

Reflection Statement:

A Multitude of Methods to Evade the Truth

“I will never understand people.

They’re the worst.”¹

Whilst *Seinfeld*² was hailed for its exploration of the minutiae of everyday life, the contemporary form of reality television has eschewed exploration of the inherent, intricate tensions in society, instead preferring to paint in broad, haphazard strokes.

Growing up, I questioned why I could merely remember a hazy vision of characters from reality television, none of whom resembled myself, whilst my favourite show, *Seinfeld*, presented distinctive, inimitable voices. Over the past year, I have scrutinised this concept, understanding that reality television idealises the mundane, squandering the potential for diverse role models to evolve within the medium.

My Major Work aims to expose the manipulation prevalent in the genre,

¹ “The Face Painter.” *Seinfeld*. NBC, New York City. 11 May, 1995. Television.

² David, Larry and Seinfeld, Jerry (Creators). (1989). *Seinfeld*. NBC, New York City. Television.

whilst exploring the psychological ramifications of character portrayals in contemporary media. A satirical mirroring of the techniques utilised within the reality television genre is employed, heightening my criticism of the medium. Its greater purpose is thus to explore the relationship between composers and audiences, revealing the distortion of individual perceptions of society that stems from this, an insight attained through the lens of 'reality TV'.

Reflecting the genre, the work appeals to varying demographics. Those who simply have a love of fiction, intrigued by tone and experimentation, gain an insight into the reality television genre, whilst academics will appreciate the necessity and complexity of the decisions regarding this inventiveness. Upon disseminating the work for feedback, I found that reader engagement directly correlated with the fragments of the story which distilled my themes into easily-identifiable satire, as in 'Editing' and 'Deduction'. I thus undertook the process of eliminating sections of the work which were not central to serving the overall purpose, ensuring greater reader appreciation.

The title *A Multitude of Methods to Evade the Truth* reveals to these readers that reality television is a means of escaping the truth, alluding to the protagonist's evasion of the psychological effects of reality television, an insight gained through a critical interpretation of the work, as academics would undertake. Such an audience may appreciate the alliteration, reflective of the portrayals of repetitious personalities. The unassuming reader finds that they have been unaware of the truth when they, too, realise they have been manipulated by the protagonist, allowing for varying readings of the text, a notion I developed upon the study of 'Ways of Reading' in the preliminary English Extension One course. Whilst the dominant reading of the text by the

majority of audiences may be centred upon the revelations of the multi-faceted manipulation involved in the reality television genre, this may be enhanced by academic readings which place emphasis on understanding the means in which composers unify purpose and form to heighten audience engagement.

The post-modern short-story medium is utilised to reflect the modernity of reality television, resistance to traditional story-telling, and the effects of a composer's manipulation. This was impacted by the English Extension One course, which espouses the interconnecting relationship between composers and audiences, and how form is deliberately moulded to affect this, influencing my further exploration of the concept. Within the text, Dr Neil Sheilgman comments on his use of "meta-commentary", a deliberate choice utilised to satirise the reality television genre through employing the language features it uses to deceive. The exceedingly obvious tone that lacks any subtlety is indicative of the medium, whilst the constantly shifting form and pace is reflective of attempts to engage audiences, heightened by sparse plots and the promise of "bombshell revelations", staples of the genre.

The deliberately slow, character-building beginning is a parallel to introductory episodes of reality television, which portray the most momentous events in the last minutes of the programme in order to ensure audiences will return the next evening. The lack of depth in the characterisation of the protagonist is also indicative of the flaws of the medium. Similarly, the juxtaposition of past and present tense is reflective of the tendency of the medium to intersperse connecting events, regardless of the time in which they occurred.

However, I struggled with the notion of whether the story was, indeed, a narrative – I feel it could have been categorized as a critical response, as its clear, authoritative tone is indicative of the genre. Mark Twain’s essay *‘Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses’*³ dispelled this perception, as his stipulation that the author shall “say what he is proposing to say, not merely come near it” comforted me in the resonance of my work as fiction, while the satirical, derisive tone of the essay influenced my experimentation with unique voices. As a proponent of the “show, don’t tell” style, it was challenging to produce a work that so heavily relied on the latter, however, I was convinced of the effectiveness of this through Diane Lifer’s observation that:

“Edgy juxtapositions and pulsing rhythms of an unconventional story may actually be more engaging to readers than the traditionally structured.”⁴

This notion was expounded by Donald M. Murray: “Demand is created when a writer expresses an individual point of view appropriate to the topic.”⁵ Thus, I felt that my decision to write in such an obvious manner was legitimised by the content that the work was parodying, illustrated through stylistic and structural choices. The headings of dictionary definitions reflect the concept, as their clarity is juxtaposed with the deceptive nature of reality television, which is typically veiled under false representations. Furthermore, the structuring of the work into fragments based on a central theme is illustrative of the genre’s episodic nature, heightened by the inclusions of tangents, reports and diagrams, further indicative of the fluidity of the genre.

The fluidity of the medium was reinforced by readings of texts including

³ Twain, M. (1822). *Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses*.

⁴ Liefer, Diane. “*Breaking the Rules of Short Story Structure*.” *Words Overflowed by Stars*. Ed. David Jauss, Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 2009. 62-69.

⁵ Murray, Donald M. “*Letter to a Young Article Writer*.” *Writer Magazine*, January 1993.

*Guidelines for Measures to Cope with Disgraceful and Other Events*⁶ by Richard Beard, and the English Extension One text *If on a winter's night a traveller*⁷, by Italo Calvino. Calvino's depiction of the blurred lines between reality and fiction is emulated in my work, as the idea of a "story within a story" arose from my readings of the texts, providing me with the confidence to manipulate structure and address the audience directly through second-person narration, reflecting how reality television defies structural conventions to engage audiences. This was further heightened by the study of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*⁸, within English Advanced, elucidating the merit of crafting shifting perspectives and narrative structure, allowing greater reflection on the central concepts embedded within the work through unifying form and purpose.

Preliminary investigations into structure and form aided the development of my personal voice and the risks I was willing to take within the work, bolstered by research into the themes and concepts I would explore. The study *Through the Looking Glass: Class and Reality in Television*⁹ discusses television's power to:

"Support the status quo by reinforcing dominant ideology through routinized program choices".

This concept thus became a facet of my work, evolving the purpose from exploring the manipulation of reality television to simultaneously illustrating the psychological ramifications of such machinations, and its

⁶ Beard, R, *A Guideline for Measures to Cope with Disgraceful and Other Events*. BBC National Short Story Award Collection, United Kingdom, 2008.

⁷ Calvino, I, *If on a winter's night a traveller*, 1979.

⁸ Shelley, M. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, 1818.

⁹ Brasted, M. (2004). 'Through the Looking Glass: Class and Reality in Television'. *Electronic Journal of Sociology*. <<http://www.sociology.org/content/2004/tier2/brasted.html>>

effects on the development of personal characteristics within the audience, reinforced through *Reality TV and the Effect on Society*¹⁰, and *Reality TV: A Sociological Perspective View*¹¹.

The notion of the personalities embedded within society being a product of their time was heightened by my study of *Belonging* in HSC English Advanced, which specifies the influence of dynamic factors on an individual, including time and place, the most pertinent concerns of my work. The protagonist's milieu has a distinctive effect on his character, as he is an artificial construct whose personality has been shaped by representations in twenty-first century media, unable to express his true identity due to insecurity, as presented in 'Minimalism'. This is emphasised through allusions to *Jurassic Park*¹², *Sherlock Holmes*¹³, *The Simpsons*¹⁴, *My Best Friend's Wedding*¹⁵, and *Elementary*¹⁶, utilised to realise the notion that the protagonist has taken various facets of popular culture and moulded them unknowingly within his own personality, stemming from my investigation into the societal effects of television, the motif heightening the criticism of the genre.

Investigations regarding form and theme worked in conjunction with research into the television genre itself. A study of *Big Brother Australia*¹⁷ allowed me to understand the repetitious nature of the personalities represented in each year, reflected in my work through the 'checklist' of stereotypical identities. The distillation of multi-faceted individuals into simple

¹⁰ Wagner, S. (2012) *Reality TV and the Effect on Society* <<http://sarahsociologystudies.blogspot.com.au/2012/02/reality-television-and-affect-on.html>>

¹¹ *Reality TV: A Sociological Perspective View* (2012) <<http://sociologyjrs2012.wordpress.com/>>

¹² M Crichton, *Jurassic Park*. Alfred A. Knopf, United States, 1990.

¹³ Doyle, Arthur Conan. *A Study in Scarlet*. London: Ward Lock & Co, 1888. Print.

¹⁴ "Scenes from the Class Struggle in Springfield." FOX, Los Angeles. 4 February, 1996. Television.

¹⁵ *My Best Friend's Wedding*, 1997, Motion Picture, Zucker Brothers Productions.

¹⁶ "Heroine". *Elementary*. CBS, New York City. May 16, 2013. Television.

¹⁷ *Big Brother Australia* (2012-13), Reality Television, Nine Network, Brisbane.

descriptions acts as commentary on the glorification of stereotypical people. This was heightened by investigation into audition processes, as *Behind Big Brother*¹⁸ and *Big Brother: The Sick Reality*¹⁹ revealed the manipulation involved in the casting in order to find the most basic, “sellable” characters, a notion reflected in “Stereotype” and “Audition”.

Dr Neil Sheilgman’s manipulation of Andrew Parker and the reader reflects that our emotional responses to texts weaken our critical thinking. The audience’s inherent trust in the protagonist is mistaken, as the technical and language features employed illustrate that audiences are easily hoodwinked by the media. Structure and form therefore subvert conventions to reflect the central purpose.

The work, I feel, has achieved its purpose in illustrating the manipulative nature of reality television. The creation of an original work has been realised through experimentation with construction, forming a satire that can be valued in diverse ways. Whilst the notion of reality television offering an insight into real life is alluring, I have discovered that it does not achieve the lofty heights of these expectations. Its central flaw is, thus, its inability to understand that society is more than a pastiche of stereotypes.

Dr Neil Sheilgman regards you with scorn, reality television producers.

¹⁸ ‘Auditions: The Complete Process’ (2012) *Behind Big Brother*
<www.behindbigbrother.com/2012/05/auditions-the-complete-process/>

¹⁹ Jones, T. (2007) ‘*Big Brother: The Sick Reality*’, *The Daily Mail*, 3 June, 2007