

**49 Up: Television, 'life-time' and the mediated self. (in Kackman, M, et al eds. Flow TV, Routledge, 2011.**

John Corner

Michael Apter's *49 Up* (2005, First Run Features), the latest in his series of seven-yearly portrayals of the life-course of a group of people first examined as young children in 1964, has won widespread critical and public acclaim. Screened in prime time in the UK and broadcast extensively elsewhere, *49 Up* has since been released internationally on DVD. The American critic Roger Ebert described the series as one of his top ten greatest films of all time<sup>1</sup> and the British writer Jonathan Freedland called it the most powerful drama ever screened on British television.<sup>2</sup> The film review website, rottentomatoes.com, gave it a 97 percent fresh rating. The series has had tremendous impact internationally, both with audiences and within television production, encouraging a range of similar projects in different countries.

This chapter looks both at the integration of formal and thematic aspects of program design (for instance, the deployment of interview testimony and visual portrayal in the development of biographical portraits phased across many years) and examines the connections with broader cultural factors (such as shifts in the social structure of Britain and related changes in social values and personal expectations) that are made by this latest program in the series.<sup>3</sup> It does so with a particular interest in questions around the idea of convergence, around an assessment of how the program compares with the wide range of reality formats emerging since the series was initially devised and designed. Articulations of ordinary selfhood as an area of cultural expression have clearly grown in scope and scale as a result of the design and styling of reality television across diverse models (*Big Brother*, *Wife Swap*, and shows such as *Pop Idol* and *The Apprentice*, for example. allowing different opportunities for personal display in interview and interaction). This range of biographic and autobiographic formats has been joined by various applications of the web, particularly the uses of *Myspace* and *Facebook*. Such modifications and extensions to how the self is projected, audited and oriented towards others, including towards society, have shifted the context in which television versions of the biographical and the autobiographical now generate their meanings.<sup>4</sup> What lines of convergence or, alternatively, of divergence can be seen when we look at *49 Up* and assess its recent success with contemporary audiences? In pursuing this analysis, issues will be raised about the program's ethics as it uses people to develop its account, the kinds of performance and self-display (sometimes uneasy) that it elicits from participants, and the relatively expansive, spacious approach it adopts in the presentation of life-times and in providing the audience with opportunities for engaging with what they see and hear. These are all issues where the practices of reality television have introduced new points of comparison, not available when the first programs in the series were made.

In exploring these questions I want to work with four connected subheadings, each of which carries the analysis into the specific qualities both of the series and the latest program and, at the same time, connects outwards to questions about values in a changing audio-visual culture and a changing society. First, I want to raise issues directly around the formal character of the program, which I think poses quite unique problems of communicative design. I then want to explore how the program plays the

biographical and the sociological against one another in ways that have been a regular point of reference in critical discussion. In the third section, I want to examine the modes of the mediated self at work and the questions of ethics and of integrity raised by the series. In a final section, I will consider the frameworks of aesthetic and social appreciation (often explicitly personalized) used by critics and audiences in engaging with the program.

### Formal Design

As I noted above, many of the most important features of the program's formal character are largely a consequence of the fact that it places its present against the context of six different pasts for each of its twelve participants. Most documentaries with a biographical theme, having little or no recourse to earlier material shot for the express purpose of biographical audit, work with a highly selective and sometimes chronologically indeterminate version of the past. They perhaps use commentary speech to provide a narrative frame for a range of materials having different origins and different kinds of status as biographic data (for instance, photographs, diary entries, anecdotes from friends and colleagues, dramatized reconstructions). Other programs, particularly those with historical themes, may have one moment in the past, a year or a decade or the period surrounding a specific event, a then placed in a relationship of mutual significance against a now. *49 Up* has material from all its previous programs as multiple points of retrospective reference. This leads to a challenging textual economy (what to put where and for how long?), one with implications for the coherence of the account as it pursues its different biographical trails.

It perhaps follows inevitably from this situation that the program will work with the basic design of taking each participant in turn (although sometimes continuing to work with the pairings and threesomes that were used in the very first program).<sup>5</sup> The alternatives, for instance an organization in terms of common themes or significant contrasts produced by selecting from across all the participants, would be thematically disruptive to the essential *biographic* appeal of the project as it has developed and, given the combined range of times and people, create problems of disjunction in the viewing experience.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, even with the chosen approach, the scale of temporal movement within what I have called the textual economy is clear. For instance, in the opening chapter of the film, that concerning Tony, the East End working class boy who is now a modestly successful businessman living in semi-retirement in Spain, there are over 40 time changes in 15 minutes as the program moves back and forth along the six points of prior temporal reference, connected by Apter's retrospective commentary and Tony's self-accounting. On average, this is a time shift every 22 seconds (throughout the programme, most scenes from past episodes are identified by a caption in the lower right-hand corner). However, such a statistic is not too illuminating because the shifts vary between scenes that contain just a few seconds of commentary over action to those that involve extensive interview speech. The amount of time given to different pasts also varies; Stella Bruzzi interestingly notes how it has become a convention for each program in the series to give less attention to its immediate predecessor than to earlier episodes. The grounds for this, as she observes, are likely to be the continuing need to emphasise the formative years and the way in which the relative closeness of the time of the preceding program in the series to that of the new material is likely to reduce its contrastive or developmental interest for

viewers.<sup>7</sup> This is particularly true, of course, for those many viewers, in Britain and abroad, who see the latest in the series without having seen any of the earlier ones.

Another significant feature of the program and the project as a whole, particularly when judged in the context of contemporary reality television formats, is the way in which the emphasis is on *contemplation* rather than *action*. Clearly, contemplative depth tends to increase with the age of participants and with the number of former selves that they are invited to reflect upon. Unlike in more recent reality formats, no specific action or circumstance is required to generate that strong sense of self-in-life that constitutes the program's main offer to viewers. The program's distinctive way of being personal springs directly from the nature of the entire enterprise as one involving sustained self-reflection, even though the interview settings are mixed with scenes of routine domestic and professional activities to support the sense of lives *being lived*. The contemplative emphasis extends to the speech, which is not much concerned with objective description beyond a few key details--often provided by Apted himself in voice-over--and which only intermittently engages with opinion or viewpoint as an extension of its focus on self-review and self-development. Although soundtrack music has been urged on him by others, as a way of cueing mood and increasing viewing interest by fulfilling generic expectations established by current reality formats, Apted has declined musical options and retained the relative quietness of the program's biographical spaces.

Given these production choices, the importance of faces and voices to the meaning and impact of the project as a whole can hardly be overestimated. Although close-ups are used with restraint, most of the shots allow for a sustained viewing engagement with participants' faces, while the thoughtful hesitation of what they say often contrasts sharply with the kinds of vigorous talk privileged in many reality formats. A concentration on face and voice underscores the identity of the program as a biographic document. It moves it away from the rhetoric of exhibition and display of much contemporary factual output and provides it with sustained interiority as an exploration of subjectivity over time. This is perhaps most evident when participant voice-over from the present is put across images from the speaker's past. Such an audio-visual approach also signals *change* in a way that is both decisive and poignant--the progress of life through the six phases of seven years is a record both of a developing *experience* of life and of a physical change, in this latest program one that is now past the point of prime.

The character of the sections given to each participant varies but each one involves extensive use of material from earlier programs, recent interviews in homes (sometimes with partners), and recent footage showing family, leisure, or occupational activity both in interior and exterior settings. The function of the latter, as I have indicated, is to establish visually something of the normal life of each participant at the present time and to provide the opportunity, combined with the material from the past, for interview speech to be heard outside the context of the interview settings themselves. Apted's own framing and linking commentary is mostly restrained, although it occasionally cues biographical ironies and contrasts (here supported by the editing strategy) that the primary materials themselves might not have generated so sharply, if at all. Throughout, we regularly hear the interviewer's questions as well as participant answers, in many scenes setting up a sense of intimacy, derived from the repeated encounters over the years, that is a distinctive feature of the series and a part of its viewing appeal.

Biography and Sociology

When *Seven Up!*, the first program in the series, was made in 1964 without any plans for updating, the project was essentially one of snapshot sociology. The program was an edition of the weekly current affairs series, *World in Action*<sup>8</sup> and sought to present a contrastive exercise in the exploration of character formation, social class, and the national future. Without any concern for scientific sampling, a group of children of sharply different backgrounds was selected from schools mainly in the south but also in the north of Britain. An event was arranged to bring some of the children together. They were taken to the zoo, to a party, and to a playground in which a variety of items (climbing nets, slides, little log houses etc) was available to have fun with. The exercise worked partly by observation but principally by interviews. The Jesuit motto Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man provided a basic idea and the hook for a loosely ethnographic project in social inquiry.

Edited sections of the opening of the first program are repeated at the start of *49 Up*. The program begins with interview segments of five children giving short answers to the question of what they want to be and do when they grow up:

*I am going to work in Woolworths.*

*When I grow up I want to be an Astronaut.*

*When I get married I'd like to have two children.*

*My hearts desire is to see my Daddy.*

*I don't.. want... to answer that.*

Then, over a sequence of the children at the zoo, the voice-over commentary notes:

*This is no ordinary outing to the zoo. It's a very special occasion. We've brought these children together for the very first time. They're like any other children except that they come from startlingly different backgrounds. We've brought these children together because we wanted a glimpse of England in the year 2000.*

*49 Up* replays this opening and reframes it for 2005:

*In 1964, World In Action made Seven Up and we have been back to film these children every seven years. They are now 49.*

A contemporary sense of problems and anxieties around industrial relations (and the gender bias of the project) is revealed in a subsequent remark in the first program's commentary that the shop-stewards and executives of the year 2000 are now seven years old. Gender is a relatively unexplored factor in the exercise. Of the 14 children chosen for interviews, ten are boys. This discrepancy posed a noticeable imbalance in subsequent instalments of the series, as later programs were viewed within changing frameworks of social value and expectation. The imbalance has been partly offset by the inclusion of interviews with some of the participants' wives, talking about marriage and family as part of the biographic testimony. However, as Joe Moran notes in his perceptive study of the series, issues of social structure have become increasingly displaced by individualistic, biographical concerns as the series has developed.<sup>9</sup> This is the case even though the lives of many of the participants bear witness to the continuing influence of the economic and educational inequalities established at the start.

There is a degree of inevitability in this displacement insofar as *retrospection* has become a primary and time-consuming part of the enterprise, grounded increasingly in the self-accounts of the participants in a way that would make any

pursuit of a broader thesis by the program a challenging one to articulate. In order to sustain an emphasis on ideas of economic and class determination, the later programs would have had to work with an entirely different design, perhaps one in which the focus on the children of 1964 was heavily supplemented by a wider range of statistical data, exposition and expert interview. As commentators have pointed out, it might also have had to work with a broader and less polarized class profile, including more children from the large and internally differentiated middle-class strata rather than a design essentially placing the working-class East End against a wealthy and established social elite.

In *49 Up*, the social has not disappeared from view but it is largely present as background, occasionally increasing in salience as a result of specific points of reference and comment made by those participants more inclined to place themselves socially in their interview speech. Of course, the mysteries of individual personality were a powerful factor right from the start, complicating any attempt at articulating too firm a sense of the likely influence of environment upon a life. The opening remarks of some of the children, as quoted above, clearly show engaging personal variations of mannerism and demeanour as well as variations of broad social position.

However, by relying primarily on an interest in personal development and in personal fate as incrementally documented in the project's archive and its new materials (both how they turned out and how things turned out for them) *49 Up* poses some problems of *readability*. As viewers, we feel the need to make sense of the dense biographic particulars *beyond* our engagement with the participants themselves. Some kind of *inferential process* is pre-supposed in the program's design (and, I suspect, widely undertaken by its audiences). There is an implied move beyond the individual locus of attention to inter-individual and more general levels of significance. Initially, there is the comparison to be made between the different participants (as distinct personalities within their given and changing circumstances). Throughout, there is also the comparison between the participants and the viewer (them and me, their lives and my life), a comparison that will clearly have strong economic and social components as well as a directly physical and psychological dimension. In fact, processes of *inference* will inevitably work alongside processes of *deduction*, insofar as interpreting individual life-stories to get a broader social understanding from the program will link up with making sense of the individual lives through social categories and criteria already established in the viewer's mind and part of their basic interpretative frame. Reading the program involves a regular movement between individualized specificity and wider import, a movement in which the constituents of meaning are both taken up and taken down the levels of generality.

*49 Up* has no *propositional* case to offer, it does not make any explicit social or political claims about the world. There is therefore no question here, as there is in many other documentaries, of agreeing or disagreeing with the way in participant testimony supports or not an emerging argument. Viewers watch, listen and construct their own sense both of the individuals portrayed and the larger social picture. In such a circumstance, the most obvious upper level to which inference can project is that of the human, a level which, if only temporarily, is likely to transcend categories of social structure altogether.

I want to look now at how four of the participants conclude their own sections of the program, rounding off their self-review. Many of the participants end their account with a strongly personalized sense of achievement, sometimes mixed with notes of regret. In the case of East End working class girl Jackie, this carries a marked

recognition of earlier inequalities. When she is asked about her hopes for the future she replies:

*What I hope to do. I'd actually... I'd like to go back to school, so that I can hold a conversation with anybody in the world and know what I'm talking about. So that I'm not stuck. I know a little bit about that, but I don't really know enough. I'd love to know... Actually, I'd really like to start my education all over again.*

And then, in a comment that picks up on her dissatisfaction with the way in which she feels she has been manipulated by the project (I shall say more about this in the next section), she comments:

*I enjoy being me. But I don't think you ever really expected me to turn out the way I have.*

Neil is the articulate, merry child of seven whose apparent lack of progress in matters of career and of family, endless changes of location, and depressive tendencies have given the series its most anxious hook of narrative anxiety (what will have happened to Neil?). Not surprisingly, *49 Up* saves his story to last. Towards the end of it, Neil offers this reflective anecdote:

*If I can just tell a short story. I was just sunbathing and a butterfly landed quite close to me. Beautiful wings, deep red colour and white sort of circles on them And... These creatures don't last very long. It landed very close to me it wasn't, ... it didn't seem frightened. And it just seemed to delight in opening and closing its wings and in just actually being beautiful for that period of time, enjoying the sunshine. And perhaps there isn't actually any more to life than that, in just being what you are, realizing that life goes on all around and that there are millions of other living creatures who all have to find their part as well.*

Although not matching this in sustained transcendence, other participants are similarly encouraged by the very nature of the terms of their involvement to pull back in their concluding remarks and offer a wider perspective, if only briefly. For instance Bruce, the melancholy schoolboy at seven who, at 49, after a varied career in teaching, is now working at a school as elite as the one he attended, sounds a realist note when asked to reflect on himself as portrayed in the first program and on his present hopes:

*I can't really recognize myself. He looks a little bit lost and a little bit sad. And I think I'm quite sort of surprised to be sort of contented and reasonably happy. You know when dreams go and the day to day living of ordinary life and family life takes over I think I think we sort of live without our dreams*

Tony, the working class boy living with his family in Spain, develops a similar theme of settling for core contentment when asked about what his dreams are now:

*To be happy, which I am. I'm happy now being healthy. With all my family we all want happiness and health for our family. Anything else would be a bonus. And that's all I really want. I don't want any more or less than that.*

This is self-audit at its simplest and perhaps most resonant, the repetitions a seeming guarantee of the strength of feeling with which these ‘modest’ ambitions are held.

### Mediated Selves

The way in which the *Up* series works with self-display and self-accounting raises a number of questions, not least because some of the participants have stated how the regular intrusions into their lives of the apparatus of television have been disruptive and even traumatic. Critical comments of this kind are even contained in the interviews themselves, including those in *49 Up*.

There are two related but different kinds of issue here. One concerns the *ethics* of the series in relation to the impact (only partly predictable in advance) it has had on the lives of those it has selected, marking them as kinds of public figure at seven-year intervals.<sup>10</sup> The second concerns the way in which the design of the series, particularly in the later programs, involves a distinctive form of *performance*. This performance is one by people who have had a sustained experience of televisuality and a developing personal (but not always happy) relationship with the director/interviewer. It is also one in which the primary requirement to engage with former selves and the self-in-development produces, as we have seen, a strong sense of the contemplative.

Some participants in *49 Up* clearly seem more content than others with the distinctive performance requirements asked of them, and unhappiness in performance connects back to the question of the series’ ethics. Jackie is the most explicit in voicing criticism of an inequality in the design and production of the series. She makes a directly personal issue of the control exerted by the director over the terms of her portrayal, accusing Apter of an unfair, distorting approach after he has posed a question to her that receives an indignant response. The following exchange takes place as she talks about one of her children:

**J** *He tends to be like the outspoken one. He’s a bit like I was at his age really. In fact, he’s very much like I was at his age.*

**Apt.** *Is that a worry?*

**J** *I think that’s...that’s terrible. How dare you say that to me! Is that a worry. Why should that be a worry? Do you think I’ve turned out badly?*

**Apt.** *No... but sometimes when you look at yourself you don’t always see things you like in yourself and you see them in your child and you think...*

**J** *No... But I never said he picked up all of my traits.. I actually think he’s probably picked up the best.*

*[and after a discussion of her son’s temper in relation to hers]*

*You will edit this program as you see fit. I’ve got not control over that. You definitely come across as this is your idea of what you want to do and how you see us and that’s how you portray us. This one’s maybe.. maybe the first one [i.e. program] that is about us rather than your perception of us.*

**Apt.** *So how up to now have I got you wrong?*

**J** *How have you got me wrong? The last one was very much based on the sympathy and the illness that I've got and what I may and may not be able to do. It should have been about what I can do, what I am doing and what I will do.*

While none of the other participants protest against the project with the same sense of personal injury as Jackie, they do articulate reservations about the impact of the series upon their lives. Nick, the farmer's son who went on to Oxford and is now a science professor at an American university, simultaneously describes the discomfort his appearance causes him and affirms its value both for him and for the audience:<sup>11</sup>

*I think this film is extremely important. It's important to me but it seems to be important to other people as well. That doesn't make it an easy thing... It's an incredibly hard thing to be in and I can't even begin to describe how emotionally draining and wrenching it is just to make the film and to do the interviews and that's even when I'm pretending that nobody else is watching it.*

Nick, in this respect like Neil, has provided one of the more marked biographies of the series, his life providing themes both of career success and geographical displacement. In pursuit of the latter, the series brought him back to his family's Yorkshire farm for the shooting of *42 Up* in order to provide continuity with the landscape footage from earlier years and to foreground his engaging dual identity as farmer's son and university scientist.

An even sharper note is struck by John, one of the public schoolboys who followed a successful career at the Bar after studying at Oxford. His wife attempts to correct his critical tone, but he goes on to balance his initially negative appraisal by noting the value which his television appearances have had for the overseas charity he supports. He then expresses his understanding of the fascination of the program, although he does this in terms that align it with contemporary reality television instead of according it distinctive value:

*It has to be said that I bitterly regret that the headmaster of the school where I was when I was seven pushed me forward for this series. Every seven years a little pill of poison is injected into....*

Wife: *No no!*

*Well... well it's the truth. There are times when I have felt that appearing on this may get causes near to my heart a bit of publicity and certainly when you came to Bulgaria for the 35 up program that did lead to us getting quite significant assistance which possibly we wouldn't have got.*

*I suspect that why this program is compelling and interesting for viewers, and I quite see why it is... is because really its like Big Brother or I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here, its actually real-life TV with the added bonus that you can see people grow old, lose their hair, get fat, fascinating I'm sure... But does it have any value? That's a different question.*

What John is perhaps failing to recognize adequately here is those ways, discussed earlier, in which the forms of display of the program are really very different from those of the reality series he cites. They provide a viewing experience in which the issues of personal identity and of the interplay between ‘reality and ‘appearance’ are articulated across 42 years of audio-visual record and are openly explored across shifts of circumstance, including adversity, both by the program-makers and the participants. This kind of questioning of the stability and mutability of the self across the different phases of a life-time is likely to offer to many viewers a kind of difficult truth about coming to terms with change and with oneself that connects strongly with their own experience and thereby gives their relationship with those on screen an increased depth of focus and of feeling.

#### Frameworks of Appreciation

The scale of popular response and critical acclaim, and the recurrent use of certain terms and phrases to describe the program’s value, can easily be documented. The *rottentomatoes* film review site ([rottentomatoes.com](http://rottentomatoes.com), accessed February 2008) contains critical remarks such as:

*I can think of no single movie, fictional or factual, that more strongly awakens our common humanity, or that establishes such a marvellous, tight bond with its characters. (Chicago Tribune)*

*Apted has constructed a peerless, suspenseful work that develops character to a depth that would make Tolstoy jealous. (New York Post)*

*A deeply moving meditation on the natural evolution of existence. (Hollywood Reporter)*

*The most remarkable chronicle of a slice of humanity in the history of cinema. (New York Observer)*

*...one of the most singular and transcendent expressions to emerge during the first century of this newest art form (Christianity Today)*

Another U.S. paper continued the spiritual emphasis:

*...an affirmation of life that feels like a gift. (Los Angeles Times)*

In the UK daily newspaper, *The Guardian*, Jonathan Freedland discussed the series’ universal humanity and the way in which it allowed viewers to witness the narrative of human life itself.<sup>12</sup> He emphasized the difference between what was being done here and tendencies in reality television:

*So in the era of Celebrity Shark Bait, let us give thanks for one of those rare occasions when television reaches beyond the banal, and touches the enduringly, inspiringly human. (Freedland 2005).*

*The Times* (London) noted:

*It makes you feel better about the human race.*

Finally, Roger Ebert’s interview with Apted, included on the DVD of *49 Up* and published in the *Chicago Sun Times*,<sup>13</sup> sustains these core terms of appreciation:

*I think it's the most notable use of film that I've been able to witness as a filmgoer. Noble in its simplicity and its honesty and its directness and its lack of pretension or grandiosity. Just the gaze of an interested observer coming into these lives and saying, 'How you doin'?'*

Like many viewers, Ebert aligns his own life with that of the participants in a way that involves both empathy and projection together with a fair measure of the sentimental.<sup>14</sup>

*I came aboard early in the series and I, too, have grown older along with it. In Tony's eyes at 7, reflecting in his mind his triumphs as a jockey, I can see the same eyes at 49, gazing upon his swimming pool in Spain. He ran the race, and he won.*

As many commentators have noted, there is a strong interplay throughout the series between patterns of confirmation and patterns of surprise. In the former, personality traits and socio-economic contexts established early on are seen to be active determinants of the way in which later life develops. In the latter, what one might have expected from earlier indications is contradicted by what happens later. Here, *49 Up* works most obviously, if quietly, with the success story model, marked in the case of university physicist Nick with a clear sense of who would have thought things would turn out like this? Yet the program is keen to find something affirming in all of its stories, perhaps where the success has been of a more personal kind (as in the case of Neil's lonely struggle, in various locations, with depression – providing a regular point of anxiety and therefore of viewing interest throughout the later programs of the series).

The narratives of confirmation and surprise work powerfully from the audio-visual record of earlier expressions of personality, but they cannot help but be overlaid by the social categories through which this record was collected, the residual sociological frame. Who can be surprised that the preparatory school boys who so confidently announced their future public schools and Oxford or Cambridge colleges at the age of seven have gone on, via these institutions, to professional success and financial security? Who can be surprised that many of the working-class children have mostly not enjoyed careers in the professions and are in some cases financially hard-pressed? A sociological frame continues to play up against a more romantic sense of individual potential and growth. From scene to scene, the emphasis, including the kinds of surprise or of confirmation on offer, varies in relation to this interplay.

## Conclusion

The ways in which *49 Up* works with and upon time are unique.<sup>15</sup> This is not only a matter of its textual economy but of its fundamental character as a viewing experience. Lives in time are what *49 Up* essentially documents, increasingly underpinning the entire venture with a strong, implicit sense of what a lifetime is.

I have suggested that, for most viewers, the interplay between social system and individual character that *49 Up* portrays is a loose enough one to allow for a wide range of interpretations, depending on prior frameworks of social understanding. Although sharp inequalities are portrayed, including those of educational opportunity, these do not constitute anything like a case, they do not become the evidence for a political argument, as they well might in another kind of film. This looseness is, of course, one of the principal factors in the popular success both of the series and this

latest episode, providing the grounds for its wider, humanistic appeal. *49 Up* offers a view of lives and of living that combines both easy and difficult terms of engagement. It is easy in its relaxed affirmation, in its often strategic deployment of the poignant and the implicit foregrounding of the personal over the systemic. It is difficult insofar as it also regularly shows participants involved in a self-accounting and self-assessment which becomes, visibly, a trouble to sustain and articulate and which is provocatively connected to the real complexities and contradictions of growing up and growing older.

Although the program is, inevitably, structured in part as an entertainment, with calculated appeals and a pleasing overall design, its versions of selfhood depart markedly, in their evaluation and tone, their reflective space and their depth of perspective, from those now familiar through the varieties of reality television. *49 Up* offers a provocative marker for looking more broadly at the ways in which television portrays lifetime variously as a process within a system, a self-directed journey and a series of encounters with chance and luck. As new conditions for the mediation of the biographic and autobiographic emerge across an expanding range of formats, modes of delivery and genres, reconfiguring the options and expectations, it is likely that the series will continue to engage, fascinate and move viewers. It will do this both by the particular manner of its deployment of the long view and its connections back to modes of portrayal that come from a less hectic period in the mutually shaping and problematic relationship between the terms of television and the terms upon which lives are lived.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Ebert, Ten Greatest Films of All Time, *Chicago Sun-Times*, April, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Freedland, A Poignant, Human Drama in the Era of Celebrity Shark Bait, *Guardian* (London) September 14, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Since the writing of the seminar paper on which this chapter is based, Stella Bruzzi's excellent study of the whole series has appeared: Stella Bruzzi, *Seven Up* (London: British Film Institute, 2007). It offers many perceptive comments about the making of the programs and their character as television and I have made reference to it at several points in my own discussion.

<sup>4</sup> An excellent review of some of the ways in which the subject and subjectivity have appeared within different forms of documentary is to be found in Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> The series actively brings together some of the participants to recreate the circumstances of the first program. In *49 Up* this involves, among other things, bringing one participant and his wife over from Australia to meet up with his childhood friend of 1964. Bruzzi *op. cit.* notes how there are minor variations in the regularity of appearance of some of the participants across the run of the series.

<sup>6</sup> Although this method was used in the first three programs, when the volume of material and the length of the life-stories to date were more modest in scale.

<sup>7</sup> Bruzzi *op.cit* 63. She also talks of the repeated use throughout the series of golden moments from earlier programs, scenes which appear to sum up character and which

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have certain striking, perhaps amusing, features which can be relied upon to engage audiences and cue them into the ongoing biographies whether for the first time or as returning viewers.

<sup>8</sup> A history of this remarkable and influential series is given in Peter Goddard, John Corner, and Kay Richardson, *Public Issue Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Joe Moran, Childhood, Class and Memory in the *Seven Up* films, *Screen* 43.4 (2002): 387- 402

<sup>10</sup> The impact will be greater for some than others, according to personal circumstance. The shaping pressures that being in the program has brought to participants have, on the whole, been different from the kinds of intensive and 'invasive' media interest accorded to key characters in reality series.

<sup>11</sup> There are some odd aspects to the treatment of Nick throughout. Established as a country boy early on, walking across the fields between school and home, his career is marked as a surprise success story in a way that only works if a strong social class contrast is assumed between the conditions of his childhood and his later achievement. However, Bruzzi observes that his father is really a farmer not a farm-worker and is a university graduate himself.

<sup>12</sup> Freedland, *op. cit*

<sup>13</sup> Roger Ebert, Seventh Time Up for Apted, *Chicago Sun-Time*, October 12, 2006

<sup>14</sup> Roger Ebert, *49 Up* film review, *Chicago Sun-Time*, November 3, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Although the German series *The Story of the Children of Gozlow* began three years earlier and was last updated in 2006. Its structure and biographical/sociological mix make an interesting point of comparison with the *Up* series, one currently being pursued in the context of a wider study of longitudinal form by the documentary scholar Richard Kilborn.