REALITY TV AS POPULAR SCIENCE: THE MAKING OF A GENRE

by

PAUL MYRON HILLIER

(Under the Direction of James F. Hamilton)

ABSTRACT

This study addresses reality TV as popular science. Proposing that we might better understand this popular media form by locating it within a wider context, the project locates key traditions and practices that were drawn upon to help formulate reality TV in the United States in the history of social experiments.

During the emergence of commercial forms of popular science in the nineteenth century, P.T. Barnum was an influential creator of a form of entertainment in which the object was to discern what was real in a manufactured amusement. By the 1950s and 1960s, both *Candid Camera* creator Allen Funt and behavioral psychologist Stanley Milgram formulated their projects as social experiments that placed unsuspecting people into carefully designed situations. Psychologist Phillip Zimbardo reconfigured social experiments in his Stanford prison experiment, paralleling similar uses in the public-television series *An American Family*, by studying social roles and types. All of these previous practices offered methods and rationales for what is known currently as reality TV, a genre that Mark Burnett helped develop by claiming to test and examine types of human behavior, and inform the ongoing making of a genre well-suited for the post-network era.

Adding to more recent work of critical genre analysis, one of the contributions of this study is to explore social experiments as a genre. This study also documents the many characteristics shared by the scientific and commercial versions of social experiments, arguing that they have informed each other and have been responses to and products of the same social imperatives. The study concludes by reflecting on the value of critical genre analysis, as well as on how this example supports efforts to retheorize media participation from a matter of quantity to one of mode.

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For Mary and Hannah

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PREFACE

The seeds of this dissertation were planted about six years ago, when I stumbled upon the radio program *Candid Microphone*. I forget where I first saw a nod to the show, but I remember how. I was researching forms of motion photography when I ran across someone's brief footnote that, before Alan Funt made his well-known show *Candid Camera*, it had been a radio program by the already noted name. What a fascinating piece of history, I thought, and being on the lookout for one of those forgotten aspects of U.S. history that can get a budding scholar noticed, I made an effort to see if anyone had given the program some consideration. I presumed someone had, since it seemed like a great topic given *Candid Camera*'s place in U.S. media history. However, I was surprised when I found that with the exception of radio history buffs and very general surveys of broadcasting history, there seemed to be only superficial treatment of the show.

I was attracted to *Candid Microphone* because it bolstered my view that technologies and texts don't naturally evolve or progress from one form to the next, are not isolated from one another, nor that technologies on their own produce certain kinds of texts or programming. If nothing else, *Candid Microphone* suggested a prior practice in place before *Candid Camera*, and I was interested in how the former informed the later.

For a time, the show remained a little interesting piece of media history in the back of my mind, but it made its way back to the forefront of my attention in a way I'd not anticipated. As a PhD student searching for my niche and topic, I turned to reality TV

for a number of reasons and on a variety of levels. My niche, I then decided, would be to research this genre and try to figure out how it emerged.

The justified problem of the "reality" in reality TV stood as a seductive siren. Already well acquainted with the ways in which media construct a/our view of the world, I linked this line of inquiry with my other interests, which were the relationships between visual culture, communication technologies, and U.S. cultural history and society. What I principally found, prodded along by and in enormous debt to my advisor, was that, first, the ontological avenue I was exploring would never be fully resolved through the way I was approaching the problem(s); that, second, the way I'd posed my questions about media had already in part determined my answers; and, finally and most importantly, I wasn't really interested the "problem of reality" in the terms I'd framed it anyway.

A productive aspect of my previous research yielded an interesting point about reality TV, though. Again pushed by my advisor to examine how reality TV as a claim and as a concept was being used and for what ends, I discovered that many of these programs were described as "social experiments." Indeed, this was widespread. So why would this be the case? What made this claim relevant and meaningful? As I began to explore, I was struck by the significance of this claim, and I became increasingly confident that there was enough compelling stuff here to make up a dissertation that could contribute to the field. I'd also found the topic important enough to sustain me through those days when I knew I'd look for an answer to the question of why I was researching any of this in the first place.

As my research matured and as I began to make social and historical connections, my old friend *Candid Microphone* made its way back into the picture. This time, though,

I returned to the show with a different set of questions and, I believe, a much richer approach. I haven't, as will be apparent, given the show itself the kind of focused and in-depth attention I once expected to, and that still remains a project for another day, but I was able to locate part of its significance, and I now have a better understanding of the program's cultural place and history.

This dissertation is a study of popular culture as a social and historical process. It seeks to chart the formation and emergence of what is known currently as "reality television." However, and contrary to much research on this genre of programming, the study of reality television as popular culture in this sense requires attention to developments much prior to the past ten years of the ascendance of reality TV as a programming format and formula not only in the United States but in Europe and many other areas, and attention as well to formations and practices seemingly unconnected to reality TV. Expansion historically and topically in this way is due to the nature of popular culture itself, in which texts are redefined as components of a practice. In concert with an approach that Maza notes as "a shift in the humanities from culture as text to culture as agency and practice," reality TV can be productively addressed by paying historical attention to how already existing resources were pulled together and through an exceptionally complex process remade into what becomes, in this case, a novel genre of entertainment programming.[1]

What makes this genre novel are two interrelated ways in which it seems to challenge if not break the mold of commercial-television programming. First, most reality-television shows do not rely on bankable stars with established track records for their marketability. Rather, most shows feature non-professional members of the public,

the vast majority of whom, upon a show's conclusion, return to anonymity or a localized

sense of celebrity. However, this turn away from the use of stars and a reliance on star

power has not hurt reality TV's popularity; by contrast, as assessed by ratings, the shows

have become a very popular and lucrative staple of television programming, as shows

like *Big Brother* and *The Real World* attest. Second, reality television does not simply tell

entertaining stories. Rather, the shows often claim to probe if not test the validity of

persistent ideas about society and human nature. In this way, the ostensible entertainment

value is intermixed with and relies upon claims that such shows produce scientifically

valid knowledge. These twin novel features of reality television – that it largely features

unknown members of the public instead of stars, and that it claims to be scientifically

valid knowledge instead of simple entertaining diversion – go against much received

wisdom about what makes commercial television popular.

Analysis of this situation can begin by asking what justifies such a divergent

approach as well as what makes it as successful as it often is. Thus, descriptive goal of

this dissertation is to address from where such novel features came and how they were

formed into the amalgam of reality television. Addressing such a goal means beginning

with the emergence of industrialized forms of commercial entertainment, exploring key

innovators and their innovations, and concluding by identifying how technologies and

techniques have both made and made possible a genre of programming. The analytic goal

of this dissertation is more difficult, but speaks to the importance of genres themselves.

The generic transgression of reality television as identified by the two novel features

noted above centers on modes of participation and of knowledge production. By

engaging non-professional publics both in commercial programming and in the making

of authoritative knowledge, the genre of reality television appears to democratize knowledge production and authority in society. However, such a claim begs a clear understanding of how genres work socially and culturally, and how they regulate participation as much as they enable it. These are some of the broader issues that the present study hopes to raise by its conclusion.

NOTES

[1] Sarah Maza, "Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History," <u>The American Historical Review</u>, Vol. 101, No. 5 (December, 1996), pg. 1503.

CHAPTER ONE

(RE)LOCATING REALITY TV AS POPULAR SCIENCE

When the major networks announced their fall 2007 programming, CBS's thirteen-episode project *Kid Nation* received a great deal of the critical attention. The show was widely described as "a bold social experiment in which CBS abandons 40 children in a New Mexico ghost town for 40 days, leaving them to form their own civilization without the interference of adults."[1] More than a few critics dubbed it a "reality" version of *The Lord of the Flies*. The *Denver Post* TV critic Joanne Ostrow suggested that this "awful-sounding new reality show is television's most controversial social experiment yet."[2]

"Awful-sounding" indeed, not only due to concerns about endangerment (leaving children ages 8 to 15 unsupervised and followed only by a film crew), but also because this was billed as "reality TV," a genre known more for exploitation than wholesome entertainment. What would these kids be asked or made to do? Who would play Ralph and Piggy? Maybe this is why CBS promoted *Kid Nation* as an "aspirational social experiment," an apparent effort to distinguish the show from typical "reality" fare.[3] And not every critic immediately concluded the program was "awful-sounding," or essentially exploitive. In the *San Jose Mercury News*, for example, Susan Young wrote that "I've only seen the promotional trailer, but maybe this really is a great social experiment that shows kids to their best advantage."[4]

Whether the social experiment was awful or great remains an open question, though it is clear that characterizations of *Kid Nation* as a social experiment are similar to how many reality TV have been described. Again and again, reality TV programs that range from MTV's *The Real World* to UPN's *Beauty and the Geek* to CBS's *Big Brother* to PBS's *Manor House* have been characterized as social experiments by creators, critics, cast, and crew.[5] Mike Fleiss, for example, co-producer of the notorious *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire*, one of the first dating-competition reality TV shows, claimed "It's a social experiment to be sure."[6] The on-line encyclopedia Britannica suggests that both *Trading Spouses: Meet Your New Mommy* and *Wife Swap*, a type of reality TV that observes people in presumably unfamiliar familial practices, "are about real housewives switching homes, as a kind of social experiment."[7] The host of *Survivor*, Jeff Probst justified grouping contestants/participants by race in a recent season by stating, "I think it fits in perfectly with what *Survivor* does – it is a social experiment. And this is adding another layer to that experiment," while Richard Hatch, the "winner" of the first season, wrote that the show "was a mentally demanding social experiment."[8] And at the same time that *Kid Nation* was announced, Fox publicized *When Women Rule the World*, a show in which "12 macho, chauvinistic guys" were required to serve "12 attractive women who feel like it's still a man's world and who think they've hit a glass ceiling."[9] FOX's president, Peter Liguori suggested that "What it's doing, in a very Fox-like fashion, is testing social mores. This is a social experiment and not a sexual experiment."[10]

While all of these shows have received a good deal of critical attention, the fact that they've been described as social experiments has escaped close scrutiny. Indeed,

most if not all these claims of social experiments by creators and critics take for granted that it is an apt description, or at least a generally established convention. But why would an entertainment program be called a social experiment in the first place? What makes this an accepted description and convention, requiring no justification?

One answer could be that since claims of social experiments are also claims of scientific – and therefore justifiable – work, claiming that these shows are scientific practices could simply be chalked up as crass marketing ploys that seek to legitimize what are often seen as crass forms of entertainment. But even if this is true, the question remains why this specific claim instead of other possible ones. Why would authority be derived from social experiments instead of, for example, the personal expression of a genius-artist? Put more broadly, how might social experiments serve as a specific, creative, and interpretive logic, in addition to being a commercially motivated rationalization?

A more complex – and compelling – answer to "why social experiments?" comes into focus when practices of social experiments are considered both historically and contextually. Since the 1950s, social experiments have been a claim, method, and a distinct type of media programming at the same time. Corresponding to similar efforts of and larger imperatives for devising tests and experiments that seek to document and examine aspects and types of human behavior(s), reality TV social experiments have extended older traditions, practices, and histories. The purpose of this dissertation is to inquire into these older traditions, practices, and histories.

APPROACHING REALITY TV

Reality TV has received a great deal of critical attention, as there have been at least as many questions asked about reality TV as there have been reality TV shows.[11] Despite this volume, four general tendencies can be identified. While overlapping in emphasis, generally described ontological inquiries address the "reality" of reality TV; hermeneutical investigations focus on the audience and on how people interpret reality TV shows; media/society studies explore ways in which reality TV expresses or produces social conditions; and a political-economic tendency addresses industrial, commercial forces and imperatives. Because all are relevant and important to this study, the primary strengths and areas deserving of more attention will be briefly addressed here.

The problem of the relationship between reality and representation is ancient, but its social significance has been magnified with the accelerated pace of technological changes, such as cameras in phones and the ability to easily share audio and visual images, in addition to the development and rise of reality programming, all of which have played a role in creating a crisis of reality, with its analog in postmodern approaches to cultural analysis. For example, Debord and Baudrillard exemplify claims of the evacuation of the real and its replacement by the capitalist spectacle or simulacrum.[12] Many critical studies of reality TV within this area advance such a view, such as those by Yesil, Fetveit and Kilborn.[13] The problem with such a critique is its positing of a position of the real from which the spectacle or the simulacra can be critiqued. Connecting to this concern, some studies of reality TV examine the seeming contradiction between reality and the edited and manufactured, often considered artificial form of reality TV.[14] In this strain of postmodern scholarship, there exists a simultaneous skepticism towards

universal notions of reality while at the same time advancing a view that electronic or mediated forms of communication distort reality.

Despite this difficulty, such work compels close attention to reality as a didactic instead of a transparent term and concept, and the ways that reality-as-a-claim serves to legitimize or to undermine media practices. In the case of some documentary work, for example, audio and visual recording equipment is quite often pointed to as capturing reality, while critiques often center on a fundamental inability of media to represent real events or moments.

As the second general tendency in literatures relevant to the present study, audience studies suggest that many people who watch reality TV programs do not view them as transparent representations of events, or as reality in the sense of an unvarnished or unmediated truth.[15] Studies that focus on the hermeneutical process, often connecting as they do with a branch of cultural studies that focuses on reception strategies and practices, suggest that people are largely suspicious about the "reality" in reality TV and are well aware that the programs are edited and manufactured. Butsch and Brown respectively, for instance, make this clear.[16]

But, at the same time, these studies also suggest that the pleasure of and attraction to these programs nevertheless lies in their claim of authenticity. Hill, for example, writes that "Although […] my research illustrates [viewers'] cynicism about the reality in factual entertainment, this does not mean audiences have rejected the *idea* of authenticity in factual TV. In fact, audiences have developed viewing strategies that foreground authenticity in a highly constructed TV environment." [17] These strategies invite the audience to play the part of a researcher while also asking the audience to observe and

discover, to take into consideration the artificial elements and hone in on authentic

behavior, and to participate in these kinds of shows by evaluating the results of the test or

the claims of reality. Equally significant, reality TV production teams clearly exploit and

emphasize "authentic" behavior. This logic helps explain a rationale for basing a reality

TV show such as *Kid Nation* on kids aged 8 to 15, because kids are seen to be less trained

to act for a camera with the result that, perhaps, more authentic emotions might emerge.

A third distinct tendency is research based in some form of a media/society

tradition. It takes up the role that reality TV plays in society, frequently situating it as a

reflection or as an embodiment of social conditions, with its effects critiqued or

determined. This body of work often relies upon textual evidence, and, in doing so,

contributes a valuable awareness of and appreciation for the textual intricacies and depth

at which such shows operate. The work of Dovey, Holmes, and Jermyn are representative

examples, as all examine texts in terms of how they express, reflect, or affect social and

cultural conditions.[18]

Such a tendency generally lends itself to two related but opposing interpretations.

One is that reality TV has effects on society that can be explained through textual

features. This is the case with a large body of work that seeks to establish reality TV as

an active agent of surveillance in society, such as Andrejevic's critiques. Largely working

from Foucauldian premises, Andrejevic makes a case that reality TV programs play a

significant role in the production of a postmodern, historically new repressive

condition.[19] Voyeurism is often aligned here, too, as Metzl's work seeks to establish.[20]

A second interpretation emerging from a media/society approach is that reality

TV embodies certain social forces, and thus doesn't cause anything as much as it reflects

other, more primary forces. For example, reality TV is sometimes seen to reflect a capitalist media system that seeks to create the cheapest programming possible in order to maximize profits and sell products. Deery's analysis of reality TV as an embodiment of a hyper form of postmodern, commodity-based capitalism serves as a representative example.[21]

The value of work that bases itself in varieties of a media/society explanation is its attempt to understand the contextual relationships that make reality TV what it is. At the same time, however, a difficulty is that such studies do not account for the development of particular reality TV shows or the making of the genre itself – necessary pre-conditions for the effects that are claimed.

The fourth and final general tendency in studies relevant to the present study is regarding political-economic limits and pressures. Because this form of programming is, in comparison, much less expensive to produce than traditional entertainment programming, commercial television networks and production companies find reality TV very desirable due to potentially much greater profit margins. The body of work that addresses reality TV as an industrial product from a political-economic perspective makes this point clearly. Magder's work, for example, demonstrates that advertisers might best be seen as the television industry's customers, as reality TV is generally a product-placement-friendly format.[22] These and other political-economic imperatives are important to the current project. For example, *Survivor* turned a profit before the first episode was ever broadcast due to an association with advertisers.

In the same way that much insight can be gained by seeing reality TV as a commodity that serves to primarily facilitate the placement of products, such work also

emphasizes how reality TV is also bound up and indebted to the global rise and use of programming formats, as some of the most popular social-experiments-as-reality-TV in the U.S., like *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, were developed and first practiced in Europe and the U.K. Indeed, the emergence of reality TV can be traced to various European projects. Developed by the United Kingdom production company, Planet 24 and first appearing in Sweden in 1997, *Expedition: Robertson* is often credited as the first worldwide format of a reality TV show, licensed to and made in thirteen countries to date, such as Australia, Columbia, Israel, Serbia, and the Philippines, to name a few.

Bound up in the global expansion and enforcement of intellectual property rights, production companies like Strix and Wall to Wall have developed a range of reality TV shows to be sold and developed throughout the world. As Waisbord persuasively demonstrates, the creation and sale of formats (that is, programs that are sold as copy-protected ideas or structures) is an increasingly important revenue stream.[23] Such political-economic critiques that attend to international capitalist conditions emphasize ways in which reality TV programs are global, material commodities, as these programs are bought and sold as such, and are fiercely protected as property.

However, as with the first three tendencies, political-economic studies of reality TV have their drawbacks as well as their strengths. In particular, economic imperatives do not wholly explain why some stories are more resonant than others. Nor do they account for the relevance and relationship of reality TV to narrative traditions. Reality TV cannot be fully understood solely as a symptom or cause of industrial conditions. Not all reality TV is explicitly created for-profit, as productions like *Frontier House* and *An American Family* demonstrate. And the line between what constitutes a format and a

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general, repeatable story structure can be debated. But, importantly, when situated in relationship to practices of popular science and social experimentation, as this dissertation seeks to do, reality TV can also be seen to address significant public issues and conditions in edifying ways, and not simply as an inert commodity.

TOWARDS A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL APPROACH TO REALITY TV

Thus, while reality TV has received a significant amount of attention, it deserves not simply more attention, but attention of a different kind. Drawing from the insights of the four general tendencies covered here, this project adds to the study of reality TV by focusing on the historical making of what has become a significant genre of reality TV programming. Its making involves and connects with a wide variety of social practices and histories; and this project seeks to account for these varied – sometimes competing and contradictory – interests. Given this intention, the perspective that best suits the project is a generally conceived cultural and historical approach. A reason for this approach is that it not only adds to a greater understanding of the genre's development, it also, and more importantly, critiques some key assumptions in relation to reality-TV's innovations. Interrelated with this, this approach also challenges a prominent line of media criticism that equates commercialization with the closing of participation.

The historical approach used here is not simply a methodological stance; it also serves as a theoretical perspective, as it asserts specific ontological and epistemological claims about the centrality of interpretation and historical conditions in the production and practice of society. Indeed, three interrelated theoretical assertions are embedded in the approach used here: that meaning is a product of human practice; that meaning, text,

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and practice have variably recoverable histories significant only in relation to a specific time, place, and situation; and, finally, that meaning, texts, and practice do not operate in a sphere separate from society, but, in fact, constitute society just as society constitutes them. Each of these is addressed in turn.

First is that human social life is constituted in communication. That is, the fundamental social process is one of socially interpreting and socially producing interpretations. An historical approach based in such an insight emphasizes that meaning is not intrinsic to an object or action, but, rather, is a fluid result of specific practices that make the object or action mean something. This position can be linked with the beginnings of interpretive sociology, from Dilthey to Weber; to Dewey, Mead, Blumer and pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, though also a principle guiding several approaches such as Pragmatics, sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology and other generally constructionist positions.[24]

From the field of media and communication studies, Carey advances this point by emphasizing that communication is not simply the transmission of texts, but rather a means by which society is created, shared, adapted and contested.[25] In terms of visual studies, the provocative work of Berger makes a strong and complementary case that both meaning and significance are products of narratives and larger social practices in which cultural texts like visual documents are situated and made meaningful.[26] Visual evidence is made, Berger points out, and not inherent in objects like photographs or video media. History, context, and narratives are crucial to this human activity of meaning-making.[27] The key point is that humans do not simply find natural ways of expressing the world,

but, rather, make ways of explaining the world and, through this activity, make that world.

Second, and as an implication of the first point, meanings, texts, and practices have no histories in-and-of-themselves. Just as they are made possible by already present conditions (which thus require explanation in order to understand the particular meaning, text, or practice under scrutiny), they in turn make possible new kinds of conditions. This recursive social process composed of the mutual constitution of texts and contexts, and of conditions and practices is the basis of a broadly regarded materialist perspective.[28] Nothing is meaningful except within and a part of historical and social relationships, which make these texts and contexts meaningful.[29] Language does not provide simply access to reality, but, rather, cannot be seen apart from society, and indeed is regarded here as (re)constituting society itself just as society constitutes the conditions and significance of language. As Peck notes, the reliance on a host of dualisms in Western thought such as "nature vs. culture, nature vs. society, material vs. mental, material vs. symbolic, conditions vs. consciousness, object vs. subject, things-in-themselves vs. the perceiving subject" is a habitual analytical beginning that must be rethought.[30] Seeing human activities as historical, contextual practices rather than reflections of or separate from a system or order is to recover human agency and to highlight ways in which cultural products are not reflections, but productions of the social order.[31]

Lastly, and simply to underscore the importance of a point already made in a number of ways, culture is seen here as the process by which society is made. Culture in this sense isn't a body of texts, the production of those texts alone, or the use of or the possibilities presented in those texts alone, but, rather, culture, in all its different forms, is

the active production of society.[32] Culture is something people do and enact, and not something reflected nor simply expressed and interpreted.

STRATEGIES OF ANALYSIS

Historical understanding of the kind sketched here makes no claim to universality or to direct access to the nature of society, but instead claims an interpretive engagement in human processes that are affected by while also producing human society. Such a perspective can be put into practice using the following general methodological guidelines. The epistemological claim that human society is not found but made requires attention to its making over time instead of to its nature at a point in time. The claim that meaning and significance is contextual rather than essential requires attention to what outside of a practice is, paradoxically, integral to it. Finally, the claim of the centrality of human agency requires attention be paid to human activity, ranging from individual to collective and from conceptions and decisions to efforts to organize and realize. An historical, relational inquiry into singular and collective practices that, in this case, produced and that continue to produce reality TV social experiments characterizes the general nature of the analytical strategy in this study.

The intention of this study is to examine and understand the historical emergence and significance of reality television as social experiments. Five key research questions guide this study:

1. In what ways was science opened up to popular uses and participation?

2. In what ways were social experiments developed and justified as both scientific and entertaining?

3. How were changes in social context and media technology manifested in changes in social experiments?

4. In what ways did social experiments serve as a basis for reality TV?

5. What are the implications of this study not only for an understanding of reality TV as social experiments, but also for understanding media participation?

While directly relevant and immensely useful, the cultural and historical perspective, purpose, and key research questions as outlined above are still insufficient on their own to guide research and analysis What it requires is a conceptual focus that can pull together the disparate facets (economic, social, cultural), sites of practice (individual to social), and sources of material (ranging from individual, to organizational, national, and international). A conceptual focus can also help strike a defensible balance between specific description and general analysis.

Given these requirements, a conceptual focus well aligned with the cultural and historical investigation of forms of media is a critical genre analysis. As Edgerton and Rose suggest, "The time is again ripe to revisit the rich potential of studying television genres, only now from a second-stage 'critical-cultural' perspective."[33] This approach emphasizes genre as a social practice that plays a significant, material role in both production and the interpretation of television texts, thus highlighting that genres are all at once industrial, textual, discursive, social, and historically made and remade. Organizing this study around the making of a genre serves to account for, and provide a compelling framework for, the multiple and varied issues and interests that converge in

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the historical development of a genre. It also foregrounds the complexities of texts and their social making and meaning.

What is distinctive about critical genre analysis is, rather than analyzing genres as a textual formula with invariant attributes, it emphasizes the social making of genres. As Mittell asserts, "Genre is best understood as a process of categorization that is not found within media texts, but [that] operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts."[34] Indeed, a range of activities, discourses, practices, and conditions make and define texts and genres. And in this way, critical genre analysis begins with what Eagleton has described as "meta questions." Eagleton writes, "instead of asking 'Is this poem valuable?' [This kind of approach] asks 'What do we mean by calling a poem good or bad?' … Instead of asking whether the clarinet concerto is slightly too cloying to be entirely persuasive, it inquires about the material conditions which you need to produce the work itself."[35] What makes this approach valuable is that it emphasizes practice and context, and with this, genre can be seen as a process within and as a part of historical and material conditions, thus fitting well the theoretical perspective of this study.[36]

Speaking more generally, a sociological approach to genre shifts the bulk of the attention to the human activities that make genres. Relevant to the project and method of this study is the line of critical genre analysis that can be traced to the early 20th-century work of the Bakhtin Circle.[37] Complementing and in large part arising from their critique of dominant theories of language, Volosinov and Bakhtin advanced an approach to genre that is both social and material. As a practice of language, genres are made within and as a part of social and historical conditions, with no essential structural or formal features or

rules determining their use. Indeed, like language, genres are made in a social world where contexts and settings prove crucial. Examining a genre, like language, involves paying close attention to the activities and circumstances in which the genre is made, by creators, readers, audiences, or users.

Attention to the social and historical making of a genre serves the aims and intentions of this study. While a handful of texts are examined, this is done in relation to the more central project of tracing the historical development of a genre. This is also done in relation to the methodological principles, where a text/society divide is rejected. No claims are made here in terms of the effects certain texts have had on culture and society. Rather, in keeping with the notion of genre as a complex and multifaceted process, this study seeks to provide evidence for the relationships between practices and social imperatives. And towards complicating if not challenging formulations that argue commercial forms of media are socially determinate, this project seeks to foreground how the genre of this study has been made by and for a range of interests, as a response to and in turn adding to a range of social concerns, though not always in intended ways.

Just as critical genre analysis provides this dissertation a much-needed methodological focus, a similar conceptual focus is needed to help organize the myriad relationships between the various contexts, levels, and sites of practice. That focus is provided by the concept of "popular science." Addressing each term in the phrase separately then together provides a way of explaining the relevance of this conceptual focus to the present study.

The "popular" in popular science as used in this dissertation means a number of things. First, it simply refers to the quantitative dimension: the fact of use by many

people. Second, it refers to the affective dimension: things that people themselves regard as interesting and important to themselves. Third, it refers to the breadth of use: things that are not only used by many people, but by people of many different social classes and kinds. Fourth, and finally, "popular" as used here refers to intention: that things are made to become popular through intentional design and engineering. All these senses of "popular"—quantitative, affective, breadth, and intention—are important to the meaning of popular science as used in this dissertation.

The use of "science" here emphasizes two things. First is the ontological claim of the value of positivism and empiricism, which promises the possibility of attaining a positive, objective knowledge of the world and how it works. Second is the epistemological claim of the centrality of experimental procedures, in which causal relationships between variables can be hypothesized and tested. Both claims are important to the meaning of science as used here. Despite clear differences between natural or "hard" science and social science, the claims of the latter rest upon the rationales and procedures developed in the former.

When reassembled, "popular science" in this dissertation labels a social formation in which the boundaries between science (elite and exclusive, tested and generally applicable knowledge) and entertainment (generally available, the industrial production of individual experiences of pleasure) are blurred in historically specific hybrids, produced and expressed in equally historically specific forms and practices. As regarded in this dissertation, popular science is the overriding and most general formation, within which social-experiments-as-reality-TV is only one of many forms, which include but are not limited to hobbyist magazines, futurist manifestos, science-fiction literature, science

kits marketed to children, self-help books that draw on psychological research, and countless other examples. While much of the dissertation focuses on social experiments, the beginning and conclusion of the dissertation will address key facets of the broader relationships of social-experiments-as-reality-TV to the formation of popular science and the implications for media participation and the democratic production of knowledge.

How to conduct a study with as broad an intention as this requires a flexible strategy of analysis. Because the intention here is to discover and map key relationships between different texts and practices instead of probing in detail characteristics of individual and isolated texts, the approach taken here draws upon various models of cultural history, which rely upon an accumulation of evidence and argument rather than direct, deductive proof. In an influential formulation, Williams characterizes the goal of such an inquiry as "the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these [many] relationships." He elaborates further that "it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned."[38]

The methodological challenge of such a strategy of analysis is that, as Williams notes more recently, "we have no built-in procedure of the kind which is indicated by the fixed character of an object."[39] Thus, each specific study needs to fashion its own particular means of analysis in response both to the topic and the available documentary record, and the particular approach here is suggested by the variety of materials drawn

upon and for what purpose they were used. While the accompanying notes to each chapter itemize specific sources drawn upon, the general types of sources can be noted here. Authoritative secondary works in U.S. cultural history were used to establish formative contexts. Published biographies, interviews, and memoirs written about or by key innovators provided detailed understanding of specific actions and rationales. Popular-press articles helped establish a sense of the interpretive frameworks current at any point in time, while trade-press articles provided a sense of industry concerns and actions. Material from each of these sets provided the means of detecting similarities of intention, form, and or practice. These patterns were then interpreted in terms of the various historical contexts.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter Two, "From Bacon to Barnum: Popularized Science and Popular Sleuthing in the Nineteenth-Century United States" begins the study proper by arguing that the professionalization and specialization of science paradoxically made possible its popularization, thus laying the groundwork for the amalgam of popular science as a form of entertainment. In tandem with the industrialization of America and a broad social reorganization of cultural forms and practices along hierarchical lines, professional forms of science became increasingly privileged and authoritative. In a paradoxical reaffirmation of this hierarchy, popularized forms of science invited publics to investigate scientific claims and evidence for themselves. P.T. Barnum was a key innovator here, as he made and designed a commercial form of popular science in which people played the

role of a researcher studying objects, assertions, and other people, creating a complex and compelling form of/for "popular sleuthing."

Chapter Three, "Showing Truth: Social Experiments as a Dramatic Form" argues that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, social experiments emerged as a policy response to social problems as well as a dramatic form for popular entertainment, with each enhancing the value of the other. Enabled in great part by the availability of increasingly portable means of recording, social experimentation as a method became particularly useful for the naturalistic study of human behavior, with findings not simply described and summarized in specialized language, but seemingly and transparently revealed and thus available to any viewer/listener who could evaluate them. Stanley Milgram and Alan Funt are particularly noteworthy as complementary innovators, as the former was indebted to commercial media in designing his work and accompanying films, while entertainer Funt situated his work in terms of its value to the behavioral sciences. The prominence and popularity of both men demonstrate how compelling social experiments as a popular dramatic form had become, and how closely interwoven social tests and experiments and commercial forms of media had become.

The fourth chapter, "Participation as a Performance: Social Experiments as Theatrical Science" explores how in the mid to late 1970s, the genre of social experiments addressed pressing social and cultural concerns about particular types of people and their social roles. With the Vietnam War clearly in mind, Philip Zimbardo as a key innovator sought to highlight how conditions influenced the roles of the prisoner and prison guards. At the same time, the program *An American Family* sought to document familial tensions and their changing roles, corresponding to a larger crisis

about the family, gender, and sexuality in society. Social experiments were thus remade, as changes in behavior were now observed over time, helping turn the genre of social experiments into a serialized form. And as people became aware that they were being studied, the roles of the creator(s), participants, and viewer/researcher became even more complex and interrelated. Principally, the viewer was more explicitly tasked with discerning what was real in a highly contrived situation.

Chapter Five, "Studying Human Behavior and Selling Reality: Reality TV as Popular Science" addresses the emergence of reality TV as a named genre in relationship to the post-network era. It explores the making of reality TV as it borrowed from and further reshaped the methods and logics of the genre of social experiments. Mark Burnett's work and innovations are addressed here, since his approach, techniques, and rationales have served as a template and inspiration for other reality-TV social experiments. Overall, the chapter makes a case that reality-TV social experiments are productively understood in relation to and as a form of popular science. In concert with previous studies and experiments that addressed human behavior in terms of particular social roles and types, reality-TV social experiments became a commercially repeatable format for addressing social issues as a form of popular science while working to support key imperatives of the post-network era.

The final and concluding chapter, "From Barnum to Burnett and Beyond" addresses the implications and contributions of the previous chapters to the study of reality TV. Locating the genre as part of a tradition of and historically made genre of social experiments opens up a suggestive way of thinking about a number of assumptions related to the genre and commercial practices more broadly. A principle contribution of

this project is to give due attention to a very prominent yet largely unaddressed genre of

media entertainment, and add to an understanding of the role and function of culture and

communication in U.S. society.

NOTES

[1] Mark Graham, "Defamer First Look: The 'Kid Nation' Preview,' <u>Defamer</u>, 16 May 2007, <<u>http://defamer.com/hollywood/les-moonves-is-their-only-god-now/defamer-first-look-the-kid-nation-preview-261125.php</u>> (23 August 2007).

[2] Joanne Ostrow, "'Kid Nation' has CBS on defensive," <u>Denver Post</u>, 25 August 2007, C10.

[3] Lisa de Moraes, "CBS Gambles Lox, Stock and Barrel,'" <u>Washington Post</u>, 17 May 2007, C07.

[4] Susan Young, "'Kid Nation' Stirring Up Controversy, <u>The Mercury News</u>, 30 August 2007, E1.

[5] A search for "social experiment" and "reality TV" on Lexis-Nexis in August 2007 returned over 500 articles for the past ten years. Many articles are duplicates run in multiple magazines and newspapers – Associated Press stories, for example – yet the breadth of the use of "social experiment" in relation to many programs labeled reality TV is clear.

[6] Emily Sendler, "When gold diggers attack!," <u>Salon</u>, 14 December 1999, <<u>http://www.salon.com/ent/log/1999/12/14/wantstomarry/index.html</u>> (23 August 2007).

[7] Richard Linnett, "Swap, trade or steal," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 12 July 2004, <<u>http://www.britannica.com/magazine/print?query=adage&id=13&minGrade=&maxGrade</u>>, (23 August 2007).

[8] Tanya Barrientos, and Dwayne Campbell, "Survive this: A new hue to CBS competition: Race defines the tribes in 'Survivor 13,'" *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 August 2006; Richard Hatch, *101 Survival Secrets: How to make $1,000,000, lose 100 pounds, and just plain live happily* (New York: The Lyons Press, 2000), 122; Lisa de Moraes, "'Survivor' Host's Geoethnic Studies, From Soup to Mutts," *Washington Post*, 8 September 2006, C01.

[9] Steve Rogers, "Fox announces new 'When Women Rule the World' reality series," <u>Daily Variety</u>, 01 January 2007, <<u>http://www.realitytvworld.com/news/fox-announces-new-when-women-rule-world-reality-series-4570.php</u>> (18 November 2007).

[10] J. Max Robins, "Harsh Reality," <u>Broadcasting and Cable</u>, 22 January 2007, <<u>http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/CA6408862.html</u>> (23 August 2007).

[11] Within the past five years, several edited anthologies have been produced which take up aspects of the genre and practice. See *Understanding reality television*, Edited by Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); *Survivor*

Lessons: essays on communication and reality television, edited by Matthew J. Smith and Andrew F. Wood. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003); *Reality TV : remaking television culture*, edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, (New York : New York University Press, 2004).

[12] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, 1994; Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, first published in France in 1967, translation in 1994.

[13] Bilge Yesil, "Reel Pleasures: Exploring the Historical Roots of Media Voyeurism and Exhibitionism," in Counterblast: The e-Journal of Culture and Communications, 2001; Arild Fetveit, "Reality TV in the digital era: a paradox in visual culture?" Media, Culture & Society, Vol. 21, No. 6, 787-804 (1999); Richard Kilborn, "'How Real Can You Get?': Recent Developments in 'Reality' Television." European Journal of Communication, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 421-39, December 1994.

[14] See Yesil.

[15] See Richard Butsch, "Reality TV: Audiences and popular factual television," Journal of Communication Volume 56 Page 226 - March 2006; Alice Hall, "Viewers' perceptions of reality programs." Communication Quarterly 54.2 (May 2006); Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (London ; New York : Routledge, 2005).

[16] Laura S. Brown, "Outwit, Outlast, Out-Flirt? The Women of Reality TV," *Featuring females: feminist analyses of media* edited by Ellen Cole and Jessica Henderson Daniel. 1st ed. Washington, DC : American Psychological Association, 2005.

[17] Annette Hill, "Big Brother: The Real Audience," *Television and New Media*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (August 2002), 340.

[18] Jon Dovey, *Freakshow : first person media and factual television* (London ; Sterling, Va. : Pluto Press, 2000); *Understanding reality television* Edited by by Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn. (London ; New York : Routledge, 2004).

[19] Mark Andrejevic, "The kinder, gentler gaze of Big Brother: Reality TV in the era of digital capitalism," New Media and Society, Sage Publications, 2002; Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: the work of being watched*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

[20] See Jonathan Metzl, "From scopophilia to Survivor: a brief history of voyeurism." *Textual Practice,* Volume 18, Number 3, November 2004, pp. 415-434.

[21] See June Deery, "Reality TV as advertisment," <u>Popular Communication</u>, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 1-20, 2004; Richard Kilborn, "Reality TV: The work of being watched." <u>Media, Culture & Society</u> 27 (4): 624-626 2005.

[22] Ted Magder, The End of TV 101: Reality Programs, Formats, and the New Business of Television," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, (New York : New York University Press, 2004).

[23] Waisbord, Silvio, "McTV: Understanding the Global Popularity of Television Formats," <u>Television and New Media</u>, November 2004, Vol.5, No. 4, pp. 359-383.

[24] See Johann Gottfried Herder, *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History* translated, edited, and with an introduction by Marcia Bunge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Max Weber, *Sociological Writings* (New York: Continuum, 1994); John Dewey, *Essays in Experimental Logic*, introduction by Tom Burke ; (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007); George Herbert Mead, *Essays in Social Psychology* edited with an introduction by Mary Jo Deegan, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2001).

[25] James Carey, "Reconceiving 'Mass' and 'Media,'" in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

[26] See John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Randon House, Inc., 1980); John Berger, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Pantheon Books 1982); John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: The Penguin Group, 1972).

[27] Also see: Lawrence Levine, W. *Photography and the History of the American People in the 1930s and 1940s* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1988).

[28] See Vico, Hegel, Marx, Lukacs, Gramsci, Williams.

[29] See Jacob L. Mey, *Pragmatics: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 306.

[30] Janice Peck, "Why we shouldn't be bored with the political economy versus cultural studies debate" <u>Cultural Critique</u> 64 (Fall 2006) , 105; Janice Peck, "Itinerary of a thought: Stuart Hall, Cultural Studies, and the Unresolved Problem of the Relation of Culture to 'Not Culture'", <u>Cultural Critique</u> 48, (Spring 2001), 208.

[31] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 166.

[32] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Broadview Press, 1961).

[33] *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader*, Gary Edgerton and Brian Rose, eds. (University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 7.

[34] Jason Mittell, *Genre and television : from cop shows to cartoons in American culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), xii.

[35] Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 87-89.

[36] See Mittell, 23.

[37] M. M. Bakhtin, *The dialogic imagination: four essays* edited by Michael Holquist; translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

[38] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 46-47.

[39] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 48.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM BACON TO BARNUM:

POPULARIZED SCIENCE AND POPULAR SLEUTHING

IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY UNITED STATES

"My whole life," social psychologist and reality TV pioneer Philip Zimbardo declared in 2001, "is about giving psychology away to the public."[1] For Zimbardo, if social psychology is to play a beneficial role in society, its results must be made available to as wide a public as possible. This sentiment is aligned with an extensive tradition in the behavioral and social sciences, and shared by many scientists. In 1942, for example, the sociologist Albert Galloway Keller noted similarly that "no matter how valid the conclusions of science may be, they must get out of the laboratory or study into the life of people before they can have a social effect."[2]

A long-standing issue is how to popularize this area and conclusions. Zimbardo addressed this by drawing upon and creating forms of popular media in concert with his work, such as the film he make to accompany his Stanford prison experiment, and by becoming a consultant for and producer of reality TV shows, the significance of which will be taken up in Chapter Four.

The effort to popularize scientific knowledge has not been confined to professional scientists, of course. Indeed, non-professionals have been creating and producing popular forms of science alongside and in response to specialized practices and

forms. For example, making social scientific findings accessible – and the social value for doing so – underlies the self-depiction of Mark Burnett, the producer of several prominent reality TV shows described as social experiments, who principally considers himself an "entertainer" while stating that, "personally, I'm interested in the sociological. I haven't reached any conclusions, yet. But maybe by the third or fourth *Survivor*, I'll have a better idea."[3]

On one level, Burnett could appear to be the doppelganger of Zimbardo, as the former is a prominent entertainer who mixes in social science while the latter is well-known social scientist who dabbles in entertainment. Their work and intentions, however, both connect with – and should be seen in relation to – practices of popular science. While one works in commercial entertainment and the other within the academy, the two have borrowed from and contributed to larger traditions of popular science in making their respective social experiments.

This chapter seeks to explore the emergence of commercial forms of popular science that reshaped science and entertainment, in which a method of "popular sleuthing" and participation between producers, critics, and viewers and consumers were key components. Such a heritage formed the basic traditions and practices that were drawn upon to help formulate reality TV as social experiments, and as such is crucial for the current study to establish.

To accomplish this goal, this chapter begins by recovering the complexity of the scientific. Instead of projecting into the past the current conception of science as a specialized and professionalized activity into the past, it is first important to recover the pre-twentieth-century notion of science as a form of general instead of specialized

inquiry. Prior to the twentieth century and the credentialing of scientists, a wide variety of people engaged in scientific inquiry. The chapter then explores the emergence of commercialized and institutionalized popular forms of scientific inquiry that drew from both pre-existing and nascent forms of popular entertainment and the budding specialized methods of professional science. It is from such beginnings that forms of popular science and the later social making of a genre can be traced. The chapter concludes by highlighting the influential innovations made here and by noting their significance.

HISTORICIZING POPULAR SCIENCE

The emergence and development of popular science as the larger context for the formation of a genre of social experiments has a lengthy and complex history. In the wake of the professionalization of distinct scientific fields in the nineteenth century emerged a variety of commercial forms that mixed scientific inquiry and popular entertainment. Corresponding and as a response to complex economic, technological, and intellectual developments throughout the century, this simultaneous professionalization and popularization of science was celebrated, contested, debated, and often disputed.

Like genre, the concept of popular science is both important to this project and calls for a (re)evaluation. While there is an immense amount of scholarship dedicated to popular science, as both a field of and object of inquiry, and some of this literature informs the project, the concept is principally used here to describe activities that draw from or remake science for non-professionals. "Popular science" has been a debated analytical category, with some recent work arguing the concept should be abandoned.[4] Secord, for example, suggests that the concept often "conceals more than it reveals" and

has been infused with unproductive if not misleading "diffusionist baggage."[5] While this project is aligned with Secord's central point and case for approaching "science as a practice" rather than as ahistorical types, the attention here is on the historical making of a form of popular science, not "popular science" as a concept itself. Even so, the concept can be used, as Broks reasons, without essentializing the term. "By accepting a comprehensive sense of the term," Broks writes, "not only do we avoid a myopic focus on the diffusion of science, but we are also encouraged to pay attention, amongst other things, to a whole range of participatory and indigenous forms, of practitioners, knowledge producers, knowledge consumers, commercial interests, political aspirations and social fears."[6]

Problems with popular science are generally problems about "science." Indeed, a good deal of work on popular science regards it as a form or method for disseminating scientific knowledge or discoveries to a popular audience, often with complex if not unintended consequences.[7] "Popular science" is conceptualized as a bridge or as a site between professional activities and a general audience. With this framework, many historical studies seek to explore how specialized forms of science were made popular, sometimes in less obvious sites, like popular novels.[8] As insightful as much of this work is, what constitutes proper or authentic forms of science is often taken for granted. "Real" science is opposed to pseudoscience and the professional to popular, as key examples are understood as natural binaries. The result, and what scholars like Secord point out, is that a priori views of science obscure if not erase how science has been historically and socially made in relationship to – and as products of – social processes and formations. The central problem is not one of binaries as much as it is the reasons for those binaries,

the ways in which forms of science are made in relation to one another, defined and practiced in particular ways over others.

TOWARD SCIENCE AS A PROFESSION

Despite several competing notions and uses, during the nineteenth century science was steadily made into an activity distinct from what it had earlier been a part. As Williams notes, prior to its specialization, the dominant usage of science was "primarily methodical and theoretical demonstration."[9] Science in the era of the emergent industrial revolution was largely understood to be any reliable, truth-seeking activity and, importantly, could in principle be engaged in by anyone. Patrick makes the case that in this era science "was more or less transparent, important not in itself but because it was part of a harmonious whole and a vehicle for general truth about the world, natural and otherwise."[10] In such an expansive conception, artistic and literary works and practices were included as an important component of scientific activity. Examples include John Constable's landscape paintings, which were seen as scientific examinations.[11] The work of William Blake, for a more complex example, combined and reshaped a range of religious and intellectual concepts and traditions as a form of art-as-truth, defying later categorizations and classifications.[12]

By the mid-to-late nineteenth century, however, science was steadily remade from a wide range of popularly available truth-seeking activities to increasingly specialized areas of inquiry.[13] As boundaries between science and other areas solidified, specific particular conditions, methods, and techniques were not only sanctioned as necessary preconditions for "proper" forms of science. They constituted and thus legitimized

particular kinds of knowledge. Part of this increasing distinction involved that between art and science, "as contrasted areas of human skill and effort, with fundamentally different methods and purposes."[14] Key institutional developments also underwrote this specialization. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, for example, was formed in 1848, actively working to define scientific fields as specialized areas.[15] And by 1886, when Carroll D. Wright, the prominent statistician and president of The American Social Science Association addressed his peers by remarking that "the work of the organization has reached few," he did not mean a broader, general public, but, rather, "scientists and philanthropists."[16]

At the same time science was increasingly specialized and thus made distinct from the general public, this process of professionalization occurred in concert with the popular.[17] Indeed, to see science as an increasingly specialized, institutionalized, and professionalized activity as the nineteenth century goes on "seriously distorts our understanding of the period," as Fyre and Lightman argue.[18] Rather than emphasizing the rise of the professional in the changing developments of science in this era, Fyre and Lightman argue that the professionalization of science occurred in direct relationship to its popularization. As complex transformations reshaped and remade society, it was not that science became professionalized and then popularized, but, rather, the professional and the popular proved to be made and contested developments in relation to one another. This professional and popular divide also corresponded to – and was a product of – larger social realignments and conditions.

POPULARIZING SCIENCE

U.S. cultural practices were profoundly reorganized throughout the nineteenth century. Lawrence Levine noted that in the first half of the nineteenth century, "Americans, in addition to whatever specific cultures they were a part of, shared a public culture less hierarchically organized, less fragmented into relatively rigid adjectival boxes."[19] But as the century progressed, the professionalization of fields of experts was achieved in part "by reducing the layman to incompetence," as science became privileged in particular terms and institutions, and a wide variety of activities sought to broadly and publicly disseminate scientific findings and claims, though not always in straightforward ways.[20] It was an era of contradictions, of social anxiety, with attempts to define what was and was not science side by side with attempts to problematize science. Emergent in this era were a complex and interrelated set of scientific practices, where, to varying degrees, science was paradoxically made specialized, popular, and commercial at the same time.

The popularization of science occurred in two interrelated senses: popular in the sense of making science widely known and, second, popular in the sense of being intelligible and interesting to a wide variety of people. Where the first was a problem of distribution, the second was a problem of form and format, and ultimately of genre. In the first sense, as science became an institutional activity within a society that both privileged and required forms of scientific knowledge, widely disseminating findings and methods became an important issue, with the authoritative scientist directing the less learned public. As Toumey points out, the professionalization of science "insulated scientists and their professional values from the rest of American culture."[21] The task of professionals

was to communicate either directly or indirectly to an audience. In concert with this need

to distribute a range of technical and scientific information were efforts to make science

popularly accessible and popularly engaging, in forms such as newspaper serials,

magazines, lectures, and museums.

This imperative to convey scientific developments, claims, and conclusions

operated hand-in-hand with the twin imperative of finding new formats, forms, and

genres up to the task. As electric forms and power machines became more widely used,

practical reasons existed for knowing how things worked. Magazines such as *Scientific

American*, founded in 1845, were explicitly created to communicate and popularize

science at the same time. *Popular Science Monthly*, which later became *Popular Science*,

was another important means. As a 1879 New York Times review of an issue explained,

this magazine was "the latest expression of scientific thought of England, the rest of

Europe, and America … Occupying the unsectarian and cosmopolitan ground of science,

it also stands nearer to the general public than any other scientific journal."[22] These

magazines not only conveyed scientific information to a popular audience, these

magazines became a form of popular science.

One of the most important popularizers was social-Darwinist Herbert Spencer.

Hofstadter emphasizes his centrality by noting that "in the three decades after the Civil

War, it was impossible to be active in any field of intellectual work without mastering

Spencer."[23] Drawing from Francis Bacon and presenting himself as a practical and

pragmatic approach to the sciences, Spencer offered a mode of inductive reasoning and

scientific application that informed, complemented, and drove a variety of social

activities. Well-suited to the pervasive and growing logic of capital development and

American exceptionalism, and a product of English industrialism himself, Spencer was "a spokesman of the new era … [as] Spencer's [philosophy] was a system conceived in and dedicated to an age of steel and steam engines, competition, exploitation, and struggle."[24] Indeed, Spencer provided a sophisticated voice and set of rationalizations for a society that de Tocqueville noted in the 1830s was "more addicted to practical than to Theoretical science," prized and privileged material application over abstraction.[25]

Spencer complemented a time and social logic, though the enthusiastic acceptance of his work and ideas was a component of mutually reinforcing intellectual currents and material practices. As Hofstadter argued, "Spencer's philosophy was … scientific in derivation and comprehensive in scope. It had a reassuring theory of progress based upon biology and physics."[26] The former was significant, as Spencer complemented and indeed informed a move to apply the natural and biological sciences to social relationships and organizations. And the latter was crucial as well, as the growth of industrialism, greatly fueled by the Civil War, materially remade public life. The logic of Social Darwinism and the mechanization of life went hand-in-hand, legitimizing each other. In an era of rapid and widespread changes, Social Darwinism rationalized U.S. expansion and individualism in terms of economic competition while electric forms of communication and steam-powered machines increased in scope, power and influence. All these forms and practices were seen in terms of the progress of a particular kind of science.[27] Science in these uses and senses was both predictable and controllable, and science became a powerful tool for social and mechanical engineering. Science was being socially and materially redefined and remade as exceptionally complex, specialized areas and fields, in which professional expertise was demanded.

Forms of popular science were more than pragmatic products of an increasingly complex and industrialized society. However, its general diffusion and intelligibility were directly linked to its professionalization and popularization. These forms offered education, entertainment, and pleasure while also supporting the emerging, dominate view of science in society. Newspapers and magazines more frequently presented the scientific as novel news stories, often serializing significant developments as an unfolding and ongoing story. "News about science," Toumey notes of this era, "had to be entertaining and, preferably, sensational. It also had to be fast-breaking, as if each day's scientific findings ought to renounce those of the day before."[28] This technique sold newspapers and magazines, to be sure, but this technique also well-matched a society that privileged both science and social life as a series of interrelated and ongoing advancements. Each development was expected to eclipse the last, and each one more splendid indeed. This approach to popular science served to reaffirm the logic of scientific progress in an entertaining manner while reconfirming the socially made and presumed poles of scientific hierarchies.

Popular science served to negotiate (while perhaps adding to) anxieties about scientific developments. Far more than a print-based activity, museums, special exhibits, lecture halls, and theaters were also crucial sites of popular science, as many scientific technologies and discoveries were crafted for an audience. For example, early forms of motion photography were demonstrated, examined, and sometimes debated in front of paying audiences, while significant medical developments were also and often staged for an audience. Winter highlights how new medical procedures in this era were often promoted as grand spectacles, such as that of Bostonian dentist Horace Wells, who

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arranged a large "popular science demonstration" of the application of nitrous oxide and, in the dentist's words, for "a new era of tooth pulling!"[29] These spectacular enactments of popular science were not crass promotions, but proved to be important venues in which people could see, respond to, and often debate scientific developments. These popular forms both assuaged fears while reconfirming them, as in the case of dentist Wells, whose public nitrous oxide demonstration failed when the patient he administered the anesthesia still felt a great deal of pain.[30]

Forms of popular science in America were themselves part of and bound up in a marketplace of goods and services and the pressures of promotion. As O'Connor puts it, "[popular science] was not a coherent or stable entity, but a battlefield or marketplace. … Those who wished to see a particular theory fixed as 'orthodoxy' were continually dismayed by the persistence of alternative theories, which called for louder popularization on their own part."[31] As part of the profound acceleration of industrialization, forms and practices of science were products of and responses to the material reshaping of social life in America. Alexis de Tocqueville may have keenly noticed that practical forms of science were privileged in American life, but he did not anticipate nor foresee how forms of science and popular entertainment would be mutually-reinforcing activities that would play a prominent role in a far more hierarchical and class-based society than the America he documented and observed.

THE RISE OF POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT

What aided the popularization of science was the corresponding emergence and industrialization of popular entertainment. The emergence of the key terms of popular

culture, highbrow and lowbrow, dates to the 1880s. Much like today, they described and distinguished types of objects, activities, and people. What has been largely forgotten is that these terms were derived from phrenology, the now discredited science of classifying racial types by measuring cranial shapes.[32] Highbrow, of course, described an intellectual or artistic superiority, which was also used to characterize the head shape of many "Caucasians," while lowbrow referred to what were considered simpler, sometimes vulgar or debased forms, which corresponded to an inferior order of cranial shapes on the phrenologist's scale. Indeed, just as scales and hierarchies of intelligence and sensibility became rationalized through a science of head contours and their supposed evolution, the crucible in which popular science was formed and institutionalized was increasingly that of popular, commercial entertainment.

Popular art and/as entertainment have a long and complex history. In addition to a rich tradition of edifying and entertaining religious forms, such practices as medieval market fairs, chapbooks and broadside ballads, and even Shakespearean plays were all made and sold as entertainment for a general, paying audience. By the mid to late nineteenth century these forms and practices of popular entertainment were remade through the growth of industrialism and a capitalist-oriented consumer culture. Not only did economic imperatives become more determinant, hierarchies of culture became more pronounced across a wide spectrum of life.[33]

The transition to an industrialized consumer society, what Trachtenberg suggestively dubbed as "the incorporation of America," changed the ways popular entertainment was made.[34] While popular science had been made for a paying, popular audience for some time, during the mid to late nineteenth century the form became both a

profitable product and a component of larger commercial activities. As Turney notes

regarding popular books, as an illustrative example, "It was generally publishers, not

writers, who were the driving forces behind the expansion of popular publishing."[35]

Industrial practices and economic imperatives created – indeed demanded – a popular

market in tandem with a material social use for popular forms. Museums are another

representative example here, as the great expansion of museums in America and

elsewhere were tied to material social changes and capitalist logics. Often promoted as

"galleries of practical science," Fyre and Lightman note that museums in this period hired

directors who "were highly skilled in the business of attracting visitors with their

entertaining and instructive spectacles." [36] As a result, many practitioners found that

popular science as a commercial form and product could be made edifying and quite

profitable at the same time.

Museums were a particularly useful site for popular science as the simultaneous

extension and valorization of authoritative knowledge. Two mutually reinforcing

activities were enacted in museums in this era. Highbrow and therefore serious areas

were distinguished from lowbrow and frivolous ones, while science was reinforced in

terms of a professional and popular divide. As Levine argued about urban parks and

museums in this era, practiced and regulated codes proved to be "a disciplinary process"

to teach mostly younger, working-class participants what was to be socially expected and

respected.[37] Along with this, forms of high and low culture and definitions of who was

authorized and capable of creating each began to be more widely shared. Levels and

distinctions were more fully naturalized and established, indeed, as the popular was being

equated with the simple if not trivial.

POPULAR SLEUTHING AS COMMERCIAL ENTERTAINMENT

As sites and activities in which people could engage a range of developments and changes, a few enterprising people made popular entertainment in ways that explicitly addressed social and cultural issues and anxieties in the form of commercial products. P.T. Barnum was particularly representative and influential here. During what is now commonly regarded as "the birth-date of modern American popular culture," when Barnum began marketing "popular curiosities" in 1835, popular engagement through scientific findings and discourses occupied the center of his approach.[38] Barnum was a key innovator in a larger and active creation of an entertaining commercial form of popular science, in which what could be called "popular sleuthing" was a profitable and compelling technique.[39]

Barnum's museum invited a public to examine and explore unusual and mysterious items and artifacts, all of which were presented as scientific findings and discoveries. But rather than acting as a professional disseminating scientific knowledge to a public or audience, Barnum constructed a format in which anyone could play the role of a researcher. While, as Daniels noted about this period, "it was much easier to claim something was legitimate science than to justify why it was not," Barnum very skillfully presented his collection of oddities as open and debatable scientific questions rather than as hard facts and claims. For example, three months after Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published, Barnum created the exhibit "What Is It?" in which an African-American actor was partly dressed in a fur suit and publicized as half-human and half-animal.[40] "It is the opinion of most scientific men," Barnum's promotion declared, "that he is the connecting link between the wild native African and the orang-outang."[41] Barnum made this exhibit

an affordable opportunity for people to confirm, question, and/or explore what was presented as an open, perhaps absurd – and, of course, controversial – scientific claim. In another well-publicized exhibit, a Barnum-employed "scientist" Dr. Griffin promoted the amazing "Feejee Mermaid," a conjoined monkey and fish, which was billed as one of the "connecting links in the great chain of Animated Nature."[42] In addition to a chance to see this oddity in person, Barnum sold an opportunity to anyone to verify or refute this evidence and claim oneself, or a chance to observe others duped by it.

As can be seen in these and many other examples, Barnum leveraged and reshaped contemporary scientific findings and discourses to market his collection of curiosities. He had a keen sense of what people would pay to see. With creative marketing, and by blending and remixing elements of theater and magic, Barnum combined a set of techniques to make a compelling hybrid, participatory form of popular science. Using what Cook describes as "fraud as a marketing gimmick," Barnum produced a form of popular science as entertainment in which people decoded and figured out what was real or truly scientific in his curiosities and claims, as "an overt game of popular cultural sleuthing."[43] In addition to his novel marketing approach, part of Barnum's genius lay in where and how he positioned his customers. Barnum situated a scientific object and claim as part of an entertaining story, involving the audience in the narrative by asking people to play an important role in the story, that of savvy observer. Barnum did not offer a scientific lecture, nor was his intent to demonstrate a fact. Instead, he sold people on the opportunity to be an amused examiner and interpreter of a complex event.

Watching people be deceived and surprised was also a key element of Barnum's approach. While Levine documents how audience participation had been a well established feature of popular entertainment, not only was sleuthing a means of participation, Barnum's unique contribution was, as Cook writes "the artful repositioning of the … audience from the role of observers to observed, looking and laughing here not only at [the stage] but *at each other*."[44] (Emphasis added) By placing his audience in this way, Barnum's customers were hardly constituted as passive or naïve dupes who without question presumed his objects and claims were without embellishment if not perhaps fake. Barnum in fact encouraged and got people to pay for the chance to object to and challenge his often outrageous items and claims.[45] Intermixing the genuine and fake, belief and skepticism, science and pseudoscience, Barnum sold people the chance to exercise their superiority. Part of the pleasure for audiences was no doubt derived from witnessing and being savvy to the whole process, and a component of this witnessing was watching and speculating whether other people were dupes or rubes.

Yet, just as science and entertainment had no clear lines dividing them, issues of truth or fake were refracted in a dizzyingly complex way. To be sure, one important reason for viewing Barnum's curiosities was to see if they were authentic. "Otherwise," as Cook writes, "why even enter the exhibition room and join the public debates."[46] However, the flip side of Barnum's objects being fakes was that they might in fact be genuine, and Barnum deftly sought to present his curiosities in these binary terms and in unresolved ways.

But such ontological questions were ultimately beside the point. When considering the popularization of science, as Cook points out, the public debate was itself

a if not the key element. Cook makes a case that the newspaper and magazine reviews of Barnum's museum were overwhelmingly tongue-in-cheek and did not take his scientific claims seriously, suggesting that newspaper reviewers at least, and likely a good portion of Barnum's customers, were well aware that greater part of Barnum's work was manufactured entertainment. While exhibits like the "Feejee Mermaid" certainly generated a stir, as one critic declared of the work and Barnum's claim that, "we can swallow a reasonable dose, but we can't swallow this," the bulk of the attention was on the absurdity and outrageousness of Barnum's claims, not on disproving them or him, since it was presumed that on the whole it was a piece of "promotional puffery."[47] The trick was to discern what was real in a sea of fake, to engage in a bit of popular sleuthing, and, has already been suggested, have a good laugh at those you thought bought it all hook, line, and sinker. Baudelaire's flâneur is challenged if overturned here, as the observer/flâneur Barnum encouraged was far from being a detached voyeur, but, rather, was an active participant in a commercial activity. Producers, critics, viewers and/as consumers together made up a social practice of popular science in which sleuthing for authenticity and reality was combined with observing others.

While it seems clear that a majority of people were suspicious about Barnum's scientific claims, this certainly does not mean that his work and practice did not (re)produce social and cultural beliefs and concepts. Despite Barnum's use of science to publicize his museum and curiosities, Barnum's methods did little to undermine scientific practices or legitimate forms of science.[48] Indeed, the opposite was both possible and quite likely, since the converse of Barnum's blatantly absurd scientific claims was "the truth." Fake science was opposed to and thus bolstered "real" science. Just as realism has

long been presumed the flipside of illusionism, particular forms of science were privileged in relation to pseudoscience. The role of the professional, authoritative scientist was also strengthened, as forms and practices outside of institutions were made to be unreliable with those inside legitimized.

A MARKETPLACE OF AMUSING FRAUDS

More generally speaking, Barnum's creative reshaping of popular science as a participatory form of commercial entertainment was part of what Cook calls "the burgeoning marketplace of playful frauds."[49] Along with minstrels and melodrama, Cook suggests "artful deception" was one of the primary nonliterary forms of popular entertainment in this era, as the growth of magic shows, theatrical demonstrations of rigged mechanical devices presented as intelligent machines, Barnum's and other activities illustrate.

In what has been considered the rise and heyday of Coney Island, for example, from roughly 1885 to 1920, many of the amusements and rides relied upon artful deception. Along with an "earthquake floor," elephant rides, haunted houses, and steeplechase horses existed a set of choreographed and scripted amusements that relied on deceiving and surprising people for the amusement of a separate, observing audience.[50] One example involved the exit of a ride in which jets of compressed air blew women's dresses up from below while an audience watched the event they themselves may have experienced earlier.[51] Both being surprised and watching people be surprised was in these and similar ways an increasingly consumerized form of commercial entertainment. Indeed, in significant ways, a number of Coney Island attractions worked

within forms of popular science, in which audience could participate as a subject and/or observer.

Barnum's museum, Coney Island, and commercial playful frauds in general were wrapped up in and part of socio-economic transformations, formations, conditions, and imperatives. Commercial forms of popular science were sites where problems with and anxieties about scientific developments and its professionalization could be embodied and managed. These practices of popular science complemented the separation of the popular and the professional. While these popular forms and practices could have been – held the potential to be – activities and sites to question and perhaps challenge a social order, they proved to principally serve the interests of capital and elite forms, concepts, and notions.

POPULAR SCIENCE AND/AS THE STUDY OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Barnum was a key innovator of and contributor to a popular science that not only leveraged scientific discourses, but also its methods. People may have been suspicious of Barnum's scientific claims and amusing objects, though the techniques of investigation that he crafted as a commercial form went largely unquestioned. Scientific claims and objects may have been debatable, but the authority of a seemingly self-evident investigation was legitimized. Indeed, by complementing the science of Bacon and Spencer, truth was a matter of proper research and investigation. This method and presumption was also a cornerstone of the budding social sciences, in which, as Ross demonstrates, it was understood that experiments on humans would naturally provide observable, unaffected results and findings. Both human behavior and social

development, Ross notes, were products of universal laws and thus could be studied using the research methods from the natural sciences.[52]

The popular sleuthing Barnum developed and sought to channel proved to be a powerful didactic form of popular science. He constructed it as an activity which presented truths to be found in and among the artificial. Barnum offered participants a managed and scripted form through which to investigate claims of scientific truth, perhaps having a good look and laugh at those rubes that did not get that it was all commercial entertainment.

By mixing science, deception, theatrical traditions with the imperatives of commerce, Barnum produced a complexly participatory popular form of entertainment that was exceptionally successful in selling people on the privilege of playing the role of a researcher. However, Barnum never claimed to be offering an authentic form of science or material evidence. Toward exploring the emergence of social experiments as a scientifically legitimate dramatic form, additional, key developments and changes need to be recovered. The growing importance of the behavioral sciences and the field's dominant methods along with developments in media technologies, techniques, and practices would prove to be mutually reinforcing activities. The professional and popular divide in science would more actively blur together as well, as professionals began to adopt techniques for communication to a public. The next chapter addresses these alignments and relationships.

NOTES

[1] Mark Shwartz, "Psychologist puts the 'real' into reality TV," <u>Stanford News</u>, 1 May 2001, 30.

[2] Albert Galloway Keller, *Net Impressions* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 27.

[3] Susan Johnston, "Watch Out. More Rats Ahead?," <u>Brant Publications</u>, Feburary 2001, <<u>http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1285/is_2_31/ai_69757684</u>> (15 August 2008).

[4] Peter Broks, *Understanding Popular Science* (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 23.

[5] James A. Secord, "Knowledge in Transit," <u>Isis</u>, 2004, page 670.

[6] Broks, 1-2.

[7] See Ralph O'Connor, *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science*, 1802-1856 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 11-15.

[8] See Jon Turney, *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics, and Popular Culture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[9] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 278.

[10] Daniel Patrick Thurs, *Science Talk: Changing Notions of Science in American Popular Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 4.

[11] See Thornes, John E, *John Constable's Skies: A Fusion of Art and Science* (Edgbaston, Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham, University Press, 1999), 51.

[12] See Stuart Peterfreund, *William Blake in a Newtonian World: Essays on Literature as Art and Science*, (Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

[13] Though its earlier use and sense, it is indeed important to emphasize that relationships based on gender and class delimited who could participate.

[14] Williams, 42.

[15] George H. Daniels, "The Process of Professionalization in American Science: The Emergent Period, 1820 – 1860," Iris 58 (1967), as quoted in Daniel Patrick Thurs, *Science Talk: Changing Notions of Science in American Popular Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 23.

[16] Carroll D. Wright, *Journal of Social Science*, v.21-22, <u>American Social Science Association</u>, 1886.

[17] See Peter Broks, *Understanding Popular Science* (New York: Open University Press, 2006), 23.

[18] Aileen Fyfe and Bernard Lightman, Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.

[19] Lawrence W Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 9.

[20] Levine, 211

[21] Christopher P. Toumey, *Conjuring Science: Scientific Symbols and Cultural Meanings in American Life* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 22.

[22] "The Popular Science Monthly," <u>New York Times</u>, 28 November 1879.

[23] Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915* (Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1945), 33.

[24] Hofstadter, 35.

[25] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Random House, 1994), 223.

[26] Hofstadter, 31.

[27] Hofstadter, 33.

[28] Toumey, 22.

[29] Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 176.

[30] Winter, 176.

[31] Ralph O'Connor, *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science, 1802-1856* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 213.

[32] See Levine

[33] See Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Alexander

Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London; New York: Verso, 1990); Lawrence Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[34] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

[35] Jon Turney, *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 6.

[36] Fyfe and Lightman, 1.

[37] Levine, 186.

[38] See James W Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3.

[39] I am indebted to Cook for the concept of "popular sleuthing."

[40] See "The "What Is It' Archive," Lost Museum, American Social History Project for Media and Learning, City University of New York in collaboration with the Center for History and New Media, George Mason University <http://chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/what/> and <http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/jackson/5pts/museum/whatsit.html> (16 August 2008).

[41] Paul Semonin, "Barnum and Science in the Antebellum Era," Lost Museum, American Social History Project for Media and Learning, City University of New York in collaboration with the Center for History and New Media, George Mason University <http://chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/lm/271/> (16 August 2008).

[42] See Semonin.

[43] Cook, 6.

[44] Levine, 179; Cook, 9.

[45] Cook notes that that "Good producers did not simply fool viewers, they also drew attention to the act of fooling -- "no producers … who wanted to stay in business for long fooled their viewers without drawing attention to the act of fooling," 17.

[46] Cook, 45.

[47] As cited in Cook, 42.

[48] See Ralph O'Connor, *The Earth on Show: Fossils and the Poetics of Popular Science, 1802-1856* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007)

[49] Cook, 23.

[50] John F Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 26.

[51] See Jeffrey Stanton, "Coney Island - Rides & Shows List," Coney Island History Site, 3 June 3 1998, <http://www.westland.net/coneyisland/articles/ridelist.htm> (16 August 2008).

[52] Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 6 – 11.

CHAPTER THREE

SHOWING TRUTH:

SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS AS A DRAMATIC FORM

Professional and popular forms of science have always been interrelated. As the last chapter argued, the professionalization of science occurred in tandem with as well as opposed to popular forms. As forms of popular science borrowed from and reshaped professional practices, the converse was true as well, particularly in the social and behavioral sciences, where an influential practice of "social experiments" emerged in relationship to commercial interests and forms of popular science. This is an important development to explore for the purpose of this study, in that reality TV most clearly exemplifies and reproduces the form of social experiment.

Only recently have forms of commercial entertainment been explicitly referred to as social experiments. But a number of significant similarities exist between the social experiments that emerged in the 1960s as a part of the behavioral sciences and earlier activities in which unsuspecting people were "tested" towards entertaining ends. Indeed, placing unsuspecting people into carefully designed situations and recording reactions and behavior is an outcome in large part of commercial activities and formations.

By extending traditions of artful deception, playful frauds, and popular sleuthing, social experiments were used to make a distinct genre of media programming as a form of popular science. The key extension exemplified in the emerging genre of social

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experiments was how producers drew attention to their own role in the construction of experiments that were said paradoxically to provide self-evident truth independent of human involvement.

This chapter explores the emergence and active making of the genre of social experiments as one that spanned scientific practice and commercial entertainment. The chapter begins by addressing conceptions and practices of social experiments in the context of imperatives that accompanied the rise of the behavioral sciences in the post-WWII era. Developments in recording technologies were particularly important for the further clarification of the genre, as will also be discussed. The chapter then focuses on two key people and their innovations and contributions to a media genre and form of popular science. The chapter concludes by reflecting on what the developments, innovations, and practices both made and made possible.

SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS AS A CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

To begin a historical analysis of social experiments, we must recover the larger social and historical contexts in which these practices were situated. Prior to the 1960s, social experiments generally referred to modes of social organization. A representative selection of works on social experiments makes this meaning clear. In 1935, Lewis Hanke, for example, entitled his book *The First Social Experiment in America: A Study in the Development of Spanish Indian Policy in the Sixteenth Century*, which described how political and economic forces shaped cultural relationships.[1] This common usage can be traced back to at least the eighteenth century. In *A Short History of the British Commonwealth*, by Ramsay Muir in 1923, New Zealand and Australia are described as

social experiments, again describing social change as a matter of how political and economic organization determines human life.[2] Even earlier, the Transcendentalist publication *The Dial* published an essay by Charles Richmond Henderson in which he argued that "The history of the human race is a series of social experiments," in which the varied ways humans have organized their material lives determined social relations.[3] And yet earlier in 1795 the French philosopher Volney suggested the history of human beings was an "immense collection of moral and social experiments" in order to argue how political organization determines social life.[4] In short, for many hundreds of years, social experiments referred to modes of social, political, and economic organization, frequently in order to compare ways of life and to suggest that deliberate modifications would lead to a better society.

Even the way the term "experiment" was used in such instances is significant. Experiments included a wide range of activities, though they most often indicated what was considered a new, or novel, or simply different kind of human activity in comparison to a similar or traditional one. An experiment here could be any kind of unlike or an altered kind of comparable activity. An experiment was also used to simply describe a practice, such as when Constable asks "may not landscape painting be considered as a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but the experiments?"[5] These uses contrasted to uses that define an experiment in terms of an essential set of criteria. A sense of an experiment as a protocol-driven means of inquiry is what enables Brown, for example, to explore what he sees as "the delayed birth of social experiments," questioning why the practice did not emerge until more recent times.[6] Earlier uses of the concept do not apply in his analysis since the "social experiments" he's concerned with

are a distinct kind that conform to certain rules of statistical comparison and use of control groups.

Despite these earlier uses, it is in the 1960s that "social experiments" become largely practiced – and begin to take on their more current characterization – in relation to a history of experimentation tied to positivism. The older use of the term as general activity never disappears, of course, but at this moment the concept begins to take on what becomes the dominant use by associating the concept to activities that conform to scientific experimentation in the natural sciences.

Corresponding to the rise of the behavioral sciences in this period, a named practice of social experiments emerges in which observational and quantitative methods for evaluating and testing natural and biological occurrences are applied to questions surrounding human behavior. Early social experiments of this kind sought to test behavior of particular relevance in that time. For example, the first social experiment in social psychology is commonly credited to Norman Triplet, who in 1895 designed an experiment to test whether subjects performed a manual task (winding fishing wheels) faster when the task was done in direct competition with another person as opposed to when the subject worked alone.[7] The rationale for locating the first social experiment here is that Triplet's experiment conformed to social scientific criteria and the experiment addressed a social concern. And, indeed, the latter point is important here, in that the role of and power of competition in society was then and remains now a significant social concern.

That neither Triplet nor others in his era ever refer to his work as a social experiment is less important than recognizing that his work shared similar if not

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fundamental features with those that came later.[8] A line was established, and social experiments were associated to the rise of positivism and long-established and accepted activities and discourses.[9] Social experiments were posited as conforming to scientific rules and measures that were said to produce authentic and trustworthy forms of evidence. And in this way, the application of methods developed in the natural sciences towards questions of behavior correspond quite clearly to the logic of capital, "progress," and Enlightenment reason.[10] Socially compelling rationales legitimized these emerging social experiments in the 1960s and later, which were tied to and a significant part of larger social imperatives that sought to discover the nature of human behavior in order to discern how best to manage it.

Knowing not only how people behave, but will behave in particular circumstances is central to a society which places a great degree of emphasis on regulating human behavior. As a significant part of American industrial capitalism, Taylor's time and motion studies for example were part of larger social and economic imperatives for calculating and controlling human behavior(s).[11] Indeed, the rationales for predicting, observing, and testing human behavior correspond to political and economic conditions, serving as material logic for their social value and contribution. Scientifically managed experiments became an authoritative way of producing – and, in some instances, a way of challenging – these imperatives and conditions.

Mills argues that "behaviorism was the dominant force in the creation of modern American psychology, and it continues to undergird the field to this day," and this prominence and rise was deeply intertwined with institutionalization of positivism and modes of experimentation as a powerfully authoritative logic for creating knowledge.[12]

Two interrelated logics converging in the post-WWII era were the social importance of learning about human behavior and modes of experimentation towards the production of authentic – if sometimes contested – forms of knowledge. And these logics served larger social needs and imperatives.

RECORDING TECHNOLOGIES, DECEPTION, AND MILGRAM'S SHOCKING DISCOVERIES

Stanley Milgram's "obedience study" remains one of if not the most widely discussed and most notable/notorious post-WWII social experiment. Milgram's project had a political and social intention, in that he sought to demonstrate that human behavior/s is/are a product of a larger system that makes most people behave one way instead of another. Milgram repeatedly argued that, "The problem of obedience … is not wholly psychological. The form and shape of society and the way it is developed have much to do with it."[13] A social structure, in other words, was at the center of his experiment as much as an individual's role in it. Milgram's work was intended as a criticism of an "authoritative" State, as he sought to demonstrate that U.S. citizens were too easily coerced by authorities into morally and ethically compromised actions.

Knowing how and the reasons why people behave in certain ways may have offered social possibilities, but it also offered social control and rationales for "normalcy." It also suggested that human behavior was an object if not a commodity that could be studied, fixed, and even sold. The objectification of behavior paralleled the rise of the "audience" as a scientific category of study, and, just as significantly, as a material object to be considered as property. And, like behavior, Mosco and Kaye argue that the

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invention and necessity of the "audience" cannot be separated from social imperatives.[14] "The concept of the audience," they note, "was hatched largely out of the marketing departments of companies with a stake of selling products through the media."[15] In much the same way as Gitlin suggested what he calls the "dominant paradigm" of communication research complemented commercial broadcasters by taking their needs and imperatives for granted, the concept of behavior complemented and advanced the social order that benefited by isolating human behavior as an object of study.[16]

But social scientific experiments did not work alone as a technique or form, as a host of interrelated interests and forms converged to give social experiments their social power. This is popular science, but in a form much different than in Barnum's time. Attention to scientific claims of truth and to relevance became yoked to policy stances that underwrote further political and regulatory decisions. The relevance of the market had, for this variation, been replaced by the demands of the state.

Using unsuspecting people and a means of deception was crucial for social experiments seeking to gain insights into human behavior, as the techniques largely validated the results. And while deceiving people as part of a scientific inquiry in order to observe or compare a reaction can be traced to the mid-to-late nineteenth century, this technique did not become systematic or institutionalized until the 1960s. As Korn notes, prior to the 1960s, deliberately making people unaware of the actual intent of an experiment was seldom done. When used, it was most often a way to compare results to people who were aware in a similar test. Korn demonstrates that from 1965 to 1985, more than half of all the published experiments in the major social psychology journals used deception as the central means of producing their results.[17]

The historical moment at which these techniques emerge is crucial. Social experiments in post-WWII America were greatly enabled by recording technologies that could be effectively hidden. Magnetic tape appears in the 1930s, but its availability and wide-spread use accelerates after the war, when media activities also grow in a variety of ways. It was not until the miniaturization of the electronic transistor in the early 1950s, though, that recording equipment could be practically concealed. Pocket-sized tape recorders became available, and some companies even promoted their use as a means of making secret recordings.[18] And this new means of documenting and recording events and people proved to be central for social experiments relying on unsuspecting people.[19] A natural or everyday looking environment in which to test and record human behavior could be constructed consonant with methodological requirements for deception and observation. When hidden, the recording equipment would not call attention to the experiment, yet it offered comprehensive means of recording data for later review. As Blass points out, "what set Milgram's contribution apart was his use of a scientific laboratory experiment."[20] But his methods were drawn from and in response to a range of influences, not simply or only from the sciences.

One can fill a warehouse with accounts that critique, praise, duplicate, and/or denounce Milgram's obedience study. But, surprisingly, few have taken up the role of media in his work. This is particularly surprising since Milgram produced six "educational films" during his lifetime, his first being *Obedience*, the work he developed in concert with his study. In his biography of Milgram, Blass calls attention to the fact that "one of his strongest interests, besides social psychology, was filmmaking. In fact, at the height of his academic career he took courses in filmmaking techniques."[21] Blass

states how this was not out of character for Milgram, in that he "was a man of many interests, a sort of neo-Renaissance man."[22] But another, maybe far more fruitful way to understand Milgram's experiments and his interest in media practices is to see them as interrelated and complementary. Rather than seeing Milgram's filmmaking and social psychology as separate activities, one could make a case that, given the historical context in which Milgram worked, his scientific experimental methods deeply informed his ideas of cinematography, and vice versa.

Regarding his obedience study, Milgram wrote that he spent a great deal of time "carefully constructing a situation that captures the essence of obedience."[23] Towards this end, unsuspecting people were a key element. The specific details of research design are worth recalling here. Milgram told people who responded to an ad in a newspaper that they would be part of an experiment to study the human learning process. An actor Milgram hired to pose as a fellow participant was hooked up to wires. The unaware person was told to deliver increasingly greater electric shocks whenever the actor provided incorrect answers to the memorization test. The actor would feign increasing pain until, should the test keep going, he would dramatically pass out, suggesting he had a heart-attack. At the prodding of an instructor who was in on the experiment, over sixty percent of the unwitting subjects kept going, serving as evidence for Milgram of the power of an authority figure to make people perform acts they may in principle oppose or would not carry out alone.[24]

Responding to the charge that deception in this case may be unethical, Milgram wrote "We know that illusions are accepted in other domains without affecting our moral sensibilities. To use a simple-minded example, on radio programs, sound-effects are

typically created by a sounds-effects man . . . [W]e do not accuse such programs of deceiving their listeners. Rather we accept the fact that these are technical illusions used in support of a dramatic effort."[25] Indeed, the creation of an environment and the masking of recording equipment (what Milgram called "technical illusions") were central to both his conceptualization of the experiment and its end-result.[26] This aspect may be why Korn suggestively points out that "[t]he most impressive experiments in this field produce their impact by creating situations that lead research subjects to believe that they are taking part in something other than the true experiment," leading him further to propose that "[s]ocial psychology may be the only area of research in which the research methods are sometimes more interesting than the results."[27] This interesting aspect may indeed be "interesting" because it corresponds to a set of techniques and activities that were first developed and honed in commercial entertainment activities by Barnum and others, as has been discussed.

ALAN FUNT AND ENTERTAINMENT AS EXPERIMENTS

At 8 p.m. on Tuesday, August 10th, 1948, ABC premiered *The Candid Microphone*, a televised version of a popular radio program of the same name.[28] One critic wrote before the first episode, "ABC's little-devil-of-a-show, 'Candid Microphone,' will show what mischief it can create with a hidden camera."[29] And, indeed, the tremendously popular radio program that preceded the television show had a reputation for being mischievous, as the premise of the program was to put unsuspecting people into contrived, out-of-the-norm situations in order to broadcast the results. The emphasis was overwhelmingly on creating situations that would solicit a laugh, as many of the

scenarios sought to play upon how people would react, perhaps also how gullible they might be, when faced with circumstances resembling a scene from, say, a fictional gangster film, or how a singing coach might respond to being asked to coach a bathtub singer, or what would happen when a mailbox strikes up a conversation with someone walking down a street.

As the figurehead and principle creator of the radio and television programs, Alan Funt considered his work to be entertainment. But he equally if not more so sought to emphasize the program's social value in terms of its contribution to the study of human behavior. Indeed, Funt saw his work as "examinations" that aided studies of human nature. A goal he repeatedly stated throughout his life was to add to an understanding of why people behave certain ways, arguing that knowledge of human nature would not only explain actions and events more fully, but also offer insights that could lead to better ways of life. With a passionate attention to recording technologies, Funt devised scripts and tests in concert with the commercial institutions of radio and TV in order to create what he considered to be both entertainment *and* socially significant works.[30]

While he did not rename the television show until the radio program ended, the term "candid camera" dates to at least 1929. It has been credited to a critic who used it to describe a type of photography that captured subjects who were unaware that they were being photographed, and soon after became associated with a kind of photo-journalism.[31] Largely used to label particular photographs in magazines and newspapers as "candid camera," professional photographers such as Margaret Bourke-White developed what she self-described as "a candid camera technique" as well.[32] The term also had popular and commercial value, as some cameras became marketed as a candid camera, and in 1938 a

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New York bus company sold tours where "candid camera fans will visit a half dozen or more picturesque spots where they can indulge their hobby."[33] Through these institutional, professional, commercial, and popular uses of the term, candid camera called attention to method while suggesting how a picture or photograph should be interpreted. In all these uses and practices, candid camera's key distinction and claim was that it presented unplanned, unrehearsed, and thus authentic moments.

Funt drew from and remade existing traditions of candid studies in creating his programs as he worked within the imperatives of commercial media and entertainment industries. As Boddy argues, television networks leveraged and negotiated regulatory and economic interests as they sought to offer distinctive forms programming for the technology.[34] Advertised and promoted as a "candid glimpse of life," the transition from radio to TV seemed like a natural progression for Funt's *Candid Microphone*. A critic for the *Washington Post* suggested that "[t]he plain and awful truth is that whereas the 'Candid Microphone' technique wasn't worked out for radio until the industry was more than 25 years old, television was born candid."[35] But what the radio program – which ran concurrent with the TV program for two years – and TV program suggest was that the practice was not the result of some isolated technological imperative, but deep social and institutional ones. Part of Funt's success was due in part to how he was able to reshape and remake an already existing – and compelling – tradition at the same time his work was made and presented a novel form of programming.

Funt credits his inspiration to his work with the Army Signal Corps during WWII. Interested in the idea of a program based upon secretly recorded conversations, after the war Funt sought to formulate and produce radio programming based on his experience

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recording soldiers' reflections during the war. Hiding the recording equipment for soldiers who were nervous or anxious in the presence of microphones, Funt said that he "had the great fortune to begin working with concealed microphones at exactly the same time when great developments were made in wire and tape recorders," recalling the evolving dependency on these technical developments as already noted.[36] At first, Funt worked to create a form of programming that would present the daily rhythms of life, such as casual conversations in a diner or time spent waiting for a bus, thinking that these kinds of recording would not only prove entertaining but could prove interesting to researchers as well. The problem Funt found as he hid microphones in public places was that those recordings weren't commercially viable nor, more significantly, did they elicit novel results. "The conversation," he surmised, "was dreadfully dull."[37]

Funt's solution was, in his words, "to think of small crises into which we could place the average man in order to study his candid reactions." He continued: "The difference … was that I had assumed the role of an active participant." By contrast, it might be better to "guide the conversation, to guide the subject toward the microphone, and to do all the other things which were to become part of my profession as a full-time eavesdropper."[38] Funt was quite aware of the fact that the situations he devised and recorded were manufactured and contrived. However, this management of situations, he argued, was not an impediment or distortion, but, rather, the necessary technique to reveal characteristics of human nature and behavior. Indeed, Funt argued that "in testing human behavior, you don't apply just gentle routine stimuli, for all you'll get is simple, stereotyped responses. If you want to know what holds a man together, or how well he is help together, you apply a real jolt and see where the cracks appear."[39]

Funt clearly and carefully designed and scripted program segments. As with many radio and television programs of the era, the narrative of the programs often included story-arcs featuring a sponsor's product(s). A telling example of Funt's use of scripts to structure a segment can be seen in a radio segment featuring Philip Morris. The set-up consisted of Funt asking an unsuspecting person (presumably someone who was visibly smoking) for directions and then, seemingly casually, leading to a conversation about the quality of mass-marketed cigarettes. Funt asked the person to compare the smoker's brand to one he provided, after which Funt would ask which was "milder?" Of course, the person would reply "Philip Morris" and then the person would be told she or he was on *Candid Microphone*.[40]

A number of questions arise about the segment, probably the most obvious being that the show was never broadcast live and Funt could have easily discarded the unwanted results thus misrepresenting the degree to which a response was typical. But the significance of this segment is that Funt was followed a script planned well in advance. While the subject's reaction might be theoretically open and fluid, the whole situation was designed in such a way to indeed predict – perhaps solicit – a likely result.

Like the participatory forms of popular science developed by Barnum and the amusements in Coney Island, one of Funt's more significant techniques was the dramatic intertwining of subject and audience. The audience did not simply watch an event unfold but could also participate in the drama and suspense, since they knew the set-up and could imagine how they might react in that situation. Funt's innovation was not simply in terms of dramatic form, but more generally how he reshaped narrative and participation themselves as a form of media entertainment. A compelling set of scripted techniques

that borrow from suspense, drama, and comedy in which people were both observers and active participants in the narrative proved to be quite commercially viable *and* socially meaningful, as questions about human behavior were increasingly regarded as both important and prevalent. And just as Barnum and Coney Island repackaged industrial America as forms of entertainment while serving to reproduce consumer culture, Funt repackaged social concerns and anxieties in an entertaining fashion, while supporting commercial culture by both commoditizing and seeking to insert his work in relation to human behavior.

As should be clear, it makes the most sense to situate Funt's work not as opposed to "real" science, but as helping to constitute it through the amalgam of popular science. Funt's work is productively situated in relationship to the rise and importance of the behavioral sciences, as *Candid Microphone* and *Camera* were defended as contributing to studies of human nature and behavior. As Funt eagerly sought to legitimize his work as a contribution to knowledge of human nature, its status as such a contribution validated his work's form and methods. "From my point of view," he wrote in 1952, "there is much more than the simple entertainment value. . . . [O]ur findings are used by eleven universities as basic subject matter in their drama, sociology, and psychology courses; instructors of those courses have told me that only in our candid studies have they found a means for examining human behavior." And in this respect, Funt found a degree of agreement even among some of his critics. The *Washington Post*'s John Crosby questioned the deception involved in Funt's work, but also wrote about a segment where Funt sought to hawk an authentic quarter-million-dollar diamond by saying "I must admit a reluctant admiration for a recent candid mike [sic] interview which provided as

profound a glimpse into human cupidity as I've ever witnessed."[41] Funt borrowed from

narrative and entertainment traditions, to be sure, but considered his work as addressing

significant human and social issues. And in this process he helped further develop a set of

techniques and practices that would continue to be copied and extended.

SCIENTIFIC AND LITERARY NATURALISM
AS A TECHNIQUE OF POPULAR SCIENCE

Both Funt and Milgram borrowed from and reconfigured narrative traditions.

"Generations have been educated to accept the characterizations of the stage and screen,"

argued Funt. He went on to suggest that in relation to his work, "audiences have to

unlearn much of this to accept candid studies, although anyone can verify our findings

just by looking around and listening."[42] Milgram similarly liked to compare his work to

fictional traditions as well, writing that "[g]ood experiments, like good drama, embody

verities."[43] In an important way, their works not only share features and techniques of

naturalism, their work can be seen as a self-aware response to, extension of and

confluence of literary and scientific forms of naturalism while corresponding to and

reshaping previous forms of popular science.

At one important level, Funt and Milgram's media practices were related to

observational sociological and other documentary forms, such as the Lynds' Middletown

studies, and works in cultural anthropology, such as Mead's, as all contributed to

knowledge of how people and cultural groups act and behave.[44] But Funt's candid studies

and Milgram's social experiments differ from other kinds of observational studies in that

planned situations with techniques of deception were devised to test and document the

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reactions and behavior of unsuspecting people. Such an intention differed extensively from documentary work in this era, most of which sought largely if not convincingly to maintain a separation of observer from the subjects recorded. By contrast, and while drawing upon the conventions of naturalism, Funt's and Milgram's work paradoxically sought to draw attention to both the act of recording and the subject.

At a second important level, both Funt and Milgram's media practices were in debt to narrative traditions. Milgram's 1962 film, *Obedience*, for example, is a carefully crafted piece of work, edited to have a beginning, middle, and end, with a textbook approach to suspense and drama. Milgram deftly builds upon each scene, the camera zooms in on faces, tension is built, all towards reaching a climax ("Will the subject actually keep going?!"). In this way, this work is a representative example of what Curtin identifies as documentaries' deep correspondences to fictional narrative traditions.[45]

But Funt and Milgram's works not only borrowed from, but reworked forms of naturalism. The dramatic fit between naturalism as a form and social experiments as a method is clear in many ways. "The novelty of the naturalist emphasis," Williams suggests, "was its demonstration of the production of character or action by a powerful natural or social environment."[46] The driving narrative function of literary naturalism was to demonstrate how character and actions are determined or at least profoundly influenced by environment and conditions. Scientific naturalism, related to literary naturalism and more broadly to Enlightenment philosophies of empiricism and positivism, put forward a view and logic that the most productive way to investigate phenomenon was by following scientific methods and using direct observation. In Funt and Milgram's work, we see the boundaries between literary and scientific converge, as

their works sought to demonstrate the role of social structure(s) in producing human behavior – one through humor and the other in more serious terms – while also following a set of codified methodological techniques, even though Milgram's work did so more faithfully than Funt's. Despite that slight difference, they both developed an innovative form of programming, a set of techniques that remade in many ways the genre of popular science.

SCRIPTS, DECEPTION, PARTICIPATION, AND SOCIAL ROLE

To conclude this discussion of Milgram's and Funt's role in the reformation of social experiments as popular science, one must reflect more generally on the significance of their contribution. Although it is tempting to make a distinction between Funt's work, made as commercial programming, and that of Stanley Milgram's, made within and for the academy, there are far more significant similarities than differences. Their use of, approach to, and claims about media were alike. Both were inspired by fictional forms and narrative traditions, and both saw pedagogical promises in their activities. Indeed, like Funt, though in a different institutional context and set of conditions, Milgram claimed he was seeking to address questions about and perceived problems of human behavior through similar means and technologies. And when compared solely on technical and procedural terms, setting aside for the moment intention and conditions, the similarities between Milgram's and Funt's work is striking if not amazing. While the use of hidden recording equipment is a significant commonality, the more significant parallels are to be found in the methods used to solicit their results and make their media texts. Both relied on putting unsuspecting people into

carefully and deliberately planned situations. Both relied on people who adopt personas to fool and/or test the unsuspecting person in order to document her or his reaction or behavior. And both "revealed" the objective of their project to the subject once the test or prank ended, and found the reaction and behavior during this part of the process to be as significant as during the experiment itself. The technique of deception was central.

Another key commonality was that both Funt and Milgram used well-planned and choreographed scripts to guide their projects and guide an unsuspecting person through a narrative. The back-story was conceived at the start, and the story set. What they sought was an end that validated the assumptions that guided the story's development at the beginning, a "result" maybe, but in the case of Funt, a punch line. Different people from different groups could be inserted to complete the narrative arc. While a useful and influential narrative technique, an equally powerful aspect here was how the script reshaped a presumed separation between participant/performer and viewer. The viewer became an active participant in this story in an interesting and compelling way. Challenging the role of the voyeur or observer, there is a sense of involvement, in that the participant on screen could theoretically be the viewer too. And since the viewer is also in on the process, has been made aware of the back-story ahead of time, there's a sense of participatory anticipation that other forms and genres are less capable of producing. The in-person "popular sleuthing" Barnum leveraged was thus remade.

Beyond the commonalities of their work, a practical relationship existed between the two men as well, as further evidence of the cross-fertilization between science and entertainment so much a part of popular science. As McCarthy demonstrated, Milgram turned to Funt as a template for his work, since Milgram was particularly interested in

how Funt productively concealed recording equipment.[47] While significant, indeed, the

relationships between Milgram and Funt extend far beyond and deeper than similar uses

of and approaches to hidden microphones and cameras. The techniques used in designing

their work, how they went about getting unsuspecting people (who both Funt and

Milgram often refer to as "subjects") to exhibit an anticipated or particular

behavior/reaction to a situation was strikingly similar. And, perhaps most importantly,

both bodies of work responded and added to larger social and political imperatives and

conditions which made these candid studies meaningful.

Finally, these works of popular science sought to educate and entertain. No

separation existed between these two sides of the same coin of social experimentation.

Both men saw their works as educational, arguing that the deception and means

employed in their work was, first and foremost, a method aiding greater learning. More

meaningfully and interestingly, is the distinctive kind of media texts they sought to

produce. Their practices differed from the naturalistic and documentary work of their era,

which also largely claimed to be educational, in that the creators never disavowed their

role. Indeed, Funt and Milgram embraced and drew attention to their roles in making

their works and reasoned it to be central to their ends. Here is the rise of a very distinct

kind of media practice, one that has informed contemporary practices, in that each text

meant not only to edify, but also to entertain.

While the individual and technical contributions Funt and Milgram made to the

making of a genre are crucial, an equally significant aspect is the social conditions and

imperatives in which their work arose and spoke to. What came first or whose was more

authentic is less noteworthy than how the two blurred together and sought to address

common concerns connected to a larger social order. Social conditions and imperatives worked to make these practices meaningful, all towards the creation of a genre of popular science, which, by borrowing from and extending forms of naturalism, worked to isolate human behavior as an observable commoditized form. This property both enabled and served to legitimize their practices, as Milgram's "human behavior" was an object of academic inquiry and Funt's "human behavior" was an object of entertainment, both to be bought and sold.

As Mittell argues, genres are always being made and remade, while often borrowing from and mixing other genres and practices. What should be further emphasized, since Mittell sees TV genres in a kind of isolated sphere, is that genre making and mixing does not occur among TV genres alone. By contrast, genres need to be situated within the historical conditions in which they're made and made possible. As Funt and Milgram's practices attest, genres are not only a collection of techniques, but they are also practices which draw from and work to contribute to a host of social interests and imperatives. These tests and experiments as a genre and form of popular science worked to support the commoditization and commercialization of human life. All this would prove to be important for further development, as the methods honed here would inform more recent practices in relation to changing social conditions and imperatives.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPATION AS A PERFORMANCE:

SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS AS THEATRICAL SCIENCE

Reflecting on his Stanford Prison Experiment, Philip Zimbardo said in 2002, "In a sense, the prison study was one of the first examples of reality TV, because we videotaped the whole procedure."[1] For Zimbardo, documenting the social experiment with audio-visual recording equipment was a central component of his project and intentions. This aspect is not surprising, since he has repeatedly stated throughout his career that both Funt's and Milgram's work served as influences. However, what proved unique in Zimbardo's experiment was that he made no effort to conceal the microphones and cameras. All the participants were well aware that they were being recorded. And for Zimbardo, someone who was astute in both media practices and behavioral studies, overt recording equipment was a technique intended to complement the overall aims of the social experiment. He not only added to a line of similar work by addressing forms of human behavior, but he also contributed to the social and technical making of the genre of social experiments, in which openly documenting and picturing social roles and types became a significant part.

No linear advancement of the emerging genre of social experiments will be argued here. The techniques and their implications were never fixed, uniform, nor unchangeable. One element did not clearly add to another in a predictable way. Rather,

what took place was often a deliberate borrowing from, building upon, and unforeseen

reworking of previous practices, techniques, and logics. Older activities provided

inspiration, but there was no culminating moment for the genre and, contrary to

Zimbardo's perspective, no single or essential technique. Instead, the genre as process

was wholly relational and historical, enabled by while also enabling a complex set of

claims and practices of which the genre was a part.

This chapter explores the further making of a genre, as it was reconfigured from

an examination of general human qualities to the study of social roles and types. By

defining participation as dramatic performance, Zimbardo's work and the NET

docudrama *An American Family* were paradigmatic responses to and significant parts of

larger imperatives and conditions that placed a degree of urgency on problems of social

roles and types. The chapter concludes by suggesting that this new facet of popular

science, which is referred to here as theatrical science, fit with commercial interests by

packaging human relationships as an interaction between ideal types.

PLAYING GUARDS AND PRISONERS AT STANFORD

In 1971, eighteen Stanford students answered a newspaper ad for participants in

"a study of prison life." They were randomly divided into equal numbers of "guards" and

"prisoners" for what has become known as the Stanford Prison Experiment, rivaling

Milgram's obedience study in terms of notoriety. Although scheduled to last fourteen

days, Zimbardo ended the social experiment after six days when a visiting colleague of

Zimbardo's expressed his outrage and horror after witnessing the student guards beating

the student prisoners. "These were real boys who were really suffering, and that fact had

escaped me," Zimbardo says in the documentary he eventually made, suggesting that he, too, became caught up in his role as a prison supervisor. "I had to end the experiment."[2]

Theatrical science is an apt characterization of the experiment and Zimbardo's innovations, for dramatic techniques were as central to the scientific process as scientific claims and techniques were for dramatic effects. While the work of Barnum, Funt, and Milgram also melded scientific techniques and claims with dramatic techniques and effects, Zimbardo brought this mixing to a new level of integration. Through a set of mutually reinforcing methods, like the clear emphasis on specific types of roles and the overt presence of audio-visual recording equipment, Zimbardo both borrowed from and leveraged key elements of dramatic arts and social experimentation. With this, he repositioned the experiment's participants in ways that simultaneously blurred and emphasized their performance, and remade the genre of social experiments in important ways.

Zimbardo perpetuated existing techniques in his study, showing the extent to which dramatic scripting and research design remained complementary. Stating that he had been inspired by Milgram's obedience study, Zimbardo sought to add to a body of knowledge about human behavior. Adopting the form and format of a social experiment, Zimbardo placed people in a managed situation to gauge and study their responses. Like the approach Funt and Milgram developed to guide their tests and experiments, Zimbardo worked out at the start the back-story, a working script, and the boundaries of the experiment. Just as Milgram conceived of a study about the effects of electric shocks on human memorization in which his unwitting participants were situated, Zimbardo constructed a mock prison complete with supervising wardens and appropriate uniforms,

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told the selected prisoners that they were imprisoned for residential burglary, and instructed guards to only refer to prisoners by numbers and not by names, all of which served as a way to express hypotheses and research design in dramatic terms.

The script Zimbardo developed drew upon already existing historical experience and understanding of participations to set the expectations for the interaction. At a time when the My Lai massacre was still a part of public discourse and student protests of Vietnam War were prominent, social tensions and problems served as both a rationale for the importance of the prison study and guided its design. Explaining a rationale for prison guard anonymity, Zimbardo said "[i]n the 1970s the police would do that during student riots against the Vietnam War. They would take off their jackets with their names and ID numbers. I was at Columbia University in a police riot, and I was at Stanford in a police riot, and the first thing the cops did was to take off anything that identified themselves."[3] Social problems and histories deeply informed Zimbardo's design and intentions, as there were urgent questions about how people in and with power behave under particular kinds of conditions. Zimbardo's work was a contribution to a set of conditions every bit as much as it was a response to them, innovating earlier forms of social experiments in the process.

For Zimbardo, the acknowledged presence of audio-visual recording equipment was meant to not only document the experiment for later evaluation and to complement in-person notes, but to also provide material for the documentary Zimbardo planned to produce in concert with his findings.[4] Like Milgram's work, the experiment itself cannot be separated from Zimbardo's understanding of and distinct approach to media. The social experiment and set of media techniques were not just complementary, but deeply

interrelated. Hidden recording equipment was crucial in Milgram's social experiment, as the deceptive appearance of an ordinary environment was crucial in supporting Milgram's findings. But Zimbardo designed his experiment in such a way that the obvious presence of microphones and cameras would not, in his view, be a methodological problem. To the contrary, they might even prove to be a valuable component to the study.

While Milgram and Zimbardo shared a number of similarities in intentions and methods and both may have claimed to be documenting the influence of conditions on human behavior, their conceptions of "human behavior" were quite different. Milgram sought to demonstrate that when guided by an authority figure, a majority of people could be made to take part in an activity that they would likely avoid or even abhor otherwise. The "human behavior" for Milgram was a trait, an unquestioned "obedience" that was the result of particular social conditions. By contrast, for Zimbardo, the "human behavior" of study was a personality, a character type, a distinct kind of role a person may adopt or internalize. Social conditions, in Zimbardo's view, shaped and perhaps determined these roles, but a decisive question that Zimbardo ignored was where and how his participants learned to act out these roles.

In Zimbardo's estimation, the prison conditions he created led the students to act in the ways they did. "It's hard to believe," Zimbardo reflected, "that psychologically what started out as an experiment, where everybody knew it was a psychology experiment in a mock prison, in several days became a prison."[5] A brutal prison, to be more precise, and while it may be interesting to ask why Zimbardo found this hard to believe when his intentions were to duplicate and study "prison life," another puzzling

question not fully answered by Zimbardo's own analysis of the experiment is where and how these students learned to act as guards and prisoners. While Zimbardo provided participants with a set of rules for the experiment itself, thus delimiting up-front what was permissible, he was keen to note that "we were studying both guard and prisoner behavior, so neither group was given any instructions on how to behave."[6] The actions performed by the participants, the roles they adopted and carried out, were, in Zimbardo's estimation, a powerful demonstration of prison conditions in creating certain roles.

The methods Zimbardo drew from and employed served to reinforce claims about the results, of which a kind of deception played a significant role. Although much of the deception typical of Milgram's and Funt's method was left out of the prison experiment, it perpetuated the method in other ways. While participants were well aware of the overall aims at the initial stages of the project, they were left unaware who would be assigned as prisoners or guards until the experiment commenced. This surprise technique was crucial to the overall project since it worked in conjunction with scientific rules of random assignment, in that the roles of guards and/over prisoners were not pre-assigned and thus biased in any way. But while participants were uninformed of their specific roles, there were signs and pointers leading up to the experiment that suggested the students might behave in particular ways instead of others.

For example, a set of rules and other documentation delimited and thus informed certain roles and a particular range of action. Zimbardo created and stressed a list of seventeen rules governing how prisoners were to behave during the experiment, such as "Prisoners must obey all orders issued by guards at all times," and "Failure to obey any of the above rules may result in punishment."[7] And conscious of and clearly responding

to the kind of criticism that Milgram's obedience study received, Zimbardo had

participants sign waivers and consent forms and provided everyone with the research

questions guiding the overall intent of the experiment.[8] While never detailing how

prisoners and guards might behave, all of these documents certainly made clear a set of

expectations. The implicit message these forms emphasized was that the experiment was

meant to study and document tension, conflict, and drama. Indeed, this could not have

been clearer, as all of the materials and activities leading up to the experiment proposed

that a struggle was to follow. In this way, Zimbardo discarded an emphasis in prior work

on participant deception in the purpose of an experiment, choosing instead to reveal both

the intention of the study and the means of its recording.

Zimbardo put cameras in plain view during all phases of the study, and in this

way underscored the purpose of the study to his participants. All the participants of the

Prison Experiment were well aware of what was being studied: how the conditions of

prison life affected their behavior. In another example of a document that made the goals

of the study clear, the "General Information" form Zimbardo distributed to interested

participants listed some of the problems to be studied, like "how powerful are labels

(such as 'prisoner,' 'guard') in exercising a controlling influence on behavior? Will our

simulating 'prisoners' and 'guards' come to behave … in a manner similar to prisoners

and guards in real life prisons?"[9] The cameras, in this experiment, would work to

reemphasize the participants' assigned roles, serving as a reminder that this was indeed a

"study" of their behavior and assigned/adoptive roles. Zimbardo also recruited an actual

police officer to pick up the student prisoners at home, and later reflected that the officer,

"mindful of the TV camera grinding away . . . was all Super Cop in stance and all

Dragnet's cool Joe Friday in delivery."[10] Recording media were not inert recorders but powerful multipliers of the effect and forces Zimbardo sought to study.

Indeed, the students participating must have entered the project with preconceived notions of the kinds of guards and prisoners that would complement the study, even if they were unaware what role they would be assigned. "To allege that all these carefully tested, psychologically solid, upper-middle-class Caucasian 'guards' dreamed this up on their own is absurd," reflected Carlo Prescott, a former inmate Zimbardo hired as a consultant to the experiment, and argued that the participants "were merely doing what Zimbardo and others, myself included, encouraged them to do at the outset."[11] Drawing attention to the complex and varied set of activities that influenced the social experiment, Prescott's statement challenges Zimbardo's accounts that the students did not enter the experiment with pre-set ideas of how to behave. "I became an unwitting accomplice to a theatrical exercise," Prescott wrote, "that conveniently absolves all comers of personal responsibility for their abominable moral choices."[12]

Zimbardo's brand of "theatrical science" was also informed by additional dramatic elements and techniques. The "casting call" for participants made clear the point of the play/experiment. Researchers and consultants designed a stage, worked out logistics, and performed roles themselves as directors, wardens, and prodding advisors. Rules that either purposely or unintentionally provided a story arc were introduced, such as "The guards were merely told to maintain law and order ... and to realize that if the prisoners escaped the study would be terminated," and, in fact, the "prisoners" notoriously plotted their escape, which led to the guards punishing the prisoners. And, not

to be overlooked, a film crew stood by and documented the project, blurring the line between scientific experiment and theatrical performance even further.[13]

In this kind of theatrical science, the dramatic and the scientific were fused into a new means of popularly generating knowledge. In designing a set to mimic certain conditions, Zimbardo put forward a way to reproduce and therefore explain pressing social problems and relations. In extending a social experiment over a period of days, Zimbardo not only added to the period of observable time, he also added a sense of culminating suspense. And by making the purpose of the study clear to the participants and with cameras a present reminder, the resulting performances corresponded with theatrical traditions. The genre of social experiment that Zimbardo both drew upon and remade took on a new degree of dramatic emphasis.

Despite its novelty, merging artistic performance and scientific study for the camera had already occurred with motion photography. As early innovators and practitioners, Eadweard Muybridge and Thomas Eakins conducted their work with motion photography under the auspices of University of Pennsylvania as photographic studies in human motion.[14] And as Mileaf has argued, Muybridge deliberately borrowed from traditions of classicism to structure his models' poses and movements.[15] This approach served several purposes, which included the productive use of a framework that the models/participants could understand and draw from as they posed for the camera. A more significant function, though, was that these artistic techniques and traditions served to deflect and counter criticism that the models in his photographic studies were nude. Artistic and scientific activities were not just mutually reinforcing, but, rather, at this historical moment, a distinct practice emerged which combined artistic and scientific

discourses and practices in relationship to the social development of photography. The crucial aspect here, though, was that Muybridge's work proved to be an important activity within and as a part of larger social conditions, as these studies not only anticipated Taylor's industrial motion studies, they also served as legitimized – if still debated – ways of looking a nude men and women.[16] Forms of pleasurable entertainment and scientific studies were never fully separate activities – and indeed combined – during the incorporation of America society.

In analogous ways for Zimbardo, social experiment, behavioral studies, artistic forms and techniques and traditions of entertainment were not just complementary, but reformed into a singular genre and practice. Borrowing from while adding to Milgram's obedience study, Zimbardo developed a method that moved the study of human behavior from what might be considered general traits to personality types and roles. His "theatrical exercise" proved to be a productive method for doing so. The traditions he worked within and as a part of served to legitimize his work, even if he received/earned a good deal of criticism. His work and techniques also suited larger social imperatives and historical conditions. But, before this is more fully explored, it will be helpful to note a corresponding project that also shaped humans as roles for an emerging form of non-fiction TV entertainment.

SERIALIZING AN AMERICAN FAMILY

Zimbardo suggests the Stanford Prison Experiment was a predecessor to reality TV. "In a sense," he writes on his website, where you can also learn about his books for sale and buy his DVD about the experiment, "this study … is a forerunner of reality TV,

as we see ordinary people up close and personal day in and night out, become transformed into something disturbing."[17] While there may be some merit to Zimbardo's claim, another program of the same era has also received a good deal of attention as an antecedent of reality TV, National Education Television's *An American Family*.[18] Promoted as capturing "the drama, humor and heartbreak of life," NET, the predecessor to PBS, promoted the series as a study of an American family. Advertisements and press releases sent to critics quoted cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead as saying "nothing like it has ever been done, and I think it may be as important for our time as were the invention of drama and the novel for earlier generations: a new way to help people understand themselves."[19] Put together from over seven months and 300 hours of footage, twelve one-hour episodes of the interactions among the Loud family – Bill and Pat Loud, their sons Lance, Kevin and Grant, and daughters Delilah and Michelle – constituted the series.

Within a crucible of dramatic art, commercial entertainment, and scientific naturalistic study, a study of social roles was crafted as a serialized form of television entertainment. The producer Craig Gilbert not only conceived of the project, but he also oversaw the daily filming and final editing of the series. With a Harvard degree in English literature and as a writer, director, and producer for both commercial and public television programs, the artistic and the commercial informed his conception of the series. However, Gilbert also credits for inspiration his experience directing *Margaret Mead's New Guinea Journal*, which was a NET-funded account of Mead's return to the island of her famous anthropological study.[20]

Gilbert claimed that *An American Family* was an attempt to study what was considered to be a typical family at a time when there was a great deal of social anxiety about and a perceived breakdown of American families.[21] As Zaretsky argues, the 1970s were a period of time in which the family increasingly became a locus that both exemplified and was seen as the cause of a variety of social problems, ranging up to and including a supposed loss of U.S. political, economic, and military power.[22] If families were properly organized and maintained, it was argued, society at large would follow.

Finding the right family to study was crucial. The Louds were selected after several months of extensive searching, though Gilbert limited his search to southern California because he believed the region to be emblematic of the era and would thus provide a paradigmatic "historical context."[23] In Gilbert's estimation, the Louds were a perfect fit for the series, since they conformed to popular expectations of a middle-class American family, which was what he was looking for. They would also work well with his stated intentions, which was to craft "a real-life soap opera, the first of its kind in broadcasting history."[24]

Speculating on what television as a technology and cultural form offered in terms of distinct programming, Raymond Williams observed "[i]n American television there is the fascinating case of the serial *An American Family*," calling it "a new kind of drama-documentary."[25] Although Williams did not go into details, he was no doubt referring to the complex and interrelated set of techniques, activities, and social and institutional imperatives that made the program a distinctive and at that time an emergent cultural form. Story arcs and documentary traditions were certainly not original with it, and nor were serialization or its claims to be a slice of real life of real people.[26] But what made *An*

American Family a new cultural form of TV "drama-documentary" was a distinctive combination of a whole collection of formal features, programming practices, and social relationships were distinctively combined. And these would inform the genre of theatrical science in important ways.

The formal features of *An American Family* need to be seen in relationship to Gilbert's intentions, conceptions, and guiding hand in the project. Promoted as a serial documentary of a typical American family, *An American Family* was intended to be simultaneously entertaining and socially compelling. Like Milgram's and Zimbardo's social experiments, and indeed Mead's work, Gilbert understood that studies of human behavior(s) and social roles involved paradoxically a good deal of planning to structure and manage both the scope of the project and final product. The narrative arc present in each episode and across the entire series was due in large part to Gilbert's well developed tactics and objectives. From the outset, the naturalistic experiment was planned. While he may not have known in advance that he would document Bill and Pat Loud's dramatic, culminating divorce as part of the narrative, Gilbert surely anticipated dramatic, entertaining moments.

Central to Gilbert's approach, from the initial development to the final product, was the focus, like Zimbardo, on social roles and types. Gilbert said he chose the Louds because they fit conceptions of a typical American family, but each member as dramatized in the series fit a particular character type. Bill Loud fit the bill as a rugged entrepreneur, and his wife as a suburban stay-at-home mom. Their five children ranged from ages 15 to 20, two girls and three boys on the cusp of adulthood, one of which, Lance Loud, received a great deal if not the bulk of attention for being openly gay. Seen

in comparison to character roles in more traditional dramatic entertainment, which rely on clear types to drive narrative, the Louds complemented Gilbert's "real-life soap opera" from the start. But, just as in soap operas, social roles and types do more than simply drive a narrative; they represent social questions, problems, and conditions. In ways similar to traditional drama, then, *An American Family* was indeed a "new,' emergent form of TV that blurred perceived boundaries between human and character studies.

INNOVATIONS IN POPULAR SCIENCE

The Stanford Prison Experiment and *An American Family* have a great deal in common. And this degree of commonality in intention and dramatic form between what's presented as scientific study and what's presented as entertainment program underscores the way in which social experiments as a genre of popular science operated across otherwise distinct practices. Both Zimbardo's students and the Louds knew they were participants in media projects, with a film crew present to document their interactions and possible changes. Both also knew that they were participating in a study/documentary about social roles, the students as prisoners and guards and each of the Louds in and as part of a family. Significantly, critics and viewers were generally aware that the participants were aware. The two projects also drew from and made innovative changes to previous practices, techniques, and methodologies for studying of human behavior(s) and roles. They may have been most alike – and aligned – in the social and cultural imperatives and conditions in which they arose and were made to be a part of. Indeed, the two proved to be compelling not just for their content and character, but for how they were in a response to and a product of larger social conditions and institutional needs.

While the Stanford Prison Experiment and *An American Family* were in debt to an earlier practice of asking/fooling people to participate in an activity in order to study and document their behavior(s) as part of a logic and tradition of popular science, both also innovated the genre, such as increasing the duration of the experiment/study and making previously hidden cameras visible. They were also shaped by and indeed complemented their respective institutional contexts. For Gilbert, conceiving *An American Family* as a serial was well suited to an institution that favored programming techniques that brought predictable people together at a set time and place.[27] For Zimbardo, his experiment was not only part of a field and line of research, his work was a part of a larger imperative for academic institutions to meet (what were seen as) the needs of society.

The move from studying/documenting traits to social roles and types also proved to be significant in the making of this genre. And this move and the genre itself are productively understood in relationship to and as a part of social imperatives, in which problems with social roles were extensive. At a time when gender and sexual roles were being both challenged and reinforced, as feminist critiques and the Stonewall riots, for example, made the issue of social roles and positions decisive, practices of studying human behavior moved from individual and intrinsic traits which were human nature and unchanged to social roles which could be changed, thus being more amenable to planned projects of social improvement. Zimbardo's and Gilbert's works were not only made possible in an era of anxiety about social roles, such an era and anxieties were given more complete embodiment and definition through the works.

Much of the critical reaction at the time was centered on the relationship(s) between the producer(s) and the Louds, and whether the overt presence of a film crew diminished, compromised, or perhaps influenced the events and narrative of the series. Ruoff's examination of the critical reception and popular commentary about *An American Family* emphasizes how reviewers were "preoccupied with how the program was made … the duration of the shoot … the motivations of the producer and the Louds, and the influence of the camera."[28] In response, Gilbert has maintained that the Louds were naive participants, never fully appreciative that he was documenting their family as part of a study for/as entertainment.[29] But whether the Louds "acted" for the camera and were complicit with the producers in crafting a particular moments or a narrative for the screen is less notable than why the objection was meaningful in the first place.

Two interrelated points regarding this should be emphasized, since they have been key elements of the genre of social experiments. First, overt recording equipment in the Stanford experiment and *An American Family* was not seen as a problem to solve, but as a tool, a necessary technique towards documenting and studying of human behavior and roles. While most critics of both the prison experiment and *An American Family* considered this aspect to be a methodological problem, the flip side of this argument was that camera wasn't an obstruction, but, rather, an advantage. Like Funt and Milgram, who argued their own roles were a crucial element to producing their works, experimenter/producer involvement had been long seen – and accepted – as an essential technique of enhanced reflexivity towards studying/documenting human behavior. An overt camera was new in Zimbardo's and Gilbert's work in relationship to past practices,

but so was the kind of behavior to be studied. Since types and roles were the object, an overt camera could be seen to encourage and thus emphasize those features.

The second and related point is about dispensing with hidden purposes and cameras. The overt camera was just one element tied to a much larger social practice of closely examining media texts to learn about human behavior and roles. Participation was reshaped, as many viewers took technical elements, such as the presence of cameras and the editing of footage into account and knew that creators and participants did, as well. Creators, producers, participants, viewers, promoters, and critics worked in dramatic relationship to one another – and together – in the making of social experiments, a genre that was intended to add to and in some cases challenge forms of knowledge about human behavior. With a comparable sense of involvement found in Funt's and Milgram's works, as viewers could theoretically be participants and were made aware of the purpose and methods of the experiment/study as they anticipated/predicted an outcome/result, viewers were also encouraged to consider and be a part of the making of the media aspects, adding a new dimension to the practice of "popular sleuthing."

As *Candid Camera* and Milgram's obedience study were a confluence of literary and scientific naturalism, the Stanford Prison Experiment and *An American Family* were a confluence of theatrical and social scientific practices. A form of participation as a performance towards studying/documenting a social role was bound up in traditions and practices of fictional entertainment and behavioral social experiments. All of this occurred in relationship to the making of a genre that invited the viewer/audience to decode and closely analyze a media text, a process both pleasurable and socially significant, as understanding kinds of human roles and behavior(s) was said to be stake.

Participants, experimenters, producers, film crews, editors, promoters, critics, and active viewers in relationship to social imperatives and concerns collectively constituted a genre that drew from and adapted previous techniques and practices.

THE INSTITUTIONAL STUDY OF SOCIAL ROLES AS TYPES AND THE CULTURE OF DISTANCE

In his 1952 autobiography, Alan Funt wrote that he hoped he would one day make a long documentary detailing the everyday activities of a human being. "Some day we want to make a photograph of the way a man spends his entire working day," Funt enthusiastically suggested.[30] He envisioned the project as something that future researchers would value and cherish. For whatever reasons, he never made the film, and in an interview towards the end of his life lamented the fact.[31] Like his early experiments simply hiding microphones in public places with the hope of recording something for commercial broadcasting, though, the project may have required his creative intervention. Whether it would have been the deliberate choosing of a compelling person and circumstances and/or his own planned manipulation of conditions and surroundings, Funt obviously understood, as he did with his candid studies, that it was not until he "assumed the role of an active participant" that he found a formula and style that complemented the needs of commercial broadcasting as well as his own stated goal of creating works that were simultaneously entertaining and educational.

Although this suggests commercial pressures can be influential, one cannot see them as simply causal. In a 1985 interview of Funt by Zimbardo for *Psychology Today*, Zimbardo says to Funt "You are really an experimental social psychologist. You share

with some of my most creative colleagues … the ability to design and manipulate social situations that reveal much about the way we behave."[32] While Funt can and should be compared to people and works in the behavioral sciences, particularly since Funt anticipated and influenced major works in the field, at the same time Funt's methods and techniques cannot be fully separated from the imperatives of commercial broadcasting. Funt may have designed and manipulated situations to reveal and study the way we behave, but he was also designing and manipulating situations because it made for entertaining radio and TV, too. And these activities weren't simply interrelated or complementary ones, but were, rather, part of a larger, singular practice. *An American Family* was part of the same tradition. By seeking to study social roles in relationship to socio-historical conditions, *An American Family* was a behavioral experiment/study that was crafted as and to suit imperatives of entertainment industries, but at the same time a contribution to larger social conditions and imperatives as well.

Zimbardo's work and *An American Family* were part of larger efforts that psychologized conflict and located social problems in terms of proper or problematic roles of and for people. The family was a key site, as it was seen to embody both the ills and promise of U.S. society. "The traditional family unit is showing signs of serious strain in America, and some social scientists are predicting its imminent doom," declared a 1971 article in the Washington Post, which suggested that lessons could be learned from a father who credited scouting and religious faith with building a strong nuclear family and thus a stronger America as well.[33] The family was also seen as a key site for comparison, as *An American Life in Moscow* suggests. This book, which was written by seven members of a family about their experience living in the city from 1968 to 1970,

shed light on pressing political and economic relationships between the U.S. and Soviet Union.[34]

Reflecting on the end result(s) of his social experiment, Zimbardo said, "We were able to do good. … The public learned something. The scientists learned something. And the participants learned something."[35] What people learned may be debated, but an equally critical issue was how his and like practices produced forms of knowledge. In the same way that Funt and Milgram commoditized human behavior as an object of study, Zimbardo and Gilbert were also part of a larger effort to commoditize social roles and types. Institutional pressures were increasingly aligned with the logic of capital, in that isolating, demarcating, and reducing social roles into predictable forms has been a key part of the commodification of human life whether to fit imperatives of positivist science or commercial entertainment. While one can debate the ways human social roles might be made, whether they're biologically, structurally, or culturally produced, the genre the Stanford Prison Experiment and *An American Family* drew from and helped create were aligned with equally scientific and commercial interests, as they worked to support social roles as a commodity to be studied, pictured, bought, sold, and sold to.

Indeed, the genre of social experiments as developed by Zimbardo and Gilbert principally packaged human relationships as interactions between types. In concert with this, the genre became a material practice in a social order Williams identified as "the culture of distance, the latent culture of alienation, within which men and women are reduced to models, figures."[36] Participation between the wide range and kinds of creators of this genre created social roles and types as pedagogical entertainment. Extending this

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genre to what has become known as the "post-network" era has proven to be an

exceedingly profitable enterprise.

NOTES

[1] Matthew B. Stannard, "BBC's 'reality' show may be cruel and unusual television," <u>San Francisco Chronicle</u>, 28 January 2002, A-1.

[2] Stannard, A-1.

[3] Philip Zimbardo, "You Can't Be a Sweet Cucumber in a Vinegar Barrel: A Talk with Philip Zimbardo," <u>Edge</u>, 19 January 2005, <<u>http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/zimbardo05/zimbardo05_index.html</u>> (26 October 2008).

[4] See *Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Study*, Stanford Instructional Television Network, produced, directed, and written by Ken Musen and Philip Zimbardo (New York: Distributed by Insight Media, 1990).

[5] Michael Mechanic, "The Real Life Prison Experiment," <u>Mother Jones</u>, 14 March 2008, <<u>http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2008/03/voluntary-confinement-one-of-the-gang.html</u>> (20 August 2008).

[6] Philip G. Zimbardo, "Reflections on the Stanford Prison Experiment: Genesis, Transformations, Consequences," in *Obedience to Authority: Current Perspectives on the Milgram Paradigm*, ed. Thomas Blass (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), 198-211.

[7] Philip G Zimbardo, "PRISONER RULES PREPARED BY THE WARDEN AND GUARDS," , <u>http://www.prisonexp.org/pdf/rules.pdf</u> (20 August 2008).

[8] I can find no evidence that Zimbardo was legally required to have participants sign consent forms and waivers and it does not appear that Zimbardo or others involved in the experiment have explained their rationales for doing so. I can also find no firm evidence that Sanford required these forms and waivers. Many accounts of the history of Institutional Review Boards note that a 1972 disclosure of the thirty-year U.S. funded Tuskegee Syphilis Study proved to be a defining moment, helping to create the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research in 1974, which produced the "Belmont Report" in 1979, the document that has been the basis for a continually revised federal guideline for human research. [See *Human Subjects Research: A Handbook for Institutional Review Boards*, Greenwald, R. A., Ryan, M. K., and Mulvihill, J. E. (Eds.) (New York: Plenum Press, 1982)]. While Zimbardo carried out his experiment in 1971, it makes sense that his use of consent forms and waivers was a strategic result of the already present attention being paid to subjecting people to these kinds of experiments. Milgram's experiment, in particular, of which Zimbardo was well-aware, received a good deal of criticism questioning the ethics of his approach. [See "The Neglected Factor in the Ethics of Experimentation," <u>The Hastings Center Report</u>, Vol. 7, No. 5, Oct., 1977].

[9] Philip G Zimbardo, "Prison Life Study: General Information," August 1971, <http://www.prisonexp.org/pdf/geninfo.pdf> (20 August 2008).

[10] Philip G Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2007), 35.

[11] Carlo Prescott, "The Lie of the Stanford Prison Experiment," The Stanford Daily, 28 April 2005, OpEd page.

[12] Prescott.

[13] See Philip G Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2007), 23-32.

[14] See Paul Myron Hillier, "Men and Horses in Motion: Thomas Eakins and Motion Photography," Early Popular Visual Culture, Vol. 5, No. 1, April 2007, pp. 25 – 40.

[15] Janine A Mileaf,., "Poses for the Camera: Eadweard Muybridge's Studies of the Human Figure," American Art, Fall 2002 Volume 16 Number 3.

[16] See Linda Williams, "Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[17] Philip G. Zimbardo, "Chapter Notes," The Homepage of Professor Philip G. Zimbardo, <http://www.zimbardo.com/current.html> (20 August 2008).

[18] See Rachel Beckman, "'70s Version of Reality TV Returns," Washington Post, 14 June 2008, Page C12.

[19] Margret Mead, advertisement for show found in Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xvi.

[20] See Craig Gilbert, "Reflections on An American Family" Studies in Visual Communication, 8, no. 1, 1982, 24-54.

[21] See Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 11.

[22] Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[23] See Craig Gilbert and Susan Lester, "The Proposal," Unpublished WNET document, 1971, as quoted in Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 15.

[24] See Craig Gilbert and Susan Lester, "The Proposal," Unpublished WNET document, 1971, as quoted in Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 15.

[25] Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), 70.

[26] See Erik Barnouw, *Documentary* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); William Bluem, *Documentary in American Television* (NY: Hastings House, 1965); Michael Curtin, "Packaging Reality: The Influence of Fictional Forms on the Early Development of Television Documentary," Journalism Monographs (Austin, Texas), Feb 1993.

[27] See James Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American television, 1948-1961* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

[28] Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 155.

[29] Craig Gilbert, "Reflections on An American Family" Studies in Visual Communication, 8, no. 1, 1982, 24-54.

[30] Allen Funt, *Eavesdropper at Large: Adventures in Human Nature with "Candid Mike" and "Candid Camera"* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1952), 205.

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CHAPTER FIVE

STUDYING HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND SELLING REALITY:

REALITY TV AS POPULAR SCIENCE

Produced by Granada Media and London Weekend Television in 2000 for ITV and broadcast by the Discovery Channel in 2001, the three-episode series titled *The Human Zoo* documents three days of tests and experiments among twelve unsuspecting volunteers in a remote setting in England.[1] Participants were divided into unequal teams that competed with each other in various contests. Billed as reality TV, the "chief scientific consultant" and on-screen analyst Phillip Zimbardo wrote that "I think it represents some of what is best in Reality TV … What the success of the current crop of reality TV in the U.S. and overseas tells us is that human behavior is fascinating to observe."[2] Before Zimbardo became a reality-TV consultant for ITV and, later, NBC, he worked directly with Alan Funt to produce narrated collections of *Candid Camera* segments that were marketed and sold to academic institutions.

Zimbardo's activities were part of a larger development in which social experiments as a genre of popular science were being made and marketed primarily as commercial products. While commercial and scientific forms of social experiments have never been fully separate activities, as has been noted, through the 1990s and at the turn of the century, two interrelated developments took place to dramatically alter their comparative importance. First, the genre of social experiments became more fully

commodified for television as the form became profitable and attractive to producers, media industries, participants and viewers alike. Second, in concert with previous studies and experiments that addressed human behavior in terms of particular social roles and types, the genre of social experiments became a commercially repeatable format for addressing – and managing – social issues. In both these developments, the form both reflected and supported key imperatives of what has been called the post-network era.

This chapter addresses key developments in the most recent making of reality TV as a genre. Uses of the term "reality TV" will be traced in order to stress how the term has been historically defined and made in relation to types of programming. A prominent reality-TV program and its producer are then explored in order to highlight significant innovations. Finally, the chapter makes a case that reality-TV social experiments continue to reshape social experiments as a form of popular science.

THE HISTORY OF REALITY TV

As a complex set of interrelated social, industrial, technological, and global developments, the post-network era serves as the context in which reality-TV as an explicitly named and practiced genre emerges. Several scholars have made a distinction between television practices during an era dominated by three competing networks and that of the post-network era, the time of cable and satellite services and other organizational and technological developments for making, delivering, and using content.[3] Indeed, the transition from the broadcast to the cable era reshaped both the industry and programming practices in profound ways.[4]

Central to the emergence of reality TV was its relation to the global transformations and realignments of the post-network era. Reality TV has both complemented and been a component of economic imperatives and social conditions on two key levels. First, judging from its popularity with reviewers, reality TV is a compelling form in which to address current cultural issues and problems in an entertaining ways. Second, it not only offers an attractive cost/profit ratio, but programming lends itself to being sold as repeatable, easily localized and copyrightable formats.[5] *Big Brother* and *Survivor*, as key examples, were both developed in Europe and sold as a commercial format for national markets.

While fitting the imperatives of the television industry, reality TV also embodies and informs much larger global conditions, such as the ascendance of what many people call neoliberalism. For example, the emphasis on profit ratios and television formats as global commodities is tied to Harvey's point that "[n]eoliberalization has meant, in short, the financialization of everything."[6] Reality TV programs are forms of what McCarthy describes as "neoliberal theater," who argues that "state policies synchronize with cultural practices to apply market-based individualism as a governmental rationale across the institutions and practices of everyday life."[7] Indeed, the logics and formations of neoliberalism have been bound up in the very emergence and making of reality TV.

The change from network to post-network left its mark on how "reality TV" was practiced and produced. Earlier uses of the specific term "reality TV" in relation to both non-fiction documentary and fictional entertainment programming are important, since they not only suggest the fluidity in which the concept was used, but also underscore that "reality TV" has only recently become a standard part of the post-network industry

thinking, planning, and investment. Until the early to mid 1990s, the term "reality TV"

denoted what many would consider to be different types and kinds of programming than

today. Programs like *Candid Camera*, *Real People*, and *The Gong Show*, which are now

sometimes regarded as early forms of reality TV, were most often referred to in the day

as "actuality programming," while "reality TV" described programs that addressed social,

political, and historical issues and events, frequently in the form of traditional

documentaries. In 1965, for example, a television critic wrote that "For those who want

to know about the development of reality TV, a new and badly-needed book arrived

yesterday at the bookstall," referring to the book, *Documentary in American Television*.[8]

The term "reality TV" also described fictional programming that addressed contemporary

social problems and issues. In a *New York Times* article titled "Call it TV, but Don't Call

it Reality," for example, John Corry asks "Where does reality programming go now?"

referring to the ABC drama about incest, *Something About Amelia*.[9]

The use of "reality TV" as a descriptive term was infrequent until the 1990s, and

then programs like *Cops* and *The Real World* became referred to as such. First broadcast

in 1989 and 1992, respectively, the term "reality TV" became widely applied to these

programs, both of which received a great deal of critical and popular attention. This

development was both bound up in and indicated a profound change in programming

practices. "Because they're cheap to make while being potentially lucrative," Howard

Rosenberg noted in describing the recently announced fall programs in 1991, "'reality'

programs are TV's sizzling ticket."[10] Game shows, the O.J. Simpson trial, *A Current

Affair*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* all became regarded at one time or another by critics

and industry materials as reality TV, as the term became more widely and popularly used and applied.

By the turn of the millennium, reality TV became more fully institutionalized in the sense of being more systematically made and sold. While the kinds of programming developed, promoted, and critiqued as "reality TV" may differ in methods and techniques, the term has become more narrowly defined as an industry product. The huge success of such blockbusters as *Survivor*, *The Osbournes*, and *Big Brother* both exemplify and solidify this redefinition.[11]

While programs like *The Real World*, *Survivor* were called tests and social experiments by producers, participants, and critics, this was more than a claim or a kind of description.[12] Indeed, many reality TV shows are frequently rationalized, presented and defended as experiments that study participants' reactions and behavior in stressful and/or abnormal situations. For example, the co-producer of MTV's *The Real World*, Jon Murray remarked of his show "[w]e try to cast really interesting people who, when they come together, something interesting is gonna happen . . . It's like a chemical experiment – you wait and see what kind of compounds are going to be created, and then apply all of the principles of drama to it."[13] These and many other programs drew from and remade previous practices and methods of social experiments. They were innovative amalgamations of techniques for testing and studying human behavior(s) and techniques for making narrative, which combined to make a form of commercial television entertainment. And few people were more influential in formulating this variation of popular science in the post-network era than Mark Burnett.

MARK BURNETT'S PROFITABLE SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

Burnett became a highly influential figure in the development of reality TV, because in part he made programming well-suited to business needs, models, and imperatives in the post-network era.[14] But Burnett's business model was one element of a larger project of crafting engaging and entertaining television, in which the study of human behavior in stressful and abnormal situations in order to illuminate social issues and problems was said to be the central aim. Made in relationship to technological developments and logics, and creatively borrowing from and leveraging fictional narrative tropes and techniques, Burnett was an innovative contributor who remade the genre of social experiments into a profitable format for commercial TV.

Accounts of Burnett's persistent efforts to sell CBS on *Survivor* are legendary, as both critics and fans have sought to highlight Burnett's rejections and eventual prominence in tandem with the rise of reality TV as a staple of programming. While there are differing versions of the final financial agreement between Burnett and CBS, as Burnett has claimed he negotiated a fifty-fifty split of the profits with CBS while the network has publicly disputed that figure, Burnett was only able to make *Survivor* after finding his own funding and advertisers for the project, such as Budweiser and Ford.[15] Eschewing traditional commercial approaches, Burnett sold companies on product placements within and as a part of the narrative of the series in the forms of temptations, prizes, and rewards, and in the process not only recovered his production costs before the first episode ever aired, but actually turned a profit.[16] This tactic proved to be quite profitable for both Burnett and CBS, whatever their actual agreement. The program was an extraordinary hit. Fifty-one million people watched the final episode, second only to

the Super Bowl that year, while the show became "the most-watched series to be shown during the summer in television history."[17] As *Survivor* was one of the first programs to be conceived of, made as, sold, promoted, and received as "reality TV," Burnett both set a standard and profoundly shaped social experiments as a form of popular science in important new ways.

A number of contextual pressures and resources made possible Burnett's project. For example, as Uricchio points out, technological developments played a central role in the creation and conceptualization of media practices at this historical moment.[18] The program was indebted to computer-based non-linear editing systems like Avid, which made editing the hours of video footage much more efficient and cost-effective. Instead of working with video in sequence, software allowed for not only rapid editing and locating spots, but also made it much easier to combine and refashion video of various sources. Indeed, at least twenty camera people and thirteen editors worked on the first season of *Survivor*, producing more than three-hundred hours of footage each day (equivalent to the entire amount shot during *An American Family*).[19] Similarly, feasibly portable audio and video recording equipment also made some choices more possible than other, the remote island setting being the most obvious. In the case of *Survivor*, a collection of technologies provided an ability to study how a select group of people will react and behave when placed on a remote island.

Technological logics and an attention to the study of human behavior also informed Burnett's creation of what could be called a reality aesthetic. Like Funt and Milgram before him, Burnett was deeply influenced by and sought to craft his work in relation to dramatic traditions. With a deft and in places sophisticated use of symbolism

(such as weather conditions to signal and foreshadow moods and coming events), Burnett drew from a rich range of narrative technique, especially suspense stories. In this way, Burnett is a highly representative example of the post-network crisis of style that Caldwell argues was a major development in this era, in which producers and creators sought to create distinct and new aesthetics as responses to the new institutional pressures.[20] And for Burnett, who has repeatedly stated that he looked to film for inspiration, from the framing of shots to the depth of colors and use of wide-angle lenses, these stylistic elements all served the larger goal of creating an entertainment program that was said to study, document, and reveal aspects of human behavior.[21]

Like *Candid Camera* and *An American Family*, *Survivor* was a television program designed and crafted to be entertaining and edifying at the same time. As examinations of human behavior and the interactions between types of people, these shows leveraged and reshaped techniques for soliciting actions and techniques for making narrative. And all these shows changed the genre of social experiments.

Whether Burnett was familiar with traditions of behavioral social experiments is less important than recognizing that his work drew from and reshaped key practices and techniques that have already been described. His breakout hit *Survivor*, a show about sixteen participants taken to the south Pacific island of Borneo and told to make their own shelter and find some of their own food as they competed for a million-dollar prize, was intentionally crafted as a way to explore types of human behavior in dramatic fashion. And, like the *Stanford Prison Experiment* and *An American Family* before, the show was deliberately designed to juxtapose and create tension among particular character types. As Ron Simon highlights with the first season of *Survivor*, "Mark

Burnett typecast his castaways in the most general terms: Gay Man, Wild Woman, Single Mom, and Yuppie."[22] While his rationale(s) behind casting the series in particular ways may be debated, he was simultaneously drawing from and deeply reshaping existing traditions of social experiments as a form of popular culture. Similar to *An American Family* and dramatic forms more broadly, Burnett positioned distinct character types in relation to one another to drive the narrative.

While everyday people have long if not always been participants in television programming, even in the form of subjecting random people to tests and experiments like *Candid Camera*, Burnett gave this feature a new degree of importance. The didactic power of "ordinary people" has been crucial for social experiments, as this aspect has been considered a methodological cornerstone to support the results, since in theory participants are randomly selected and could be anyone. On one level, real people became an effective marketing claim, employed to suggest that the outcome, unlike fictional TV, is theoretically unpredictable and potentially novel. But on another level, everyday people gave reality TV a particular originality and authority, in the sense that it gave the impression that any member of the public could be a participant.

In these and other ways, Burnett was making a participatory form of entertainment that worked at a number of levels. As a key part of this, what was "real" in *Survivor* became a major part of its critical and popular reception. Like *An American Family*, where reviewers largely focused on how the show was made and in what ways these activities and techniques might have influenced scenes and narrative, how *Survivor* was made received a great deal of attention. Again like *An American Family*, questions about editing, cameras, film crews, and everyone's motivations were part of the critical

reviews and popular discussions about Burnett's show. Print articles and segments in TV news and gossip shows addressed "the making of" *Survivor* in tandem with its broadcast. For example, in addition to devoting time to the broadcast episodes, shows like *Entertainment Tonight* and websites like Reality Blurred provided additional details about the participants along with facts about how the show was made.[23] This kind of attention became an important if not a cornerstone to reality TV, as these programs were deliberately made to invite close readings and speculation. Burnett was not making a kind of programming to be inertly watched. Rather, his show invited and encouraged an examination of its claim(s) about the "reality" depicted, thus engaging viewers directly in a collective practice.

For Burnett, reality TV was conceived as a form to probe different types of people's interactions in competition with each other. He has said his methods were designed to address social tensions and problems.[24] The remote island setting of the first *Survivor* served as a narrative backdrop, but Burnett has said that its principle purpose in choosing it, beyond the scenic, was that "[n]ature strips away the veneer we show one another every day, at which point people become who they really are."[25] Documenting the type of person each participant was helped Burnett, as he put it, address or perhaps expose social issues and problems. "How [the participants] relate to others during the stress," Burnett noted, "…becomes a lesson on how to optimally interact with family and coworkers." [26] At work here was more than an effort to add a pseudo-scientific gloss to his work. Burnett drew from and contributed to existing practices of studying types of human behavior in the form of entertaining tests and experiments.

Reality TV remade previous practices while presenting at the same time a novel form of entertainment. Part of Burnett's success was no doubt due to his creative borrowing and reshaping of dramatic traditions and aesthetics, but an equally salient aspect was how his work presented evidence of social issues and problems. Beginning with a broad research question (how do people interact in stressful conditions?) and by devising methods (like a remote island, a series of competitions, and a film crew) to explore a range of issues (such as, to name only a few, gender roles, sexual identities, race relations, competitive strategies, and/or religious world-views), reality TV extended in significant ways a genre made to address social problems with social experiments. Burnett has often made this intention both explicit and specific, with the thirteenth season of *Survivor* being a notable example, as the season's participants were divided into "tribes" of Asians, Hispanics, Caucasians, and African Americans and widely claimed to be a social experiment to deal with racial problems.[27]

Attention to social issues has also become a staple in other reality TV shows. For example, describing the contentious and never-publicly-aired program *Welcome to the Neighborhood*, Lisa Moraes wrote in the *Washington Post*, "In this social experiment … seven families competed to win a 3,300-square-foot, four-bedroom, 2 1/2 -bath house on a cul-de-sac near Austin." The seven families were "a religious, African American family; a Wiccan family; a Latino family; an Asian family; a picture-perfect white family (except mom is a stripper); a young white family headed by staunch Republicans, only mom and dad are covered in tattoos; and a white gay couple with an adopted African American infant."[28] But ABC executives elected to shelve the program after a chorus of concern from activist groups, like the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

(GLAAD) and the Fair Housing Alliance, that argued the program would validate

intolerance and perpetuate stereotypes. While ABC scrapped the show, it defended its

decision to make it by stating, "Our intention with *Welcome to the Neighborhood* was to

show the transformative process that takes place when people are forced to confront

preconceived notions of what makes a good neighbor, and we believe the series delivers

exactly that."[29] And after it became clear that the program was indeed crafted as a

morality tale, or the results of the social experiment was that the "white gay couple"

"won" the house while the neighbors confronted preconceived perceptions, a few people

argued ABC was mistaken to yank it. After seeing the first two episodes, Neal Justin

wrote, "The early episodes go to great lengths to show that the cul-de-saccers will

eventually become more tolerant. Preview clips have them saying such things as 'my

perception changed' and 'I don't think we'll look at people from a distance and judge

them again.'"[30] Even GLADD publicly changed its position, producing a documentary

about the show for its satellite station that portrays the results of *Welcome to the

Neighborhood* quite positively.

Although questions about representations of race were at the center of much of a

debate over the previously noted season of *Survivor* and that of sexuality over *Welcome

to the Neighborhood*, what received little to no attention was the notion that the social

experiment could shed light on social relations and kinds of human behavior. In fact, in

debate condemning and praising the show, the implicit assumption was that behavior can

be exposed, learned, or reified using such a method.[31] Whether these programs worked to

break down or reaffirm stereotypes and/or the notion of categories themselves remains an

open question, though what was assumed was the role of social experiments in the production of knowledge.

REALITY TV SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS AS POPULAR SCIENCE

Written in 2000 as a critique of the first season of *Survivor*, the title to an article in the *New York Times* sarcastically asked "Hey, What if Contestants Give Each Other Shocks?" Insightfully connecting Milgram's and Zimbardo's similar set of questionable if not problematic techniques to Burnett's, Erica Goode wrote that "By the late 1970s, ethical guidelines discouraged the use of most deception in psychological research … As a result, neither the Milgram study nor the Stanford prison experiment could be carried out today. … The producers of reality television shows, however, are unfettered by such constraints." Shows like *Survivor*, Goode argued, place people into potentially harmful situations, while "the philosophy appears to be that participants in reality shows know what they are getting into."[32]

The potential and actual effect on participants is at the center of a number of critiques of reality TV. Such critiques emphasize the ethical dilemmas embedded in the form of social experiments, in terms of how it drew attention to the boundary between allowable producer participation and that which would invalidate the claims made about the significance of what was filmed. Burnett was criticized, for example, when a cameraman during the second season of *Survivor* did not aid a participant who had been severely burned. In response, Burnett defended the action in terms of the roles and rules of social experiments in much the same way as Zimbardo did with the Stanford Prison Experiment. "I would have fired the cameraman," Burnett replied to why the participant

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was filmed instead of helped, stating that "The cameraman isn't a medical person; the cameraman is there to film."[33] More recently, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry tried to persuade NBC to cancel *Baby Borrowers*, a reality-TV show that temporarily placed willing-parents' infants and toddlers with participating teenage-couples in order to explore and document how they all would behave. NBC countered critics of the show by maintaining that "'Baby Borrowers' is a social experiment that can educate teenagers on the responsibilities of parenting," much as Milgram defended his work by foregrounding the larger goal of the experiment.[34] Speaking about *Kid Nation*'s controversial use of kids, Andrejevic suggests "the only reason they get away with it is that they're trading on a history of documentary filmmaking. … In any other industry, this would be called exploitation."[35]

Burnett and others are also trading on the traditions of social experiments and their claims to authoritative knowledge. Three interrelated and mutually reinforcing components to reality TV social experiments in relation to this point should be emphasized. First, the genre emerged as a participatory form of popular science, in which an audience is invited to investigate what is authentic in what is widely understood to be a contrived and exaggerated form. Second, the genre makes contradictory claims about the design of the experiments/programs that works to support the validly of the "results" and redirects problems about methods. And, third, as the genre has been made to address pertinent social issues and problems, a popular form of evidence is presented as validating the social imperatives and formations of the post-network era. More should be said about each of these.

A number of reality TV audience studies suggest that viewers overwhelmingly question the "reality" in the sense of an unvarnished truth, and are well aware that the programs are edited and manufactured. At the same time, Hill's work also suggests that the pleasure of and attraction to these programs lies in their claims of authenticity, writing that "[a]lthough many viewers are aware of press reports questioning the truthfullness of popular factual, and my research illustrates their cynicism about the reality in factual entertainment … audiences have developed viewing strategies that foreground authenticity in a highly constructed TV environment." [36] As these programs draw from traditions and techniques of popular science, audience studies like Hill's emphasize that reading reality TV in terms of discerning authentic moments is not so much a viewing strategy as it is an active component of the genre. Indeed, viewers are not just encouraged to consider the artificial elements and hone in on authentic moments, but to participate in these as programs as active researchers.

Pleasure in conducting close readings and in decoding what is real is not simply invited; it is a key part of what is being sold. This strategy is deftly leveraged by the producers, and has long been and element of and developed for commercial entertainment. Indeed, the parallels between the activities Barnum employed and reality-TV social experiments are both illustrative and hard to ignore. Just as Barnum made scientific claims that few took to be truthful while encouraging people to investigate them, reality TV producers put forward claims of "reality" that few people take to be unvarnished yet at the same time are the central object of concern and attention. Popular sleuthing and playing the role of a savvy researcher are products to sell. The significance

here, just as with Barnum, is that the authority of a seemingly self-evident investigation is legitimized in the service of generating knowledge and making money.

The second point about the contradictory claims of reality TV also needs to be addressed. On one hand, producers emphasize that their deliberately manufactured settings and methods actively produce the results, while on the other hand producers claim these conditions and methods simply catalyze findings instead of cause them. "On our show, it's a competition, and we're just the officials," says Mark Koops, the executive producer of NBC's *The Biggest Loser*. "We set up the game … and we don't overtly influence things at that point."[37] In an analogous manner, the host of *Survivor*, Jeff Probst remarked in an interview, "This is an equal-opportunity game. Twenty people are given the same materials, the same odds of winning a million dollars."[38] In both cases, the properly designed experiment is said to have no determining effect or bias in the outcome.[39] These claims mask the ways in which producers and their methods shape the results of these shows and the degree to which these shows manage and produce the results.

However, as Milgram's and Zimbardo's work attests, the methods used to solicit participant responses are not only far from neutral, they are questionable if not problematic. This form of popular science presents a truth that negatively reaffirms itself. On one hand, by borrowing and reshaping methods of and claims about legitimized social experiments, reality TV can claim that methods (such as a designed competition) produce self-evident results. On the other hand, as commercial entertainment, reality TV social experiments are not subject to pressures like peer review boards or institutional rules.

Indeed, they can – and often do – claim to be trivial and therefore harmless entertainment.

Finally, the third key point about the relation of reality TV to inquiry into social problems needs to be addressed. Social issues and problems have driven social experiments. As part of a tradition of using social experiments to provide self-evident and scientific evidence of and for society, a key part of reality TV's power is that it indeed addresses relevant and perhaps important social issues and problems. Like *An American Family*, *The Real World* has both claimed to be a study that documents the drama and tension of people and has been complexly interpreted in this way as well.[40] As Miller points out, the show is notable in that it has "engaged some of the very ordinary concerns of young people."[41]

But reality TV social experiments have been a way to manage or delimit problems as well as engage them, and in individual instead of collective ways. As Ouellette and Hay note, "[t]he citizen is now conceived as an individual whose most pressing obligation to society is to empower her or himself privately."[42] Few other forms suit this logic and imperative as well as reality TV. Aligned with larger social logics of and imperatives for privatization, much of the social work of the genre reaffirms dominant social orders by offering a powerfully didactic form of popular science that naturalizes human types while it industrializes and psychologizes conflict and social problems.

THE SOCIAL WORK OF REALITY TV SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS

By placing everyday people at the center of the show, reality TV has been recognized by some as being more inclusive than previous and contemporaneous

programming. Gamson, for example, has pointed out that forms of reality TV have included people previously absent from and/or grossly misrepresented in older and many other commercial forms of media.[43] The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation notes as well that "unscripted reality and competition programming continues to be the most inclusive television genre, offering the chance for America to see LGBT people as they really are. … The significance of LGBT-inclusive reality TV cannot be overestimated."[44]

As progressive as this can be, reality TV also embodies a cultural logic and practice that Harvey described as "The narcissistic exploration of self, sexuality, and identity [that] became the leitmotif of bourgeois urban culture."[45] To do this, reality TV produces this "self" as a commoditized product.

Reality TV sets out to use social experiments to solve or at least document what are seen as problems between and among categories of people. In this way, not only have the concepts themselves been naturalized and disconnected from the conditions in which they're made, reality TV social experiments have become a form in which compelling problems can be documented in ways that don't seriously challenge dominate orders. The didactic quality of reality TV claims to let the viewer be the judge while leaving aside the matter of how the conditions have made, framed, and presented the questions and the results.

NOTES

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[3] See Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); and *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* edited by Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[4] Ted Magder, The End of TV 101: Reality Programs, Formats, and the New Business of Television," in *Reality TV : remaking television culture*, edited by Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette, (New York : New York University Press, 2004).

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[7] Anna McCarthy "Reality Television: A Neoliberal Theater of Suffering," <u>Social Text</u> 93, Vol. 25, No. 4, Winter 2007, pg. 21.

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[10] Howard Rosenberg, "The Reality TV Glut-It's Unreal!," <u>Los Angeles Times</u>, 15 May 1991, PART-F.

[11] See Michael Hirschorn, "The Case for Reality TV," <u>Atlantic Monthly</u>, May 2007, <<u>http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200705/reality-tv</u>> (18 August 2008).

[12] See Emily Sendler, "When gold diggers attack!," <u>Salon</u>, 14 December 1999, <<u>http://www.salon.com/ent/log/1999/12/14/wantstomarry/index.html</u>> (23 August 2007); Tanya Barrientos, and Dwayne Campbell, "Survive this: A new hue to CBS competition: Race defines the tribes in 'Survivor 13,'" <u>Philadelphia Inquirer</u>, 24 August 2006; Richard Hatch, *101 Survival Secrets: How to make $1,000,000, lose 100 pounds, and just plain live happily* (New York: The Lyons Press, 2000), 122; Lisa de Moraes, "'Survivor' Host's Geoethnic Studies, From Soup to Mutts," <u>Washington Post</u>, 8 September 2006, C01.

[13] M. Weingarten, "MTV Moves the 'Real' Fishbowl to Honolulu," <u>Los Angeles Times</u>, 14 June 1999, p. F2.

[14] Burnett's first show was *Eco-Challenge*, a program he created and produced for the USA network, premiering in 1995.

[15] See Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 221-223.

[16] The exact figures are exceptionally hard to determine, but see Mark Burnett, *Jump In!: Even If You Don't Know How to Swim*, (New York: Random House, 2005), 86.

[17] Jim Rutenberg, "And Then There Was One: 'Survivor,'" <u>New York Times</u>, 23 August 2000. Also see Bill Carter, "Survival of the Pushiest," <u>New York Times</u>, 28 January 2001.

[18] William Uricchio, "Television's Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow," in Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, eds., *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Durham: Duke, 2004), 232-261.

[19] See Simon, 192.

[20] John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, N.J. : Rutgers University Press, 1995).

[21] For how editing and aesthetics work as communication, see: Horace Newcomb, "On the Dialogic Aspects of Mass Communication," <u>Critical Studies in Mass Communication</u> 1 (1984), 34-50.

[22] Ron Simon, "the changing definition of reality television," in *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader*, Gary Edgerton and Brian Rose, eds. (University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 191.

[23] See Andy Dehnart, "Survivor," <u>Reality Blurred</u>, <<u>http://www.realityblurred.com/realitytv/archives/survivor/</u>> (18 August 2008).

[24] See Burnett, 123-132.

[25] Burnett, 186.

[26] Burnett, 116.

[27] See Lisa de Moraes, "'Survivor' Host's Geoethnic Studies, From Soup to Mutts," <u>Washington Post</u>, 8 September 2006, page C01; Tanya Barrientos and Dwayne Campbell,

"Survive this: A new hue to CBS competition: Race defines the tribes in 'Survivor 13,'" Philadelphia Inquirer, 24 August 2006.

[28] Lisa de Moraes, "ABC Faces Reality, Pulls Welcome Mat on 'Neighborhood,'" Washington Post, 30 June 2005, page C07

[29] Moraes, C07

[30] Neal Justin, "There goes the 'Neighborhood';ABC invited us to peek in on its new series, a social experiment. Now we're not welcome," Minneapolis Star Tribune 8 July 2005, pg 21E

[31] Derrik J. Lang, "Tribes on newest 'Survivor' show to be segregated by race," The San Deigo Union Tribune, 24 August 2006.

[32] Erica Goode, "Hey, What if Contestants Give Each Other Shocks, New York Times, 27 August 2000.

[33] Allison Hope Weiner, "Docu Drama: The producers of 'Survivor,' 'Temptation Island,' and others fess up," Entertainment Weekly, 07 March 2001, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,101752,00.html> (11 September 2008).

[34] Patricia Cohen, "NBC Show Draws Fire," New York Times, 3 July 2008, Arts, Briefly.

[35] Ez and Maria Elena Fern, "Is child exploitation legal in 'Kid Nation'?," Los Angeles Times, 17 August 2008, E-1.

[36] Annette Hill, "Big Brother: The Real Audience," Television and New Media, Vol. 3, No. 3, (August 2002), 340

[37] Daniel Frankel, "Hubbub over nonfiction faking fizzles: Staging of unscripted series doesn't deter audience," Variety, 3 June 2008.

[38] Derrik J. Lang, "Tribes on newest 'Survivor' show to be segregated by race," The San Deigo Union Tribune, 24 August 2006

[39] Competition is said to be a neutral component for many, not all, reality TV social experiments. This serves several purposes. Competitions also have an exceptional degree of social relevance, in that competition is often celebrated as a natural element of social life. Competitive eliminations also serve as a narrative arc and complement the assembly-line production of reality TV. Simon notes that "[t]he most successful reality shows have incorporated game show strategies, especially a context with an ultimate winner, all of which help to propel the narrative to a definitive conclusion." Simon, 192; Also see Todd Gitlin, "Prime Time Ideology: The Hegemonic Process in Television Entertainment,"

Social Problems (February 1979), 251-66, "For commercial and production reasons which are in practice inseparable … the regular schedule prefers the repeatable formula."

[40] Keveney.

[41] Bill Keveney, "MTV's 'Real World' launched a revolution," USA Today, 9 October 2007, <http://www.usatoday.com/life/television/news/2007-10-09-real-world_N.htm> (18 August 2008).

[42] Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 3.

[43] Joshua Gamson, *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[44] "Where We Are on TV: GLAAD's 11th Annual Study Examines Diversity of the 2006-2007 Primetime Television Season," Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, 24 August 2006, <http://www.glaad.org/eye/ontv/06-07/overview.php> (18 August 2008).

[45] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33.

CHAPTER SIX

FROM BARNUM TO BURNETT AND BEYOND

In August 2008, *Entertainment Weekly* proposed a list of "The 35 Most Appalling TV Shows Ever."[1] That reality-TV shows like *Wife Swap*, *The Real World*, *Baby Borrowers*, *Temptation Island*, and *Kid Nation* were included wasn't as surprising as that every single program on the list was a reality TV show. On one level, their list demonstrated a narrow view of TV programming, begging the question of whether anyone at *Entertainment Weekly* had ever watched an episode of *Cop Rock* or *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* if not more recent fare like *Swingtown*. But aside from their myopic and ahistorical view, their list demonstrated on another level a widely shared and sometimes earned view that reality TV is crass, exploitive, and appalling. Although these kinds of superficial dismissals often serve to assure the people calling them "appalling" of their own moral sensibilities, thus making it okay to watch the shows while often overlooking that a lot of other people have taken the exact same approach, the bigger problem in dismissing the genre in these simplistic terms is the inference that these shows do not deserve to be fully interrogated. Indeed, considering reality TV an appalling or trivial form of entertainment is to miss the exceptionally complex reasons these shows are made, watched, and legitimized.

In contrast to such easy dismissals, sustained attention to reality TV demonstrates how its development has occurred in relation to interconnected and mutually reinforcing

practices and histories that, in the case of this study, come together in the genre of social experiments. An overview of the fall 2007 television schedule in the *New York Times* suggested that the reality TV show *Kid Nation* "falls in the social-experiment section of reality programming."[2] That the author identified a "social-experiment section of reality programming" is notable, for it is one of the very few instances where someone outside of makers and producers has made such a connection. While producers, promoters, critics, cast, and crew have been describing and defending reality TV shows as social experiments, there's been scant notice of a commonality or, more significantly, how this can be a theoretical and material framework with which to understand both the production and reception of these shows. This dissertation has sought to pick up and seriously explore and analyze this direction. By conceiving of reality TV as popular science, this project adds to the understanding of reality TV, its historical development, and its social production. It has attempted to demonstrate that social experiments are far more than a claim about reality TV, but that reality TV has been made in relationship to and as part of a tradition of social experiments. And far from being a trivial or simple form of entertainment, the genre of social experiments has served and worked in relationship to a complex set of social and institutional imperatives.

This concluding chapter seeks to highlight some of the key findings of the study and the ways in which this project contributes to the study of reality TV. The chapter also proposes a number of questions and areas for further study. Main points in the making of a genre of social experiments are recalled as they answer the guiding research questions of this study. The implications and contributions of this project are then addressed in turn.

The chapter and thus this dissertation conclude by pitching one critical point this work

contributes that may be worth considering if not implementing.

KEY FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

Given the extent to which justifications of reality TV rely on claims that they are

social experiments, this dissertation sought to examine and understand the historical

emergence and significance of reality TV as social experiments. A cultural and historical

perspective and framework of analysis was developed in order to examine and make

sense of key relationships between elite and popular, scientific and entertaining, and

positivist and dramatic forms and practices that together inform reality TV as social

experiments. Attention was focused through the use of critical genre theory and by

recognizing the general formation of popular science as the cultural context for reality

TV as social experiments.

Addressing the research question of in what ways science was opened up to

popular uses and participation, Chapter Two, "From Bacon to Barnum: Popularized

Science and Popular Sleuthing in the Nineteenth-Century United States" explored the

roots of a participatory form of popular science. During the early industrialization of

entertainment, circus owner and promoter P.T. Barnum created an activity in which

people paid for the chance to investigate an object and claim, presented as blend of

science and amusement. He developed a popularly accessible and commercialized

scientific practice that comprised "popular sleuthing," which encouraged a public to

participate in scientific debates while it supported emergent social orders and hierarchies.

The form and technique also proved profitable in other ways, in that it directed questions

of authenticity and truth to the viewer/participant while masking a producer's involvement in the process.

Chapter Three, "Showing Truth: Social Experiments as a Dramatic Form" answered the research question of in what ways social experiments were developed and justified as both scientific and entertaining. Greatly aided by technological developments and logics, in the 1950s and 60s entertainer Allen Funt and behavioral psychologist Stanley Milgram used deceptive techniques and devised natural-looking yet abnormal settings in order to explain how people behave and, as a result of this, address pressing social problems of the day. Popular, commercial practices and professional, academic practices drew from and informed each other in great measure here, as Milgram borrowed from and was perhaps inspired by Funt's work, while Funt leveraged rationales and sought to contribute to the same set of issues as Milgram. They both proved to be key figures in making the genre of social experiments that presented a contradictory form of self-evident evidence, where truth and reality were to be found in a scripted and manipulated form of edifying entertainment.

The question of in what ways changes in social context and media technology were manifested in changes in social experiments was answered in Chapter Four, "Participation as a Performance: Social Experiments as Theatrical Science." The genre Funt and Milgram developed was remade in the 1970s, as behavioral studies and experiments moved from a focus on what was considered general, universal traits to that of addressing the interactions between particular types of people and particular social roles. Psychologist Phillip Zimbardo's prison experiment and the public-television docudrama *An American Family* drew from and reshaped a genre of social experiments in

relationship to larger changes and in key ways. For example, people participating in them now knew they were being observed and recorded by visible camera crews. Critics focused on the technical making of the genre and how aspects like editing influenced the production, while questions about self-conscious performances for a camera became more prominent. All of this further emphasized a process of popular sleuthing, of trying to figure out what is real, authentic, or perhaps unintended in a highly contrived piece of evidentiary entertainment.

To answer the research question of in what ways social experiments served as basis for reality TV, Chapter Five, "Studying Human Behavior and Selling Reality: Reality TV as Popular Science" described the conditions of the post-network era as they enabled efforts such as those of successful reality-TV producer Mark Burnett. During the post-network era, Burnett was a key figure in remaking the genre of social experiments as reality TV. Again aided by technological developments and influenced by institutional imperatives, reality TV drew from and significantly reshaped methods and logics of social experiments. As a genre well-suited to be made and sold as a format, reality TV complemented global, industrial realignments. And in relationship to a genre that has long been made to address relevant social issues, reality TV was also a contradictory and sometimes paradoxical way in which social problems could be managed.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

This study makes some key substantive, methodological, and theoretical contributions. While these are addressed below, this section also highlights how the final research question has been addressed throughout, by addressing the implications of this

study not only for an understanding of reality TV as social experiments, but also for understanding media participation.

A substantive contribution is to extend significantly our understanding of reality TV. By exploring the historical making of social experiments, one of this project's key contributions has been to bring attention to an aspect that has not been investigated in any systematic fashion. In addition, conceiving social experiments as a form of popular science opens up a suggestive way for understanding and critiquing important aspects of reality TV and these closely related traditions. A few people have likened Burnett to Barnum, suggesting the two shared a promotional flair while trading in questionable if not offensive fare.[3] The deeper and indeed more interesting connection between the two, though, is their common ways of addressing social issues and problems as popular science. By mixing science, deception, theatrical traditions within the imperatives of commerce, both produced complexly participatory popular forms of entertainment that are strikingly similar. For example, critics of both have largely addressed *how* they put together their practices, taking for granted that they were manufactured amusements. When the question of "real" versus "fake" was addressed, it was most often in terms of a presumed gullibility of others. And they both made their products in a way that Miller described the making of modern advertisements, "by posing as an ally to the incredulous spectator."[4] They were also exceptionally successful in selling people on the privilege of playing the role of a researcher.

A big – and crucial – difference between the two, however, was that Barnum never claimed to be offering an authentic form of science or material evidence, while Burnett has situated his work as contributing to a scientific questions and a field of

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inquiry. The work of Funt, Milgram, Zimbardo, and Gilbert, and the genre of social experimentation they added to and remade add resonance to Burnett's claim that "*Survivor* is 'social Darwinism.' … I was very interested in seeing from a sociological standpoint what type of person would win this type of game."[5] This is only one of many instances in which popular and professional forms of science have borrowed from and remade each other. This project suggests how popular and specialized modes have mutually reinforced each other, and in this way have in part legitimized reality TV.

The central methodological contribution is to broaden how one can use critical genre analysis. Two contributions to the methodology of critical genre analysis can be suggested. Building upon work such as that of Mittell, the first contribution is to demonstrate that television genres are not exclusive to television, but instead draw from and reshape a host of related traditions, activities, and techniques, such as in the case of this study social experiments, popular science, and methods of investigation, all of which are related to and bound up in social imperatives. By exploring interconnected and related activities, this dissertation advances an approach to genre that attends to the wide-ranging histories, interests, and social formations that are connected to the making of any genre. The significance of this methodological broadening is how it emphasizes that genres are not made in spheres isolated from other activities. For this project, this approach helped explain better how reality TV has been legitimized by working within the powerful, widely accepted, and authoritative traditions of science.

The second methodological contribution of this study has been to present an inductive approach to critical genre analysis. In contrast to many recent genre studies that examine well-accepted categories such as sit-com, drama, and documentary in large part

to establish how these genres inform one another and serve as material logics of and for production and reception, this study traces the making of a genre that has not been widely identified or promoted by industry. By identifying and naming this genre we not only have a better understanding of a long-standing practice, but a grounded critique emerges as well, which is more fully addressed in the concluding portion of this chapter.

The theoretical contributions of this project are tied to the theoretical perspective advanced here, in which texts are redefined as components of a practice. The object of this study has been to chart the formation and emergence of what is known currently as reality TV, and in doing so has placed the bulk of the attention on formational contexts, discourses, and histories. Regarding genre as a practice instead of solely as meaning is to highlight the material fact, as Williams' noted, that "meaning is always produced; it is never simply expressed."[6]

A key theoretical contribution of this study is how it provides evidence for continuing to rethink and understand media participation. The larger issue that questions about participation connect to is that of commercialization and communication. Put generally, a prominent line of media critique argues that the greater the commercialization, the less participation. For example, McChesney contends that commercial media discourages public participation while Edward and Chomsky maintain that the commercialization of popular media has shut down meaningful participation.[7] A central contribution of this study is to demonstrate that the equation is inadequate. Commercial practices do not close off participation. As Griffen-Foley points out, "audiences have for more than a century been contributing to successful media outlets," from print-based forms, to radio, to TV.[8] Indeed, commercial practices have long had a

stake in creating forms of participation, which the historical approach and understanding used here provides evidence for.

An opposite claim often made about reality TV illustrates the same theoretical error. Several scholars argue that reality TV represents a new and significant level of participation. Suggesting that the reshaping of participation is a key element of the genre, several arguments about reality TV, such as Lunt's, root a critique of the form in the presumption that "Participants who have traditionally been in the position of the audience are now involved in the production of such programs, blurring the boundary between production and reception."[9] However, by tracing the historical and contextual making of reality TV as social experiments, a more complex picture emerges. Everyday people and the "audience" have long been participants in production of television programming. In fact, clear relationships exist between modes of participation and media systems. As this dissertation sought to demonstrate, everyday people have been participants in the production and reception of television programming since the emergence of the technology and cultural form, as *Candid Microphone/Camera* and later *An American Family* attest. So with this perspective it is hard to see what is novel or distinct in arguments about reality TV as a new level of popular participation.[10]

A way to begin to resolve the "quantity" theorization of media participation is to recognize how desirable and sought-after participation is for media companies and media systems, but that this participation is shaped, channeled, and used in very particular ways. Claims that, due to the presence of ordinary people in reality TV, their narratives and results are authentic and authoritative mask how the genre shapes and channels actions and behavior. While Ouellette and Hay are right to emphasize with respect to reality TV

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that "[o]rdinary people are now welcomed on screen, providing subject matter, 'case studies,' points of identification, and sources of disobedience and conflict," at the same time it should be stressed how claims of "ordinary people" are an actively and didactically made component to the genre.[11]

Locating reality TV as part of the ongoing making of a genre of social experiments offers a way to critically interrogate claims of real and ordinary people and to situate this claim historically. A key theoretical contribution of this study is how it provides further evidence of the necessity to rethink media participation itself. The struggle for greater participation as a feature of media democratization is most effectively cast as not one about more or less participation (what was referred to above as a "quantity" theorization), but about the kind of participation. The findings here substantiate and provide further evidence for the importance of considering modes – not the amount – of participation as the key site for inquiry.

Indeed, a broader claim can be suggested about commercialization and participation. Perhaps it is more defensible to argue that commercial interests do not simply close off participation as much as they manage and sell it. By foregrounding the interconnected and multilayered facets between producers, participants, critics, and viewers in making the genre of social experiments (all of whom played crucial parts), this study sought to show the historically specific ways in which modes – not amounts – of media participation proved to be much more important a site for analysis.

AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

By identifying and exploring reality TV in relation to social experiments and popular science, a number of avenues have been opened, several of which are suggested here, and all of which add to the study of reality TV.

Logics of mechanical recording equipment in producing evidence are tied up in the genre of social experiments, and might have been more fully explored here, since this aspect plays a role in their paradoxical legitimization of truth. A key didactic aspect that Barnum's work, Funt's, Milgram's, Zimbardo's, and Burnett's social experiments share is that authority was not derived simply from claims of truth, but by providing an activity in which one could seemingly arrive at seemingly self-evident truth. Throughsleuthing, truth and authenticity can be found, because reality has been conceived in a binary way through the opposition of artificial/real. How this binary logic works is illustrated well by Berger, who addresses what might be called the negative affirmation of visual evidence. He notes that "it is because photography … quotes rather than translates, that it is said that the camera cannot lie. … (The fact that there were and are faked photographs is, paradoxically, proof of this)."[12] Indeed, the malleability and susceptibility of audio-visual products to alterations from retouching to fabrication paradoxically serves to reinforce the didactic value as evidence. This logic might be more situated as a social and historical practice in which the genre of social experiments has been in relationship and played a supporting role.

In relation to evidence and truth, experimental procedures and traditions of science might be more broadly considered with the making of the genre. Indeed, social experiments emerged in relationship to significant practices and discourses in the

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behavioral sciences, science in general, in addition to broader questions about human nature. At a time when TV itself was promoted in terms of a popular science, as Spigel has pointed out, the genre was made in connection to a wide yet interconnected set of discourses and practices.[13] As Milgram advanced a social scientific approach to the question of human nature and social conditions, people such as Arendt asked similar questions yet in profoundly different ways.[14] Popular science, experiments, and social philosophy all intermixed in a set of conditions in which authoritative forms of truth and evidence were privileged in terms of certain notions of science. This whole complex set of relationships is an area in need of more examination and elaboration, since it would add to a understanding of how the genre of social experiments has worked to support some traditions and logics over others.

With this and at the same time, the complex role of social experiments in simultaneously breaking down and reaffirming cultural issues, problems, and concerns is subject that also deserves further treatment. As Newcomb observes, "[t]he settings and strategies of 'reality' programming – remote geographic locations, enclosed houses, isolation, intense social interaction, contests, observation by outsiders – are manufactured versions of liminal experience. Rules are both broken and affirmed in these sites."[15] The genre of social experiments has a remarkably interesting history here in negotiating cultural issues and rules as manufactured liminal experiences. It is an aspect that might be productively explored in terms of and linked to participation as well, in that producers, participants, and viewers as investigators are combined here in making at once an instructive and entertaining cultural form.

In addition, there are significant parallels and overlaps in relation to melodrama as a dramatic form and the genre of social experiments. As Cook suggests, Barnum's activities were made in relation to melodrama as a key form of popular entertainment.[16] This history and tradition indeed informs the study here, and is also in need of further treatment, since this one of the more noteworthy aspects informing the greater social making of the genre. Along with this, traditions of improvisation might be productively included. The techniques used in making the genre are not only similar, but these traditions and forms are alike in the ways social problems are taken up and managed in addition to serving as cultural reference points and traditions that have been drawn from and combined.

Finally, a consideration of legal issues and developments in relation to the genre deserves fuller analysis. While there are a range of questions here, two areas would extend an understanding of the genre's development. The first is bound up in the global dimensions in making of the genre, since reality TV's development in the post-network era has been greatly enabled in relationship to copyright laws. As questions about what constitutes a repeatable story structure and a copyrightable format arise here, so do explanations about the genre's rise and importance as a commodity. The second area is of course the legal aspects of putting unsuspecting or willing people into contrived situations. Only alluded to in this project, institutional pressures, rationales, and conditions have made one form of social experiments federally regulated while a shared form has been subject to a different set of legal rules and oversight.

Lastly, the extent to which the developments traced here inform other than American experience and conditions deserves greater attention. While the relationships

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between scientific and commercial-entertainment forms and uses of social experiments served as key conditions in the United States, their importance more globally speaking cannot be adequately assessed without further study. Indeed, reality TV as a named television-show format was pioneered in European countries, with shows such as Big Brother exported to the United States rather than emerging indigenously. Intriguing questions such as the degree to which popular science serves as a trans-American-European formation and thus a broadly available basis for such shows despite their geographic disparity could then be raised and productively explored.

CONCLUDING SOCIAL EXPERIMENTS

By recovering how and in what ways reality TV as social experiments are equal parts entertainment and ostensibly scientific experimentation, the ethical problems and means of addressing them now current in the scientific realm could similarly inform the entertainment industries. In 2001, the BBC made *The Experiment*, a recreation of Stanford Prison Experiment as reality TV.[17] While the show received a great deal of critical attention and only ultimately aired after being significantly reedited, its making and reception said a great deal about the genre of reality TV. On one level, the recreation demonstrated the similarities between social experiments and reality TV shows, but at the same time, because it was largely understood as a recreation, a tradition was obscured and lost. More importantly, both the Stanford Prison Experiment and *The Experiment* were representative examples of a genre of social experiments, and a significant line of reality TV, but one that continues to neglect the ethical problems of its practice.

The question of participation here is exceptionally complex and multilayered. On one hand, the genre has presented opportunities, while on the other hand there have been substantial questions about how this has been done and for what ends. Some participants have even enjoyed being a part of these shows, even when they're made to be a villain, like Taylor DuPriest, who was ten years old when she on *Kid Nation*, saying "Even though I was the bad person, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, so I'd love to go back. It was fun."[18] Other people have deeply regretted their participation, such as Matt Kennedy Gould, who was the only unaware person and subject of *The Joe Schmo Show*, reflecting that "If I had to do it over again, I wouldn't do the show at all. Honestly, the show really made me feel dumb. … I was so embarrassed about the whole premise of the show that I never wanted people to think, 'Oh, here's this guy who didn't even know the show was about him.'"[19]

Lines between empowerment and exploitation are often complex, and at this level fail to substantially critique more egregious – even appalling – aspects of reality TV. *Kid Nation*, for example, was extensively critiqued for how it exploited kids, but this argument did not prove damming since the same thing could be said about using kids in any number of generally accepted activities, ranging from sports to beauty pageants to movies to commercials for TV.[20] By foregrounding the relationship between a line of reality TV and social experiments, however, this dissertation suggests a critical intervention, as an attention to the methods social experiments itself and interrelated traditions can offer a historically grounded critique of key aspects of reality TV. Genevieve Deittrick's experience on *Temptation Island 2* might be understood in relation to now-prohibited social experiments, as she noted that "The producers really didn't like

me … I went to college for criminal justice … and you learn about interrogation methods where they deprive you of sleep, deprive you of food … and after the first few days I realized that's what they were doing, … people's emotions would get high."[21]

Indeed, making a historical connection between methods and intentions recalls how review boards became established in the academy, and perhaps suggests that commercial industries should adopt a similar if not the same kind of regulatory system. Systematic institutional research on human subjects, it might be emphasized, are not and have not been conducted in or by the academy alone. The next step in the making of a genre of social experiments might hopefully include applied measures to radically change their methods, and perhaps their emphasis as well.

NOTES

[1] Annie Barrett, "The 35 most appalling shows ever," <u>Entertainment Weekly</u>, 15 July 2008, <<http://www.ew.com/ew/gallery/0,,20177969,00.html>> (8 August 2008).

[2] Bill Carter, "As the Networks Order New Shows, Fox Moves to Consolidate Its Gains," <u>New York Times</u>, 17 May 2007, A-1.

[3] For example, see Kelli Anderson, "Out of the Wild," <u>SI Adventure</u>, 12 May 2003, <<http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/features/siadventure/27/out_of_the_wild/>> (25 August 2008).

[4] Mark Crispin Miller, *Boxed In: The Culture of TV* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 14.

[5] "Survivor: Mark Burnett," <u>USA Today</u>, 19 July 2002, <<http://www.usatoday.com/community/chat/0719burnett.htm>> (16 August 2008).

[6] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 166

[7] Robert W. McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (London: Vintage; New York: Pantheon, 1988).

[8] Bridget Griffen-Foley, "From Tit-Bits to Big Brother: A Century of Audience Participation in the Media," <u>Media, Culture and Society</u> 26, no. 4 (July 2004): 533–48

[9] See Peter Lunt, "Liveness in Reality Television and Factual Broadcasting," <u>The Communication Review</u>, 7:329-335, 2004, 329.

[10] See Peter Lunt, "Liveness in Reality Television and Factual Broadcasting, <u>The Communication Review</u>, 7:329-335, 2004.

[11] Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 3.

[12] John Berger, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Pantheon Books 1982), 89.

[13] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 71.

[14] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

¹⁵ Horace Newcomb, "Reflections on TV: The Most Popular Art," <u>Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader</u>, Gary Edgerton and Brian Rose, eds. (University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 32

¹⁶ James W Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ "Shocking experiment recreated for TV," <u>BBC News</u>, 14 May 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1986889.stm> (20 August 2008).

¹⁸ Kate Ward, "10 Reality Stars: Where They Are Now," <u>Entertainment Weekly</u>, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20216895_10,00.html> (8 August 2008).

¹⁹ Kate Ward, "10 Reality Stars: Where They Are Now," <u>Entertainment Weekly</u>, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20216895_3,00.html> (8 August 2008).

²⁰ Ez and Maria Elena Fern, "Is child exploitation legal in 'Kid Nation'?," <u>Los Angeles Times</u>, 17 August 2008, E-1.

²¹ Kate Ward, "10 Reality Stars: Where They Are Now," <u>Entertainment Weekly</u>, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20216895_6,00.html> (8 August 2008).

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