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# Premeditations of performance in recent live television

*A scripting approach to media  
production studies*

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**ABSTRACT** The article discusses the ways that performances in television are premeditated. Its focus is on practices of scripting performances in current interactive and reality TV. With a basis in empirical material on television production, the article describes concretely some cases of scripting in international television formats. Its focus is particularly on forms of scripting that are seldom recognized as such, thus contributing to a feel of the real, the authentic and the immediate. Three forms of scripting are discussed: ‘cueing’, scripting of social settings and scripting of temporal sequencings. The article shows how current television formats that strive for the unscripted feel in fact could be said to involve radical extensions of scripting beyond conventional practices. In more general theoretical terms, the article suggests looking to the scripting of mediated performances as an alternative approach to the tradition of media production studies.

**KEYWORDS** *interactive TV, liveness, media production, performance, reality TV, scripting*

**Some of the** fundamentals of agency seem under-explained in research on the media. The logical place to go for an account of such fundamentals should be in research on the structures and processes of media production and organization; after all, this is an area specially dedicated to the study of agents premeditating and generating mediated communications. However, the traditions of media production studies seem concerned mainly with the relationship between actors, social settings, professions and organizational frameworks. This typically gives rise to discussion of issues internal to the production process, such as gatekeeping, creative freedom, professional autonomy, economic pressures on production and source–journalist relationships. Media production studies do not seem to



address in any sustained fashion just what it is that social agents do in order to communicate through media. Reading media production research, one learns much about what the activity of producing agents *is symptomatic of*— for example, of professional adherences or managerial pressures. But one learns little or nothing about what the activity of producing agents *actually and concretely achieves* in terms of mediated communications (partial exceptions include Caldwell, 1995; Schudson, 1995). This may go some way towards explaining the somewhat parochial character of media production studies, largely cut off as it is from studies of texts and audiences.

This parochialism has been intermittently addressed, with calls being made for an integration of production with textual and reception studies (cp. Alvarado, 1982; Gripsrud, 1995). The issue most in focus has been that of authorship. In structuralist and poststructuralist textual analysis this notion was comprehensively exorcised in what was effectively an internal critique within studies of the *élite* cultural arts, formulated by radicals in the field such as Roland Barthes (1977) and Michel Foucault (1977). They attacked a dominant and well-established notion of the author developed in historical-biographical literary studies. The violent metaphors of promoting a ‘death of the author’ matched the monolithic nature of what they were attacking. When imported into the area of broadcasting, however, the anti-authorial argument lost much of its productive force. There was simply no real entrenched authorial status to challenge, no real canon of works and few individual geniuses to attack. The result was a continual fixation on the issue of just how dead the individual author figure might be. Television production studies has been in continual conflict over whether to dispense with individual authorial intention (e.g. Bruun Andersen, 1988; Gitlin, 1983), modify it (e.g. Alvarado, 1982; Murdock, 1993) or revive it (e.g. Newcomb and Hirsch, 1994; Thompson and Burns, 1990). Lately, film studies has produced anthologies that begin to re-examine the elision of its *auteur* tradition (Grodal et al., 2004; Staiger, 2003).

The problem with this line of scholarly thought may be not so much what it argues as what it leaves out of consideration. The issue of authorship is at most one part of the larger issue of agency. The human handling of media technology, resource allocation and logistics in production is much more than an issue of individual shares in the handling process. This article looks at agency in mediated communication by discussing the ways that performances in television are premeditated, and its focus is on practices of scripting performance in current interactive and reality TV. The article describes concretely some illustrative cases of scripting in international television formats. The focus is particularly on forms of scripting that are seldom recognized as such – what can be described generally as scripting for the unscripted feel. A more specific argument also runs throughout, that current formats which strive for the unscripted



feel in fact could be said to involve radical extensions of scripting beyond conventional practices.

## **Ways of premeditating mediated performances**

Among other things, the concept of a 'performance' involves the display of skills in communicative situations that are everyday and institutional (Carlson, 2004). In the case of modern media, this display of skills becomes a powerful imperative placed on performers (Gade and Jerslev, 2005; McKenzie, 2001), and in a sense it is obvious that as a rule, mediated performances must be comprehensively premeditated. The mastering of technology, the allocation of considerable resources and the often complex logistics that are characteristic of media production all render this necessary. There are of course exceptions, mainly in interactive media communication such as the telephone and internet chat. But any notion that media performers in an average film or broadcasting context can merely 'wing it' without premeditation can be safely discounted. As a rule, the performance must be carefully set up so as to be consistent with the needs of technology, the logistics of production and requirements of the format. In media production, all these needs are taken care of by scripts of various kinds. Being a professional media performer is knowing how to meet these needs, and how to build a performance from a script (Ytreberg, 2005).

In academic studies of production, scripts are rarely mentioned. While doing field studies, media production ethnographers will be handed routinely the main script from which the production team is currently working. Ethnographers will use the script to get an idea of the basics of what is going on in production, but as a rule they will not focus in their publication on what literally has been closest at hand. It seems that they are in the habit of expecting the moment of revelation to be a verbal exchange; it is as if media professionals' own fetish for swift, in-the-corridor decision-making rubs off on researchers. The few research contributions that do take an active interest in scripts tend not to be ethnographically based. In addition, they use the word 'script' more or less synonymously with 'manuscript', documents in production that detail what performers say (e.g. Peters, 2001; Scannell, 2003; White, 2004). It follows from this use of the word that performances that do not use such manuscripts can be called 'unscripted'. However, the actual use of scripts goes far beyond individual manuscripts. Even a cursory look at the various kinds of documents that are used to premeditate media performances will show that the camera operator has a camera script, the set designer a floor script, and that a number of professions headed by a director relate to a main script for production. Behind this one finds more documents handled by, for example, writers, producers and managers, that outline the main



structure of the format. In so doing, the latter will shape performances comprehensively.

The direction of verbal performance through verbatim manuscripting, then, is only one of many forms that scripting for media performance takes. It is perhaps one of the most readily noticeable, at least if it involves reading aloud on camera. However, this practice has receded in non-fiction broadcasting. No doubt the reason is that current ideals of performance in the media place a premium on the immediate and informal, leaving less space for legitimately presenting oneself as noticeably scripted; but there are also ways of scripting those performances that strive for an unscripted feel. A great number of scripting devices work not by dictating the specifics of people's performance but by directing and setting them up in various ways. In the following, three such areas of practice are described: scripting through cueing, the design of social settings and the design of temporal sequencings.

These three areas of practice will be discussed with reference to television formats that are live (or at least strive for a live feel) using conventions of 'continuity', as Jérôme Bourdon (2000) terms it. Live broadcasting is a prime exponent of rhetorical values that have been ascribed often to the television medium more generally, such as the real, the authentic, and the immediate (see the overview in White, 2004). The unscripted feel in a mediated performance works powerfully to guarantee such core values. At the same time, live broadcasting tends to promote a shift in the way that broadcast performances are managed. The contingencies of live performance limit the usefulness of verbatim manuscripting and instead tend to promote the specialized performer's competence to produce on cue an extemporaneous stream of fluent talk according to a given format or genre's requirements (Goffman, 1981; Scannell, forthcoming 2007). Liveness also tends to increase broadcasters' attention to the design of social settings and temporal sequencings. For example, this can be seen readily from the way in which major sports events are adapted comprehensively to broadcasting needs; they take place in environments that are made for cameras and microphones, that unfold at the pace and facing the way that mediation requires.

### **Scripting performances through cueing**

It is quite possible to produce effects of spontaneity and informality by using verbatim scripts that feature hesitations, stutters, emphases, changes of direction in speech and other markers of unscriptedness. The problem is not only (perhaps not even mainly) that of masking scriptedness; just as important is the fact that such scripts are time-consuming in production and, in some respects, quite demanding of the performer. *Ex tempore* performance is fitted more easily and economically to live formats. Staying away from verbatim manuscripts or other detailed dictations of the performance



allows the performer to tap into their communicative storehouse, honed by professional practice, to produce a feel of the unscripted. But this, too, poses problems for performance, since extemporized performance is harder to contain within the requirements of the format. For example, a verbatim manuscript can be timed accurately in advance, whereas the time of *ex tempore* performance must be kept by the performer while performing. There are various ways of dealing with these complications. One main practice is through cues, communicated from the production team to the performer during performance.

Cueing is a routine practice in most live broadcast productions. It involves one or several helpers in the stage wings, who consult the script and direct the performer. During performance, the producer will produce reminders on, for example, time limits, and may suggest lines for the performers, a practice common in interviewing. Most major live formats, where the logistics of performance are complex and relatively unpredictable, depend on cueing for the continuous management of broadcasting. Cues are made either visually, gesticulatively or audibly through hidden earpieces. Various conventions exist to manage this effectively and discreetly. The producer countdown to the host during performance is a commonly employed verbal convention ('20 seconds . . . 10 seconds . . . cut now'). The gesticular parallel sometimes used by producers who have eye contact with the performer is the show of one finger per remaining minute and the cut-throat hand slash. This illustrates a more general point; the scripted performer is effectively communicating not just to absent audiences but also to production personnel who are present in the stage wings, hidden from the absent audiences. Broadcast communication forwards to the audience has to be managed conjointly with collusive communication backwards with production. Communicative competence in media performance consists not least in being able to combine forward and backward communication in sometimes bafflingly complex ways, such as addressing audiences while simultaneously listening to producer directions through earpieces.

### **Cueing in interactive television**

On the face of it, the current trend toward interactivity in television would seem to be a symptom of the demise of broadcast scripting. An example would be television based on text (short messaging service; SMS) messages and to a lesser degree multimedia messages (MMS; as overviewed by Beyer et al., forthcoming, 2007). A parallel development to digital TV in the area of interactivity, SMS-based TV is spreading fast in Asia and Europe. European developments are spearheaded by the Nordic countries and have become a feature of current television in most countries. The programming covers a broad generic spectrum but often tends toward low-budget, youth-oriented entertainment formats. The hosts' level of professionalization in these



types of SMS-based TV is modest and their performances closely modelled on the non-mediated registers of youthful colloquial conversation. This works to lower the threshold for viewers to send in the text or multimedia messages that provide these programmes with much of their revenue. So professional and text messagers seem to meet someplace that is very far from the reach of scripts, or indeed from any form of comprehensive premeditation of communicative performances. The ideal is to allow messagers and hosts to meet up as individuals in a spontaneous and immediate manner. Take this example from the Norwegian SMS-based programme *Blender*, which works with a split screen design, with a host appearing onscreen left and a moderator appearing in a chat scroll on the right, inbetween participants' text messages (all excerpts translated from Norwegian by the author):

<Cheech5>

'alloylo

<Jostein>

Yo cheech . . .

The tone is thoroughly informal and colloquial. Nevertheless, *Blender* in fact deploys a range of conventional forms of scripting in live television; the host starts and stops talking on cues given in a main script. The producer is available on-ear to feed factual information, interview questions and other information. Here, cueing is done not only for the professionals but also for the programme's audience, when they double as participants in the programme through text messages. Even if the text messages are informal and colloquial, this in no way precludes them from being quite comprehensively premeditated on the production team's part. On closer consideration it is hardly surprising that a programme whose budgets partly depend on revenue from messaging needs to exercise a degree of control over it, even if the ideal notion of interactive empowered users may obscure such mundane realities.

Examples of extended cueing have been described by master's student Silje Nordby Skøien (2005), who observed the production of a *Blender* programme dedicated to the topic of wildlife. One interview segment in the programme featured a taxidermist as interviewee. While preparing their scripts, the producer and the host discussed questions for this interview and how to integrate text message input into the questioning. At one point the host suggested: 'And then I can say, when someone sends an [MMS] picture of their cat, how much does it cost to have that one stuffed?' The main script's segment 9 contained these specifications for the interview:

Talking to taxidermist.

MMS: Pets dead or alive.

Shooting pets in order to stuff them.



The main script, then, required the host to trigger text messages in such a way as to fit them into the flow of interviewing. In the actual broadcast the emphasis shifted to include SMS messages, as both the host and moderator asked for audience opinions on pet taxidermy. Their repeated invitations (the host verbally, the moderator in writing) served as cues for the audience to respond via messages. In the episode of *Blender* in question, this cueing of text messages extended to the point of ‘cheating’, as the moderator himself began to text messages, posing as an anonymous audience member:

<Anonymous>

What would it cost to stuff my dog?

He then answered his own fake, with his own name ‘Jostein’ attached:

<Jostein>

We’ll see if we can find the answer to that soon.

The moderator then relayed the question to the taxidermist interviewee. There was no response to the wildlife topic from text messagers, so the moderator had to repeat the scam before a trickle of loosely relevant text messages began to appear on the chat.

Faking a small contribution from the audience is in itself far from new or unique to interactive television. However, the *Blender* case illustrates how interactive technology facilitates a new range of scripting devices for the production team for directing the performances of non-professional participants. They can cue performances via text on the screen, and interestingly the written mode of performance does not seem to work against an unscripted feel. Furthermore, topics can to be tried out on participants with verbatim repetition and no attempt to hide it, whereas a question cannot be asked identically twice in an ordinary live broadcast interview. Plain fakery is now much easier, since fake messages can be used with relative ease for the purposes of keeping the programme going and promoting further audience participation. In programmes such as *Blender*, the reach of scripting is actually extended in the sense that it works to premeditate and cue the performances of non-professional participants.

## Scripting social settings

In mediated communication the social setting of communication is not a given, since production and reception do not coincide. This makes the construction of recognizable and appealing mediated social settings all the more of a key to making communication work. This is particularly apposite for the social settings of informal broadcast programming, which tends to simulate or at least borrow actively from the informal settings of face-to-face communication. A typical, well-established example is breakfast TV, which tends to work with settings built on the features of the modern





home: the kitchen for cookery segments, a sofa grouping for interviews, an approximate living room environment for the latest in interior design or flower arranging. The need to provide mediated settings with an element of the individual and informal extends also to contemporary journalistic genres, where often it will take the form of a simulated journalistic back region. Numerous formats feature the journalist sitting in a workspace, surrounded by colleagues, maybe even sharing a simulated informal work conversation with them, all in the name of injecting informality into journalistic communication.

However the construction of such social settings by the media involves some interesting, inherent complexities. In informal face-to-face interaction, the setting usually requires little attention. Roughly speaking, the pavement, a home kitchen and the sidelines of a soccer pitch will all do for a chat with a friend. There is little need to tailor these social settings specifically for the interaction. In the media, settings as a rule need to be set up specifically for the purposes of mediatization, whether they be formal or informal. Therefore, the social settings of informal media interaction have little of the basic flexibility and taken-for-grantedness of the pavement and the kitchen. The reasons are largely to do with the needs of technology. Scripts for mediated social settings have everything to do with handling technology and marrying it to fluent, convincing communication, and this is no easy trick to pull off. Mediated social settings have something alien and unsettling about them to most non-professional performers with no particular media training, because the mood and feel of the programme are often so detached from the mood and feel of the production setting. Standing in a breakfast TV studio is nothing like standing in a home. The homey props look about as incongruous as a skycrane camera would in an average villa. One realizes at once that this is a studio governed by some unknown rules of organizational and technological expertise, and that the sofa is a prop.

It should be noted that the scripting of social settings in television is a very different matter from radio. Visuality makes the issue of social setting a much more elaborate affair. In radio-technological terms, a recorded buzz of voices is enough to indicate that a conversation is taking place, for example, in a pub. Television needs an actual pub, or a studio made out to look like one. Often, television teams have preferred the studio version, both in fictional and factual productions. Using an actual pub is practically difficult: it is not fitted for space-consuming TV technology, and it might be necessary to interfere with the running of the pub. Location settings in themselves may provide a measure of authenticity. However, studios offer a greater degree of control over the way that performers move in their settings. An important category of auxiliary scripts take care of the studio setting, so as to facilitate a type of informal and individualized performance. A key type of script in this context is the floor plan, which lays out a standard set-up for cameras



and their movements, pre-setting certain multi-camera coverage options. In doing so it also sets up the performance in a number of ways. These kinds of studio settings are constructed so that the performer will be in the unobstructed, well-framed view of the camera and clearly audible via microphones. In addition, they are constructed for the performer to move from camera to camera, sometimes using markers on the floor to facilitate correct camera framing.

These kinds of studio set-up are the result of a further difference between mediated and face-to-face performances. In the latter there is usually some leeway for trailing off, both in the sense of faltering in speech and looking at nothing in particular. Erving Goffman (1963) terms this 'looseness' and holds that within bounds it is allowed, even routine in everyday face-to-face behaviour. Studio television is different. Here the host cannot really afford to be seen communicating with no one in particular – communications must be addressed to a ratified party, whether persons in the studio or audiences via address to camera. When the host moves physically in the studio for live or continuous coverage, this usually means that they will have to address first one camera, then another, with no lapse inbetween. The real-time address shift between cameras has become a standard device for dynamism and variation. Usually it requires studio rehearsals where the performer memorizes movements and camera address shifts, to a point of internalization reminiscent of dancers and actors.

In sum, the premeditating work of studio settings and their scripts is quite extensive for these types of performances. But because usually no overt dictation of details in gesture or movement is involved, there is always at least some leeway for individuality in the performance. Professionally informal performers seem to work very effectively in small studio spaces, provided that there is room for projecting movements, gesticulations and mimicry that have an individualized, non-premeditated feel to them. After all, the performance of informality largely hinges on finely tuned effects; the little smile or cough or raised brow, the hand in the pocket, the small hesitation gesture. It seems that non-verbal communication is particularly hard to dictate, if an effect of unscriptedness is the goal. This may be why the scripting of individual gestures, for example, is extremely rare in current live television; it looks too stiff and overtly premeditated, even when professionals are doing it. The scripting of social settings, however, can be very extensive with an effect of unscriptedness still preserved.

## **Social settings in reality TV**

In recent television, the traditional division between constructing a social setting in the studio and registering the unfoldings of a pre-existing location setting has become increasingly blurred. This development was characterized famously by Daniel Boorstin (1992) as a tendency toward 'pseudo-events'. Major event-character productions tend to take place

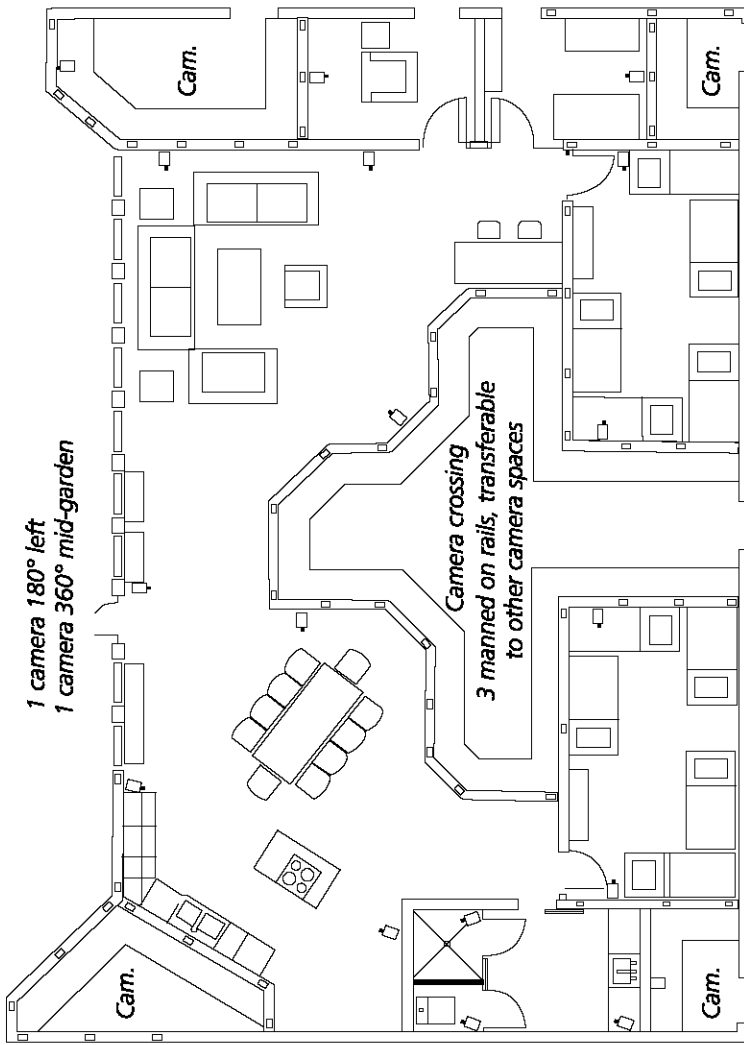


in a setting that is so media-saturated that it comes to resemble a studio situation, even if its rationale is still tied to the ongoings of an outside world.

The reality show *Big Brother* extends this tendency in sometimes drastic ways. It is an extreme (hence instructive) case of how comprehensively current television can set up performances by scripting social settings. Here, television builds from scratch a social setting that contains the performer's whole life for a number of weeks, including very intimate and private moments. The general features of the *Big Brother* phenomenon have been well covered in a fast-growing body of research (e.g. Kilborn, 2003; Roscoe, 2001; *Television and New Media*, 2002; Tincknell and Raghuram, 2002; van Zoonen, 2001). More interesting in the context of this article is the way in which the scripting of ordinary people's lives is actually managed in these formats, an issue that research does not seem to have covered so far. Several forms of scripting for *Big Brother* production provide interesting leads; one is the so-called technical plan. All versions of this format build from scratch a 'Big Brother bunker', where the participants are locked in for the duration of the competition (see, for example, Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

In practical terms, the social setting is a container built to house a flat and multi-camera production facilities. According to a sort of inverse panopticon principle, the participants' living area is surveilled by a ring of cameras and microphones (supplementing the participants' body microphones). As indicated in Figure 1, the camera set-up combines automatic surveillance-type roof cameras and cameras hidden behind one-way mirrors. There are also mini-cameras, for example, the one in the lower left-hand bathroom that is mounted on the shower head. This is a very comprehensive and professionally quite challenging production set-up. The production team needs not only to expose rudimentarily what is going on, but also to disentangle the specifics of who is saying and doing what to whom, in a setting that is always potentially crowded with people. Basic production virtues such as the action match and the foregrounding of relevant sound sources become quite demanding to uphold when there is no script to dictate or direct individual performances.

The scripting of *Big Brother's* social settings serves to contain uncertainties over what participants will say and do by making possible an extensive ritualization of domestic life. The bunker living area generally takes the layout of a flat with spaces for social interaction: the sofa grouping, dinner table, kitchen counter and garden. However, these are also the spaces for a series of ritualizations imposed by the production team: voting ceremonies, contests and various assignments are introduced to keep the participants active and the social interaction going. The sofa grouping doubles as a setting for the regular voting-out of participants. The garden doubles as the site for competitions and assignments of a more physical nature. This, then, is a house setting, the traditional arena for relaxation and intimate



Note: 'Cam.' and 'Camera' indicate the placement of manned cameras. Automatic cameras operated by remote are indicated with small square icons.

Figure 1 Floor plan with camera set-up, *Big Brother* (Norway, 2001)



behaviour, but overlaid with competitions and ceremonies that have a strongly competitive and ritual cast to them. Typically, the private home is associated with individualized, informal, intimate and generally unpremeditated behaviours. However, the scripting of *Big Brother's* social setting makes it possible to overlay a (simulated) home setting with a steady stream of competitive rituals. This has the effect of transforming the participants' performances into something considerably more regulated and predictable than everyday behaviour. As the *Big Brother* floor plan illustrates, a sophisticated, especially set-up surveillance regime of cameras and microphones is there to sort out whatever goes-on that have not been pre-sorted by the social setting.

### **Scripting time sequencing**

Media production is all about keeping time, since a deadline of some sort is always moving toward you. Consequently, the confident mastery of time is highly valued in most professional media cultures. This goes not only for the ability to write a script, perform a task or budget on time, but also for the ideal attitude toward handling tasks that are highly temporally structured. For example, journalists typically value swift decisions and clearing away of formalities, so even in the higher prestige echelons of television news there is a cult of the informal, non-procedural way of going about production. In effect, the ideal of informal attitudes goes hand-in-hand with the competence to handle strict time limits. The admired news professional is typically a journalist who can come in from an assignment, go straight on air without a manuscript and deliver a fluent monologue exactly within the allotted timeframe.

In fact, it is quite routine to use such timeframes actively for producing informal and individualized performances. All scripts in the media presuppose some form of time sequencing, and many of them are highly explicit and formalized about their timekeeping. In many ways, time sequencing forms the backbone of main scripts in broadcasting; it often provides a skeleton onto which other forms of scripting are added. Typically, a main script will work according to quantified linear time, blocking this time into separate segments, quantifying every segment and adding up time as segments are sequenced together. There are a number of basic practical reasons why this is such a routine procedure. In current broadcasting, all programming except major events is slotted into schedules that work with intervals of a few seconds. A programme of 28'50" has no more than a few seconds of slack. For the total time to add up correctly, the main segments of the programme have to be balanced out in a controlled fashion – that is, by timing them. In live productions, timing must be kept constantly during production so the producer can cut and cues can be given in a way that promotes fluency between segments. Close time also has to be kept for purposes of identifying, editing, tracking and archiving.



Timers abound on all technological equipment to count and document all these slices of time.

A main script directs not just the specifics of the performance timing itself but also some of the macro-temporal aspects surrounding it. The script provides a generic specification of each segment (e.g. interview, music, vignette) along with its expected time. In a standard live or continuous magazine format, this calls for a type of interview midway between the news soundbite and the in-depth documentary interview. There is time for introduction, rounding off, approximately five to 10 main questions and a limited quota of follow-up questions. When used by someone with professional competence, a main script can be used to infer a rather detailed structure of temporal segments and sub-segments. For experienced performers, the timing of segments becomes a matter of internalization, an ingrained feel. Experience builds a finely tuned subconscious feel for aligning the sum total of available time in each segment and available time for individual utterances and movements. Professionals will use an acquired repertoire of appropriate words and set phrases to fill each segment extemporaneously, dispensing with verbatim scripts and looking all the more informal for it.

The scripting of time sequencing is not only a matter of dividing and subdividing into segments but also of how segments tie together sequentially. In fictional genres this will happen most often according to a narrative logic, for example, deploying the spatial and temporal shifts between segments that are characteristic of soap operas' multiple and parallel narratives. The temporal logic of non-fiction magazine formats is different. It involves liveness, or at least an approximation of continuous lived time, but at the same time a number of temporal and spatial shifts are involved, since liveness is routinely interspersed with videotaped segments of varying kinds. Thus the audience's feeling of sharing a continuous time with each other and the programme's goings-on partly hinges on the host's ability to segue seamlessly between videotaped segments and studio interview segments. The way that this is done is rather complex. It involves different forms of shift and overlaying between addresses to the absent audience, to studio audiences and to guests or interviewees. The key point in this connection is that the system of shifts and overlayings is a product of the main script, since it is here that the basic temporal structure is laid down. As a rule, the main script will be at its most specific where establishments and shifts of address need to occur. At these points it will provide a dense set of audio or video source information, timings and cues. These are the places for the host to insert all the established phrases that have been developed in non-fiction genres to signal a shared and continuous time and space between professional media performers and their audiences, including the welcoming of guests, home and studio audiences. This, and ritual references to 'we' and 'us', serve to draw all parties together as ratified participants in the communicative here and now.



## Time sequencing in reality TV

Established practices of scripting time sequencing in live broadcasting, then, depend on professional hosts to turn a scripted sequential order into a performance. The main departure that reality TV makes from this pattern is in the taboo that it imposes on dictating its participants through scripts. The genre's appeal to reality, intimacy and authenticity is tied inextricably to the fact that no one is allowed to tell the participants what to say or how to perform. Therefore, the scripting of time sequencing in reality TV formats needs to be particularly flexible in terms of accommodating possible developments and fluctuations in performance. However, this scripting also tends to be very much formative in the sense of imposing a limited range of possible sequencings for the performance. Daniel Dayan has coined the phrase 'probabilistic scripting', which may be applicable here (personal communication with Daniel Dayan). The key to broadcasters' scripting of time sequencing increasingly lies in their power to narrow down the range of performance options. The extensive ritualizations of reality TV have been mentioned already, and are vitally important in this respect. Not only do they increase control over social settings, they also provide sequencings that are intrinsic to the ritual. A contest, for example, is temporally divisible into a challenge – acceptance – start – stages – final ranking sequence. There are of course different ways of performing the act of competing, but ordinarily this basic sequencing will not be questioned either by participants or viewers. In this sense, contests seem to be compatible with general notions of authentic and real behaviour; playing by the rules of a competitive ritual can be seen simply as an accommodation of what competitions are about naturally and inherently. Indeed, the structures of contests seem very robust in this respect. For example, the producers of *Survivor* are able to pass their thoroughly scripted sequencings off as a contest about survival, although probably more in a social than a *Robinson Crusoe* sense. It is, after all, recognizable somehow as having to do with surviving.

Reality TV has developed some unorthodox scripting practices to convert the inherent time structures of rituals into chronologically timed and sequentially blocked units. For example, the *Big Brother* production team constructs its main script directly from a continuous logging of the bunker's action and happenings, which results in a so-called 'line-up' (Lindstad, 2003). The team is constantly producing live coverage for digital television and the web. But at the same time (and all the time), two dedicated loggers on the day shift and one on the night shift note down as much as possible on what the participants are saying and doing, sequentially timing and blocking along the way. The line producer's job includes not only producing live coverage but also taking out the most promising logged bits, so-called 'items', and inserting them chronologically into a line-up. When the line producer goes off live coverage duty in the



morning, they begin work on revising and adjusting the line-up, which effectively becomes a main script for that evening's main programme. This programme shows yesterday's events but is narrated and presented in the present tense.

Figure 2 shows an excerpt from the line-up for an episode of Norwegian *Big Brother*. Item 10 is of special interest: this is the point at which an assigned competition causes division and quarrelling among the *Big Brother* participants.

7	11 B Dancing in the backyard SP	n/a	Ommserver	00.00.20	21.25.32	00.19.07
<i>Item description:</i>						
Rodney dancing in the backyard						
Put in a sequence of one minute						
8	11 B and A Everyone is painting, except Per Mo . . .	n/a	Ommserver	00.01.30	21.25.52	00.17.37
<i>Item description:</i>						
Use the static iso long shot for a time lapse, with lots of activity (put music under)						
Round off with a pan over all the artworks, or with Rodney painting away, stressed out at the end						
Cut to Lars Joachim criticizing Ramsy's mailing. 11 55, Lars says: 'But you fucking must'.						
Ramsy holds tight Anne Mona who laughs						
9	Item bumper	n/a		00.00.03	21.27.22	00.17.34
10	12 A Weekly task SP	n/a		00.05.00	21.27.25	00.12.34
<i>Item description:</i>						
Today's big quarrel . . . Anne Mona reads the assignment, then an intense quarrel breaks out over what their stakes should be. They get more and more agitated. The division is between Morten who does not want to stake 100% and so Rodney won't go down to 75% and the result is that BB sets the bet at 50% (VOICEOVER?)						
From 12.29.35 to 12.32.33 there is a real climax, Rodney smashes a bottle against the wall and is livid. We will probably use all of this.						
Use iso where Rodney throws a bottle against the wall!						
End could be; Rodney, fuck that, we're finished, screech . . .						
11	12 A and Bn Morten alone, all smoking	n/a	Ommserver	00.01.00	21.32.25	00.11.34
<i>Item description:</i>						
Morten sits left alone on the sofa, everyone else goes out smoking and badmouthing him						

Note: A major part of the running time in this excerpt (indicated in the second column from the right) is taken up by the climatic segment 10. It takes place in the main living room area. Because it involves all participants in a heated argument, this sequence is covered with long shots that secure an overview of the action but occasionally obscure contestants and their talk.

Figure 2 Line-up excerpt, *Big Brother*, 19 August 2001





This is the point at which an assigned competition causes division and quarrelling among the *Big Brother* participants. Obviously well attuned to the temporal unfolding of this stage of the competition, the loggers follow up this point of high interest and excitement with correspondingly detailed suggestions for editing, voiceover, sequencing, cueing and camera selection. In short, they are able to produce a fairly detailed draft of an editing script almost instantly – which attests not only to the loggers' professionalism but also to the way in which the events and actions of this sequencing have been premeditated. Otherwise the line-up script in Figure 2 is structurally very similar to a standard non-fiction script for live or continuity formats in its ways of quantifying and blocking time. Interestingly, the end result for *Big Brother's* main script is as tight and elaborate in its time sequencing as an average magazine format script.

In this line-up excerpt it is also worth noting that the *Big Brother* producer ('BB') intervenes directly (albeit hidden to audiences) in order to settle a bet, making an enraged loser of one participant. So here the producer is not just responding to unfolding events but also setting up further events. Indeed, the scripting of *Big Brother* involves an intricate interplay between discrete but pervasive setting-up efforts before performance and equally discrete post-production adjustments. The minor scandals involving the 'fake' setting-up of action in reality TV formats attest to a belief in the industry rhetoric that this is 'real people' who are 'just being themselves'. If they are, it is precisely in the sense that they navigate without scripts and without professional performers' competence. But it makes little sense to insist that performances in this genre can be regarded as separate from all the scripted setting-up activity that surrounds them. The sort of setting-up by production teams that is illustrated in this particular *Big Brother* production is in fact a quite routine activity. There are always veering courses of action that need to be nudged back on course. In *Big Brother* the producer may call a housemate to the 'diary room', for example, to prevent them from referring to named third parties. In reality soaps the participants may be asked to perform an 'item' again if it missed the attention of cameras and microphones the first time round.

The routine necessity of these types of manoeuvrings are in fact fairly obvious to most people involved in such media production, non-professional participants included. Even though they do not (and cannot) know the script, there is no reason to doubt the participants' ability to understand a simple point: production teams get up to various set-ups and small 'fakeries' in order to be able to put together their segments as the format requires. The main point in a scripting connection is to note that these set-ups are seldom a matter of making participants do something markedly different from what they would do anyway. It is usually a matter of bringing out more efficiently what various scripts have set up already in order to get footage that is readily usable within the episode's sequencing structure.

436 For example, nothing indicates that involving non-consenting third parties



is something many *Big Brother* participants actively want to do – they merely forget themselves on occasion. And doing something once more for the benefit of cameras is, after all, doing something similar to what the participant has done already – although the participant may experience a loss of belief in their own authenticity the second time round. But after all, in the final instance a programme produces effects of unscriptedness for its viewers, not its participants. And research suggests that on the whole, participants are quite concerned to deliver the sorts of performances that the format requires (Syvertsen, 2001; Ytreberg, 2004). When performing their expansive and informal selves, these participants seem to become deeply involved in delivering the kinds of performance that the formats require. In effect, a close and continuous cooperation is going on between professionals and non-professional participants, even if power is unevenly distributed between them.

## Conclusion

This article has discussed some established but little-described practices of scripting in television and focused on some extensions of these scripting practices in current interactive and reality TV. There are arguments implied in its descriptions that deserve a more explicit hearing in conclusion. The article has been making an argument throughout that scripting is still vitally important to broadcast performances, even in a time where the unscripted feel seems very much the norm. It suggests that scripting answers the basic technological and logistical needs of large-scale performance media, and consequently that scripting is indispensable to them for all practical purposes. There may be a sort of checks-and-balances function going on; if the scripting of some aspects of the performance has to be reduced (e.g. the verbatim scripting of talk), there will be a drive to maintain control by more comprehensive scripting of other factors (e.g. social settings and time sequencings). This does not mean that scripting is a constant and essentially invariable thing. Clearly, television has been on the move toward formats and genres that place certain strict limitations on scripting. The article limits itself to arguing that counteracting practices are also part of the picture, that they are significant by virtue of simply being there, shaping the performances of current television and pushing the boundaries of how scripting is done.

The article has sought to shed light on some ways that the mediated performances of current live television are being concretely and practically premeditated. This approach to media scripting departs from established approaches in media production studies in a number of respects. First, it looks at the material culture of scripts; second, at how various forms of communicative competence are applied to them for the purposes of mounting a mediated performance. The approach does not privilege per se the oral communication of meetings and corridor encounters in media



production. A scripting approach privileges the handling of technology as being absolutely vital to understanding both the logic and outcomes of media production. It looks at professions and professionalism from the point of view of performance, rather than pursuing internal issues of, for example, individual freedom, professional autonomy and interprofessional strife. In so doing, a scripting approach may counter a certain parochialism in media production studies that has prevented it from integrating its insights actively with those of textual and audience studies. It is tailored to focus not on what media production tells us about those producing (important though that may be), but on how such production is always geared first and foremost toward the premeditation of mediated performances.

### Note

1. The technical plan shown in Figure 1, as well as other information on *Big Brother's* production, are taken from a master's thesis on the 2001 Norwegian series of *Big Brother* (Lindstad, 2003).

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