or seven years. I've got car magazines that deal with classic cars, modern tuned cars, cars that are only just released or yet to come out.

This is my favourite car of all time, Ferrari 250 GTO, it has a three litre V12, it was the first car ever to break 100 brake horsepower per litre. There were only 36 ever made and every one of them is unique.

And this is my baby, a 1969 MGV convertible. I've spent pretty much every penny I've earned on it. Just got the carbies done.

Rebuilt those, stripped them down. The engine was a bit tired so we pulled that out and took it all to bits and rebuilt it.

I'm very pedantic in terms of all the technical details. Would I rather have my Ferrari 250GTO or my left arm? I'd have to say I'd keep my arm, because you can't really do much work on them if [in VO] you've got one arm.

ENG: clinch - suspension/orientation

SEM: interest

CU: track over magazines on floor

ECU: Hand holds magazine in shot

CU zoom to ECU: magazine

LS: DAVID sits in middle of magazines, holds one magazine

VLS: DAVID with MG, track and tilt to bonnet.

ECU: MG bonnet, hood pops

MLS: DAVID in overalls, working on engine, track in.

ECU: Hands opening car part

MLS: DAVID in overalls, working on engine

MLS: DAVID from below, working on engine

LS: Car approaches along road, turns in front of camera and out of shot

MS: DAVID in rearview mirror, driving.

CU: car tyre turning

MCU: car bonnet stops in front of camera

MLS: DAVID 'talking head' sitting amongst tools in overalls

MS: DAVID turns to camera from engine, thumbs up

[sound: wipe] blurred wipe

SEM: transition
| DAVID | OK, you're probably going to have to duck under my arm, and go in front of me and I'll hold you.
Hang onto me, grab me.
That's fine, take your time, take your time. |
<p>| NERD | That's it. |
| NERD | Alright |
| [sound: NERDS talking] |
| MLS: DAVID on cable, <strong>steadied</strong> by DANIEL, <strong>steadied</strong> by ROBIN and SOM. TIM W <strong>edges</strong> along cable, <strong>ducks</strong> around DAVID. Track back to <strong>VLS</strong> |
| CU: ROBIN and SOM |
| MS: DAVID and TIM W |
| [sound: NERDS clapping and cheering] |
| MLS: <strong>feet edge</strong> along cable, tilt up as TIM W <strong>touches</strong> tree |
| Pan to DAVID, holding between TIM W and DANIEL |
| MLS: <strong>daniel jumps</strong> onto rope and swings. |
| NERD | Grab the tree, grab the tree. |
| NERD | That's not cool. |
| [sound: laughing] |
| JOSEPH | Grab my hand, grab my hand, Tim. |
| DANIEL | That was my fault. |
| NICK | Normally I do this with chicks. |
| [sound: laughing] |
| MLS: <strong>daniel jumps</strong> onto rope and swings. |
| Bumps TIM W off cable, both <strong>swing</strong> |
| JOSEPH reaches for TIM W |
| DANIEL stretches feet for cable. |
| NICK | Commonly I do this with chicks. |
| MLS: <strong>jack and nersd watch</strong> |
| MCP: TIM K <strong>wobbles</strong> along ropes |
| Kirk doesn't look too good. |
| MLS: <strong>daniel jumps</strong> onto rope and swings. |
| [fast speed] TIM K <strong>edges</strong> to balance with MARIKA |
| MCU: TIM K <strong>wobbles</strong> along ropes |
| MLS: <strong>nick holds</strong> onto tree and TRENT, TIM K <strong>balances</strong> on other side of tree |
| [sound: laughing] |
| <strong>ACT</strong>: teamwork |
| <strong>ENG</strong>: clinch - orientation |
| <strong>SEM</strong>: talking head |
| <strong>ACT</strong>: enthusiasm |
| <strong>ENG</strong>: clinch - partial answer |
| <strong>ENG</strong>: clinch - ambiguity |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Action or Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>Arms high, Nick, arms high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICK</td>
<td>[in VO] I was trying to get the next rope. But I failed to catch it, and I started swaying madly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOSEPH</td>
<td>Sorry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICK</td>
<td>[in VO] and the next thing I remember is I was on the ground. I'm alright now though the damage to my ankle only lasted a few seconds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>Armes straight, get your breath back and go again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICK</td>
<td>Ok.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID</td>
<td>[in VO] It all flowed smoothly from there, we just passed it back and forth. And got everyone around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICK</td>
<td>Track to MLS NICK on ground, sits up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>Armes straight, get your breath back and go again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLS:</td>
<td>from below, looking up tree, DANIEL holds tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>MLS: NICK edges along cable holding ropes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICK</td>
<td>MLS: Nick wobbles, catches next rope. Tilt to feet, tilt up, NICK drops rope, falls onto ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>MLS: CAMERON pats NICK on shoulder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICK</td>
<td>NICK nods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID</td>
<td>MLS: from below, TRENT along rope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLS:</td>
<td>MCU: DAVID 'talking head'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>MCU: DAVID 'talking head'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLS:</td>
<td>SEM: talking head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>MCU: CAMERON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>MCU: CAMERON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>MSC: NERDS group, [into fast speed] pan as NERDS walk away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>Your time starts now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>[in VO] Once we started the stick thing, and we all had to lower a stick on our fingers, [in VO] everything started to make sense, working as a team, listening to each other,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLS:</td>
<td>SEM: talking head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>MLS: NERDS along stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>MLS: NERDS group with CAMERON looking on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>MCU: ROBIN 'talking head' [CAPTION: Robin]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>CU: fingers bunched together under stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMERON</td>
<td>MCU: DAVID from behind NERDS, balancing stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>MLS: NERDS group with CAMERON looking on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>MCU: ROBIN 'talking head' [CAPTION: Robin]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>CU: fingers bunched together under stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROBIN</td>
<td>MLS: NERDS along stick</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Engagement Levels:**
- ENG: clinch - ambiguity
- ENG: clinch - orientation
- SEM: music - emotive
- ACT: teamwork
- ACT: enthusiasm
- SEM: talking head
- ACT: orientation
- SEM: talking head
| 
|---|
| Talking with each other, discussing strategies and how to best go about something. |
| **MS:** ANDY and MILAN *watching* |
| **MS:** NERDS along stick, zoom to **CU** fingers under stick. |
| **MCU:** DANIEL 'talking head' [CAPTION: Daniel] |
| **CU:** track along on MARIKA from behind NERDS |

| **DANIEL** |
| There's a lot of the intellectual sort of [in VO] problem solving dynamic to it. |
| **MCU:** DANIEL 'talking head' [CAPTION: Daniel] |
| **SEM:** talking head |

| **TIM W** |
| Seph knows about this. |
| **MS:** TIM W *points* amongst NERDS |

| **JOSEPH** |
| [in VO] I definitely find that what I've done at university which is problem solving stuff is exactly the skills that we've needed today. |
| **MS:** JOSEPH amongst NERDS, tilt to stick |
| **MLS:** NERDS group *squat* with stick |
| **CU:** JOSEPH 'talking head' |
| **SEM:** talking head |

| **CAMERON** |
| I get a lot of smart people having a go at this exercise and very few of them do it as fast as you guys just did it in, so well done, great result. |
| **MLS:** NERDS group *squat* with stick |
| **MS:** ANDY and MILAN *watching* |
| **MLS:** NERDS *stand* in line |
| **MS:** CAMERON profile, pan and zoom to **LS:** NERDS group |

| **SOM** |
| [in VO] I think today really showed that we are nerds and we are really good at thinking through things before we do them. |
| **MLS:** SOM *balanced* on plank, *held* by other NERDS |
| **LS:** SOM *stretched* on plank, *holding* out box |
| **MCU:** SOM 'talking head' [CAPTION: Som] |
| **ACT:** teamwork |
| **SEM:** talking head |

| **JOSEPH** |
| Just knock it really hard and hopefully it won't hit the rope. |
| **MLS:** box on end of plank. PHILIP *pokes* box off. |

| **DANIEL** |
| No! |
| Pan with box as *falls* on ground |

| **TIM K** |
| Every single exercise we've done, it's been more intellect than actual physical ability. How often do we really need to balance. I mean it's not a major skill. |
| **MCU:** TIM K 'talking head' [CAPTION: Tim] |
| **MCU:** NICK *crawls* |
| **MCU:** TIM K *crawls* along plank, pan |
| **MCU:** TIM K 'talking head' |

| [sound: NERDS talking, clapping and cheering] |
| **MLS:** NERDS *balance* on end of plank |

| [sound: laughing] |
| **MLS:** TIM W *falls off* plank, face into ground |
| **ENG:** clinch - jammed answer |

| [music: bass sting] |
| [Transition: three overlapping images] |
| **CU:** ball *kicked*; hands *keep* ball; long socked legs |
| **SEM:** transition |