**Recompositions of lives**

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I want to point here to the ways in which reconstruction acts within the 7 Up! Films, because I think that is interesting psychological, in terms of visual media, and in terms of personal narratives. I’ll emphasise the last, 56 Up! film, while referring to some of the others.

I think the first point to bear in mind, for me, is how much the later programmes work with material from the first ones, so that reconstruction operates within this clearly constrained frame. That could mean that lives are progressively narrowed by the move from the programmes’ first edits of large amounts of material, to later programmes which quote those earlier edits and each time leave behind their own recorded, edited-out material. Such narrowing moves are only tangentially related to what happens in personal narrative research, though they do happen to some extent in longitudinal research, and perhaps sometimes in long-term memory. But televisually, in this programme framework, it would difficult to show audiences things they didn’t see seven or 14 years ago to help make sense of what they are seeing now - not, at least, without explicit and extensive commentary - even though such things happen in everyday conversation and life all the time. things omitted from earlier films are, though, sometimes dragged into later ones verbally by participants. For instance, John, in 56 Up!, describes his struggling single parent family of origin, to complicate his long picturing in the series as a child born into privilege and a successful law career. When such a disruption happens, sense has to be made of it. Extensive screen time in 56 Up! goes into describing the charity and communitarian aspects of John’s life, both visually and verbally, which pulls his objections into a kind of narrative sense and moves away from his earlier heavily classed positioning in the series.

Within the programmes’ own materials, there are returns to prior material that make clear and present sense by stating the past in more emphatic terms, as coextensive with and determining of the present. For instance, the programmes often go back to the childhoods of Bruce and Symon to show moments that predict later trajectories of caring or personal difficulties, respectively. But there are more complex returns too, when the programmes make visual and semantic capital out of earlier, passed-over images. They revisit, for example, the cheerful and then the anxious face in footage of Neil at successive filmings at seven and 14, unremarkable at the time, and frame them in terms of Neil’s later mental health issues. Later still, even these images of trouble are recapitulated and recuperated by showing them, and then presenting a story of Neil’s later work in local politics as a kind of triumph over his distress. This is a redemptive narrative of the kind Dan McAdams says defines US sociality, and that has a broader contemporary social currency, too.

It seems hard, at least on the surface, for particiants to escape the programme framings and reframings, even when they import material or perspectives of their own, and this has had implications within the rest of their lives. Many participants have pointed out this difficulty; some have left the programme temporarily or permanently for this reason. In 56 Up! there is a strong focus on showing their objections – again, of course, edited. The participants say that they were affected by the programmes’ interested and partial selections, not just in the films but in how people saw them. Some are angry about this, while others recognise that complete and completely satisfactory stories of themselves are impossible. Nick describes his story within the series as a story of someone, not him, and of the changes that happen to that person.

Neil insists in 56 Up! that contrary to the programme’s redemption narrative of his life, he has not done the things he wanted, and he is being misrepresented as happy. The film then shows shots of him laughing, and wonders in voiceover whether people *know* when they are happy. The reiterated encapsulation of the programmes, ‘Give me a child till he is 7 and I will show you the man’, also seems to close things down. I think maybe the film form of the programme tends towards such closing-down too, partly as a heuristic to keep the complexities of long-term life stories under formal and audience-appropriate control, and this other aspect of narrowing is something to be aware of.

One of the most obvious reconstructions happens at the level of overall programme editing. Popular media commentary on the series has tended to note a move from class to psychological framings across the life of the series. However, one could also characterise this shift, as perhaps Susan Bell’s account suggests, as a series of shifts towards the *intersectional* framing of identities, in relation to gender, ‘race’ and transnationalism, as well as class – factors that were perhaps less remarked by editors and audience earlier on. Susan’s reading of the successive foregrounding and backgrounding of ethnicities makes sense here. These moves can be complex, involving, for instance, shifts away from explicitly political positions about ‘race’ and racism, towards multicultural cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, and what Paul Gilroy has called cultural conviviality, for instance in the segments about Symon and his family, and about Lynn. The editorial moves across the series also involve, I think very strikingly, a leap into particularity for the women in the series, whose earlier lives were cyphers and whose paucity in the series the filmmakers publically regret.

At the same time, the series does move, perhaps inevitably, towards life course framings. This is a form of psychologisation, certainly, but one that is also the result of 56 year olds often having more tendency and ability to reflect on their lives; of the historical specificity and significance of this ‘baby boom’ generation (in fact, a cohort born at the tail-off end of the 1950s boom and before the larger early-1960s boom, so in a birth-rate ‘dip’); and more practically, of the need to review and recapitulate for old and especially new audiences of the series.

More broadly, we could say that the programmes are constructed and reconstructed within different historical conjunctures, in ways that are not necessarily completely controlled by interviewees or programme makers. For instance, like a lot of cultural and indeed academic productions at the beginning of this second decade of the 21st century, 56 Up! is suffused with issues related to the financial crisis. If ‘class’ in its 1950s understanding has become tangential to the series, ‘inequality’ is frequently an edited-in concern in 56 Up!, especially in relation to ‘austerity’ policies and global inequality. It would be hard for editors to resist Jackie’s television-gold moment when she turns to camera and asks David Cameron to give her a job. There is also the - moral, rather than political - address that Lynn makes to the cuts in services that have made her redundant and shifted the nature of the social world, as well as the programme’s engagement with a host of other financial-crisis concerns about money, jobs, housing, children, and migrants, played out both verbally and visually. These concerns spread all over the programme, like the name of a large region written in enormous across a map, so spaced-out they can be hard to see as a whole. I am not sure the programme makers *deliberately* have edited all this in or out, even if they had tried to; it’s more the way in which the contemporary context makes itself felt within the film.

This brings me to a wider point. Despite the struggles for meaning between programme makers and interviewees, and perhaps ‘history’ itself if I can momentarily consider it an agent, the narratives remain more broken up even than what I have written so far might suggest. To return to earlier examples: the ‘give me a child’ claim is clearly too tendentious, and positioned rhetorically as such, really to carry its own argument. Similarly, we can only imagine the scenes of struggle of which John claims; we do not see them, as we saw evidenced privilege before, in earlier films. And as Susan has described, the programme’s narratives of nation, ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, and class are highly dialogic, lacking the persuasive force of more unified stories.

There is also I think a large degree of complexity in the programmes deriving from the way in which film itself allows multiple and extended, or what Laura Mulvey in her 2004 book *Death 24 X a second* calls ‘delayed’, readings of visual images and sounds. In such readings, the gaze floats over the image, the ear absently picks up and drops things, attention wanders., understandings play and play themselves out, stagnate or remake themselves. This delaying potential is present in older film technologies of close-ups, slow motion, zooms in and out, panning, repeated shots, or just moments of stillness, allowing films to create and explore uncertainties about what their photographic types of visual images and sound recording seem to declare is ‘really’ there.This delaying and rendering uncertain is also facilitated by newer video and especially digital technologies of, for instance, pausing, rewinding, making stills, editing your own exerpts or compilations from films, or watching excerpts or compilations made by others on Youtube. Also contributing to delayed readings, in Mulvey’s sense, are the specific set of audiencing possibilities now embedded in products such as the Up! series – watching not just on tv, but on time-delayed broadcast player services; getting the programme and indeed the whole series as a dvd or box set or downloading these; reading, hearing and seeing interviews and reviews; learning about the series in class; seeing or finding out about the different national incarnations of the programme all over the world -that is, the whole storyworld of the ‘Ups’. These all offer possibilities for delayed, slowed-down, expanding and reconstructing readings.

There are a lot of accounts of how film relates to psychic structure, including Mulvey’s own influential characterisations of female objecthood and spectatorship. In *Death 24 X a second* she relates film to deferred action, *nachtraglichkeit* in Freud’s work. The endlessly deferred character of human life meaning can seem to be flattened out and banalised in many contemporary media forms – by their speed, repetititiveness, simplification. This is not a characterisation I would agree with; in adopting it, we might be ascribing to these media features of the contemporary neoliberalised subject, who in any case is only ever one part of subjecthood. However, the specific intersections in Seven Up! of personal, social and media complexities, interviewees who are relatively powerful within the programme structure - since the programme makers need them to continue to validate the programme’s premise – and the historical and political freight of the programmes, which now carry with them moments from the past six decades: All this means that deferred action gets written over the series in an unusual and compelling way. That is, perhaps, one reason why people talk and feel so much about it, as this gathering today evidences.