When *lives* meet *live*: categorization work in a reality TV show and “experience work” in two home audiences

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Abstract

This paper explores the cultural and political implications of some “seen but unnoticed” aspects of a TV program and its viewing. Both practices are approached as social interaction in a changing visual space. A close multimodal analysis is undertaken of an extract from a live Danish reality TV show Robinson Ekspeditionen 2000 and its two receptions. The extract was selected on the basis of what at first looked like a coinciding interpretative practice in two widely different audiences, first, an elderly couple in their living room, and second, four young men watching the same episode together. In the extract, the host interviews “judges” in the last episode of that year’s series. The analysis shows how the host’s talk, geared toward eliciting audience reactions, produces certain contrastive categorizations and positions. In both audiences, the host’s categorization of a participant was met with an amused repetition of what was just seen and heard. The paper demonstrates why the two similar repeats actually show differing orientations to the formulation on the basis of different (life) experiences. The analysis of the extracts is used to discuss, with a combination of process-oriented theorization, the episodes in relation to the political atmosphere in Denmark anno 2000.

Keywords: membership categorization; multimodal analysis; reality TV; audience reception.

1. Introduction

The complexity of social worlds or the world in general has been the focus of many recent contributions to the human, social, and natural sciences. Among others, in a recent co-authored book (Atkinson et al. 2008) on the complexity of ethnography, a call is made to unify the increasingly dispersed field of qualitative studies into specializations (e.g., social interaction, narrative, materiality,
The present paper contributes to the recent humanistic research that regards understanding and researching human situated action as essential for contemplating issues such as identity, politics, and culture.

The embodied aspects of human sense making are important also for identity and categorization work. With his ethnomethodological and anthropological background, Goodwin (2000a) regards action as a practical accomplishment in which people use their own and others’ talk, body, and material surroundings, not just to do situationally relevant next moves in an activity system (Goffman 1972), but, while they act in the world, the participants also constitute identities or other socially or culturally relevant categories. Another approach that deals with local accomplishment of identity is the ethnomethodological membership categorization analysis (MCA): “Category, context and activity stand in a relational configuration to each other; they thereby compose a mutually elaborated whole” (Hester and Francis 2003: 41). MCA can be combined with the sequential meaning making that conversation analysis especially has concentrated on (e.g., Stokoe 2009). It also provides a possibility for analytically treating local accomplishments of action as sites of doing society or doing culture. The combination of MCA with a sequential analysis has recently produced studies in which the tacit, and not strictly publicly available, nature of meaning making is dealt with (e.g., Raudaskoski 2010), producing results the provisional nature of which is not hidden (e.g., Butler and Fitzgerald 2010). The present paper hopes to contribute to these explorations through an analysis in which the tacit nature of identity work is treated as multidimensional.

After first analyzing a live broadcast encounter on TV that took place through a mediating video link between two locations, the paper studies two parallel viewing situations in totally different settings with the same televised encounter.

2. Researching TV viewing as a cultural and social practice

Recently, practice theoretical (Reckwitz 2002) approaches have been gaining popularity and could be seen as a holistic answer to the worries about the division of the qualitative studies field mentioned earlier, as they can provide a background for understanding discourse as constitutive, multimodal interaction. Chaney (2002) highlights that phenomenological insights into individual forms of experience of textually mediated discourse are valuable. The processual aspect of world making is also captured in the performative turn in cultural studies (see Bell’s 2007 discussion of recent challenges and developments). The present paper with its close analysis of situated actions hopes to contribute to these musings with empirical methodology.

Media viewing is regarded as a situated activity in which interpretations are exhibited in and through interactions. The focus is on how the material-
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semiotic media in question becomes part of the moment-by-moment interaction or interpretation. There is a body of conversation analytical and ethnomethodological studies that have had a similar interest in vision-in-interaction, as expressed in: “the focus of analysis is not thus representations or vision per se, but instead the part played by visual phenomena in the production of meaningful action” (Goodwin 2000b: 157, see also Goodwin 1994).

3. Attention to attention

Unlike many other activities exhibiting the mundane visual order (Hester and Fracis 2003), in the TV viewing situation, the focal activity is watching (and listening). Along the lines of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter 1992) and also of multimodal interaction analysis (Norris 2004), in this paper attention is regarded as a social, and therefore publicly observable and analyzable, action in the world.

Another aspect of attention work is that it often necessarily requires memory work. It is noteworthy that remembering can be a very subtle act and not always a verbalized account (cf. Raudaskoski 2010). In TV viewing of live broadcasts, the viewers as historical bodies (Scollon and Scollon 2004) and the Bakhtinian chronotope of the ongoing TV broadcast meet; the lives of the audience members meet the live program. The unfolding of events on the screen can be oriented to in terms of laughter, incipient talk, etc.; social interaction, narrative, materiality, place, and visuality can all become a focus, even if fleetingly, in a viewing situation. Following Goodwin (2000a), we could talk about cooperative accomplishment of action in which various semiotic fields are activated by the participants, that is, they visibly and hearably pay attention to something in their environment; they adjust this work to the other participants’ actions; and they sometimes actively guide the other participants’ attention to a certain feature in the environment. The Goodwins have also analyzed how people in conversation evaluate events, objects, or people (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987). When people do that, they show their understanding of what is going on. According to Bakhtin, all sense-making activities have an evaluative aspect, as Tovares (2006: 470) reminds us: “In a number of his works, Bakhtin (e.g., 1975, 2000) argues that evaluation is an integral part of understanding and that ‘understanding that is devoid of evaluation is impossible’ (1975: 346, my translation).” In the analysis, the doings and sayings with regard to the two audiences will be also explored as evaluations.

In 2003, Ron Scollon and Suzie Scollon developed the “discourses in place” aspect of the nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2003) which extended Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2001) frameworks for visual and multimodal analysis to a more situated direction of how the visual is oriented to. The Scollons call the approach geosemiotics, as the aim is to understand how texts and other
signs function in public places. There, attention, as well as the Goffmanian civil inattention, are also of interest: how do people foreground or background certain potentially meaningful elements (*semiotic aggregates*) in a public place? Thus both contextual configuration and geosemiotics have the indexicality of (also multimodal) meaning making and acting in the world as the focus. Membership categorization analysis within ethnomethodology to which I next turn also covers the other type of indexicality that geosemiotics describes: indexing a larger discourse.

### 4. Membership categorization analysis

To give a short introduction to the concepts and basic ideas of membership categorization analysis (MCA) I refer to Silverman’s (1998) account of Sacks’s (1992) ideas. In MCA, the general interest is in the “categories that members of society use in their descriptions” (Silverman 1998: 77). Harvey Sacks wanted to find out how exactly this membership categorization apparatus worked. For the present paper, going through the whole technical apparatus (cf. Jayyusi 1984) is not warranted. Therefore, only the most relevant aspects of it are introduced, following Silverman’s (1998) introduction to membership categorization analysis and, further, Eglin and Hester’s review (1992) of Jayyusi’s book. Also, as mentioned earlier, Stokoe (2009) provides a good account of how membership categorization analysis and conversation analysis can be fruitfully combined to find out how different categorizations are dependent on the immediate interactional environment. In the present paper, the methodological interest lies also in how membership categorization and embodied interaction relate to each other in TV programs and their viewing. What is important in contextual configuration and geosemiotics is the emphasis on the material features of the environment and how the place and its objects have both material and meaningful affordances (and limits) that are essential for the ongoing action.

Any individual can be described with a set of differing categories, resulting in different identity constructions: for example, (i) a gray-haired father; (ii) a pensioner. In these two examples, the collections (membership categorization devices, MCDs) that are made relevant are different, too (father—family; pensioner—end-of-occupation). Sometimes pairings of categories (for instance, father—child) form standardized relational pairs (SRPs) that imply certain standardized rights and obligations (Silverman 1998: 82). A situation that a person is in also implies MCD features: for instance, an elector in the *Robinson Ekspeditionen 2000* episode under scrutiny here has certain category-bound rights and obligations; she is obliged not to just cast her vote but to tell the interviewers or the audience about her life and emotions as someone who has been involved in the competition before.
Eglin and Hester (1992: 252) describe how categorial incumbency is publicly available “(i) to perception—naturally for gender and age bracket, emblematically for occupations such as the police, army, or priesthood identified with and by uniforms, and scenically for other cases; (ii) through behaviour (talk and action); (iii) through first-person avowal; (iv) through third-person declaration; and (v) through credential presentation.”

The analysis below will show how these forms of categorial incumbency were present in the data and how they contributed to what was going on (cf. Fitzgerald and Housley 2009).

5. Data

The embodied nature of interaction in material surroundings is the starting point to (i) analyze the interaction in a TV program and (ii) to analyze how this “text” was actually received by different audiences, and how in that reception people made comments about the program. Thus, the analysis navigates—with the ethnomethodologically oriented conversation analysis as the main analytical approach—a central site of engagement (Scollon and Scollon 2004) in the free time of many families in Denmark in the year 2000, namely watching the highly popular Robinson Ekspeditionen.

The data discussed in this paper come from the program itself and two video-recorded TV viewings of it, more explicitly from the last episode in the autumn of 2000. In that episode, the winner of this reality TV game show was elected.1 Two different viewing settings were video observed: an elderly couple in their living room and a young man with three friends who were watching the program in his room.2 The two audiences were active viewers: they talked/commented, laughed, or otherwise showed to each other, sometimes in overlap, how they perceived or understood the program. The elderly couple made comments on average three times a minute, whereas there hardly was a silent moment when the four young men were viewing the program.

In the last episode of Robinson Ekspeditionen 2000, three pairs of “judges” in different parts of Denmark were connected to the studio through a video link. Each pair had one vote in the final vote for the winner of the 2000 program. Instead of being identified immediately, the only thing that was said about these participants before they were introduced and interviewed briefly was that they were contestants from the previous years’ episodes and that there were three voting places with regional chairpersons and their helpers or assistants. Thus all of them were familiar faces to the regular Robinson viewers. The general distribution of the interviewees was the following: (i) white woman, white man; (ii) non-white man, white man; (iii) white man, white woman. In other words, the pairs could be seen as a set of contrasts and categories. These remote
participants were sitting in local studios and were connected to the main one via a video link. So, the host had to interact with two sets of people: those conveyed through the video link and the invisible viewers of the program.

When new guests are interviewed in the program, the host has to introduce them—the slot is an “introduction” or “description” place. The first person in a pair was always introduced through a video montage from their past Robinson participation, which meant that after the video was shown they were not introduced anymore, but greeted normally with their first name only. After a couple of questions, in the first and last interview the helpers were introduced with the habitual formula <first name, last name>.

6. Analysis of the TV interview

The following extract (Old Ole) comes from the second of the three introductory interviews. The first person has been presented to the viewers through an edited video clip and now the host starts talking to him live through the video link. The reason why the analytical focus lies in this specific extract is because it caused a deviant case as far as media reception studies are concerned: there seemed to be a similar uptake in the two audiences. The extract shows how exactly the chairperson and the helper were introduced in this interview and, most importantly, how the latter differed from the other two introductions of helpers: for example, no second name was given.

The following extract is the second of the three interviews. There is a video link between the host and the interviewees. Sometimes there are two video frames on the screen at the same time with the host’s picture to the right (about 1/12th in size of the guests’ video picture). Above the host’s small picture it is possible to see the logo of the TV channel and below it the outlines of Fyn og Øerne islands. At the very bottom of this “multimodal” screen is indicated—with white block letters on a red banner—where the participants are from: Fyn and Øerne (see Figure 1).
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In Extract (1) the two electors, Martin and Ole, are introduced and welcomed to the program. Both the host and the two guests look at the camera when they are talking. So the gaze to the camera in this case does not indicate so much parasocial interaction, that is, the participation framework of *talking to you at home*, but—as the host and the guests were communicating through a video link—*talking to you in the other studio*. See the appendix for the transcription conventions.

(1)  Old Ole

1

2  H: so we say good evening to Odense and to you

3  (.) {Martin,}

4

5  M: good evening Thomas ((M’s gaze: camera))

6  H: now listen you [were] almost th[ere]

7  [((looks down))]

8  M: [((quick smile))]

9  H: uh:(.) how was it to disappear so close to the

10  final last year ((gaze down [to papers]))

11  M: [it uh:(.) it is

12  {not} always nice when one is so close to (.)

13  {not}

14  to winning and then as if to

15  sniff at the quarter of a million and then

16  anyway lose it but it has to be said that it’s

17  not a shame to lose to someone like Dan

18  H: How are you [now] when you came- you were

19  {not} [((gaze down))] (. ) quite bitter
that time have you gotten things in
their proper perspective yet, ((gaze down))

M: yes I mean one has to (. ) just come away from
the island come home and then put on weight a
bit (. ) so: so things fall into place and when
one then sort of thinks the whole thing
through how one has played the game so one has
to just acknowledge but (. ) this time it just
didn’t work = [ . hh but it is - ]

H: [=and you ] have a hel { per }
at your side (. ) Martin (. ) namely ((head
down))
[a genuine (. ) > really genuine < islander]
[((the left picture zooming out to show Ole))]
[from (. ) Fanø, (. )]
[((gaze down))]
[namely] (. ) old (. ) Ole. u::hm:
[((gaze up))]}

Ole, you also disappeared close to the finals,
do you recognize some of what uh [ - - ]

Before the start of the segment Martin was introduced through a compilation of video from his participation in the previous year’s Robinson competition. It is clear from the compilation that he is a young man who is an old competitor (cf. Eglin and Hester’s list of categorial incumbency above). After the compiled video stops, we see the host in a close-up with his gaze to the camera. As
the video serves as an introduction to the person, the host just greets Martin and reminds viewers of Martin’s exact whereabouts, Odense (the region is visible as soon as the two frames are shown at the same time). When Martin’s name is mentioned, the screen changes to show two pictures: on the left Martin in a medium shot and to the right a small picture of the host (about 1/12th of Martin’s picture). Martin looks into the camera and returns the greeting by first-name basis—he knew the host from his participation in the program. After this short exchange of greetings the host warns Martin that he should pay attention to what the host is going to say (now listen, line 6). The host looks down at his notes soon after he starts his first statement about Martin’s past success in Robinson. Martin smiles a bit when the host finishes his almost there (line 6). The actual question is preceded by a hesitation mark (uh:) and a little pause, and after his question the host immediately turns to his papers. Martin starts his answer by a little hesitation, pause, and a restart (It uh: . . . it is not, lines 11 and 12). When not is uttered, there is a switch to a medium shot of Martin. After this the host asks another question and almost immediately when the host starts talking, the TV screen shows him in a close-up shot. When the host comes to the end of the question (yet, line 20), his gaze goes down to his notes again. With Martin’s answer, the screen shows again the speaker in a medium shot. At the end of Martin’s turn (line 28 where there is a bit of an overlap), the host starts talking (line 29) immediately after Martin comes to a transition relevance place in his talk, so Martin—after an overlapping little inhale and a start of a but clause (line 28)—drops his turn. In his next turn (starting in line 29) the smiling host is describing that there is a helper next to Martin and he seems to be checking his notes about who it is: a genuine really genuine islander from Fanø, namely old Ole. Genuine is replaced (with a rapid pronunciation) by born-and-bred or really genuine and while this categorization is done the two-picture constellation is back on the screen, and the bigger picture on the left is zooming out to show Ole who sits next to Martin. Before the host describes Ole’s success in a past Robinson Ekspeditionen and goes on to ask the question, he again looks at his notes.

The host starts describing the second person to be interviewed before the viewers (or he) can see the interviewee (line 29). The host consults his papers often during the introduction: the categorizations used about Ole are thus visibly produced as premediated. At the same time the visible reading of notes underlines again the institutional nature of the interview.

So, in his third-person declaration (cf. Eglin and Hester’s list above) the host uses certain descriptive categories (helper, a genuine really genuine islander from Fanø, old Ole) when he tells the viewers something they did not know but that at the same time becomes visible to them (lines 29–40). The host formulates a new arrival to the interview and he also formulates limited access to the interviewee when he is described without an identifying name or picture (and
you have a helper at your side, lines 29–31); the new guest only appears to the host and to the viewers while the introduction is going on (line 34). This strategy creates an expectation of excitement: who is it going to be? The introduction progresses thus from inexplicit (*a helper, a genuine (*) >really genuine< islander from Fanø*) to explicit when a person’s name and his visible face make him present.

This banter differs in many ways from the other interviews as far as the host’s practices of categorization are concerned. Ole is the only helper who is not introduced with a <firstname, lastname> formulation, but with first name only. This could be because Ole is among the more famous Robinson participants and, therefore, he is more familiar to viewers. Mentioning his status as *a genuine really genuine islander from Fanø* is also something extra in relation to how the other helpers were introduced. It was only the gender of the very first elector (i.e., not a helper) that was made relevant through the category description in elector or rather electress.

The host’s construction of Ole as *the old Ole* is a very interesting one as such, because it evokes a set of contrasts: the man next to Ole, Martin, is visibly young. Calling somebody old, especially when there is a younger person standing next to him, is a bit rude, but the host is also making use of ambiguity. The description is funny, as there is a cheese in Denmark called *Old Ole*; the formulation is also used in the Danish bingo halls as the nickname for the number 90. So, *old Ole* is an identity construction (whereas *Ole* would simply be referring to the individual in question, though in more intimate turns than <firstname lastname>), and the combination *old Ole* implies various collections (membership categorization devices).

The wordy introduction (with a string of adjectives or modifiers) to Ole that makes the audience attentive to the person to be introduced could also be analyzed as an assessment (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987). Thus, Ole is assessable: he is in one or another way of value, even if his institutional role is that of a helper in the situation. This fact makes the description even more interesting, as Martin is younger than Ole but—as a transnational adoptee from Sri Lanka—he also potentially looks different, like a second- or later-generation immigrant as many Danes with fluent Danish are called in Denmark. Ole’s worthiness of attention might have something to do with the fact that not only is he a really genuine islander from Fanø (also, as opposed to the distant island that the Robinson participants have spent their time), but a genuine islander could form a standardized relational pair with the category *Dane*: Ole is also a really genuine Dane (as is of course the Danish cheese, a part and parcel of the Danish cultural knowledge).

It could be claimed that though subversion takes place visually in this interview (Martin has been interviewed, he has been passing as another Dane who has participated in Robinson), the transition to the next interviewee gives us
hints about the added normality of Ole in comparison to Martin. So, the category description old Ole does not concern just Ole (but also Martin), and it is not just an explicit identification of this man, but also a general category of a Dane.

All in all, the way Ole is introduced could be called an assessable name (Goodwin 2003) appearing in an assessment sequence which consists of recognizing an assessable and producing an (co)assessment (agreeing/disagreeing with the first speaker). As the primary recipients of this talk, that is, the viewers, are not co-present, and as the speaker has to be understandable by any viewer, he is performing a for anyone as someone structure (Scannell 2000).

The way the host starts his turn (and you have a helper at your side Martin) constructs Martin as the recipient of his turn between the studio and the video-mediated site where these electors are sitting. The turn is meant to silence Martin, so he cannot say anything: he turns to Ole with a tiny, polite, smile on his lips. Ole does not smile at all during the introduction. Both of them recline to produce a strong collaborative assessment (for example, laughing, shaking, or nodding head) nonverbally.

A detailed analysis of the program clip could thus help pinpoint how the participants are categorized differently in a TV interview. Following Bakhtin, it can be claimed that the categories unavoidably do evaluative work. Next I turn to analyze closely two similar looking responses in the two totally different audiences to one specific categorization/evaluation. Were they the same and what kind of experiences did the specific categorization prompt?

### 7. Analysis of reception

There are excellent analyses of how the audience is oriented to in media discourse (e.g., Fitzgerald and Housley 2009). However, let us follow Scollon’s (1998) recommendations and also see what happens in two audiences (the elderly couple and the four young men). In the transcripts the viewers have their gaze on the TV unless otherwise indicated.

In both settings, the participants were active when the electors were introduced. The elderly couple, for instance, recognized the persons introduced through a video clip (but that is Regina). The young men were more anticipatory. They tried to guess who the electors from each part of the country would be even before the first one of them was introduced through a video.

#### 7.1. The elderly couple

Figure 2 shows the general layout of the room.
Figure 2. *The seating and other arrangements in the couple’s living room*

Figure 3 shows a picture of A and B.

Figure 3. *The couple watching* Robinson Ekspeditionen 2000

As can also be seen in Figure 3, A was knitting throughout this episode.

In the following two transcripts, the home audience actions and remarks are placed within the program flow.
The elderly couple made small remarks or otherwise showed their understanding of what is going on.

(2) The couple

1 M: [ - - ] how one has played the game so one has
to just acknowledge but (.) this time it just
didn’t work=[.hh but it is-]
5 H: [=and you ] have a hel{per}

6 at your side (. ) Martin (. ) namely ((head
down))
9 [a genuine (. ) >really genuine< islander]
10 [((the left picture zooming out to show Ole))]
11 [from (. ) Fanø, (. )] [namely ]
12 [((gaze down)) ] [((gaze up))] (. ) old (. )
13 Ole. [u::hm: ] [Ole,]
14 A: =Ôm:old [Ole yeah.] ô [((broad smile))]

15
16 H: you also disappeared close to the finals, do
17 you recognize some of what uh [ - - ]

When the host mentioned Dan (see Extract [1]), the winner of that year’s Robinson, the couple exchanged some comments about his funny deeds. We join the situation toward the end of Martin’s interview where he is in a close-up shot. In line 5 the host starts turning the topic into introducing Ole (see description of [1], Old Ole, above). After he utters old Ole (lines 12 and 13), A says in a subdued voice, m:old Ole yeah, overlapping partly with the host’s hesitation mark (in line 13). She has a lingering smile on her face for a while. I now turn to see what happened among the youngsters.
7.2. The young men

In the young male audience, before the whole introduction the youngsters tried to guess who the electors from Odense could be. By doing this they showed that the program format was successful in their case in building up excitement around the identities of the electors.

The general layout of the room can be seen in Figure 4 (the research assistants are not marked in the layout as they did not stay in one position, though they were also following the program).

![Figure 4. The seating and other arrangements in the young man's (E) room](image)

C and D can be seen in Figure 5.

The transcript starts from the same place as in Extract (2).

(3) The young ones

1 M: [- -] how one has played the game so one has
2 to just acknowledge but (.) this time it just
3 didn’t work=[.hh but it is-]
4 H: [=and you ] have a hel{per}
Figure 5. Two young men watching Robinson Ekspeditionen 2000 in their friend’s room

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at your side (.)

[ah ]

[((D’s gaze to E/F))]

Martin (.)[namely ((head down))]

[((but now I have been) interrupted]

[((D’s gaze back to the TV))

[a genuine (.)>really genuine< Islander]

[((the left picture zooming out to show Ole))]

[from (.) Fanø, (.)

[((gaze down))]

Ole]  

[AH! ]

[((smiles))]

[ah Ole ]

[namely ] (.old (.){Ole.}=

[((gaze up))]

[((smiling)) old Ole(h)he,]

[((turns to E/F))]

[((turns to TV))}
This short extract shows how much more active the young audience was at the TV. Out of the four youngsters, D reacts to the host’s overlapping talk with Martin. He says *ah*, and turns to the two boys sitting on the sofa (lines 8 and 9). When he turns his gaze back to the TV, he shows how he interpreted the host’s talk as an interruption. He puts words in Martin’s mouth, saying *but now I’ve been interrupted* (line 11). Through this imaginary quotation D also gives an interpretation of how Martin might interpret the host’s behavior, how Martin might see his situated relationship with the host. When Ole appears in the picture, D immediately recognizes him (line 17), and so does F (line 20). E also strongly reacts to Ole’s face, smiling (lines 18 and 19). When the host says *old Ole* in his introduction, D turns again to the two boys on the sofa, and says, smiling, *old Ole*. Then D turns back to the TV.

So both in the home of the elderly couple and in this room with four friends, the TV host’s *old Ole* was repeated in the same sequential action. Apparently reception studies do not assume that TV programs would create similar reactions. Lewis mentions that “the televisual message is so extravagantly coded that it is amazing any two people should respond to it in the same way. That people do is a testimony to our tightly controlled cultural horizons” (Lewis 1994: 25–26). So, what we seem to have captured with the same repetition in two totally different audiences (line 14 in [2], “The couple” and line 23 in [3], “The young ones”) is a deviant case for Lewis. To be able to explore more about these two audience reactions, let us look first at repeats as a phenomenon.

7.3. *Repeats*

One of Bakhtin’s points was that we recycle words, and thus meanings, but we always can add our own take or accentuation to the words used (cf. Linell’s discussion [2009: 83]). In the above two cases, the program was successful in eliciting a reaction in the audiences—they showed their involvement. This also means that the viewers show their ability to understand the gist, they have noticed the formulation. The *really genuine islander* was not a categorization that would elicit a reaction, but *old Ole* got the audience talking. There was, though, identifying talk among the boys just before they recognized Ole’s face. These first reactions (°*Ole*, *AH!*, *ah Ole*) also confirm that the man was not unequivocally called *old Ole*. So, the TV viewer’s maxim (Hester and Francis 2003: 41) in this context (Ole standing next to Martin in the final episode of *Robinson Ekspeditionen*) was to see a familiar face, known by the first name. That the categorization can be regarded as an assessment is also due to the fact that the host’s talk was reacted to, it was “not treated simply as a description” (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987: 11).

When we look at the two repetitions more closely, we can see that different features of the categorization were picked up by the different audiences. There
is one difference between these two remarks. D’s words are directed to his friend with a head turn (Excerpt [3], lines 23 and 24), whereas A keeps looking at the TV when she utters the words (Excerpt [2], lines 14 and 15). The reason for this seems to be that in the room with the young men, Ole was recognized before the host mentioned his name (Excerpt [3], lines 17–20):³ To understand what the utterance (old Ole) is doing in that position, we have to look at the preceding interaction, as well.⁴ Therefore, D’s turn is not an identifying one, but rather one of addressing the host’s choice of wording. It could be seen as an affect display that follows an assessment (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987). Haddington (2006) discusses three types of gaze direction and linguistic recycling in assessment sequences. He found out that mutual gaze occurs during an agreement sequence. In fact, what we could see D doing here is looking for an agreement for his assessment.

In Extract (2), old Ole occurs as part of identifying or remembering how the man was (sometimes) called and fitting that action with the host’s talk. What happens there is similar to what Kangasharju (2002) describes concerning how repeats are used to build and display alliances in meetings. It looks like alignment to the host’s description is happening also in Extract (2), yeah at the end of the turn (line 14) making it explicit that A does not only repeat what the host says, but also agrees with his formulation.

So, on the surface the two audience reactions are similar and could be taken as proof for Lewis’s assumption of tightly controlled cultural horizons mentioned above: Though rare, there can be similar interpretations, in this case from two totally different audience members (age and gender). But, as was shown by the analysis, similar phrases do not always mean the same in different contexts, as the work that the two repeats old Ole were doing was different. In the first extract A’s repetition serves as a way to do remembering, and in the second extract D’s repetition of the host’s phrase comments on his description. Thus, A situately constructs Ole as a known face, a member of the Robinson crowd. In Bakhtinian terms, both of the audience members were borrowing (very recently heard) voices and at the same time constituting the consequentiality of the talking head’s choice of words. The two repetitions could also be called performative citations (Butler 1993), one of which (that of D) showed more resistance, or at least a transformation. And when the elderly lady sympathetically agrees with the formulation old Ole, not only does she agree with the categorization of the man as old but—as an elderly person herself—does not regard it as funny. We could say that both of them picked from old Ole meanings and allusions that were not confirmed by the host (cf. Schegloff 1996) but by the co-present others.

In membership categorization terms, the host constructed Ole as something extraordinary, and as he did this after introducing Martin, Martin stays in the
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category *previous contestant* sitting in Odense, whereas Ole is categorized not just as a previous contestant but as a *real Dane* from the island Fanø. For the elderly lady in Aalborg, Ole’s categorization served as a memory device; for the young man in a location nearby, the categorization was treated as funny and, therefore, fitted well with the expectations of the genre and the host’s role in it.

8. Discussion

In examining people at media in homes, not only do we get a glimpse into the everyday life of people, but also how popular culture and values are accomplished in the viewers’ actions and practices. To do this, we have to have a theoretical understanding of what it means to act in the world and sophisticated analytical tools to find out how this sense-making activity could be analyzed from authentic data.

A closer look at these fleeting phenomena showed, among other things, that the viewers had understood a gist in the program: the host’s formulation was successful in getting attention from the audience. The data analysis above showed that almost identical utterances in similar position did not actually function similarly. It is an example of how actors recognize events in their phenomenal world such that the publicly available interpretation is proper and culturally meaningful (cf. Goodwin 2003). In the two locations in Aalborg, Denmark, that evening, the elderly woman seemed to have an understanding, recognizing reaction to *old Ole*, whereas in the young men’s gathering, the categorization caused, if not outright sneering, at least a mild amusement. Whether the description was originally the host’s or not, his assessment can be seen as a result of his *experience of* and with Ole, it shows an “affective involvement in the referent being assessed” (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987: 9; bold in original). These kinds of public structures then “provide resources for the interactive organization of co-experience” (1987: 9; italics in original), as indeed happened in the two audiences. Also, the analysis shows how the community of *Robinson* viewers consists of different “situated practices and situated identities” (Rawls 2006: 28). In the practice of watching *Robinson*, the aged seemed to be orienting to the past, using the seen and the heard to recognize and to reminisce, whereas the youngsters concentrated on the ongoing or immediate next in the program flow. Here we might have accessed how the program’s attempt at an extraordinary, rather than common-sense, relational configuration (cf. Hester and Francis 2003) through talk and the technology of the TV media (zooming out to show Ole) was actually interpreted as part of the participants’ mundane visual order. They were watching the program as part of their life experiences: repeating the words of the host of a popular reality TV show was doing different work because the social activity of watching the show was not “the same” in those contextual or relational configurations.
As mentioned in the introduction, the Goffmanian heritage has been further developed by, among others, the analysis of contextual configuration and also nexus analysis. We could suggest that the civic inattention that is easily observable in public places might also have been visible in the broadcast. When Ole was introduced with emphatic, culturally utterly Danish assessables, the attention was naturally geared toward him, and successfully so. One could claim that—at the same time—civic inattention was paid to the fact that Martin sitting next to Ole was different from him. Martin’s skin color was not an unimportant signifier in 2000 Denmark (Madsen 2000), but indexed a possibility of not just racial but ethnic or societal difference. It could (like objects and materials) “reverberate within webs of signifiers” beyond the situation at hand (Hurdley and Dicks 2011: 278). And though the repetitions at the two homes were showing media literacy, the question remains whether the emphasized Danishness was an issue for them at all, or were they just repeating the signifier, not the signified of a discourse (age/ethnicity)? In any case, we might have been witnesses to a site of engagement in which something was being learned through attending to an important cultural signpost (cf. Rawls 2006: 36) which the program was. That is, how to talk about (and therefore how to see) a certain publicly known individual, and in that process to be disciplined to not see the person next to him: “Rather than the production of judgments, it is the shaping of incidents and their participants that constitute ethics” (Bell 2007: 119; italics in original) (cf. Burke’s terministic seeing as discussed in Sarangi 2007).

Linell discusses perception as always situated, using Rommetveit’s example of the same white triangle which is perceived in different terms according to what is around it. Our situation in the studio was similar: Martin was sitting next to Ole, whose authenticity and Danishness was—even if humorously—discursively emphasized.

Experience comes to us from within the situation, it is an “interworld” phenomenon. (Linell 2009: 158)

Hopefully the present paper with its close empirical analysis has been able to contribute to the growing methodological interest on how a real-life event can be linked to the cultural-historical spacetime (Agha 2007). It has been an attempt to dig into the possible formation of attitudes toward others outside of the realm of political (media) discussions. Housley and Fitzgerald (2009) demonstrate how personalized politics provides a powerful moral ordering. In the present paper, the opposite movement has been under scrutiny through single case analysis: the subtlety of categorization work in an entertaining program could enhance the general trends in the media and political discussion and atmosphere. The analysis has tried to capture how complete utterances, unlike incomplete ones (Gotsbachner 2009), can be suggestive because of their sequential placement on a visually “moving stage.” Burnett (2005: 64) in his
book on digital images states that “what is less clear is the manner in which viewers relate to what they see. The full force of personal and public history comes to bear on the process of visualization.” The present paper offers a way of empirically analyzing Burnett’s concerns and does that in the “unashamedly provisional” (Butler and Fitzgerald 2010: 2465) manner that categories can be studied in and through the tacit features of interaction. The analyst, through her viewer’s maxim, has aimed at understanding, to paraphrase Bovet (2009), what makes a reality TV show political rather than just entertaining.

Appendix: transcription conventions

All the data examples have been translated from Danish by the author. The thumbnails from the TV are placed with regard to what is going on in the transcript and signaled with “{ }” to mark a cut to a new viewpoint. The rest of the transcription conventions are as follows:

- lower case: What was actually said
- x: Stressed (part of) word
- °word°: Word delivered quieter than the surrounding talk
- .word: Word produced with an inbreath
- >word<: Speech item delivered quicker than other talk
- !: Exclaiming tone of voice
- .: Falling intonation
- ,: Flat intonation
- :: The sound is lengthened
- wor-: The word/sentence is cut off
- (N): Length of pause in seconds
- (): Pause shorter than two-tenths of a second
- =: Talk/action latches on another
- ( ): Analyst not sure what was said
- (( )): An activity or comment on the delivery of speech
- [ ]: Simultaneous speech/activity
- [ - - ]: Some talk is missing from the speaker’s turn

Notes

1. In the program, two teams have to survive in a faraway, usually tropical, place. They have to live without any modern comforts and have to take part in various competitions. During the series, the participants have to vote people out. In the final program, viewers at home and
a selection of participants from the previous programs decide who the winner of the whole series will be. The presenter in the studio is the same person who followed the people in the wilderness and was in charge of the competitions and votes there.

2. The research materials are used in this article with a signed consent from the participants.

3. In a TV viewing situation, the preference for treating persons as recognizables (“if recognition is possible, try to achieve it” [Sacks and Schegloff 1979]) is also present, but this time not as an interactive achievement between the host and the youngsters.


References


When lives meet


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