

**A JOURNEY THROUGH MEMORY: AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO *REELING IN***

***THE YEARS***

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
THE BA (HONS) FILM, LITERATURE AND DRAMA**

**DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**GILLIAN BYRNE**

**SUPERVISORS: ANN-MARIE MURRAY AND PAUL HOLLYWOOD**

**30/05/2013**

## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgments.....	3
Table of figures.....	4
Abstract.....	5
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	7
1.1 Background to the Study.....	7
1.2 Motivation for the Study.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
2.1 The Television Audience.....	11
2.2 The Research Audience.....	14
2.2.1 The Effects and Uses and Gratifications Models.....	14
2.2.2 Towards a Qualitative Approach.....	15
2.3 Individual Memories.....	17
2.4 Collective Memories.....	19
2.5 Memories and Television.....	19
2.6 Television and Nostalgia.....	20
2.7 Memory Work and Prosthetic Memories.....	21
2.8 Conclusion.....	22
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY.....	24
3.1 Research Objective.....	24
3.2 Case Study.....	25
3.3 Sample Design.....	26
3.4 Study Design.....	27
CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION.....	29
4.1 Online Questionnaire.....	30
4.2 Observation of Collective Viewing.....	34
4.3 Results of Survey.....	35
4.4 The Interviews.....	40
4.5 A Reflection of Memories.....	41
4.5.1 Reflecting Individual Memories.....	41
4.5.2 Reflecting Collective Memories.....	44
4.5.3 Conclusion.....	46
4.6 A Construction of Memories.....	47
4.6.1 Constructing Individual Memories.....	47

4.6.2 Constructing Collective Memories .....	48
4.6.3 Conclusion .....	51
4.7 Nostalgia .....	52
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	55
REFERENCES .....	60
APPENDICES .....	64
Appendix 1 – Broadcast Industry ratings system and <i>Reeling in the Years</i> ratings.....	64
Appendix 2 – Online Questionnaire.....	73
Appendix 3 – Three stages of the Interview Process .....	77
Appendix 4 – <i>Reeling in the Years 1981</i> Survey .....	79

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my supervisors, Ann-Marie Murray and Paul Hollywood, for their support and guidance throughout this project. I would also like to thank Colin O’Keefe from the DBS Library and Lara Harte and Michael Talty from the RTÉ Reference Library, who tirelessly sought and retained material which was invaluable to my research for this thesis.

I am extremely grateful to Jim Booth, Anne Harte, Brendan Hayes, John Lauritsch and Niamh McCole; their unwavering advice and encouragement sustained me throughout the long and what at times seemed like a never-ending road to completion. I salute you all!

Special thanks to Andrew Fitzpatrick, Director of Scheduling RTÉ and John O’Regan, Producer of *Reeling in the Years*, for kindly agreeing to be interviewed for this research project. I am also indebted to Gareth Ivory and Imelda Allen, audience researchers in RTÉ, who explained the audience measurement system and provided ratings statistics upon which my analysis relied.

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to all the respondents who not only gave up their time to assist in this research project but also allowed me a look into the window of their past, their experiences and their memories. Without them, this project could never have been realised.

Most of all though, I wish to thank my mother, Mary Byrne and my wonderful, beautiful daughter, Leah Byrne, for the endless cups of tea, words of encouragement, patience, kindness and loads of hugs. Your constant presence and support is an inspiration to me, thank you so much.

## **Table of figures**

Figure 1 Table of events depicted in Reeling in the Years 1981. ....	25
Figure 2 Respondents attitudes to watching historically based programmes.....	30
Figure 3 Respondents’ general attitudes to Reeling in the Years .....	31
Figure 4 Respondents’ attitudes to Reeling in the Years .....	32
Figure 5 Profile of Group A respondents and events they wished to discuss .....	35
Figure 6 Profile of Group B respondents and events they wished to discuss .....	36
Figure 7 Profile of Group C respondents and events they wished to discuss .....	37
Figure 8 Profile of Group D respondents and events they wished to discuss .....	38
Figure 9 Profile of Group E respondents and events they wished to discuss.....	39
Figure 10 Ratings for first run episodes of Reeling in the Years (TAM Ireland Ltd. 2012b).....	69
Figure 11 Ratings for repeat episodes of Reeling in the Years from 2009 to 2012 (TAM Ireland Ltd. 2013).....	70
Figure 12 Ratings for scheduling slots from 2009 to 2012 (TAM Ireland Ltd. 2012b).....	72
Figure 13 Survey of events in Reeling in the Years 1981 given to respondents.....	79

## **Abstract**

This thesis sets out to explore why *Reeling in the Years*, one of RTÉ's most successful archive programmes, is such a popular programme. As it is an archive programme, the project aims to uncover how *Reeling in the Years* connects people to past events, using a combination of responses to an online questionnaire, collective viewing, observation and discussion of the case study selected: *Reeling in the Years 1981*. Following on from the introduction which explains the motivation for the study, the literature review begins with an examination of television theory and how audiences engage with and derive meaning and/or pleasure from watching television. It continues with a brief investigation into current academic methodologies for studying audiences before delving into the specific areas of individual and collective memories and how television programmes such as *Reeling in the Years* use memory and nostalgia to fulfill gratification needs of their viewers. Chapter three accounts for the methodology behind the research project, drawing on antecedent empirical studies highlighted in the literature review in order to make a case for the direction the researcher undertook to achieve the research objective. An analysis of the questionnaire and the interview sessions undertaken by five groups of individuals is studied in the following chapter, drawing the conclusion that *Reeling in the Years* reflects individual and collective memories and constructs collective memories. It will also confirm that there is little distinction between events as they are shown on screen and the respondents' recollections of those events and also verify that although individuals actively engaged with the programme, they were not nostalgic for 1981. The final chapter provides a succinct summarisation of the overall project before re-establishing the conclusions drawn from the preceding analysis.

Remembrance of things past is not necessarily the remembrance of things as they were.

Marcel Proust

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Ireland's national broadcaster, RTÉ, celebrated fifty years of broadcasting in 2012 and in doing so, compiled a series of historically orientated programmes such as *The Entertainers*, *50 Years in the Glow*, *Kneeling in the Years* and *Highlights from the TV Archives*. However, celebrating fifty years of broadcasting does not limit the media organisation to its historic programming. The presence of this type of programming on television is also evident in its regular schedules.<sup>1</sup> Christine Geraghty and David Lusted contend that programmes like these strike a chord with viewers, reminding them of what it was like to be “differently positioned – as children, adolescents, fans – in that history” (1998: 197). They can appeal to all generations and are not restricted to one genre. The one quality they have in common is that they all, in one way or another, concern themselves with history.

One of RTÉ's most successful archive programmes is *Reeling in the Years*. As the most often run programme on RTÉ, Andrew Fitzpatrick, Director of Scheduling, notes how *Reeling in the Years* almost always comfortably reaches the anticipated ratings expected.<sup>2</sup> He asserts “we have high expectations [for *Reeling in the Years*] and it still...does the business” (2012: 11). Competing in a multi-channel, post digital switchover environment, Fitzpatrick notes how *Reeling in the Years* is a “TV brand ... they're synonymous [brand and title], great song and all, its ... really good editorial judgment made it a success” (ibid: 17). As far as he's concerned, there's no other archive programme on Irish television which has been as successful as *Reeling in the Years*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Broadcast material identified as historic can be extended to include retro dramas and comedies such as *Mad Men* and *That 70s Show*, historical docu-dramas concerning moments of national crises such as *Stardust* and *Whistleblower*, mining the archives for programmes such as *Gaybo Laughs Back* and *Nationwide Revisited*, as well as the rerun scheduling of old series such as *Murder She Wrote* and *Diagnosis Murder*. It also includes arts documentaries like *Brian Friel* and *Imagining Ulysses* and historical documentaries such as *Seven Ages*.

<sup>2</sup> RTÉ's aim is to generate a forty per cent share across RTÉ One and RTÉ Two during peak time viewing. A share is the percentage of those watching television who viewed a particular programme. *Reeling in the Years* consistently delivers in its repeat transmissions which average out between a thirty and thirty five per cent share of viewers. A detailed analysis of ratings and *Reeling in the Years* audience share is included in Appendix 1.

## **1.2 Motivation for the Study**

This consistent popularity begs the question what is it that makes *Reeling in the Years* so successful? Its popularity suggests that it will continue to be a regular fixture in the schedule for many years to come. It is this very popularity that makes *Reeling in the Years* such an interesting case for exploration. The broadcasting industry largely determines a programme's success by the number of individuals that tuned in and watched that programme. It obsessively counts viewers but does not examine how the audience interacts with the programme, nor concern itself with the meaning derived from it, the modes of attention the audience applies to the programme or why it's popular.

Countering this, much academic discourse concerns itself with the attention the audience gives to a particular piece of televisual text and the meaning and/or pleasure derived from it. To that end, this research project attempts to establish what aspect of *Reeling in the Years* repeatedly attracts such a huge audience. As *Reeling in the Years* is an archive programme, this thesis will attempt to uncover how peoples' memories of national and international events connect with the events shown in one particular episode of *Reeling in the Years*. It seeks to establish whether individual and collective forms of memory and nostalgia emerge as a vital component of an audience's engagement with and enjoyment of the programme. There has been little epistemological investigation into how audiences engage with historical archive programmes and in particular, archive news programmes.<sup>3</sup> This study aims to add to the current literature and research findings surrounding audiences and their engagement with archive programmes within the televisual landscape.

Justin Lewis contends that viewers "don't just engage with the sounds and pictures on the screen, [...they] engage with them in *particular* ways" (1991: 49) (emphasis in original).

---

<sup>3</sup>Two seminal theories on audience interaction with archive programmes are Myra MacDonald's exploration of television's production of 1960s cultural memory concentrating on archive documentaries and Amy Holdsworth's examination of television's relationship between the past and the present via family history documentaries and nostalgic entertainment programming (MacDonald, M. 2006; Holdsworth, A. 2011).

To delve into the ways that audiences engage with programmes, the literature review introduces relevant researches into the television audience and how individuals connect with and derive meaning/pleasure from what s/he watches on television. It will briefly explore how, in antecedent academic discourse, audience studies have mostly evolved into an empirical, semi-ethnographic approach, making a case for the approach taken in this thesis. The literature review concludes by focusing on studies of memories and their value individually and collectively before examining how television uses memory and nostalgia. Following on from that, chapter three explains the methodology employed in order to achieve the research objectives set out. It will present *Reeling in the Years 1981* as the case study in this project, as well as clarify the sample design of the respondents who took part, concluding with the method behind how the study was carried out.

The main body of this research project attempts to answer the question: does *Reeling in the Years* construct or reflect individual and/or collective memories? It examines whether and to what extent there is a divergence between the depiction of historic events in the programme and the audience's personal recollection of those events. Amy Holdsworth states "memory and nostalgia are the principal modes through which highly selective glimpses of the television archive are viewed" (2011: 101). As such, the research will also highlight if, when viewing a particular episode of *Reeling in the Years*, the audience are nostalgic for that period in time.

This section of the thesis draws on Annette Kuhn's memory work to assess the memories of the participants in this research project (2002b). For those who were too young to remember the events or who weren't living in Ireland at the time, it will ask if their memories are partly constructed by events that are depicted in the programme through employing Alison Landsberg's theories on prosthetic memories (2003). From that, an analysis will be drawn in chapter five which offers a conclusion to the research questions set out,

as well as recommending further avenues for exploration. This project anticipates offering a unique insight into the complexities of memories and television audience members, which forms the basis of this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Television, simply put, is a medium through which moving images along with sound are transmitted by a broadcaster and received by the audience. Yet, describing television in such minimal terms does not even begin to quantify how it has entertained, informed, educated, shocked and literally challenged cultural and social perspectives. Television is a means by which a society can make sense of the world they live in. In order to establish whether individual and collective forms of memory and nostalgia emerge as a vital component towards an audience's engagement with *Reeling in the Years*, one must first look towards a definition of the audience and their use of this pervasive medium.

### **2.1 The Television Audience**

Modern life is paradoxically both constrained and empowered by images and information received through the television. Theorists, such as Jean Baudrillard, contend that contemporary society has become so immersed in media events, reality and the meaning of reality has been substituted by signs and symbols which merely simulate reality (1981). So who are the audience? To try to understand who the audience is, to attempt to grasp that recognisable yet intangible designate, one must take into account the complexity surrounding the multitude of individuals who nationally and internationally form what is universally termed as the 'audience'.

There have been many definitions of the television audience. Lisa Lewis notes that "network television's enduring image as mass culture inevitably has implied a low class and uneducated audience" (1992: 164). Labelling culture "a paradoxical commodity", theorists such as Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer believed audiences were mere entities fashioned by media institutions and televisual texts (1944: 18). The audience can be defined as specific groups of people characterised by particular economic, cultural and social associations and classified according to their particular, unique opinions and outlooks

(Morley D. 1980; Lewis, J. 1991). They are also creations of specific types relating to age, class, gender and demographic region (Liebes, T. & Katz, E. 1993; Television Audience Measurement Ireland Ltd. 2012).

Ien Ang asserts that “media audiencehood has become an intrinsic part of our everyday reality” (1996: 80). So it should come as no surprise to any theorist, researcher or academic that watching television in a domestic environment is an extremely complex practice. Lewis asserts that to understand television, “we must understand the rules of the domestic setting in which it finds itself” (1991: 52). Watching television is sometimes an active process, which involves the audience actively sitting down and watching television. At other times, they can also be performing a variety of other tasks simultaneously which bear absolutely no relation to the task of watching television. Audience members view many different types of programmes, based on interests derived from their social and cultural background and more importantly, to satisfy their particular needs at a particular moment. Therefore, as Ang contends, the absolute definition of the television audience can never be concluded “because the world of actual audiences is too polysemic and polymorphic to be completely articulated in a closed discursive structure” (1991: 14).

Audiences come to television in different contexts. With the proliferation of social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, half of America’s audiences are now engaging in some sort of social media activity simultaneous with television viewing (Roy, D. 2012: 5). Liz Huszaril asserts that although 95% of people watch broadcast television, 51% also use the internet to consume television programmes and 12% watch on mobile devices, such as i-phones and i-pads (2012: 7). Emerging on-demand services, such as the launch of the RTÉ Player on UPC, means that not only can viewers choose what they want to watch but also, when they want to watch and on what medium they want to watch. Although valuable in attempting to understand the diverse ways in which audiences engage with television

programmes, this still doesn't explain what a viewer actually does while watching the programmes, what levels of attention are given to watching a particular programme and what meaning or enjoyment they take from that programme. So where does one begin to examine how an audience reads meanings into media messages?

As audience members spend considerable amounts of their leisure time watching television, there can be no doubt that television is used primarily as a source of entertainment and enjoyment. John Tulloch notes that "most of the audience research about TV talk relates ... to pleasure" (2000: 58). In David Buckingham's study of the British soap opera *Eastenders*, he surmises that soap operas are a pleasurable experience for the audience because "the narratives of soap opera tend to place the viewer ... in a position of knowledge" (1987: 64). David Morley also examines the pleasure factor an audience member experiences when he questions "the viewers' positive or negative response to the text as a particular cultural form – do they enjoy it, feel bored by it, recognise it as at all relevant to their concerns?" (1981: 10). James Lull examines the social uses of television in a domestic context in order to explain the distinct behaviours which are associated with watching television.

Lull divides how audiences use television into "communication facilitation, affiliation /avoidance, social learning and competence/dominance" (1990: 37). Television can be used to assist communication in a household by acting as a mediator in conversations or reduce discomfort when conversation wanes. Morley confirms that television "may often simply serve as a common experiential ground for conversation" (1986: 22). As a method of affiliation/avoidance, television unites families because it is a family behaviour which is undertaken together. With regard to social learning, television transmits programming of national concern, enabling audiences to make informed decisions from pre-electoral debates and even uncovers social and cultural injustices through investigative journalism. Television

can also be used to reinforce or negate an audience member's behavioural conduct as a process of competence by his/her connection to a character. As a form of dominance, a mother can regulate what and when a child is allowed to watch and can even use television as a means of punishment. In understanding how audience members use and integrate television into a central part of family life, one can then begin to apply this as a way of researching television audiences.

## **2.2 The Research Audience**

Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz assert "the study of television is the study of effect" (1993: 8).

The effects of media messages on the audience have always been at the centre of theoretical research. There are three distinct phases of audience research. Their distinctiveness lies in the level of control, influence and impact which are credited to the producers of media messages versus the audiences interpreting the messages produced. From the effects model, through to the uses and gratifications model and onto qualitative studies, research has undoubtedly proven that audiences are not merely passive recipients of televisual texts but in fact, can agree with a portion of the text or even totally reject the images presented to them.

### **2.2.1 The Effects and Uses and Gratifications Models**

The Effects Model epitomised the belief that society was composed of individuals who mindlessly accepted the meanings in televisual texts without question. Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst note that the Effects Model defined the media as "a narcotic where messages are injected into the mass audience as if from a hypodermic syringe" (1998: 5). However, the failure of the effects approach to acknowledge external influences and perceptions rendered this model naïve and untenable. In the Uses and Gratifications model, theorists turned away from the stereotype of the hypodermic needle into concerning themselves with how audiences were using the media. Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Karl Erik Rosengren state that from the very start, the U&G model emphasised "the

differential needs, orientations and interpretive activities of members of the audience possessing different social and/or individual characteristics” (1995: 175). Although this model identified audience members as active rather than submissive, uses and gratifications assumes that all audience members will interpret television texts in the same manner. This model doesn’t take into account a viewer’s motive for choosing a programme to watch, nor allow for the complexities of how media texts are consumed by individuals and groups, even though it offers “some prospect of differentiating audiences” (Hart, A. 1991: 43).

### **2.2.2 Towards a Qualitative Approach**

Stuart Hall, in *Encoding/Decoding*, significantly designated the role of the receiver (audience member) of the media text as being just as important as the role of the sender (producer) (1980). He suggested that the meaning generated by the producer when encoding the message is not closed. In fact, the signifying potential of the televisual encoded text and the meaning behind the message is only fully realised at the decoding stage. From the moment Hall’s treatise was released into academia, theorists began to explore and investigate how the audience actually receives and decodes television and its programmes. For the first time, media texts were considered to be polysemic, which inevitably directed audience studies towards an empirical, qualitative, quasi-anthropological approach.

Drawing on anthropology, the purpose of ethnography is to establish the way people live their culture. The ethnographer goes out into the field, observes the culture, collects data and presents an analysis. Ethnographic research on television audiences can be a protracted, expensive and often laborious commitment but qualitative research is hugely beneficial because theorists can gain an understanding of how media is actually used. Abercrombie and Longhurst define “media consumption” as a “fragmented experience” (1998: 33). As such, the complexities behind researching audience behaviour are extensive and often problematical. However, whilst being almost impossible to ever gain a definitive answer

about audiences, an ongoing commitment to uncovering the heterogeneous modes of television viewing allows us to view the audience in relation to the complex, diverse ways in which they engage with television.

Lull states any human behaviour can be “considered ethnomethodologically: walking, talking, viewing television” (1990: 11). Considerable ethnographic research has endeavored to reveal the meanings audiences generate from televisual texts and under what circumstances. Ang notes that, due to the ethnographic approach to studying audiences undertaken by many researchers, “a sort of methodological consensus has emerged, a common ground in which scholars from divergent epistemological backgrounds can thrive” (1996: 36). Although the methodologies behind various analyses are diverse, theorists of audience research advocate the necessity for meaningful, interpretative research focusing on the everyday lives of people.

Morley and Lewis’ studies of audience reactions to particular programmes according to socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicity revealed how class structures and social position determined and influenced the meanings generated in a television text (Morley, D. 1980; Lewis, J. 1991). Morley’s study of societal and family behaviour uncovered a clear, distinctive contrast between female and male consumption patterns of television viewing (1986). Ang’s research on *Dallas* revealed respondents simultaneously enjoyed watching the programme but were also defensive of the pleasure derived from watching it, leading her to conclude that the respondents bought into the dominant ideology of mass culture (1985). Liebes and Katz’ international investigation of multi-cultural interpretations of *Dallas* emphasised how their respondents engaged with the programme through identifying with the characters and storylines rather than making a critical reading of the programme (1993). Ellen Seiter’s analysis of domestic television consumption and how children mimic what they

saw on television in the classroom proved the value of qualitative audience research as a viable method for studying television audiences (1999).

As research has borne out, audiences are sophisticated so television must respond to their sophistication by producing programmes that will give meaning to the audience and satisfy their refined needs. One of the ways in which television has responded to its audience needs is through creating programmes which remind them of their history, their identity and reinforce a sense of collective belonging. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney note how “cultural memory has emerged as a useful umbrella term to describe the complex ways in which societies remember their past using a variety of media” (2006: 111). Commemorative events throughout history are shared and mediated through the televisual landscape, reinforcing a sense of recognition, identification and belonging. The pleasure a viewer derives from viewing historical programmes is related to his/her memories of the events being portrayed and/or the nostalgic emotions they evoke. However, memory is not merely cultural or collective; it is also highly personal and unique to an individual.

### **2.3 Individual Memories**

To begin to get a sense of the complexity of memory, one should consider a new born baby as an open book. The baby is instinctive; possesses no learned behaviour patterns, has no concept of beliefs, opinions and/or attitudes. The pages in that book are blank, waiting on experiences to fill it, to form the identity of that baby as this book of experiences are filled in and they remember. For instance, a child touches a hot radiator and experiences pain. The next time s/he approaches the radiator, s/he will do so with caution, remembering the pain experienced the time before. James Fentress and Chris Wickham assert that “remembering is an experience, or an activity performed by mind” (1992: 4). Memory is a complex subject; it is the sum of all the experiences - intellectual, intuitive and physical – of a person,

transforming into behaviours, decisions and actions as a result of the memories of those experiences.

Fentress and Wickham contend that memory encompasses all aspects of an individual's psychological and intellectual life, "from the most abstract and cognitive to the most physical and unconscious" (ibid: 5). Thinking about a loved one, reading a book, interpreting a media text, forming an opinion, are all, to some extent, shaped by memory. To coin a phrase - we are what we remember; if we are what we remember, the way we portray ourselves in our memories, the way our thoughts are configured through our memories, the way our identity is composed from our memories and the way we communicate our memories to others is, in essence, the way we are.

Various individuals remember events from different points of view, using a variety of strategies to preserve them. Memory is an active method of reconstructing the past, "in which elements may be retained, reordered, or suppressed" (ibid: 40). However, memories are subjective connotations of a past experience which is remembered in the present moment. Paul Grainge asserts "the negotiation of memory describes the echo and pressure of the past as it is configured in present-based struggles over the meaning of lived experience" (2003: 3). Originating in the past and impacting in the present, memories, as a way of reliving stories from the past, are a fundamental aspect in defining one's identity. However, memory is not simply a personal process; it is also a collective process. Fentress and Wickham also note that memory is "structured by language, by teaching and observing, by collectively held ideas, and by experiences with others" (1992: 7). Although personal memories belong solely to one individual, collective memories are shared memories, experienced socially and culturally.

## **2.4 Collective Memories**

One of the first theorists to explore collective memory, Maurice Halbwachs asserts that people obtain their memories through their interaction in society. Memories evoked in people's minds materialise "under the pressure of society" (Halbwachs, M. 1992: 51). He argues that externally imposed cultural influences determine what memories an individual holds and which are discarded. Yet, this oversimplification doesn't take into account an individual's autonomy in choosing what is significant enough for him or her to retain. The past is always reconstructed and modified through memories in an arbitrary and subjective manner. As a version of events, people employ memories to create the world around them and give themselves a location in which they have meaning in the world. Kuhn confirms that an individual's memories extend further than his/her own private recollections. They proliferate into an unlimited system of meanings that combine the "personal with the familial, the cultural, the economic, the social, the historical" (Kuhn, A. 2002b: 5).

## **2.5 Memories and Television**

Television began as a medium with no regard to the importance of memory and little comprehension of the "value of archiving or systematically storing and preserving its output" (O'Sullivan, T. 1998: 201). In Ireland, the value of storing and making use of archive programming only began to be fully realised at the turn of the twenty first century. As the majority of individuals cannot have been present at moments of historical significance, they rely on television to communicate those events to them. As such, television plays a crucial role in how these events shaped the identities of the very people who watch them. Not only do these events shape identities, they are embedded in the minds of individuals so much so that when one asks the question of 'do you remember...?', s/he is more than likely to be asking 'do you remember when you saw...?' Mariette Clare and Richard Johnson contend television highlights "the ways in which private memories and identities come to be connected with public versions of history" (2000: 197). Television makes a direct link

between personal remembrances of events of significance and cultural structures of meaning derived from these events.

Other theorists, such as Morley, Ang, Seiter and Lewis, confirm the role of television in constructing individual and societal identities (Morley, D. 1980, 1986; Ang, I. 1991, 1996; Seiter, E. 1999; Lewis, J. 1991). Labelling television “a technology able to picture and embody the temporality of the past”, Grainge suggests that the ideology of mass duplicity fails to acknowledge the potential for conveying the past through television, a recognised form of mediation (2003: 1). Holdsworth places television as central to a society’s understanding of the past (2011: 96). Gill Branston notes that memories cannot be “viewed as unarguable historical fact” (1998: 52). People constantly revisit, rework, reconstruct and re-imagine their memories in order to confirm their individual beliefs, attitudes and opinions. Robert Burgoyne asserts that in contemporary media culture, history “has been replaced by ‘experiential’ collective memory” (2003: 225). Holdsworth augments this supposition, stating “in the contemporary televisual landscape, memory and nostalgia lie at the very heart” (2001: 6). Television, as a mediator, draws on the numerous aspects of cultural memory in order to present to its audiences a history and experience which can be vicariously experienced and imagined. In doing so, it bridges the divide between individual subjectivity and historical objectivity.

## **2.6 Television and Nostalgia**

Nostalgia refers to a sentimental yearning for the past, which is often elicited by an individual witnessing an event, action or phenomenon which reminds them of a past with positive connotations. It is evoked when an individual experiences a longing for security, contentment and unity experienced in the past, yet also knows that one can never return to the past and those pleasurable emotions. Kuhn asserts when this occurs, “memory becomes tinged with the bittersweet, death-defying sadness of nostalgia” (2002b: 160). Nostalgia for

the wonderful times of yesteryear often emerges as a reaction to periods of transition or conflict, whether private, social, political or economic. Another important aspect of television is how it embodies nostalgia in certain types of programming. Holdsworth cites many examples of nostalgic television, including:

The reinvention and resurrection of cult or canonical texts such as *Doctor Who...* or *Life on Mars...*, the popularity of nostalgia programming (i.e. the clip show or list TV) and ... the development of online television archives (2011: 5).

Its popularity is partly due to “its tendency to draw people into the past instead of the present” (2003: 144). Television, regardless of whether or not it evokes nostalgic emotions, turns historical events into narratives that enlighten and influence the personal interpretation of an individual viewer, as well as the multitudes that make up the audience, underpinning the pleasure involved in remembering.

### **2.7 Memory Work and Prosthetic Memories**

Kuhn advocates the use of ‘memory work’, which enables one to characterise the links between personal memory and external memories of shared historical events. She defines memory work as “an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of it’s (re)construction through memory” (2002b: 157). Memory work does not concern itself with the legitimacy or accuracy of what is remembered. Rather, it seeks to endorse memory as confirmation of a specific recollection of a historical event, questioning the authenticity of the memory, extracting the meanings in the recollection of that event and interpreting the meanings extracted.

Kuhn goes on to define memory texts, which are produced across a range of media such as television, photographs, print, film etc., as a “cultural phenomenon” (2002b: 5). These are used as a secondary source of memory which can modify or indeed, alter an

individual's initial consideration. Television, as a source of cultural production, creates memory texts through its commemoration of national and historical anniversaries, its self-reflexive recycling of programmes in its schedules, the popularity of nostalgic programmes and its interpretation of history through documentary programming. Seiter notes "adults have powerful memories of childhood experiences with the media" (1999: 8). The media reinforces both individual and a culture's identity and memory of events through its broadcast of these specific types of programmes.

Landsberg delves into the impact of mass media and their ability to create memories for those who may not have lived or experienced events of national importance. Her notion of a 'prosthetic memory' establishes that memories artificially produced through engagement with media texts acquire the intimacy of being implanted into an individual's personal memory (2003). These synthetic memories create a social historical past, a past which connects the individual to the national and allows the individual access to a past which would otherwise be unavailable to them. Landsberg asserts "the pasts that prosthetic memory opens up are available to individuals across racial and ethnic lines" (2003: 149). This enables individuals to empathise and bond across socio-economic, ethnic and other forms of diverse groupings.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Audience members' attitudes and opinions are built up of such innumerable, diverse, constituent parts that their interpretation of a particular text at a particular time when experiencing a particular emotion is flexible, mutable and constantly shifting. However, understanding television audiences and their appetite for consuming media provides a starting point to gaining an understanding of why this research project is a worthwhile endeavour. As shown, empirical audience studies prove that television is not the massive cultural deception which Adorno and Horkheimer believed capitalist corporations could use as an effective tool

to dominate and subjugate the masses. Also, audiences do not interpret a televisual text in the same way, regardless of the gratifications they desire to be fulfilled. In fact, television's engagement with the viewer opens up a variety of polysemic readings.

Borne out by the research above, this thesis aims to reveal if *Reeling in the Years* reflects individual and collective memories using Kuhn's method of memory work (2002b). Clare and Johnson advocate the use of memory work because it "can make transparent the operation and encoding of cultural power" through establishing the diverse ways the respondents interpreted the messages in the programme (2000: 222). It illustrates how memory meanings are not closed; highlighting the act of transformation that memory work produces. For those respondents who were too young to have lived through the images depicted in the programme and those who are not from Ireland, the research will also reveal if *Reeling in the Years* constructs individual and collective memories, using Landsberg's theory on prosthetic memories (2003). Subsequently, the research will reveal if there is a deviation between the portrayal of events in the programme and the audience's remembrance of those events, closing with a brief exploration of whether its participants are nostalgic for the past.

Society, made up of diverse ethnic and cultural communities, is unique and multifarious. Regardless of the meaning invested in its production, audiences will decipher programmes according to their own unique views and opinions. Following an examination of above studies, the researcher adopted the empirical approach to her project as the most appropriate and suitable method in ascertaining the meanings inherent in *Reeling in the Years*. In order to determine the extent to which memory is involved in audience response, it's necessary to document the responses of an actual audience grouping. Recognising the value of the ethnomethodological research approaches detailed above, the study was designed to permit the collection of qualitative data by means of collective viewing, observation and interview.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

### **3.1 Research Objective**

As the literature review has shown, memory is a complex subject in which the past is subjectively reconstructed in the present moment. Memories also bridge the divide between personal and cultural historical events. Television, as a mass media tool, enables its audience to look to the past through its historical programming. Regardless of the dominant hegemonic discourse that may be inserted into programmes, there is strong academic epistemological evidence of the heterogeneity of audiences when it comes to deciphering the meanings offered in a televisual text. Lewis confirms this when he states “something as intricate as a TV program is seeped in potential ambiguity” (1991: 54). A singular televisual text contains many potential diverse meanings, depending on an individual’s cultural, social and economic background and their tastes and attitudes.

*Reeling in the Years* is an archive programme which repeatedly attracts huge audience ratings.<sup>4</sup> As such, this thesis focuses on the particular aspects of memory and nostalgia derived from this historical programme to determine exactly what it is that makes it so popular. Imitating previous empirical work, such as Morley, Lewis and Liebes and Katz’s studies, this project aims to assemble valuable qualitative data through the collective viewing of this programme, observation and post-viewing discussion of the memories evoked (Morley, D. 1980; Lewis, J. 1991; Liebes, T. & Katz, E. 1993). It does so in order to uncover how peoples’ memories of national and international events connect with the events shown in one particular episode of *Reeling in the Years*. It also seeks to establish if individual and collective forms of memory and nostalgia significantly feature when engaging with the programme.

---

<sup>4</sup> A detailed analysis of ratings and *Reeling in the Years* audience share is included in Appendix 1.

### 3.2 Case Study

From an industry perspective, *Reeling in the Years* is classified as an entertainment programme which gives the viewer a flavour of events which occurred in the particular year being transmitted.

Month	Event
January	Ronald Reagan is sworn in as President of the USA, prompting celebrations in his ancestral hometown of Ballyporeen.
January	American hostages freed from Iran are given a warm welcome during a stopover at Shannon Airport.
January	Mary McAleese reports for 'Today Tonight' on the unveiling of the new DeLorean car in Northern Ireland.
January	President Reagan survives an assassination attempt.
February	A disco turns to tragedy when 48 young people die in a fire at The Stardust nightclub on Dublin's Northside.
March	Republican prisoners embark on a hunger strike lead by Bobby Sands, demanding political prisoner of war status.
April	Britain's Buck's Fizz, singing 'Making Your Mind Up' win the Eurovision Song Contest, held in the RDS in Dublin.
May	Construction begins on Knock Airport, with or without planning permission.
May	Bobby Sands dies after 66 days on hunger strike, resulting in extensive rioting.
May	An Aer Lingus plane is hijacked on route from Dublin to London.
May	Irish politicians hit the campaign trail for the 1981 General Election.
May	Pope John-Paul II survives an assassination attempt.
June	Irish election results are in with Garrett Fitzgerald leading a coalition government with Michael O'Leary.
July	Protesters take to the streets to air their opposition to the IRFU's plans to tour South Africa.
July	Britain's Prince Charles marries Lady Diana Spencer.
July	A violent riot in Ballsbridge, Dublin arises when Gardai prevent a protest march in support of the hunger strikers from reaching the British Embassy.
August	Kieran Doherty, elected to the Dáil, becomes the eight hunger striker to die.
September	Offaly are All-Ireland Hurling Champions whilst reigning champions Kerry become the All Ireland Football Champions for the fourth time in a row.
October	After the death of ten hunger strikers, the hunger strike is called off granting the prisoners demands.
October	Ireland's first women Army recruits pass out on parade.
October	Irish supermarket boss Ben Dunne is kidnapped.
October	Egyptian President Anwar Sadat is assassinated.
Miscellaneous	In Rugby, Ireland lose each one of their Five Nations' matches.
Miscellaneous	The Rubik's Cube, a child's toy, gets a spot on Ireland's premier chat show: The Late Late Show.

Figure 1 Table of events depicted in *Reeling in the Years* 1981.

Each episode of *Reeling in the Years* covers events across a multiplicity of areas, including news, current affairs, sport, politics, entertainment, pop culture and music. Series producer, John O'Regan notes that "in every way, *Reeling in the Years* is not comprehensive, it's indicative" (2012: 7). *Reeling in the Years* does not attempt to be a full news or political

review of a particular year, nor be a definitive historical documentary of the past. It tries to give a broad picture of events that occurred in that particular year. Each episode contains images of selected events, using captions to alert the viewer as to what is going on, against a soundtrack of the popular music of that year.

This research project aims to produce an in-depth analysis of *Reeling in the Years 1981*, particularly focusing on individual memory, collective memories and nostalgia emotions evoked in the respondents. It was chosen primarily because it contains footage that is expected to continue to have reverberations in contemporary society. The programme contains both positive and negative aspects of Irish history which makes it an ideal sample for the purpose of the research project. The scope of this thesis means that the results will provide a legitimate representation of individual and cultural memories from a particular group of people, specifically realised through the programme *Reeling in the Years 1981*.

### **3.3 Sample Design**

The sample consists of five groups of between three and six people, drawn from five different locations in Dublin: Raheny, Stoneybatter, Leopardstown, Artane and Swords. The researcher asked five individuals to bring together a group of between five and seven people to participate. There were no restrictions placed on age, gender, socio-economic position, marital status or even familial positions on potential respondents.<sup>5</sup> The researcher informed each initial group leader that the only requirement for each group was that they are known to each other, so that the post-viewing discussion can be as informal and relaxing as possible. It was also indicated that non-Irish respondents would also be welcomed to participate.

Imitating Seiter's sample design choice, it was considered essential that the respondents should have an established rapport with the researcher (1999). In addition to the

---

<sup>5</sup> Twenty four individuals took part in the research project in total. The sample drew in respondents who are principally from Dublin: sixteen from the Northside of Dublin and three from the Southside of Dublin. One individual comes from Maynooth in Co. Kildare, one from Co. Mayo, one from Sligo, one from Scotland and one from Canada. They range in age from eighteen up to fifty five years old and are evenly split with 50% female and 50% male respondents. The research project drew in a diverse mix of individuals, from a wide variety of social groups.

primary respondents in each group being familiar with the researcher, the researcher fully anticipated that most other respondents would be known to the researcher to some degree, thereby putting the respondents at ease with the aim of eliciting more open, honest responses. The decision to engage with all respondents in the primary respondent's domestic setting further exploited the relaxing atmosphere the researcher wanted the respondents to experience. The limitation of the research project dictated a very small sample of respondents, all recruited within one small geographical area, on Dublin's Northside. The only exception to this was Group B, who was recruited from Dublin's Southside.

### **3.4 Study Design**

The principal mode of research was conducted by observing and interviewing the respondents who were asked to recall their memories of events depicted in *Reeling in the Years 1981*. Prior to the interview sessions, respondents were asked to fill in a background questionnaire online.<sup>6</sup> One of the aims of the online questionnaire was to define the personal profiles of each respondent, so that the research project would have accurate data for the whole group, such as age, nationality and social background. The primary objective of the questionnaire was to identify the respondents' viewing habits in watching historical programmes overall and determine their opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards *Reeling in the Years*. Following on from Giuseppe Iarossi<sup>7</sup>, the questionnaire was designed to be clear, concise, and brief (2006: 30-44), using the likert scale.<sup>8</sup> Although the online questionnaire was valuable in terms of providing ground information, the primary research focused on in-depth group interviews with respondents to elicit the personal and collective memories in relation to *Reeling in the Years 1981*.

---

<sup>6</sup> Online questionnaire is included in Appendix 2

<sup>7</sup> Giuseppe Iarossi advocates the use of questionnaires which are clearly defined and brief, as well as ensuring that the wording is impartial and unbiased.

<sup>8</sup> The likert scale rates choices from low (strongly disagree) to high (strongly agree) Ian Brace asserts the rationale behind the likert scale is to 'sum the scores for each respondent', so that the statement will "represent different aspects of the same attitude" (2004: 86).

The interview process for each group lasted approximately one hour and forty five minutes. There were three stages to the interview process.<sup>9</sup> The first stage was an initial introduction followed by collectively viewing *Reeling in the Years 1981*. As there are twenty four individual story segments in *Reeling in the Years 1981*, the ensuing interview could not ever hope to encompass all events depicted. Therefore, for the second stage, the researcher provided a survey listing all events depicted, asking each respondent to mark the top five most significant stories for them, in order of importance.<sup>10</sup> This survey formed the basis of the discussion, with the respondents making a consensus decision as to which events they wanted to discuss during the subsequent phase. The third and final stage was the discussion of *Reeling in the Years 1981* whereby respondents discussed events selected and related their individual memories connected to the events, which in turn gave an insight into collective memories. Towards the end of the discussion, the researcher asked if watching *Reeling in the Years 1981* prompted feelings of nostalgia for 1981.

An interview, like most qualitative studies, has limitations. For instance, the interaction with respondents is an account of their beliefs, not necessarily an accurate reflection of those beliefs. Lia Litosseliti calls this “the potential bias and manipulation risk” (2003: 23). However, as this project was concerned with peoples’ memories of historical events captured in the present moment, this is precisely what the research aimed to uncover. The following chapter provides an analysis of the rich and fascinating memories which were prompted through viewing *Reeling in the Years 1981*.

---

<sup>9</sup> The interview process explained to respondents is included in Appendix 3

<sup>10</sup> The survey given to respondents is included in Appendix 4

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION**

Television's audience is not a mere homogeneous mass, passively accepting the status quo but consists of a heterogeneous multitude of individuals, who each decipher and create meaning from television texts according to their own unique culture, environment and socio-economic background. John Fiske notes that "the television text is a potential of meanings capable of being viewed with a variety of modes of attention by a variety of viewers" (1987: 84). As previously noted, the advantage of qualitative studies is that the researcher gains intimate knowledge of the varied meanings the respondents assume from watching the programme studied. This research project was designed to examine how audiences engage with *Reeling in the Years* from the perspective of memory. This was achieved through the participants responding to an online questionnaire prior to the interview sessions and during the sessions, a combination of collectively viewing *Reeling in the Years 1981*, observation and interview.

The online questionnaire was designed to reveal the viewing habits of the participants and to what extent they engaged with historical programmes in general and *Reeling in the Years* in particular. It was anticipated that completing an online questionnaire would save time in the group discussion stage. The interview sessions began by collectively viewing *Reeling in the Years 1981* and during this stage, the researcher observed the extent that the respondents engaged with the programme. The researcher then asked the respondents to complete a survey listing the five most significant events they wished to discuss. A group consensus decision was taken to decide which events and in what order they would be discussed. Using Kuhn's memory work to uncover how respondents recalled the events presented onscreen, the interviews set out to define if *Reeling in the Years 1981* is reflective of individual and/or collective memories. For those who had no memories of those events as they occurred in 1981, the interviews drew on Landsberg's prosthetic memories to investigate

if *Reeling in the Years 1981* is constructive of individual and/or collective memories by delving into how respondents remembered how and when they first learned of events portrayed onscreen. By revealing if the programme constructed or reflected memories, it was anticipated that the study would reveal whether and to what extent, the respondents' memories deviated from the events that were shown. Finally, the study would conclude by examining whether the respondents experienced a sense of nostalgia for 1981 after watching the programme.

#### **4.1 Online Questionnaire**

95.8% of the invited participants responded to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire asked the respondents to rate how strongly s/he agreed with each statement.

<b>Event</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I love watching old rerun series, such as <i>Murder She Wrote, Columbo, etc.</i>	13%	21.7%	30.4%	30.4%	4.3%
I love watching period dramas, such as <i>Upstairs Downstairs</i>	27.3%	27.3%	18.2%	22.7%	4.5%
I love watching historical docu/dramas, based on real non-Irish events, such as <i>The Tudors</i>	8.7%	13%	47.8%	30.4%	0%
I love watching historical docu/dramas, based on real Irish events, such as <i>Stardust, Whistleblower, etc.</i>	4.3%	13%	26.1%	43.5%	13%
I love watching Top 100 etc. review programmes, such as <i>Top 100 Greatest TV Moments Ever</i>	8.7%	21.7%	34.8%	34.8%	0%
I love watching archive documentaries, such as <i>Brian Friel, Imagining Ulysses</i>	17.4%	30.4%	30.4%	17.4%	4.3%

**Figure 2 Respondents attitudes to watching historically based programmes**

As Figure 2 highlights, there were mixed reactions to historical based programmes. Overall, the respondents reacted positively to the various types of programmes. The most positive reaction was towards watching historical docu-dramas, with Irish based narratives more

popular than non-Irish based stories. The popularity for Irish based narratives could well be tied to the fact that one of the examples given was *Stardust* and that most respondents were from Dublin. Reactions to old rerun series' were mainly evenly split with 34.7% reacting positively and 34.7% reacting negatively to the series. Tastes for review programmes were also quite evenly split with 30.4% reacting negatively and 34.8% reacting positively to them. Transmission of archive programmes didn't fare very well with 47.8% reacting negatively and 21.7% reacting positively to them. However, period dramas were the least popular in the questionnaire with 54.6% reacting negatively and 27.35% reacting positively to them. Respondents' neutrality on each genre was generally very high in comparison to some of the other results, such as strongly agreeing/disagreeing with most statements, thereby showing that whilst individuals might not be staunch fans of a particular genre, they don't particularly dislike any of the genres. This would correspond to the proliferation of historical programmes on RTÉ because if these programmes didn't get the ratings expected, they would be removed from the schedules. Director of Scheduling, Andrew Fitzpatrick confirms "we do lots of straight archive where you ... top and tail something and put it out as it originally went out (2012: 15). Archive programmes, such as *On The Street Where You Live* or *Gaybo Laughs Back*, are transmitted due to reasonable expectations of achieving desired ratings.

The third section of the questionnaire specifically dealt with *Reeling in the Years* and was designed to gauge the levels to which the respondents engaged with the programme.

I watch Reeling in the Years	never 0%	hardly ever 17.4%	if I catch it 65.2%	regularly 17.4%	all the time 0%
I watch Reeling in the Years	alone 27.3%	with family 68.2%	with friends 4.5%	mixture of both 0%	
I watch Reeling in the Years because	I want to 4.3%	another person turns it on 8.7%	it happens to be on 87%	nothing else is on 0%	

**Figure 3 Respondents' general attitudes to Reeling in the Years**

The industry audience share of a programme is the percentage of people watching television at the time of broadcast who viewed that programme. How often the respondents watch *Reeling in the Years* roughly corresponds to the industry audience share of low to mid thirties that *Reeling in the Years* achieves. No-one said never or all the time which were the other two responses that could have been selected. Responses to who they watch with and why they watch *Reeling in the Years* demonstrates that, although it is not must-see television, it can be defined as an easy watch programme. In other words, whilst respondents will only watch the programme if they happen to catch it or when another family member turns it on, they will still sit down and watch it. *Reeling in the Years* can also be defined as a family show because most of the respondents watch the programme with family members.

The questionnaire then moved back to the likert scale and asked respondents to rate the level to which they agreed with different statements.

Event	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I love watching <i>Reeling in the Years</i>	0%	8.7%	39.1%	39.1%	13%
I will record <i>Reeling in the Years</i> to watch at a later time rather than miss it	26.1%	65.2%	8.7%	0%	0%
<i>Reeling in the Years</i> is an accurate reflection of national historical events	0%	8.7%	17.4%	56.5%	17.5%
When I watch <i>Reeling in the Years</i> , I remember the past with fond recollection	4.3%	4.3%	21.7%	65.2%	4.3%
When I watch <i>Reeling in the Years</i> , I long for those days gone by	13%	26.1%	47.8%	13%	0%
When I watch <i>Reeling in the Years</i> , it reminds me of the events that are in the programme	4.5%	4.5%	4.5%	63.6%	22.7%
When I watch <i>Reeling in the Years</i> , it shows me Ireland as it was	0%	0%	13.6%	68.2%	18.2%
<i>Reeling in the Years</i> reflects what it means to be Irish	4.3%	21.7%	30.4%	39.1%	4.3%

Figure 4 Respondents' attitudes to *Reeling in the Years*

Overall, *Reeling in the Years* was rated positively by the respondents. Whilst they don't record the programme to watch at a later time, the majority of the respondents agreed that they love watching the programme when they do catch it, with slightly fewer respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement. Perhaps one of the reasons behind this is that it is a pure archive programme. John O'Regan, series producer, notes "it's possibly more powerful to assemble a sequence of stories and to use captions because it allows you to engage more directly as a viewer with the event that you're seeing" (2012: 3). The show is not presenter led, nor does it comment on the events being shown. *Reeling in the Years* tended to prompt memories of events that were shown in the programme, whilst all respondents believed that the series accurately reflected, to some degree, Ireland as it was. However, there was a more mixed reaction to the programme being defined as a programme which reflects what it means to be Irish. Although more agreed that it did reflect Irishness, it was second only to nostalgia in terms of a negative response and quite a high percentage of respondents remained neutral. For the majority, *Reeling in the Years* prompted respondents to remember the past with fond recollection whilst watching the programme. However, they were clearly not nostalgic for the past whilst watching the programme.

At the end of the questionnaire respondents were asked what they remembered most about 1981. The researcher purposely did not specify personal memories or national events. Respondents replied with a wide variety of events that they most remembered. Those who weren't born or were young in 1981 responded with statements such as "nothing I wasn't born" and "not much as I was only seven" to "nothing from my memory but I do know stories from stuff I've read." For those who remembered 1981, it was a mixture of personal and national events. These included "my grandmother passed away", "the summer was brighter, not much money but people seemed happier", "going to France on my summer holidays", "the Stardust tragedy", "the hunger strikes and moving into my first home with my

husband” and “Charles and Di marry.” These responses highlight how people remember a particular year with an event that occurred in their own personal lives and also remember a particular year from when national events occurred.

The online questionnaire provided ample data on respondents’ viewing habits and in particular, the feedback they gave on their views of *Reeling in the Years*. Although people don’t necessarily include it as part of their essential viewing activities, they do enjoy the programme and the memories it evokes. The respondents’ reacted more positively to *Reeling in the Years* than historical programmes in general. This establishes it as a programme that viewers’ identify with, evoking memories of the past through spectacles which are not rose-tinted. However, to gain intimate knowledge of those individual, collective and prosthetic memories, the focus group interviews yielded more fertile and rewarding results.

#### **4.2 Observation of Collective Viewing**

Five groups of people, totaling twenty four, met with the researcher to watch *Reeling in the Years 1981* and discuss their memories of that year. Groups A to D consisted of family members and close friends so they vibrantly interacted with each other throughout the programme. For instance, Anne in Group A turned to Brendan Jr. to explain the footage he was watching, whilst Trish in Group D kept hitting Joseph beside her as another event came on screen. All respondents in these groups actively engaged with the programme, laughing at the hairstyles and clothes. They sang, hummed or tapped their feet along to the music throughout the programme and commented on the footage as it appeared on screen.

Group E consisted of neighbours and although they all actively watched the programme, they didn’t sing or hum along to the music. At most, they tapped a finger or their feet and nodded in acknowledgement of a particular song. Furthermore, they were a quieter group than the previous four in that they made fewer comments and didn’t talk loudly at the television. This suggests that because the final group consisted of neighbours, they

weren't as comfortable in each others' company and as such, were more conscious of and restrained by their actions.

### **4.3 Results of Survey**

After viewing the programme, the respondents were asked to fill out a survey listing the five most important events they wished to discuss. Following on from that, the group made a consensus decision about which five events they would discuss as a group. This involved a lively debate between groups A to D, as the only directive issued by the researcher was that the group must be in complete agreement as to the order in which events will be discussed. For instance, Group A made their decision on combining the individual responses to make a collective decision whereas in Group B, they decided to discuss everybody's most important event followed by the events that the majority included individually as significant.

#### **Group A**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age in 1981</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Event 1</b>	<b>Event 2</b>	<b>Event 3</b>	<b>Event 4</b>	<b>Event 5</b>
Anne	24	Northside of Dublin	Hunger strike	Stardust	Election results	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Apartheid protest
Brendan Sr.	Declined	Northside of Dublin	Stardust	Reagan assassination attempt	Hunger strike	Knock Airport	Women passing out in army
Andrew	Not born	Maynooth	Stardust	DeLorean car	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Ben Dunne is kidnapped	Aer Lingus plane hijacked
Brendan Jr.	Not born	Northside of Dublin	Hunger strike	Stardust	DeLorean car	Riot in Ballsbridge	Ben Dunne is kidnapped
Carla	Not born	Northside of Dublin	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Bobby Sands dies	Knock Airport	Stardust	Rubik's cube
<b>Group</b>	n/a	n/a	Hunger strike	Stardust	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Knock Airport	DeLorean Car

**Figure 5 Profile of Group A respondents and events they wished to discuss**

Having regularly socialised at the Stardust nightclub prior to the fire, Anne and Brendan Sr. rated the Stardust as an important event they wished to discuss. However, the hunger strike was considered by the group to be the most significant event to discuss. This

was possibly because it was a national event of with significant historic resonance.

Interestingly, Andrew chose the Stardust fire as most significant for him, even though had no connections to anybody who was affected by the Stardust tragedy. As Carla, Brendan Jr. and Andrew were not yet born in 1981, it was envisaged that their memories of events would be prosthetic memories. This group spent a long time discussing the first two events which resulted in them being the only events which were covered in the interview session, due to time restrictions.

### Group B

Name	Age in 1981	From	Event 1	Event 2	Event 3	Event 4	Event 5
Ken	10	Northside of Dublin	Bobby Sands dies	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Stardust	Hunger strike	Buck's Fizz
Patricia	Declined	Mayo	Knock Airport	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Not selected	Stardust	Rubik's cube
Maria	8	Northside of Dublin	Stardust	Hunger strike	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Pope assassination attempt	Rubik's cube
Terry	12	Northside of Dublin	DeLorean car	Stardust	Bobby Sands dies	Reagan becomes President	Wedding of Charles and Diana
Dermot	12	Northside of Dublin	Hunger strike	Pope assassination attempt	Apartheid protest	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Women passing out in army
<b>Group</b>	n/a	n/a	Hunger strike	Stardust	Knock Airport	Wedding of Charles and Diana	DeLorean Car

Figure 6 Profile of Group B respondents and events they wished to discuss

It's interesting to note that Maria was the only one wanted to discuss the Stardust as the most important event from 1981 even though most of the group are from the Northside of Dublin. Perhaps this is because the others knew nobody who directly suffered as a result of the Stardust and as such, were not personally connected to the event. Patricia, who is from Co. Mayo, wanted to discuss the construction of Knock Airport most of all because she grew up in that region and had vivid memories of Monsignor Horan and what he did for that region. Although the others didn't include Knock Airport on their list, they agreed that it

should go on the group list. For Ken and Dermot, the hunger strike and Bobby Sands were the most important events of that year and it was agreed that that would be the first event discussed. This group's decisions on what they wished to discuss perhaps relates to Annette Kuhn's memory work, which establishes how directly or indirectly individuals connect to events in a programme. They were able to relate their memories to the programme because they remembered events in the programme from when they occurred. Although there were time restrictions, Group B were able to discuss the first four events.

### Group C

Name	Age in 1981	From	Event 1	Event 2	Event 3	Event 4	Event 5
Kathy	7	Southside of Dublin	Buck's Fizz	Aer Lingus plane hijacked	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Stardust	Women passing out in army
Ronan	12	Southside of Dublin	Aer Lingus plane hijacked	Bobby Sands dies	Buck's Fizz	Stardust	Reagan assassination attempt
Nicole	7	Southside of Dublin	Stardust	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Ben Dunne is kidnapped	Bobby Sands dies	Reagan assassination attempt
<b>Group</b>	n/a	n/a	Buck's Fizz	Stardust	Aer Lingus plane hijacked	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Bobby Sands dies

Figure 7 Profile of Group C respondents and events they wished to discuss

For Kathy, Buck's Fizz winning the Eurovision Song Contest was the most memorable event for her. She can vividly remember the guys whipping off the girls' skirts in the performance. Also important to Kathy was the wedding of Britain's Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer because she suggests "it was every girls dream to be a princess". Nicole also remembered the wedding of Charles and Diana and Buck's Fizz. However, Kathy and Nicole both agreed that as they were only seven years old in 1981, most of their memories that were activated through watching *Reeling in the Years 1981* were as a result of learning about the events much later on in life. It emerged that the most significant event in the programmes for Ronan was the hijacking of the Aer Lingus plane, as he had a personal

connection with the event. All five events that the group wished to discuss were discussed in their interview session.

### Group D

Name	Age in 1981	From	Event 1	Event 2	Event 3	Event 4	Event 5
Sandra	14	Northside of Dublin	Stardust	Hunger strike	Buck's Fizz	General election campaign	Bobby Sands dies
Samantha	Not born	Northside of Dublin	Stardust	Hunger strike	Bobby Sands dies	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Aer Lingus plane hijacked
Trish	18	Northside of Dublin	Stardust	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Bobby Sands dies	Pope assassination attempt	General election campaign
Joseph	14	Northside of Dublin	Hunger strike called off	Bobby Sands dies	Hunger strike	Stardust	Buck's Fizz
Holly	Not born	Northside of Dublin	Stardust	Hunger Strike	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Bobby Sands dies	Riot in Ballsbridge
<b>Group</b>	n/a	n/a	Stardust	Hunger strike and Bobby Sands	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Buck's Fizz	General Election Campaign

Figure 8 Profile of Group D respondents and events they wished to discuss

For Group D, the most important event they wished to discuss was the fire in the Stardust nightclub because they are from Coolock where the incident occurred. Sandra and Trish have clear memories of the Stardust at the time it occurred. The only one who differed was Joseph because, from Finglas, the Stardust only became more important to him when he married Sandra in later years. Holly and Samantha were extremely familiar with the Stardust even though they were not born in 1981. For them, the Stardust is particularly relevant because it is a tragedy that occurred in their district and they are surrounded by memorials to the Stardust victims. As such, their memories were not only prosthetic; they were also individual and collective. For this group, discussion on the Stardust and the hunger strike took up most of the time, leaving only a couple of minutes to discuss the wedding of Prince Charles to Lady Diana and Buck's Fizz winning the Eurovision Song Contest.

### Group E

Name	Age in 1981	From	Event 1	Event 2	Event 3	Event 4	Event 5
Trevor	2	Northside of Dublin	DeLorean Car	Stardust	Hunger strike	Reagan assassination attempt	Buck's Fizz
Gerry	12	Scotland	Pope assassination attempt	Bobby Sands dies	Reagan assassination attempt	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Reagan becomes President
James	15	Northside of Dublin	Stardust	Bobby Sands dies	DeLorean car	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Reagan becomes President
Tracy	10	Canada	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Freed American hostages in Shannon	Pope assassination attempt	Rubik's cube	Reagan assassination attempt
Dearbhla	9	Northside of Dublin	Hunger strike	Buck's Fizz	Wedding of Charles and Diana	Pope assassination attempt	Rubik's cube
Damian	8	Sligo	Stardust	Reagan assassination attempt	Hunger strike	Election results	Pope assassination attempt
<b>Group</b>	n/a	n/a	Stardust	Both assassination attempts	Wedding of Charles and Diana	DeLorean Car	Hunger strike and Bobby Sands

Figure 9 Profile of Group E respondents and events they wished to discuss

Some members of Group E were not from Ireland and had not put the fire in the Stardust nightclub on their list of events they wished to discuss. However, the Stardust was the first event to be discussed, mainly because the Irish participants felt that this event was the most significant event for them in 1981. Even though most participants rated the hunger strike and the death of Bobby Sands as quite significant, they decided to list this as the fifth event to be discussed, possibly because they had forgotten about it and only remembered towards the end of the selection process. Tracy, being from Canada, had no firsthand knowledge of a lot of the events that were portrayed in *Reeling in the Years*. Her awareness of them was gleaned through subsequently watching programmes about them or through friends discussing them. With the exception of the hunger strike, this was the same for Gerry from Scotland, although the subsequent interview revealed that his prosthetic memories were less vague than Tracy's. Trevor, unsurprisingly, had no authentic memories of 1981 so his knowledge of events was synthetic. Dearbhla, James and Damian had clear memories of

events captured in the programme when they occurred in 1981. There was enough time in this focus group session to enable the group to discuss all the events they had listed.

The surveys above focused the respondents on the events that they wished to discuss during the interview stage of the discussion and provided an effective lead in to the next stage of the process. Interestingly, O'Regan asserts that the programme "follows the idea more of a time capsule than a rigid news review because it's not possible when you talk about event criteria to say what's more important" (2012: 2). This is consistent with the choices the participants made above. Although some events were selected across all groups, individuals' personal choices sometimes differed vastly. All of them had distinct reasons for choosing what was important for them to discuss.

#### **4.4 The Interviews**

Following on from the selection process, the interviews produced many rich examples of Kuhn's memory work (2002a). These memories not only concurred with events shown in the programme, they expanded in the respondents' remembrance of them. The interviews also revealed some events have been constructed from what Landsberg describes as prosthetic memories (2003). These are memories which have been artificially created through media texts to the extent that they acquire the familiarity of a personal memory. Common themes emerged throughout the interviews with regard to individual and collective memories and will be analysed in the following section. The analysis of the respondents' memories will then move onto the participants' opinions of whether the programme reflected the year it represented before concluding with the extent to which respondents were nostalgic for that year.

#### **4.5 A Reflection of Memories**

Memory connects an individual to the past through reliving that event in the present moment. Burgoyne notes that memory is a “physical relation to an actual experience that is significant enough to inform and colour the subjectivity of the rememberer” (2003: 225). All the respondents recalled their individual memories, enhancing, enlarging and giving a more rounded interpretation of the events which were shown on *Reeling in the Years 1981*, which in turn answered the question of the extent to which *Reeling in the Years* reflects individual memories. Their distinctive memories of 1981 can be categorised as anecdotal, impersonal and past/present memories (Kuhn, A. 2002a).

##### **4.5.1 Reflecting Individual Memories**

Kuhn labels events in which the narrator places him/herself in the story, employing “first-person narration of a specific event or occasion” as anecdotal discourse (2002a: 9). With these stories, the narrator is often the protagonist or even the chief protagonist in the story. When recalling anecdotal memories, the narrator often begins with ‘I remember one time...’ Anne’s memories of the Stardust tragedy are particularly clear. She recalls going to the Stardust nightclub in Coolock prior to the night of the fire to see Gene Pitney performing. Whilst waiting for him to come on stage, she looked around the dance hall thinking “if a fire ever broke out in here nobody would get out alive”. On the night the fire broke out, she had loose plans to go but ended up at a party instead. She remembers the next morning waking up to her father hugging her and telling her there had been a fire in the Stardust. She states “I remember the feeling of heartbreak because I knew I’d know people in it.” She recalls the anxiety she felt waiting to find out who she knew that died in the tragedy. Anne’s memories of the Stardust nightclub are a clear example of an anecdotal memory because they firmly position her as the protagonist in the story. Although she wasn’t in the club when the fire broke out, the footage on *Reeling in the Years* brought back traumatic feelings of the fear that she felt at that time.

Dermot recalls the hunger strike and remembers the event as being very much in his family's "sitting room" because people who came to his home were "significant players in what was going on in terms of the hunger strike." As far as he's concerned, in 1981, there was no political leadership. People in the North and the South were stuck in a "time zone." He remembers "there was a huge critical vacuum...and the only avenue forward was violence and conflict." Dermot's remembrance of the hunger strikes is also anecdotal as he identified himself as personally connected to the story which was captured on the programmes. He related to the individuals involved in the hunger strikes in a personal way and although he didn't know Bobby Sands or any of the hunger strikers personally, he discussed them and the events as though he did.

The Aer Lingus plane which was hijacked was a very personal, anecdotal memory for Ronan due to the fact that his mother was the Aer Lingus hostess on that plane who the hijacker first approached. When the news broke, he remembers his father telling him and his younger brother that their mother was on the plane that was hijacked. Although the whole event lasted less than twenty four hours, he remembers the media hype surrounding his mother. Even though it was over quite quickly, he sometimes wonders what his life would have been like if the bomb had detonated. As he says, "I could have lost my mother at twelve years of age." As an anecdotal memory, Ronan's thoughts that his mother could have died created a personal event in his life which was also played out on the national stage. He even asked the researcher if this episode was chosen because of that footage, to which the researcher replied that she was unaware of his connection to the event.

In contrast to anecdotal memories, Kuhn identifies "impersonal discourse" as memories which dissociate "the informant from both the content of the account and its narration" (2002a: 9). These types of memories are typically narrated in the third person. The storyteller places him/herself as an observer of that memory rather than an active

contributor to that memory. For instance, when discussing the hunger strikes and Bobby Sands, Brendan Sr. discussed how society in the Republic of Ireland reacted. He notes “they felt there was something seriously wrong with the political institutions and the State and the way the State reacted to the minority community but they didn’t want the trouble down here.” However, he suggested that although people would remember the hunger strikes and particularly Bobby Sands, very few people could name subsequent strikers who died.

Patricia discussed the construction of Knock Airport at length and although she had a lot of knowledge and memories about the event, she discussed it in the third person. She notes that Monsignor Horan “done it for the fact that he wanted to keep people in Mayo and didn’t want emigration and ... it would bring money back into Mayo.” For her, Monsignor Horan was a “remarkable man...and well liked and people still admire him for what he has done.” Impersonal memories, such as Brendan Sr. and Patricia’s remembrances, were not recalled with the same passion and enthusiasm as anecdotal memories. However, a personal perspective of events which were shown in the programme, such as those above, still validates the conclusion that *Reeling in the Years* reflects individual memories.

Memory is a “relationship between pasts and a particular present” (Clare, M. & Johnson, R. 2000: 199). Kuhn draws on what she called “the past/present register” to distinguish memories which connect the past to the present (2002a: 10). The most common type of this past/present memory discourse is when the narrator compares the past to the present but another type can be when the narrator links a past event to a present event. Ken linked the Stardust event to time he was in a gay bar, Dublin’s The George, on New Years’ Eve 2006 when a fire broke out. There was a pyrotechnic show which caught on the Christmas tree in the corner and the tree went up on fire. He remembers “it was on top of the landing and all of a sudden the flames started to come over on the ceiling.” He remembers

the panic in the club and everyone shoving to get out. Fortunately, nobody was injured but afterwards he recalls texting a friend and saying “we almost had a gay Stardust.”

The past/present discursive register also emerged around discussions on the hunger strike. Joseph compared the footage of the Ballsbridge riot to the Love Ulster rally in Dublin in 2006. He remembers being in Clery’s shop on O’Connell Street and saying to his wife Sandra “get your ma, we’re going...There’s gonna be trouble.” About ten minutes later the riot broke out on O’Connell Street. Although Joseph wasn’t present at the Ballsbridge riot in 1981, he still compared it to the O’Connell Street riot many years later. Ken and Joseph’s remembrances are obvious examples of memories that connect events from 1981 to other, similar events which occurred many years later. They effectively demonstrate how the past/present register is a relevant method for uncovering memories which reflect an individual’s recollection of a separate but related event to the event which was portrayed in the programme.

#### **4.5.2 Reflecting Collective Memories**

O’Regan defines *Reeling in the Years* as a programme that loosely lies between entertainment and information. For those who remember a particular year they are watching, he hopes that the programme “provides them with an opportunity to, in effect, join the dots of their personal experience to the dots of public events ... of the time” (2012: 9), which corresponds to the individual memories outlined above. These memories also proliferate into a collective understanding of national historic events. Kuhn’s research confirms how memory texts collectively, as well as personally, symbolise the reality of the past in the present moment. She notes that memory texts are “key in the production, through memory, of shared identities” (2002a: 11). They enable individuals to share their understanding of key events which constitute a culture’s identity.

Trish's memories of the fire in the Stardust nightclub tell a similar story to Anne's. She can remember being particularly annoyed that she couldn't go on the night of the fire because it was the final of a disco dancing competition. The fire in the Stardust was devastating for her because she knew so many people who had died in it. She remembers "thanking God every night and then you start thinking, God if we'd been there would we have gotten out?" Her annoyance at not being able to go turned into relief as details of the fire emerged. She recalls the day after the Stardust "sitting at the telly non-stop, all day in a daze." For her, it was a horrible time because she lived in the community and wherever she went, everyone was crying. The Stardust clearly had a huge impact on Trish and her family, as her sister Sandra recalls, "She [Trish] had nightmares afterwards. I found her crawling on the bedroom floor one night under the smoke ... [as though] she was trying to find her way out under the smoke." Trish and Sandra's recollections demonstrate how the footage of the Stardust nightclub in *Reeling in the Years 1981* evoked powerful anecdotal memories. Not only were they the protagonists in their telling of the story, they see themselves and their community as survivors of a tragedy.

Much like Dermot, Joseph remembers the hunger strikes and how for him, as an impressionable thirteen year old, he looked up to the hunger strikers and admired them because they were literally starving themselves to death for a political cause. He remembers "Bobby Sands was a big thing for me." He heard about Sands' death in school and can recall not believing that he died and then going home to find his mother and father talking about it. For him, the hunger strikes were the "first political situation that I had to think about." Damian remembers the hunger strike because his mother and father are from Fermanagh and his family "would have all been pretty sympathetic to the cause." He remembers driving to Fermanagh every week to visit his grandparents and experiencing first hand, the tension in the air. For Terry, watching the footage of the hunger strike brings back memories of "riots,

riots all the time.” He remembers the riots not as singular events but continuous, reflecting that the worst night for rioting was the night that Bobby Sands died. Anecdotally, Joseph, Damian and Terry connected the events surrounding the republican prisoners in the maze prison going on strike to events which they, to some extent, personally witnessed.

### **4.5.3 Conclusion**

As detailed above, Kuhn’s tropes of memory revealed that *Reeling in the Years 1981* reflects the individual memories of the respondents. All the individual memories discussed above weave a rich tapestry surrounding the events that were shown on the programme. The respondents expanded on and enhanced the events by positioning their personal life stories into the history of the events portrayed. Although some respondents believed *Reeling in the Years 1981* to be an accurate reflection of 1981, others, particularly those who were personally connected to particular events felt that the footage didn’t expose the magnitude of some events that occurred.

Talking about the programme in general, Ronan stated that *Reeling in the Years* “captured our history in a fantastic way because you get the politics, the sport, the music, the ticker tape.” On the other hand, Brendan Sr. believed that the problem with *Reeling in the Years* is that it doesn’t really show ordinary life. Although it addresses an aspect of Irish society and global society on one level, it neglects the fact that Ireland in 1981 was a depressed economy. He asserts “people had no work. People were emigrating by the plane load and the boat load.” Although Anne loves *Reeling in the Years* and in particular, how it revives memories that have been long forgotten, she believes *Reeling in the Years* is “an idealised view” of Ireland at that time giving the viewer only a snapshot of what actual life was like living in that year.

Trish and Sandra were particularly vehement that *Reeling in the Years 1981* didn’t cover the Stardust tragedy very well. Their main criticism was that the programme spent less

than one minute covering a tragedy which had such an effect on their lives and impact on their community. Sandra complained “if you turned your head to chat to someone sitting beside you it would be over.” Trish agreed “there’s more on Buck’s Fizz than there was on the Stardust.” However, Joseph attempted to justify the length of the coverage of the Stardust by pointing out the reason why they felt it was so short is because of the fact that it had such an impact on them. Ronan thought that the footage of the Stardust on *Reeling in the Years 1981* was appropriate. He states “all you needed to show was one image and one image would trigger the whole thing and they showed a couple of minutes of what happened and having no music behind it was appropriate.” The respondents’ reactions and how they felt the programme dealt with events portrayed were positive or negative depending on how closely they were affected by those events portrayed.

#### **4.6 A Construction of Memories**

Holdsworth asserts that archive television or programmes whose content derives from historical news and current affairs recordings “forms the basis of much popular modern history on television” (2011: 96). In order to answer the question if *Reeling in the Years* constructs individual and/or collective memories, the researcher looked towards the respondents who had no actual memory of the events as they occurred. Their memories were constructed as a result of cultural memories of those events.

##### **4.6.1 Constructing Individual Memories**

Cultural memories offer a useful paradigm for an analysis of the importance of media texts in clarifying societal perceptions of history. To reveal these types of memories, the research project drew on Landsberg’s prosthetic memories to disclose how respondents’ individual memories are assimilated through televisual texts (2003). Landsberg describes prosthetic memories as those which enable an individual to have “an intimate relationship to memories of events through which one did not live” (ibid: 148). As far as she’s concerned, these

memories are indebted to the mass media due to producing and broadcasting historical-based programmes. These programmes act as a bridge that unites an individual and the past by showing them history as it was.

Cultural memories are invariably linked to prosthetic memories because individuals typically depict one as synonymous with the other. These are memories which have been gleaned from news and documentary programmes, history movies, museums, literature, education, the internet and stories that have been re-told, sometimes many years after the events occurred. Grainge asserts that “cultural memories [are] a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history” (2003:16). For the respondents whose memories were constructed from synthetic memories, their memories only formed part of a collective memory. Based on that, the research concluded with the supposition that *Reeling in the Years 1981* did not construct individual memories. Programmes such as this could never construct only individual prosthetic memories because they would have been viewed by thousands of individuals.

#### **4.6.2 Constructing Collective Memories**

The fire in the Stardust nightclub was deemed to be a cultural memory as most individuals, to some extent or another, possess some knowledge of the event. Brendan Sr. believes that the Stardust “had a very profound effect on the people.” He noted that its reverberations are still felt to this day, particularly for people on Dublin’s Northside. Samantha asserts that she knows about the Stardust because it’s always been a part of her life. The Stardust memorial park acts as a reminder to her and the community she lives in about the lives that were lost. As well being a cultural memory, the Stardust fire is also a prosthetic memory. For instance, Holly remembers hearing her mother talking about the event and learning about what happened in school. She also remembers “watching the film as well”, noting that her family always watched the film about the Stardust on the television. Not only are Holly’s memories

of the event caused by her living so close to the heart of the tragedy, her memories have also come from watching the film *Stardust*.

Landsberg's theory on prosthetic memories which have stemmed from media portrayals of national or historical events emerged in other discussions about the Stardust fire. Dermot remembered the media hysteria surrounding the event and how "everybody was talking about it, everybody knew somebody that was affected by it. It was almost incomprehensible." Damian recalled how there was little information in the media at the start. He notes "news programmes reported that they were years looking for enquiries and things like that. No-one knew really what, how things went wrong...Maybe it was covered up a little at the start." Gerry remembered watching a documentary on the Stardust which showed more detail than the footage on *Reeling in the Years 1981*. He asserts that his knowledge of the Stardust is "mainly from third party discussions but it was a dreadful way to die."

The footage of the Stardust nightclub on *Reeling in the Years 1981* also prompted many discussions about fire safety and nightclub regulations. As far as the respondents were concerned, the word Stardust is synonymous with a nightclub fire. Although she wasn't born when the nightclub went on fire, Carla recalls "it's always something that you know, it's a tragedy that never should have happened and you see how easily it happened." Andrew, also not born in 1981, states "it kinda makes you aware of what you should do in that situation and what you should be looking out for." Brendan Jr. agrees "I'm not the only person who goes into a nightclub and checks where the fire exits are." Although Kathy is from the Southside of Dublin and doesn't remember the Stardust at the time it happened, she does have extensive memories of the event, stating "even though we don't remember seeing it, the minute someone says Stardust, we know exactly what they are talking about." This is a result of programmes and documentaries she watched on television, as well as, news footage she

remembers of the tribunal which was set up to investigate what happened, confirming Landsberg's theory on prosthetic memories.

Interestingly, the respondents believed that although the Stardust is a cultural memory, it is a cultural memory which is only significant for Dublin people. For instance, Carla notes that if the Stardust had happened in Cork, "it wouldn't affect us in the same way." Tracey confirms this when she asserts that her knowledge of the Stardust is limited. She states "I don't know much, it's like third party, just from the news." Asked if the Stardust is still in the minds of people today, Dermot notes that for Dublin people it's still something that is significant for them but "in the minds of the masses, no, these things dwindle away." For the respondents, the Stardust tragedy is something that is uniquely a Dublin tragedy.

How programmes such as *Reeling in the Years* construct collective prosthetic memories also surfaced in discussions from the younger respondents with regard to the Republican prisoners going on hunger strike in the maze prison for political prisoner of war status. With the exception of Nicole, those who responded in the interview session voiced their prosthetic knowledge of the hunger strikers. Brendan Jr. remembers the hunger strike, more so through watching the movie about Bobby Sands, *Hunger*, than through any other means. He asserts "watching the film showed me how much this really meant to people and how serious it was." He asserted that watching the movie and then programmes like *Reeling in the Years 1981* gave him an understanding and knowledge of what the prisoners were protesting about. Tracy remembers the hunger strikes but in Canada, it was more from the British perspective. She notes "there would have been a lot of Thatcher talking about it. I don't think there was an Irish view of it at all." Nicole was shocked watching the hunger strike on *Reeling in the Years 1981* because prior to watching the programme her knowledge only extended to Bobby Sands and the dirty protest. She states "It was the first time watching

it for me ... I [have] never seen any of the footage before.” She didn’t question the footage as being anything other than accurate which emphasises how *Reeling in the Years 1981* constructs collective memories.

#### **4.6.3 Conclusion**

Although not as vocal as the respondents who remembered the events when they occurred in 1981, *Reeling in the Years 1981* uncovered many collective memories of events captured in the programme for the participants whose memories were constructed through Landsberg’s prosthetic memories. The events in the programme are broadcast as they were shown at the time of original broadcast, with captions summarising what went on to give a context and to allow the viewer an understanding of the events. With every episode, series producer, John O’Regan tries to stick to the rule that “you stay as true as you can to the events of the year” (2012: 11). Like the series, *Reeling in the Years 1981* doesn’t comment on the events surrounding the hunger strikers or the Stardust fire, it simply shows the events as they aired in 1981. This conforms to Landsberg’s assertion that programmes, such as *Reeling in the Years 1981*, acts as a mediator between historical events of national importance and those who were too young to remember them.

The younger respondents were particularly moved with how the programme dealt with the fire in the Stardust nightclub. Damian noted that because the producers showed the footage with no background music, it made the Stardust tragedy stand out in relation to the programme overall. He states the Stardust event “was quite somber in the programme.” Trevor, who was too young to remember the fire when it happened, confirmed “it’s more respectful as well for it.” Although Gerry, from Scotland, agreed that the footage was interesting, he commented “I was expecting a lot more of it.”

Many of these respondents also connected the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana in 1981 to their son, Prince William and Kate Middleton’s wedding in 2012. Dermot,

who doesn't remember the wedding at the time but only through later media coverage of Princess Diana's lifestyle, noted "of course you would have to connect the two, it's his mother." Kathy further endorses the connection, asserted that when she watched Charles and Diana coming down the steps on *Reeling in the Years 1981* "the minute you see that engagement ring ... I immediately think of Kate because she is now wearing it and I think that is where the huge connection is." Responses like these demonstrate how the programme is constructive of collective, prosthetic memories.

Damian stated that *Reeling in the Years 1981* constructs some memories. He notes "the events I don't remember? Well, it kind of constructs them." This is compatible with O'Regan's hope that for those who were too young to remember a year, *Reeling in the Years* acts as a "history lesson in disguise", allowing people to experience what their "parent's generation might have experienced on television if they had been watching at that time" (ibid: 9). Gerry, who moved to Ireland in the mid 1990s, considered the programme to be an educational tool of sorts. He reflects "as a stranger coming in, it was always good to catch up with a little bit of history that I might not have known." However, not all comments were positive about the programme. Carla and Brendan Jr. were in agreement with Brendan Sr. in that *Reeling in the Years 1981* romanticised Ireland of 1981 to a certain degree. So it comes as no surprise to reveal that the overwhelming majority were not nostalgic for 1981.

#### **4.7 Nostalgia**

When viewing a historical or archive programme, if an individual experiences a longing to return to that moment in the past, they are nostalgic for that period. Holdsworth defines nostalgia as "a desire for 'being-in-place' and it is this desire that resonates with ... the role that television and television memories play in our personal histories" (2011: 15). O'Regan states that growing up in Ireland in the 1980s was a time of "economic deprivation, recession, emigration, of Northern Ireland being riven by everything from the H Block hunger strikes to

the attempt at de-evolution, the Anglo Irish Agreement” (2012: 10/11). As far as he’s concerned, he wouldn’t be nostalgic to return to that period and he would be surprised if anybody did.

Similarly, after watching *Reeling in the Years 1981* none of the respondents experienced nostalgic emotions for 1981. When asked if watching the programme made them nostalgic, there was a resounding ‘no’ from all groups. When asked why not, Dermot noted 1981 was all about “trouble and tragedy” to which Terry added “no jobs, volatile, emigration.” Although Ireland was in the grip of a recession in 1981, as it is today, Dermot asserted “we are not as inwards looking now, not as parochial now. We are a lot more worldly.” Ken agreed, “we are more open, more progressive, more tolerant now...the ugliness, the South African thing, people being discriminated against, the gay thing, single parent, all of that has moved forward.” Meanwhile, Trish, comparing Ireland of 1981 to Syria today, asserted that she’s happy to live in the present moment. For her *Reeling in the Years 1981* “portrays a horrible, horrible vision of Ireland.” Watching *Reeling in the Years 1981* made Canadian Tracy think “oh my God, what did I move here for?” It didn’t give her a positive image of Ireland when watching the violence reflected in that particular episode.

The younger respondents’ who weren’t born in 1981 were also adamant that they would prefer to live in Ireland in 2012 than 1981. Carla noted “I’m kinda glad I’m living in 2012.” For her, even though Ireland is currently in a recession, it is still a better place to live in. Brendan Jr. stated “1981 looked like a pretty grim year to live in Ireland.” Samantha noted Ireland in 1981 as a very dark period in history. She states “it was all sort of death; the Stardust fire, the plane being hijacked, hunger strike, people getting shot. There was nothing really good about it.” For her, watching *Reeling in the Years 1981* would not prompt her to want to live in that era at all. Holly agreed with Samantha reaffirming “I wouldn’t have liked to live in it, definitely not.” Anne confirmed “we weren’t relaxed. We were resigned.” She

further asserted that life in 1981 was difficult because people at that time didn't believe they were entitled to anything and they didn't have a choice.

Although none of the respondents were nostalgic for 1981, some, like Kathy and Joseph, did say that they would like to go back to the age they were. As a seven year old in 1981, Kathy recalls it being a very happy time because she didn't have to worry about bills or mortgages; her chief concern was whether or not she'd be picked on the skipping team. Yet even though she remembers 1981 as a happy time she'd like to revisit as a child, she states "as an adult? No, there's nothing to go back for." Joseph asserts that although it was a sad period with Bobby Sands and the Stardust, he would "love to be able to go back to being about thirteen or fourteen." For him, he would love to be younger again but have the knowledge that he has now to be able change some decisions he made in his younger years.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

*Reeling in the Years* is one of the most successful, archive-driven programmes on RTÉ television. As such, this research project set out to establish what it is about *Reeling in the Years* that consistently attracts the television audience. Due to the limitations of an undergraduate research thesis and the restrictions on word count, the memories shared in this thesis only scratch the surface of the memories the participants shared with the researcher, or, to paraphrase John O'Regan, they are only a flavour; a snapshot of the experiences of the participants (2012). More detailed analysis of the participants' memories would warrant further examinations of the interviews they undertook. Nevertheless, this thesis will provide a strong starting point for those who wish to explore how a wider range of historical programming affects a wider group of people cross demographically.

The thesis began with an exploration of epistemological evidence surrounding the media audience and the ways in which individuals engage with and derive pleasure from viewing television. It continued with an examination of academic empirical audience studies and their evolution into a semi-ethnographic approach, concluding by moving into the specific area of individual and collective memories and their significance in deciphering how television uses both memory and nostalgia as a means of satisfying audiences from which two key theoretical perspectives emerged. Kuhn's memory work enables a researcher to establish the links between personal memories of events and external memories of those events, extrapolating the meaning and interpretation of memories uncovered in the process (2002a). Landsberg's hypothesis of prosthetic memories determine how memories that are created through viewing media texts are transformed into personal memories, even though an individual was not aware of the events when they occurred (2003). A methodology was devised in order to build upon the insights of their approaches in addressing the concerns of

this research. As shown earlier, the methodology highlighted a number of antecedent theoretical works that this project drew on in order to achieve its objective.

As a pure archive programme, this thesis revealed how individuals' memories of national and international events corresponded to the events shown in *Reeling in the Years 1981* by asking whether the programme reflects individual and/or collective memories. To do so, the project drew on Kuhn's memory tropes which, she asserts, enable "informants' accounts ... [to be] treated not only as data but also as discourse, as material for interpretation" (2002a: 9). Anecdotal memories position the respondent firmly in the centre of the specific event or occasion recollected. At the other end of the spectrum, impersonal memories are delineated as memories which circumvent personal association, whilst past/present memories concern themselves with how time is situated in memory discourse. These memory tropes offer a deeper insight into the activity of remembering and were crucial in establishing how memories enable individuals to generate, revise and refresh the stories they wish to tell about themselves, cementing and becoming part of their identity.

Using Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memories, this thesis also asked if *Reeling in the Years 1981* was constructive of individual and/or collective memories (2003). The research uncovered how prosthetic memories are inevitably linked to collective, cultural memories which are shared throughout the various groups. *Reeling in the Years 1981* confirmed "the multiple facets of cultural memory as lived in history and experienced through the auspices of twentieth-century media" (Grainge, P. 2003: 6). Cultural memories not only act as a reminder for those who lived through them, they also enable those who were not present during those days to have enough knowledge of them that they become synthetic memories. As a result of drawing out both reflective and constructive memories, the researcher was able to successfully ascertain that there was little divergence between the depiction of historic events in the programme and the respondents' personal recollections of

those events before concluding with the observation that, although the respondents actively engaged with and enjoyed the programme, they were not in the least nostalgic for the year the programme embodied.

The interview sessions produced many examples of the types of memories individuals have of the events portrayed, augmenting and enhancing the events shown in *Reeling in the Years 1981* with their own recollections of the events when they occurred. Some of the events shown on screen have become ingrained in the cultural memory of society so much that younger participants inevitably possessed Landsberg's prosthetic memories of those events. Although they were too young to remember certain events when they occurred, they possessed knowledge of those events through watching dramas and documentaries on television about those events and even through watching *Reeling in the Years 1981*.

Holdsworth determines that "the constant recirculation of the nation's cultural and individual pasts in the present [is captured] through the ubiquity of past television" (2011: 96). *Reeling in the Years 1981* undoubtedly evoked memories, both individual and collective, in those who watched the programme. As the research has shown, there was an abundance of memories which were extracted from viewing the programme. The research revealed how the Stardust fire is unquestionably a cultural memory in Dublin society. Regardless of age, or how closely affected they were by the Stardust, all of the respondents possessed intimate knowledge of the tragedy, so much so, that one only needed to utter one word – Stardust – and all respondents knew what was being discussed. Other cultural memories which emerged throughout the groups were the Republican prisoners embarking on hunger strikes and the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer. With regard to the hunger strikes, even though some respondents might not have been aware of whom all the hunger strikers were, they knew what the dirty protest was in terms of Irish history. Other participants possessed extensive knowledge on why the prisoners embarked on a hunger

strike and in particular, that Bobby Sands was the leader of this strike and the first hunger striker to die. The wedding of Charles and Diana also particularly stood out in the memories of respondents, mainly due to the fact that Diana continued to dominate the media right up to her tragic death in 1997 and beyond.

Although *Reeling in the Years 1981* prompted individual and collective memories which yielded richer, abundant versions of events, enhancing the stories on screen, it didn't make respondents nostalgic for an unattainable past. This was mainly due to the fact the 1981 was portrayed as a year in which there was mass rioting, hunger strikes, assassination attempts and the fire in the Stardust nightclub. Although some respondents were nostalgic for their youth, in that they long for the innocence of their childhood, all were adamant that contemporary Ireland is still a better era to live in than the early 1980s. Respondents' attitudes of how accurately *Reeling in the Years* reflects events portrayed on screen corresponded to how closely the events portrayed affected them. For those who had a personal connection to the Stardust fire, there was an overwhelming criticism with regard to the fact that *Reeling in the Years 1981* showed less than a minute of footage and failed to show the devastation that the fire left behind. On the other hand, for those who were not personally connected to the Stardust, the footage was a poignant reminder of that night, handled with sensitivity and respect.

In conclusion, this thesis combined academic discourse with a broadcasting industry's perspective<sup>11</sup> on the audience to uncover how people engage with *Reeling in the Years* and the meanings derived from that engagement. It revealed some lively, vivacious individual and collective memories and also, more harrowing, heartrending accounts of stories that undoubtedly enhanced the images on screen. This thesis discovered how individuals' memories of national and international events connected with the events shown on *Reeling in*

---

<sup>11</sup> A detailed analysis of the broadcast industry's ratings system is included in Appendix 1.

*the Years 1981*, revealing how individual and collective memories were essential to the respondents' engagement with the programme.

## **REFERENCES**

- Abercrombie, N. & Longhurst, B. (1998) *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London: Sage.
- Adorno, T. & Horkheimer, M. (1944) *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*. Accessed on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm>.
- Ang, Ien (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- (1991) *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. London: Routledge.
- (1996) *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*. London: Routledge.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1981) *Simulacra and Simulations* in Rivkin, J. & Ryan, M. (2004) *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 365-377.
- Brace, Ian (2004) *Questionnaire Design: How to Plan, Structure and Write Survey Material for Effective Market Research*. London: Market Research in Practice Series.
- Branston, Gill (1998) "Histories of British Television" in Geraghty, C. & Lusted, D. (eds) (1998) *The Television Studies Book*. London: Arnold, pp. 51-62.
- Brunsdon, Charlotte (1990) "Television: Aesthetics and Audiences" in Mellencamp, Patricia (1990) *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. London: BFI Publishing, pp. 59-72.
- Buckingham, David (ed). (1987) *Public Secrets: 'Eastenders' and its Audience*. London: British Film Institute.
- Burgoyne, Robert (2003) "Memory, History and Digital Imagery in Contemporary Film" in Grainge, Paul (ed) (2003) *Memory and Popular Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 220-236.

- Clare, M. & Johnson, R. (2000) "Method in Our Madness? Identity and Power in a Memory Work Method" in Radstone, Susannah (ed) (2000) *Memory and Methodology*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 197-224.
- Erll, A. & Rigney, A. (2006) "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction" in *European Journal of English Studies* (August, 2006, 10 (2)), pp. 111-115.
- Fentress, J. & Wickham, C. (1992) *Social Memory*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Fiske, John (1987) *Television Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Fitzpatrick, Andrew (2012) RTÉ, Interview Transcript, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- Geraghty, C. & Lusted, D. (1998) "Introduction to Chapter 11" in Geraghty, C. & Lusted, D. (eds) (1998) *The Television Studies Book*. London: Arnold, pp. 197.
- Grainge, Paul (2003) "Introduction: Memory and Popular Film" in Grainge, Paul (ed) (2003) *Memory and Popular Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 1-20.
- Halbwachs, Maurice (1992) *On Collective Memory*. (trans. Coser, Lewis) Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Hall, Stuart et al. (eds) (1980) *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Routledge.
- Hart, A. (1991) *Understanding the Media: A Practical Guide*. London: Routledge.
- Holdsworth, Amy (2011) *Television, Memory and Nostalgia*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Huszaril, Liz (2012) "The 2012 Top 5 Media Insights You Need To Know" in Booth, J. (June, 2012) *Promax/BDS – The Conference 2012, L.A. Live, Los Angeles*. Internal RTÉ Promotions Briefing Document.
- Iarossi, Giuseppe (2006) *The Power of Survey Design: A User's Guide for Managing Surveys, Interpreting Results, and Influencing Respondents*. Washington: The World Bank.

- Jensen, K. & Rosengren, K. (1995) "Five Traditions in Search of the Audience" in Boyd-Barret, O. & Newbold, C. (eds) (1995) *Approaches to Media: A Reader*. London: Arnold, pp.174-184.
- Kuhn, Annette (2002a) *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger: Cinema and Cultural Memory*. New York: New York University Press.
- (2002b) *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. London: Verso.
- Landsberg, Alison (2003) "Prosthetic Memory: The Ethics and Politics of Memory in an Age of Mass Culture" in Grainge, Paul (ed) (2003). *Memory and Popular Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, pp. 144-161.
- Lewis, Justin (1991) *The Ideological Octopus: An Exploration of Television & Its Audience*. New York: Routledge.
- Lewis, Lisa A. (1992) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. London: Routledge.
- Liebes, T. & Katz, E. (1993) *The Export of Meaning: Cross-cultural Readings of Dallas*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Litosseliti, Lia (2003) *Using Focus Groups in Research*. London: Continuum.
- Lull, James (1990) *Inside Family Viewing: Ethnographic Research on Television's Audiences*. London: Routledge.
- MacDonald, Myra. (2006) "Performing Memory on Television: Documentary and the 1960s" in *Screen* (Autumn, 2006) 47:3, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 327-345.
- Morley, David (1980) *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding*. London: British Film Institute.
- (1981) "The Nationwide Audience: A Critical Postscript" in (1981) *Screen Education*, 39.
- (1986) *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. London:

Routledge.

(1992) *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

O'Regan, John (2012) RTÉ, Interview Transcript, July 06<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

O'Sullivan, Tim (1998) "Nostalgia, Revelation and Intimacy: Tendencies in the Flow of Modern Popular Television" in Geraghty, C & Lusted, D. (eds) (1998) *The Television Studies Book*. London: Arnold, 1998, pp. 198-211.

Roy, Deb (2012) "Harnessing the Power of Social TV" in Booth, J. (June, 2012) *Promax/BDS – The Conference 2012, L.A. Live, Los Angeles*. Internal RTÉ Promotions Briefing Document.

RTÉ Television (2012) *Television Audience Measurement*. (internal document) Accessed on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 from <http://marconi.rte.ie/ard/xml/researchmethods.xml>.

Seiter, Ellen (1999) *Television and New Media Audiences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Television Audience Measurement Ireland Ltd. (2012a) *An Introduction to Television Audience Measurement in Ireland*. Accessed on July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 from <http://www.tamireland.ie>.

Television Audience Measurement Ireland Ltd. (2012b) *Audience Measurement Ratings Data*. Personal Correspondence, June, 2012.

Television Audience Measurement Ireland Ltd. (2013) *Audience Measurement Ratings Data*. Personal Correspondence, April, 2013.

Tulloch, John (2000) *Watching Television Audiences: Cultural Theories and Methods*. London: Arnold.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1 – Broadcast Industry ratings system and *Reeling in the Years* ratings.**

For the broadcast industry, the audience are objectified and transformed into commodities, relegated to mere numbers on a spreadsheet through the audience measurement system via ratings. The audience measurement system allows broadcasters and advertisers to identify how many people turned on a particular programme but are restricted to only having access to the numbers extrapolated from a random sample of individuals across a demographic and only after the programme has aired. Furthermore, the audience measurement system fails to identify the levels of attention given to the programme watched. It can only determine whether an audience member turned on the television set and a particular channel at a particular time. However, as this practice is the accepted industry standard, it is a worthwhile endeavour to attempt a short explication of the process.

Commercial broadcasters are primarily driven by the capitalist ideology to make money whereas the overriding philosophy behind public service broadcasting is to provide a public service, in which it attempts to inform, entertain and educate the very public it serves. Regardless of whether a broadcaster is commercial or public service, both use the audience ratings system to define whether a programme is a success or a failure. Charlotte Brunson verifies this supposition when she states that broadcasting organisations are principally interested with “maximising audiences and revenue, not with the codifying of proper ways to watch” (1990: 63). A commercial broadcaster’s revenue is yielded through the sales of commercial advertisements which are placed before, during and after the programmes in the broadcaster’s television schedule. Audience ratings for programmes are essential for selling the advertisement spots around those programmes. They will identify for the advertiser how many people (and from what demographic) their advertisement has reached.

Although public service broadcasters, such as the BBC, do not contain advertising in their programming schedule (they are funded through the obligatory licence fee payment which all householders in the UK must purchase), television ratings are still an essential prerequisite in determining if a programme/series was successful. In public service broadcasting, ratings are used to ascertain if the scheduled programme or series has reached the audience the broadcaster aimed for; the audience being the public who fund the licence fee. Morley notes that the broadcasting industry's ratings system portrays "viewers and the differences between and among them exclusively in terms of a few generalized and standardized viewing behaviour variables" (1992: 175). Audience members are differentiated through age, gender and socio-economic group in the ratings system. Although this method of quantitative research produces analyses of how many people from what particular demographic are viewing a particular programme, it does not tell us why they are viewing that programme and in what way. Also, all other establishments of identity and the disparity between them are effectively ignored.

In Ireland, Television Audience Measurement Ireland Ltd. (TAM) is the company who has overall responsibility for conducting research into audiences for television programmes which are broadcast in Ireland. TAM Ireland commissions AGB Nielsen Media Research in Dublin to provide the actual measurement service of television audiences. This is achieved by using the Peoplemeter system, an electronic means of measuring audiences which was introduced in Ireland in May, 1989 (RTÉ Television. 2012: 1). Representative samples of homes throughout Ireland are selected and Peoplemeters and handsets are installed within them. The handsets are likened to an advanced remote control which enables panel members (i.e. all of those who live in the home) and their guests to register what programmes they are viewing. This information is fed into Nielsen Media Research who then provides broadcasters and advertisers with "detailed information on the approximate

number of people watching channels, programmes and advertisements at any given time” (Television Audience Measurement Ireland Ltd. 2012a: 1).

As a result of the ratings system, broadcasters can determine the percentage of viewers broken into subgroups of age, gender, social class and region that watched the programmes they offered on their channels. Advertisers can ascertain the percentage of the population that watched the advertisements they placed in those programmes, also broken down into the above subgroups. When examining ratings, broadcasters use the share a programme got, which is a percentage of all people who are watching television at that particular time watched that particular programme, whilst advertisers focus on the programme’s TVR, i.e. what percentage of the whole population that viewed that advertisement. As such, a programme’s share will always be higher than a programme’s TVR.

Ang asserts that audience measurement “bears an economical meaning” because it “produces the necessary standard through which advertising rates can be set” (1991: 53). The results from the ratings system cannot totally and unconditionally be confirmed as an authentic measurement of what the whole country chose to watch or not watch on television because the data produced is established from a small sample of households which are determined to be representative of the whole country. The only way to truly ascertain a complete picture of television viewing figures would be to install the Peoplemeter system in every home but this would prove expensive, time consuming and possibly, not economically viable. The current means of audience measurement has been accepted by broadcasters and advertisers as the most reasonable method of demarcating the total viewing figures for Ireland, across all channels on any particular day. In a nutshell, the ratings system, as it exists today, is the system which vested interests decide the value of commercial advertising slots, if programmes are successful or not in their scheduled slots and whether it’s

commercially profitable to continue investing money in a particular programme or not.

Whilst in the commercial broadcast industry there can be no doubt that the ratings system is economically driven, Ireland's public service broadcaster, RTÉ, is also dependent on commercial advertisement sales to achieve its public service obligations.

RTÉ holds a unique position in that it is a dual funded broadcaster. Its funding derives from the combined licence fee payment from householders in Ireland, as well as its reliance on the commercial advertisements which surround the televised programmes. The motive for dual funding comes from RTÉ's inability to fulfill its public service legislative obligations on a licence fee remit alone, due to the size of the country. As a result of dual funding, RTÉ constantly balances on a tightrope between fulfilling its public service role and satisfying the audience reach demands of its advertisers. So, how does RTÉ balance on this tightrope? RTÉ's Director of Scheduling, Andrew Fitzpatrick asserts that the starting point is "our public service remit" (2012: 2). Labelling them "institutional obligations", he goes on to provide examples of the type of content, including religious or children's output, which a commercial broadcaster would not be required under legislation to provide but as a public service broadcaster, RTÉ is obligated to do so. As a result, RTÉ's television schedule is made up of programming content which is suitable for different types of people, based on age, gender and social class; content which is sometimes produced for entertainment purposes, sometimes to inform or educate and other times content which reflects the lives of the population. Fitzpatrick asserts that when creating the RTÉ One and Two schedules, "you're thinking of your audiences, you're thinking of your commercial audiences, you're thinking of public service remit" (ibid: 3). As RTÉ is also dependent on commercial advertisement sales, in deciding how much to spend on a given programme slot, it is always looking to maximise the opportunity in a given slot and deliver as big an audience as possible.

Slot expectations, or how well a programme is expected to rate in the audience measurement system is contingent upon where it's scheduled and the potential audience it can inherit from the previous programme scheduled, as well as what other broadcasters are scheduling against it at the same time. Fitzpatrick notes that when deciding whether a scheduled programme was successful in terms of the ratings it achieved,

You're looking at the competitive landscape, what was the programme, did it deliver on our slot expectations...you're looking at each one and you're looking across the whole mosaic of the schedule (ibid: 4).

For instance, a programme scheduled after Fair City and Eastenders on RTÉ One would be expected to deliver a strong rating, depending on what the competitors had scheduled against it whereas a programme scheduled against Coronation Street on TV3 would not be expected to deliver a high rating. In this case, the determination of whether that programme was a success would be based on criteria such as, was the programme well constructed and well crafted or was it entertaining? In other words, did it deliver on what RTÉ wanted it to deliver on in terms of content?

There are also challenges for Irish broadcasters in the face of increased competition from other broadcasters as a result of the national switchover from analogue transmission to digital terrestrial transmission in October 2012. Almost all homes in Ireland now have the ability to receive multi-channels from digital packages offered by competing service providers. At the very least, they can continue to watch Irish channels through a set top box or an approved digital television. This highlights the fact that broadcasters, such as RTÉ, are competing for audiences who have a wider choice of alternatives available to them.

However, linear broadcasting and the percentages that watch RTÉ One and Two are still very high when considering the wide range of channels available to so many people. Fitzpatrick

notes that the peak time share across both channels is forty per cent, a number which he believes to be a strong performance from the channels competing in a multi channel environment. He asserts “two channels... generating forty per cent share is pretty extraordinary” (ibid: 7). So where does *Reeling in the Years* fit into this complex schedule, competing against other broadcasters, in a broadcast landscape which is changing and evolving?

In an environment where the peak time share across two channels averages at 40%, it’s interesting to see the average ratings for each series of *Reeling in the Years* when it first aired:

Custom Group	Channel	Variable\Audience	*Individuals	Custom Group	Channel	Variable\Audience	*Individuals
Reeling 60's	RTÉ One	TVR	11.31	Reeling 90's	RTÉ One	TVR	11.70
		Index	100			Index	100
		Profile	100.0			Profile	100.0
		000s	424.9			000s	416.2
		Share	35.04			Share	31.14
		Item Counter	8			Item Counter	10
Reeling 70's	RTÉ One	TVR	7.77	Reeling 00's	RTÉ One	TVR	11.29
		Index	100			Index	100
		Profile	100.0			Profile	100.0
		000s	283.1			000s	462.0
		Share	26.57			Share	27.87
		Item Counter	11			Item Counter	10
Reeling 80's	RTÉ One	TVR	12.99				
		Index	100				
		Profile	100.0				
		000s	452.5				
		Share	34.49				
		Item Counter	10				

Figure 10 Ratings for first run episodes of *Reeling in the Years* (TAM Ireland Ltd. 2012b)

*Reeling in the 80s*, the first series, aired on RTÉ One on Monday evenings at 20:00, from 06<sup>th</sup> September 1999 to 08<sup>th</sup> November 1999. The share for that series averaged out at 34.49%.

Following on from that, *Reeling in the 90s* aired on Monday nights at 20:00 from 11<sup>th</sup>

September 2000 to 27<sup>th</sup> November 2000. The share for this series averaged out at 31.14%. *Reeling in the 70s* aired on Tuesday evenings at 19:00, from 10<sup>th</sup> September 2002 to 12<sup>th</sup> November 2002. The share for this series averaged out at 26.57%. *Reeling in the 60s* aired on Friday nights at 20:30 from 10<sup>th</sup> September 2004 to 29<sup>th</sup> October 2004. The share for this series averaged out at 35.04%. *Reeling in the 00s (Noughties)* aired on Sunday nights at 19:55 from 17<sup>th</sup> October 2010 to 26<sup>th</sup> December 2010. The share for this series averaged out at 27.87%. So, for the first time these series transmitted on RTÉ One, they delivered a share ranging from the mid twenties up to the mid thirties, a share which RTÉ believed would have delivered on their expectations.

As *Reeling in the Years* has been repeated so often, the researcher then asked how well did repeat runs do in the last four years? The results are as follows:

Year		Target Audience	Individuals 4+	Year		Target Audience	Individuals 4+
		Base Audience	Individuals 4+			Base Audience	Individuals 4+
2009	Live	TVR	9.41	2011	Consolidated	TVR	9.90
		Index	100			Index	100
		Profile	100.0			Profile	100.0
		000s	389.1			000s	404.4
		Share	35.87			Share	34.43
		Item Counter	53			Item Counter	57
2010	Live	TVR	8.91	2012	Consolidated	TVR	8.39
		Index	100			Index	100
		Profile	100.0			Profile	100.0
		000s	366.7			000s	345.1
		Share	29.67			Share	30.41
		Item Counter	65			Item Counter	12

Figure 11 Ratings for repeat episodes of *Reeling in the Years* from 2009 to 2012 (TAM Ireland Ltd. 2013)

The category 'live' means that ratings which the programme delivered when it transmitted on linear broadcast. From 2011, TAM Ireland began delivering consolidated ratings, which were the combined ratings from linear viewing and those individuals who watched the programme on their PVR's up to midnight on the evening each programme aired, or

V.O.S.D.A.L. (viewing on same day as live). What is interesting to note is that repeat programmes achieved a better overall share than the original transmissions of those programmes. In 2012, the average share was 31.11%. In 2011, the average share was 34.43%. In 2010, the average share was 29.67 and in 2010, the average share was 35.87. Considering that these programmes are the most often run programmes on RTÉ's schedules (some episodes have been shown thirteen and fourteen times), the fact that it continues not only to rate highly but exceptionally better than they did on their original transmissions is something quite remarkable. One can begin then to understand why Fitzpatrick schedules them.

To put the ratings of *Reeling in the Years* in context, the researcher then asked for ratings for comparable slots. The *Reeling in the Years* series typically airs after the *Six One News* on RTÉ One, Monday to Friday at 18.30 in the months of July and August, when coverage of the news is reduced to a half hour programme. As such, the researcher began by requesting ratings for the second half of the *Six One News* from September to July, in a three year period from 2009 to 2012. As *Reeling in the Years* typically transmits after the *Six One News*, the researcher then requested ratings for any programmes which transmitted at 19:00 from September to July for the same three year period. These would be ratings of programmes which like, *Reeling in the Years*, broadcast directly after the news. Finally, the researcher also asked for ratings for Sunday nights at 18:30 following the *Six One News*, again ascertaining the ratings of series' which have a potential large audience inheritance from the news but also a news that is a half hour programme rather than its usual hour long slot. This would enable the researcher to draw the comparison against programmes which were scheduled at the same time as *Reeling in the Years*, as well as programmes broadcast after the news. The results were startling:

Panel Type	Audience	Activity	Platform			
National	*Individuals	Live	All			
Channel	Day Part	Day Part group	Date group \ Variable	TVR	000s	Share
RTÉ One	18:30 - 18:59	18:30 - 18:59 Complete Time Band Split(MTWTF--)	Sept 09 to July 10	12.08	498.8	42.83
			Sept 10 to July 11	12.88	526.1	44.12
			Sept 11 to July 12	11.42	468.7	40.62
	19:00 - 19:29	19:00 - 19:29 Complete Time Band Split(MTWTF--)	Sept 09 to July 10	8.06	332.9	27.07
			Sept 10 to July 11	8.57	350.3	27.85
			Sept 11 to July 12	7.71	316.4	25.76
	18:30 - 18:59	18:30 - 18:59 Complete Time Band Split(-----S)	Sept 09 to July 10	9.89	408.2	33.17
			Sept 10 to July 11	10.54	430.5	33.57
			Sept 11 to July 12	9.65	396.1	31.83

Figure 12 Ratings for scheduling slots from 2009 to 2012 (TAM Ireland Ltd. 2012b)

It is unsurprising that the Monday to Friday 18.30 slot from July to September received shares from 40.62% to 44.12%, as this is the second half of the *Six One News* and is not competing for an inherited audience. Programmes airing after the *Six One News* on Monday to Friday, from September through to July only received shares from 25.76% to 27.07%, which is significantly lower than the share that *Reeling in the Years* received. Programmes airing on Sunday nights at 18.30 following the news did a little better, between 31.83% and 33.57% but these ratings were still lower than the ratings for *Reeling in the Years* repeat broadcasts. When the fact that the cost of playing out the repeat programmes of *Reeling in the Years* is significantly lower than the cost of producing programmes in the above slots, the value of *Reeling in the Years* and how well it does in terms of audience figures truly emerges. As far as Fitzpatrick's concerned, there's no other archive programme on Irish television which has been as successful as *Reeling in the Years*. As the audience figures above show, the Irish nation seems to agree with him. For that reason, *Reeling in the Years* will remain on RTÉ's television schedules in the future.

**Appendix 2 – Online Questionnaire**

I am conducting research about the RTÉ television show, *Reeling in the Years*. The aim of the research project is to attempt to understand how a television programme like *Reeling in the Years* might trigger memories, either personal or collective. Here are some questions that I would like you to answer. Please note that all responses are completely confidential. Thank you for your time.

**Section One**

Name:

Gender:

Nationality:

Marital Status:

What year were you born in:

What level of formal education has been completed (please tick one):

Secondary  Some Third Level  College Graduate  None of the above

What is your profession:

How many people including yourself currently live in your household:

Adults:  One  two  three  four  more than four

Children:  One  two  three  four  more than four

How many people including yourself currently work outside the household:

One  two  three  four  more than four

## Section Two

**Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. There is a comment field included at the end of each section if you wish to comment further**

I watch television (opposite)

hardly ever  not very regularly  regularly  often  every day

I love watching old rerun series, such as *Murder She Wrote*, *Columbo*, etc.:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

I love watching period dramas, such as *Upstairs Downstairs*:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

I love watching historical docu/dramas, based on real non-Irish events, such as *The Tudors*:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

I love watching historical docu/dramas, based on real Irish events, such as *Stardust*, *Whistleblower*, etc.:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

I love watching Top 100 etc. review programmes, such as *Top 100 Greatest TV Moments Ever*:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

I love watching archive documentaries, such as *Brian Friel*, *Imagining Ulysses*:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

### Section Three

**Please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements. There is a comment field included at the end of each section if you wish to comment further**

I watch *Reeling in the Years*:

never  hardly ever  if I catch it  regularly  all the time

I watch *Reeling in the Years*:

alone  with family  with friends  with a mixture of friends and family

I watch *Reeling in the Years* because:

I want to  another person turns it on  it happens to be on  nothing else is on

I love watching *Reeling in the Years*:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

I will record *Reeling in the Years* to watch at a later time rather than miss it:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

*Reeling in the Years* is an accurate reflection of national historical events:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

When I watch *Reeling in the Years*, I remember the past with fond recollection:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

When I watch *Reeling in the Years*, I long for those days gone by:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

When I watch *Reeling in the Years*, it reminds me of the events that are in the programme:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

When I watch *Reeling in the Years*, it shows me Ireland as it was:

strongly disagree  disagree  neutral  agree  strongly agree

*Reeling in the Years* reflects what it means to be Irish:

( ) strongly disagree ( ) disagree ( ) neutral ( ) agree ( ) strongly agree

The thing I remember most about 1981 is:

---

---

The thing I remember most about 1990 is:

---

---

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.

### **Appendix 3 – Three stages of the Interview Process**

#### **Stage One: Initial Focus Group Introduction (Litosseliti, L: 2003)**

First of all, I want to welcome and thank you very much for taking the time to attend this focus group session. Also, special thanks to XXXX (primary respondent) for organising you all to be here.

The purpose of my research project is to attempt to uncover how the RTÉ television show *Reeling in the Years* connects people to past events. I am hoping this discussion will reveal if *Reeling in the Years* constructs memories and/or if it accurately reflects personal memories to the events shown on screen. What we discuss here this evening will be very beneficial to my research project.

For the purposes of transcribing for analysis, I will be recording the interview. These recordings are completely confidential and any published research will contain your first names or first name and initial of surname only. You can opt out of the interview and the research project at any time if you are not happy to be recorded or for your experiences to be used in this manner.

The length of tonight's session should take no longer than one hour, forty five minutes.

There are three stages to this session. The first is we will watch *Reeling in the Years* 1981.

The second stage is where I will ask you to fill in a survey. The third stage is the discussion itself. I will explain each stage to you as we go along.

So the first stage – we are going to watch *Reeling in the Years* 1981.

#### **Stage Two - Survey**

*Reeling in the Years* 1981 has twenty five individual story segments, which we cannot possibly hope to discuss in the time allotted. So, following on from that, I am going to hand

you a survey which I will ask you to list, from one to five, the most important/significant events for you to discuss, with one being the most important. This list will form the basis of our discussion later on.

### **Stage Three – Group Discussion**

The idea of this group discussion is to enable you to share your views and experiences in a relaxed and informal setting. This discussion will last no longer than one hour. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers, simply different viewpoints. All comments, whether positive or negative, are important to this research project.

What you want to say and how much you want to say is completely up to you. For the purposes of the recording, please try to make sure that you do not interrupt others or talk at the same time.

You have selected the five events which we are now going to discuss. Please don't worry about taking up too much time discussing one particular event, we will simply eliminate the lesser events rather than going over time. I would rather have rich detail on some events than lesser detail on all five!

Following on from that, I wish to discuss the nostalgia factor, or if watching this particular episode makes you long for yesteryear.

If you have any questions not related to the event being discussed, it would be better if you kept it to the end but feel free to ask me, or each other, about a particular event as its being discussed! So has anybody got any questions? We will begin.

#### **Appendix 4 – Reeling in the Years 1981 Survey**

Please list the top five most significant events of 1981 for you, starting with one as the most to five as the fifth most in the favourite box.

<b>Event</b>	<b>Favourite</b>
Ronald Reagan is sworn in as President of the USA, prompting celebrations in his ancestral hometown of Ballyporeen.	
American hostages freed from Iran are given a warm welcome during a stopover at Shannon Airport.	
Mary McAleese reports for 'Today Tonight' on the unveiling of the new DeLorean car in Belfast	
President Reagan survives an assassination attempt	
A disco turns to tragedy when 48 young people die in a fire at The Stardust on Dublin's Northside	
Lead by Bobby Sands, Republican prisoners embark on a hunger strike, demanding political prisoner of war status	
Buck's Fizz, singing 'Making Your Mind Up' win the Eurovision Song Contest, held in the RDS, in Dublin.	
Construction begins on Knock Airport, with or without planning permission.	
Bobby Sands dies after 66 days on hunger strike, resulting in extensive rioting.	
An Aer Lingus plane is hijacked on route from Dublin to London.	
Politicians hit the campaign trail for the 1981 General Election.	
The Pope survives an assassination attempt.	
Election results are in with Garrett Fitzgerald leading a coalition government with Michael O'Leary.	
Protesters take to the streets to air their opposition to the IRFU's plans to tour South Africa.	
Prince Charles marries Lady Diana Spencer.	
A violent riot in Ballsbridge arises when Gardai prevent a protest march in support of the hunger strikers from reaching the British Embassy.	
Kieran Doherty, elected to the Dáil, becomes the eight hunger striker to die.	
Offaly are All-Ireland Hurling Champions	
Reigning champions Kerry become the All Ireland Football Champions for the fourth time in a row.	
After the death of ten hunger strikers, the hunger strike is called off, granting the prisoners demands.	
Ireland's first women Army recruits pass out on parade.	
Supermarket boss Ben Dunne is kidnapped.	
Egyptian President Anwar Sadat is assassinated.	
In Rugby, Ireland lose each one of their Five Nations' matches.	
The Rubik's Cube gets a spot on The Late Late Show	

Figure 13 Survey of events in Reeling in the Years 1981 given to respondents