

## Putting your relationship to the test

Constructions of fidelity, seduction and participation in *Temptation Island*

*Poñendo a proba a túa relación*  
*Construcións da fidelidade, seducción e participación en Temptation Island*

**Resumo:** *Temptation Island* semella alimentarse apenas do voyeurismo dos seus espectadores ofrecendo aos participantes a oportunidade de obter pracer da súa estancia e/ou aumentar o seu status de 'famosos'. Ao mesmo tempo, a cultura popular é un punto importante para construción social do significado. É un lugar onde se ofrecen definicións do que as nosas sociedades aceptan ou non, toleran ou non, sancionan ou non. Programas televisivos como *Temptation Island* son microcosmos que nos permiten examinar os nosos límites así como elementos das nosas culturas que asumimos como normais. Son particularmente as relacións humanas, no xénero e na sexualidade -elementos centrais da sociedade- o que fan *Temptation Island* un obxecto de investigación relevante. A análise do discurso televisivo e da súa recepción (en foros enliña) mostra a importancia cultural e natureza de xénero dos discursos de fidelidade, honestidade, beleza física e as regras sagradas do xogo. Mostra tamén como os espectadores (homes) entran nun contrato social co programa, para poder comer coa vista os corpos (femininos), para obter pracer dos fallos e penas dos participantes e para tolerar abusos emocionais en nome do xogo.

**Palabras-clave:** *Temptation Island*; cultura popular; xénero; construción social.

**Abstract:** *Temptation Island* only seems to feed the banal voyeurism of its viewers and to offer the participants the opportunity to derive pleasure from their stay and/or to increase their celebrity status. At the same time, popular culture is an important site for the societal construction of meaning. It is a place where definitions are offered on what our societies accept or not, tolerate or not, and sanction or not. Television programmes such as *Temptation Island* are microcosms allowing us to examine our boundaries as well as elements in our culture that we take for granted. It is in particular the emphasis on human relationships, gender and sexuality -core elements of society- that makes *Temptation Island* relevant research material. The analysis of the television text and the reception of this text (on online forums) shows the cultural importance and gendered nature of discourses on fidelity, honesty, physical beauty and on the holy rules of the game. It also shows how the (male) viewers enter into a social contract with the programme, in order to ogle the (female) bodies, to derive pleasure from the failure and misfortunes of the participants, and to tolerate emotional abuse in the name of the game.

**Keywords:** *Temptation Island*; popular culture, gender, societal construction.

## INTRODUCTION

The reality show, *Temptation Island*, was televised for the first time in 2001 on the FOX network in the USA. Many television networks bought the rights to this format, resulting in local variations of the original in for instance the UK, France, Australia, Brazil and Italy. In Belgium and the Netherlands the local version was produced by Kanakna Productions for two SBS Networks broadcasters, namely VT4 in North-Belgium and Veronica in the Netherlands. The first Dutch *Temptation Island* was televised in 2002, and since then a new series has been produced every year. The fifth, and at present last, series was televised in April 2006, on VT4 and Veronica, with Hans Otten (VT4) and Tanja Jess (Veronica) as presenters.

The format of *Temptation Island* is relatively simple, based on a clear and quasi-impenetrable categorising of the participants. Eight couples, four men and four women, are housed separately in 'resorts' on two tropical islands<sup>1</sup>, where they meet a number of so-called 'bachelors' (or 'tempters' and 'temptresses'). The programme format revolves around a relationship test, where each partner receives the attention of the 'tempters' and 'temptresses' for two weeks. As the Veronica TI website says: *'During their stay they are seduced by attractive men and women who give rise to their ultimate fantasies.'*<sup>2</sup>

The eight partners (and their 'tempters/temptresses') spend most of their time having fun, in smaller or larger groups, while every action is filmed and recorded by (sometimes hidden) cameras and sound recording equipment of *Temptation Island's* production team. The different episodes consist of a montage of these clips, with commentary, as well as interviews with the participants.

The (group)interactions are alternated with two subformats. On the so-called 'dates', which culminate in the 'dream date', the partners choose one of the tempters/temptresses for a private date during which they undertake a romantic activity or an adventure. The *Temptation Island* production team thus attempts to heighten the pressure on the partners (and their relationships). In the second scenario the participants are shown video clips of their partners' escapades at the so-called 'bonfires', while at the same time being interviewed by one of the presenters. The final meeting between the couples also takes place during such a bonfire. Both the video clips and the interview questions are aimed at increasing the pressure on the partners. In the final episode

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<sup>1</sup> The television text hardly makes any reference to the locality of these resorts, disconnecting them from their (post)colonial realities.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.temptation-island.nl/>

the couples are visited some months after their Temptation Island stay, and an inventory is made of the damage caused to the relationship.

In some programmes the basic format was changed. For example, in Temptation Island 2005 the barman and barlady - who played an important role in the festivities - took on the status of 'tempter' and 'temptress'. In Temptation Island 2006, an extra 'temptress' was invited (Rebecca Loos), and a new group of 'tempters/temptresses' was brought to the island, including some of the previous participants (Tim De Pril, Gaby Visser and Rowena Guldenaar<sup>3</sup>), and the participants had to choose which of the 'tempters/temptresses' could stay. In addition, the mother of one of the participants came to visit her, and the respective 'dream dates' of that couple was replaced by a 'reconciliation date', where the couple could spend time alone to try and mend their relationship and '*to make something special of their second last day on Temptation Island*' (Veronica TI website).

### POPULAR BANALITY?

At first glance a programme such as Temptation Island appears to be to feed a banal voyeurism on the side of the viewers, and to afford participants an opportunity for entertainment (as far as relationships go, as well as from a tourist perspective), with possible stardom as an added bonus.

At the same time popular culture is a site where social meanings are constructed, where we are offered definitions of what our society would tolerate, would strive for, or would sanction. These constructional processes are not always homogenous. In fact, popular culture is characterised by a criss-cross of the many contradictions inherent in our culture. It is a place where attempts are sometimes made to transcend or transform rigid and impenetrable discourses. As John Fiske (1989) argues, popular culture serves as oxygen for these transgressions. At the same time it is also the stage where hegemony operates and finds foot. Hegemonic discourses can be contested, but such challenges can be dangerous because of the risk of social sanctions.

Television programmes such as Temptation Island are microcosms allowing us to examine our boundaries as well as elements in our culture that we take for granted. It is in particular the emphasis on human relationships, gender and sexuality, core elements of society, that makes Temptation Island so relevant as research material. In addition, this programme generates viewing pleasures for large audiences, and draws

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<sup>3</sup> Tim De Pril was a partner in Temptation Island 2. Gaby Visser and Rowena Guldenaar were 'temptresses' in respectively Temptation Island 3 and 4.

many online discussions. In one of the many discussion forums<sup>4</sup> viewing pleasure is summarised as follows: *'Of course, it supplies viewers with sufficient "suspense and sensation". That's why we watch. And don't forget the lovely bodies'* (Bobette, 02-05-2006, femistyle.be).

However, not all viewers are entertained by the programme. As often happens with popular television – which was also emphasised in Ien Ang's analysis in 'Watching Dallas' (1995) – there are two different discourses underlying the evaluation of popular television programmes. On the one hand there is the discourse (or the ideology, as Ang calls it) of mass culture, condemning popular television as boring and irrelevant. We find examples of this perspective on some of the forums, for example one posting which says: *'Never watch this rubbish'* (jootje02, 04-07-2005, sbs.nl), or another: *'I don't need this on TV'* (LastHorizon, 02-07-2005, sbs.nl). In some instances the condemnation is somewhat less subtle, as in the following description of Temptation Island as *'a fuck-around-programme with machos and sluts!'* (kattekop, 30-03-2006, femistyle.be). On the other hand there is the discourse on popular culture which views these cultural expressions as legitimate and (even as) of cultural importance. The following posting on the Veronica website illustrates this very well: *'Every Monday and Wednesday my housemates and I again sit on the couch with the three of us. This programme is fantastic. What I find a pity is that they show previews of later shows, so that you already know that some things go very badly. (In any case you know that already, but this only confirms it ;-))'* (Lady\_Y, 05-04-2006, veronica.nl).

These two discourses cannot be totally separated; they are reconciled by the ironic perspective, as is demonstrated by the following posting: *'Of course it is pulp TV, but one has to agree, that can also be fun at times. Life is serious enough'* (Angel45, 02-07-2005, sbs.nl). This reconciliation of the two discourses becomes even more noticeable when one looks at the question on a poster (from the mass culture perspective): *'Is there really no-one who recognises the sadness of the programme?'* (calimero, 13-04-2006, vt4.be) The answer came the following day, and is telling evidence of the ironic perspective: *'Sad? Sure. Pathetic? Definitely. Entertaining? Enormously!'* (sugababe, 14-04-2006, vt4.be).

Therefore an analysis of popular cultural products such as Temptation Island can never be made outside of the specific social contexts. As

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<sup>4</sup> This text is based on an analysis of the broadcasts combined with an analysis of the postings on Temptation Island on the following forums, blogs and feedback pages: fok.nl, sbs.nl, belg.be, zattevrienden.be, whitelinefirm.nl, veronica.nl, goedZO?!.com, femistyle.be en vt4.be. The online postings are quoted verbatim. The author does not necessarily agree with them as to form and content. Please note that the postings from the forums are all translated from the original Dutch.

was already said, popular television programmes are founded on numerous discourses about human interaction as well as about television and popular culture. In the case of Temptation Island these discourses include discourses related to (hetero)sexuality, gender, fidelity, and monogamy. Secondly, Temptation Island is an integral part of the television and media system(s). This implies in the first place that Temptation Island is embedded in chains of intertextuality. The fifth Temptation Island series is internally intertextual, as it refers to the previous series, allowing for a learning process of audiences, participants and media professionals. There are also many forms of external intertextuality (or combined versions). Not only 'ordinary' viewers produce texts about Temptation Island (via forums and blogs), but other media do so as well. The magazine, *Humo*, has for instance run a comic strip about Temptation Island. Magazines and newspapers regularly publish interviews with participants, or discuss how the programme will develop or what new relationships have been formed. Some participants - such as Andries de Jongh<sup>5</sup>, one of the partners of Temptation Island 5 - produced texts on their own websites or in newspaper or magazine columns.

Many references between Temptation Island and other programmes and cultural texts exist, for instance through the (media)pre-history of the participants. Both Andries de Jongh (a partner in the 5th TI series) and Dennis van Solkema (a partner in the 4th TI series) took part in the Dutch Big Brother, and the couple, Sven and Sally (partners in the 4th TI series), previously participated in the VT4 programme, *The Block*. Sometimes they also transcend the Temptation Island sphere, as in the case of Goedele van Ruyssevelt, one of the partners from the first Temptation Island, who became a presenter on VT4 when the island series ended, or the music group, *Seduced*, whose members were all participants in the second series of Temptation Island.

A second consequence of Temptation Island's embeddedness in the television system, is that the series cannot be regarded as separate from the media production context. The television system is a commodified system, aimed at the production of a television programme of such popularity that it can compete strongly on the television market of North-Belgium and the Netherlands. This political-economic context strongly affects its nature. It is also a professional system, grounded in media-professional identities, structured *inter alia* by means of - inter-related - ethical discourses, discourses on the hierarchy between participants and media professionals, discourses on the format of reality TV, and discourses on the quality of television. Of importance for this text are the power relations generated by this context, on the one hand

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.big-andries.nl/>

in the interaction between the participants, as well as between the participants and the media professionals, and on the other hand in the interactions between participants, media professionals and the discursive context. It is precisely from this power-laden interactions that the television text, *Temptation Island*, originates, and in turn will feed (as a televised discourse) into culture and society.

#### POWER AND THE PRODUCTION OF A TELEVISION TEXT

According to Foucault - in his analytics of power, in the 'History of Sexuality' (1978) - power does not belong to a specific actor (or class), but it cuts across human relationships. However, this mobile and multi-directional character of power does not mean that power relations are by definition equally balanced. Foucault expressly recognises the existence of unequal power relations, focussing on disciplining (of the other and the self) in 'Discipline and punish' (1977). He states at the same time that no actor will ever fully realise his strategies and intentions, because there is always the possibility of resistance and contra-strategies. It is precisely this dynamic combination of strategies and contra-strategies, of hegemony and resistance, of creation and restriction, that power becomes so productive. Through this power logic new discourses and identities are produced, and old discourses and identities are transformed or in fact consolidated.

Applying Foucault's analytics of power on the television system implies that both the production sphere (the interaction between ideologies, participants and media professionals) and the reception sphere (the interaction between ideologies, television texts and viewers) are characterised by power relations that are not entirely controlled by a specific actor, so that resistance against unequal power relations is still possible. In *Temptation Island*'s production sphere the different actors - presenters, cameramen, sound engineers, technicians, directors, producers, partners, bachelors - effectively find themselves in unequal power relations. On the one hand the media professionals largely control the island context: they developed (*in casu* adapted) the format, they made the rules that have to be followed on the island, they chose (*in casu* cast) the participants, they concluded their contracts, for 24 hours a day their cameras (partly visible and partly hidden) are focused on the participants, they ask the interview questions, and they select the footage and edit it into a cohesive narrative which is broadcast on their respective stations. On the other hand the participants are not totally powerless. The entire format of *Temptation Island* depends on their willingness to commit themselves to the interaction with the other participants, to answer the interview questions, to live with micro-

phones attached to their bodies, and to try and forget the ubiquitous cameras and cameramen, and behave as 'normally' as possible.

In the reception sphere the viewers also have their interpretative freedoms. Changing the television text cannot (in principle) be accomplished, but audiences do interpret the televised events and the personalities of the participants. In other words, as Stuart Hall also argues on the basis of his encoding/decoding model (1980), meanings that are generated in the production sphere are not necessarily the same as that generated in the reception sphere. People watching *Temptation Island* will not necessarily interpret the text in the way the producers intended. Resistance against the dominant interpretation always remains a possibility.

The idea is that the different power processes in the production and the reception spheres work productively. In the production sphere it is precisely the unequal power relations between the actors - co-determined by the circulating discourses, that transcends the individuality of the actors - that ensures that a television text is produced. In the reception sphere it is the interaction between the viewers and the television text, once again co-determined by circulating discourses at the level of the social and the cultural, that creates new interpretations and meanings amongst the viewers.

#### KEY DISCOURSES IN TEMPTATION ISLAND

The interaction between the participants, stimulated by the production team's management thereof, leads to the creation of the television text. In this respect television is a discursive machine that transforms human interaction into (television) texts. As all texts, the *Temptation Island* texts are also ideological in character, containing a series of discourses that transcend individual statements and interactions cast in pictures and sounds. As we have said, these discourses cannot be separated from the cultural context whence they originated, and in this way *Temptation Island* thus makes these discourses - and therefore our culture - visible and tangible.

One of the most important discourses generated in (and through) *Temptation Island*, is the discourse about sexual fidelity. In principle human relationships can be organised in many different ways, but in *Temptation Island* - through the emphasis on the basic dichotomy of the couple - the bachelor a specific form of heterosexual relational organisation is privileged, thereby ruthlessly excluding many other societal forms. But at the same time the status of the bachelors is acknowledged, without stressing the gender differences between the 'tempters' and 'temptresses', although their identity (as a category) stands in an antagonistic relationship with the partners, because the bachelors represent hedonistic pleasure, which at the same time is articulated as

threatening. It is the forbidden fruit, which is in itself also a specific and reduced presentation of this social category.

It is noticeable that there are limits to the relationships that are subjected to the Temptation Island test. The following sentence from Kanakna productions'<sup>6</sup> call for participants indicates that married couples would not be considered: '*Participants must be older than 20, unmarried, and must be free for two weeks.*' A second limitation - not mentioned in the call - is children. The impact (and evidence) of this limitation became clear during Temptation Island 2 in 2003, when one of the couples (Cindy Stoop and James Serbeniuk) had to leave the island because Cindy Stoop was pregnant. In the Temptation Island discourse, marriage and children are seen as too important to be drawn into the game or even considered.

Moreover, the idea of the relationship test is reduced to one of resisting (physical) seduction and of sexual fidelity. On the Veronica TV website the end result of the 5th series (broadcast in episode 15) was summarised as follows: '*Bianca was not the only one to stray; Liesbeth and Cheyenne also could not resist temptation, even though they denied this in the strongest terms. The pictures tell a different story.*' A specific and homogenous representation is offered of what is regarded as primordial in a relationship, and which criteria should be used to test a relationship. The problematic character of (sexual) infidelity and the intrinsic link between love and sexuality, is strengthened by the recurrent references in the broadcasts to earlier crises between the partners as result of infidelity. It is precisely this testing of mutual trust that is seen in the Temptation Island text as an important motivating factor for participating. This element is also emphasised on the VT4 website, where the couple, Bianca and Björn, was introduced as follows: '*Bianca and Björn are from Willebroek. She has previously been unfaithful, and he often confronts her with this. She now wants to prove to him that one mistake means nothing, and win back his total trust.*'

Once this trust is backed up by practical evidence during the Temptation Island encounter, and the partners have proven their fidelity to each other, the way to an everlasting and harmonic relationship lies open. Sexual fidelity becomes proof of love that - once the 'right one' has been found - is forever. This is well illustrated by the following sentence from the description of the couple, Lisette van Veenendaal and Len Konings, on the VT4 website: '*They take part in Temptation Island to prove that they were born for each other.*' In this sense Temptation Island is articulated as a rite of passage, allowing people to enter the

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<sup>6</sup> This text can still be read on the following website: <http://www.rotationz.be/new/news.php?newsid=1949>.



world of 'genuine' relationships. Thus the programme forms part of the hegemonic discourse of heterosexual monogamy, where relationships are regarded as exclusive, and where participants are perceived as striving for a lifelong unity.

When the partners fail the relationship test, another element takes precedence: honesty. The entire configuration (and power dynamic) of *Temptation Island* is in any case based on truth speaking. Participants who are interviewed (alone or during the bonfires) are trusted to be revealing their innermost feelings to others (the presenters, their partners, the viewers). If they are not honest, they run the risk of having their actions interpreted negatively by the production team, or being pressurised to be 'honest', with the constant threat of being 'unmasked' by the video clips. However, it is in particular when it comes to sexual infidelity that the pressure to be 'honest' becomes extreme. Of course this emphasis on honesty forms part of the production team's management strategies, because the 'struggle' followed by the 'confession' creates 'good television', and it can also be used to further undermine the position of the other partner. But these management strategies only strengthen the emphasis on the cultural importance of honesty, presenting it in the television text as an important regulatory mechanism in human relationships.

Apart from the emphasis on honesty, other cultural demands are made on human actions. The strong emphasis on the narration of the self, within the basic framework of the relationship test, presupposes consistent and rational (or rationalisable) action. Emotional fluctuations and (seemingly) inconsequent behaviour are frowned upon in the commentary and in the interactions with other participants. For example, when Bianca Mommen at first held herself very aloof from the single males, and even reacted very emotionally to clips of her partner, Björn, holding hands with a 'temptress'. A few episodes later she was seen to have sex a couple of times with one of the bachelors. After these events, the other partners and singles, as well as the voice of commentator, expressed their total lack of understanding.

The immediacy of the television system also plays a role here, because there is a time limit for filming, and participants do not have the opportunity of withdrawing to re-assess their positions and/or to rationalise their actions. Withdrawing from the group is in any event regarded as a problem, as the sociability of the participants is taken for granted. Participants sometimes do isolate themselves, but this is articulated as a problem in the broadcasts, for example by referring to the grief of that specific participant. These emotions are the only legitimate explanations for voluntary social isolation. At the same time the individual responsibility of the participants is strongly emphasised. They take all

decisions as mature and independent individuals, so that the entire structuring context (and in particular the production team's management) moves to the background.

A second key discourse in *Temptation Island* is based on the ideal of physical beauty as source of and catalyst for attraction and seduction. On the Kanakna website the invitation to participate is expressly directed at '*good-looking people (singles/couples)*'. According to the Veronica TI website the partners are exposed to seduction by '*handsome single men and women*', and it is not by chance that a tropical island is chosen as set for the series, resulting in an endless parade of scanty swimsuits, bikinis and shorts. Here, the production team does revert to gendered stereotypes (although also the male bachelors do not escape from these processes of objectivation). An illustration of this choice is the scene where the female singles are introduced to the male partners. In an unobtrusive reference to Kubrick's '*Eyes Wide Shut*', the masked singles parade in long hooded gowns, clearly wearing only lingerie underneath. These images are also used on the front page of the VT4 website and in an affichage campaign. After this 'revelation' the singles wrap themselves around the partners. This elicited the following remark from one of the partners: '*They were touching us all over, and I thought: I hope they stay away from my business.*'

A significant number of the *Temptation Island* scenes support the idea of physical seduction, including the apparently inevitable wet T-shirt competition, the slapping of (female) buttocks, the selection rituals for the 'dates' (reminiscent of beauty contests), and short-skirted or bare-chested dancing. In particular, the relationship test comprises exposing the partners to the physical component of sexuality, and to female and male beauty. It is thus also no accident that magazines such as Maxim and P-Magazine, that rely very strongly on the 'babe' concept, as well as nude publications such as Playboy and Penthouse, published photo reports on the female singles. The most recent examples of these are the photographs of Liesbeth van Muylem in P-Magazine (April 2006) and of Mieke and Rowena Guldenaar in Playboy (July 2006). In this respect the male participants received little publicity. With this emphasis on physicality, *Temptation Island*'s discourse also reinforces the classic ideals of (female) beauty, with symmetry and slimmness as key components.

This somewhat exclusive focus on physicality and beauty is toned down by the notion of the 'connection'. Already attracted by the bodies of the singles, the partners quickly develop a preference for one or two singles. These individual preferences are legitimised by the concept of the 'connection', which suggests that there is a compatibility between the relevant personalities. This 'connection' refers more to an attraction based on character than one based on the physical, and partly soft-

tens the exclusive focus on participants' bodies. The repertoire of 'connection' however mostly comes to the fore later, and thus does not really diminish the emphasis on the physical.

A third and last key discourse involves the 'holy' rules of the game. As the direct interventions of the production team are supposed to remain hidden, their control is translated into the system of rules. The power of the media professionals is never directly seen in operation in *Temptation Island*; we only see the results of this power imbalance. Despite a number of modest manifestations of resistance, the entire programme radiates obedience. The participants are docile bodies, disciplined by the production team. One example of this is the escape scene, where some of the partners decided to swim to the 'women's resort' when they found that their boat had been approached to within reach. They effectively jumped into the water to swim the 500 metres to the 'resort', but were persuaded to return to their ship, with the escape ending as a failure.

Here the concept of the relationship test also plays an important role, as departing from the rules is equated to the undermining the test. Therefore disobedience (or a critical attitude) is rearticulated into cheating, thus creating a *Catch 22* situation for the participants. In this respect *Temptation Island* is a metaphor for normalisation of media power as an impassive mover, the 'primum movens immobile' that manages to hegemonise its own basic assumptions, principles and methodologies. At the same time *Temptation Island* is an alarming discourse of obedience, with participants prepared to let their relationships deteriorate for the sake of the rules of the game, and for the entertainment of the many.

#### POWER IN TEMPTATION ISLAND'S PRODUCTION SPHERE

When the power relations between the participants and the production team are examined more closely, it is rather difficult to ignore the inequality of these relations. The production team use a number of sophisticated management techniques to place the partners under pressure. The most important of these mechanisms is the unlimited trial.

By basing the entire programme concept on a relationship test to which the participants voluntarily subject themselves, the extreme interventions by the production team is legitimised. On the *Temptation Island* websites of VT4 and Veronica, the concept of the relationship test is explicitly mentioned. The first sentence of the introductory text on the VT4 website<sup>7</sup> is: '*Four couples travel to Thailand, where they are separated for sixteen days, during which their relationships are subjected to extreme tests.*' On the Veronica TI website the first sentence was: '*Tempta-*

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, this website was no longer online.

*tion Island: the ultimate fantasy is a reality programme where four unmarried couples travel to an exotic location the test their relationships.'*

Based on the concept of the relationship test, Temptation Island becomes an unlimited trial, where not only the 'tempters'/'temptresses' 'do everything in their power to place as much pressure as possible on the women [and men]' (VT4 website), but where the production team as well try to influence the context in such a way that the carefully selected couples' relationships are placed under pressure, often resulting in a break-up between the partners when the programme ends. By taking part in a programme of this format, the participants relinquish their power over the nature and intensity of the tests to which they are subjected. At the same time this willingness to relinquish power legitimises the production team's interventions and the intensity thereof. During the programme participants often say that they underestimated the pressure on their relationship, without referring to those persons who - under the pretext of the unlimited trial - knowingly place their relationship under duress. In their discussions the participants strongly emphasise the 'seduction' to which they are subjected by the presence of the tempters/temptresses. As often happens in the television system, the interventions of media professionals are not mentioned, but remain concealed.

The basic mechanism of the unlimited trial as management technique is strengthened by the artificial setting, which is strongly reminiscent of a panopticon. The participants are cleverly isolated by housing them on a distant tropical island, which offers a wide range of tourist (and sexual) attractions, but at the same time strongly resembles a prison (including the occasional 'escape'). Within the imaginary walls of the so-called 'resorts' the participants are subjected to numerous surveillance techniques by means of which (almost) all their activities are captured day and night. These images are then shown to the viewers and their partners. Finally Temptation Island is 'safeguarded' by numerous rules, contractually enforced, which direct and discipline the participants' behaviour.

A third management technique is based on what Foucault has termed confessional power. *Inter alia* through interviews the participants are continually urged to describe their activities and emotional state, and to confess even the slightest 'infringement' to the presenters and thus also to the viewers. The interview questions are (partly) enabled by the production team's Olympian perspective (due to the ubiquitous cameras). This not only results in an endless series of (self)revelations, which the presenters of course do not reciprocate, but it also makes the presenters the first witnesses (and judges) of the, often inevitable, 'lapses' of the partners. The culmination of the confessional power is found in the subformat of the bonfire, where the partners are not only questioned on their reactions when seeing suggestive or explicit clips of their partners, but where they also

confess their own 'bad behaviour'. It is in particular at the last bonfire, where the partners are re-united and have to confess their 'sins' to each other (and to the presenter and viewers), that the most intimate details are confessed, often leading to emotional outbursts. One example of this was at a bonfire during *Temptation Island 5*, where the couple, Björn<sup>8</sup> and Bianca Mommen, were re-united already in the middle of the programme so that she could confess - after the clips had already been shown to the viewers and to Björn - that she effectively had sex with one of the bachelors, Stephen. Björn stormed away raging: '*Ten days, even that you could not do for me*', and ran weeping to the beach. There he started shouting '*Why?*' so loudly that the sound quality of the recording was affected.

Two remarks have to be made regarding this analysis of the production team's management techniques. First, the interaction between the participants is important, but not only because the programme is based on seduction of the partners by 'tempters/temptresses'. Here the power dynamics are also more complex, because the partners try to support and protect each other, but they also discuss and judge each other's behaviour during the interviews. An example here is Tim De Pril's brief description ('*fingering*') of what in his view happened at a swim-party between one of the partners, Liesbeth de Lange, and the bachelor, Edwin Rutgers. As can be expected, such a delectable snippet is eagerly broadcast. Second, and more important, is the fact that resistance against the management of the production team is evident amongst all participants. Despite having very little opportunity, participants sometimes do manage to escape the cameras and microphones, for example, by swimming far enough out to sea, thereby becoming invisible and also inaudible, or by simply removing the portable microphone. Also refusing to participate in the interaction by locking themselves in or by 'going to bed early', can in some instances be seen as resistance. This is also true of the roles of the tempters/temptresses', that were sometimes not performed with as much enthusiasm as expected. For example, in episode 12 of *Temptation Island 5*, the temptress Mieke at first accepted partner Len Konings' invitation to go on the dream date with him, but later returned the chain - the symbol of the 'chosen one' - to him, saying that he was too arrogant, and that she no longer wanted to go on the dream date with him.

#### THE TELEVISION TEXT AND THE VIEWER

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<sup>8</sup> It was not possible to discover all the participants' surnames, and where this was the case, only first names are used.

The Temptation Island production process is aimed at creating a television text, which in turn has the objective of reaching as many viewers as possible. As has been said, the viewers engage with the text in their own interpretative manner, and not necessarily follow the intentions of the producers. However, the audience is not necessarily hyperactive, and might often be satisfied to accept this dominant reading of the television text.

The popularity of the programme is not only evidenced by the many hundreds of thousands of viewers, but also by the many responses and discussions on online discussion forums, blogs and feedback forms. And these online responses make it possible to involve the voices of the viewers in this analysis. But this method has its drawbacks, as online forums also are specific communicative systems with their own specific characteristics.<sup>9</sup>

As could be expected, these online responses are extremely diverse. A large part of the postings is purely informative, asking for or offering information on how the programme is developing, but also on the private lives of the participants. This category of postings also includes the so-called 'caps' (or stills of the broadcasts), which appear quite often in the forums, as well as quotations from the broadcasts. For example, when two of the 'tempters' sing a snippet from the Carnival Medley by Hans Teeuwen, with this eminent text: '*A stiff prick is made to pump with, falderie, faldera,*' this is eagerly quoted. Also partner Bjorn's cries: ('*TEN DAYS!!!*') (SEMTEX, 24-04-2006, fok.nl), was a popular quote, in addition to references to older quotes belonging to Temptation Island's standard repertoire, such as '*No kissing no fucking*' and '*Drink is the devil*' made by partner James Serbeniuk from Temptation Island 2.

These more informative postings are supplemented by a limited number of predictions of future developments and analyses of cultural<sup>10</sup> and gender differences (or expressions of cultural and gendered (lack of) comprehension). However, the main attitude displayed by the postings on the forums that were analysed was of a judgemental nature. In other words, the posters expressed themselves on many different levels about the participants, their behaviour, their physical appearance, their personalities and their moral fibre.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, a number of these forums were moderated, so some postings were removed or only partially shown. Sometimes the moderation policy was explained, such as that of the vt4 forum on Temptation Island: '*Our aim is to talk about the programme, not let participants hang their dirty washing on the line! We will be very strict in this regard... such postings are removed because of their aggressive and offensive nature.*' (Amourath, forum moderator, 1-04-2006, vt4.be).

<sup>10</sup> The focus of this text is not on cultural differences. Differences between the North-Belgian and the Dutch broadcasts are not considered, as are the differences in online culture between Northern Belgium and the Netherlands, and the difference in status between the posters ('ordinary viewers' and participants).

It is in particular the idea of the (unlimited) trial that emphasises the indisputable element of play. In a number of instances the words 'play' or 'game' are expressly used. It is a game in which the stakes that the participants will fail, are high, and some viewers watch with drooling eagerness for the participants to 'transgress'. Others again strongly support certain participants, so that the programme is turned into a race into decline, rather than a series of smaller and larger human dramas.

To be able to define this programme as play, it is imperative (at least in part) to place the players in a not too favourable position and to avoid identification, so that pleasure can be derived from seeing their problems displayed on the screen. It is for this reason that so much emphasis is placed on the fact that the participants themselves carried the responsibility to decide whether they wanted to participate, or that they are discredited by calling them 'mad', 'silly' or 'stupid'. Via this mechanism some of the partners are reduced to jokers, so that the broadcasts can have legitimate entertainment value, and the participants can be judged. In exceptional cases posters (such as Bobette) have a more self-reflexive attitude towards this, or participants are defended against this type of criticism (even though it is not

*'I find it an amazing programme: just cannot understand that there are still couples who want to participate, because by now everyone knows the game so well!!! I would never participate, but I like to watch it.'* (praia, 12-05-2006, verionica.nl)

*'It is very clear that this year they are doing their best to brew mischief and to make the couples uneasy about their partners (but OK, that is part of the game)'* (Megara, 13-04-2006, vt4.be)

*'I am curious whether it will again be heavy, and now I hope the women will make the mistakes haha'* (lichtspeed, 15-07-2006, sbs.nl)

*'Carl and Kim must stay together; only Eva must pull herself together; get real, girl, you cannot let your whole life revolve around one man'* (ilonatjuh18, 11-07-2005, sbs.nl - more about Temptation Island 4)

*'OK, the participants ask for this, but surely as a human being this would destroy you?'* (believer, 28-04-2006, femistyle.be)

*'What fool goes to an island with her boyfriend where she leaves him alone with single girls?? You're begging for it! And the single girls? I would die of shame.'* (Maartjj\*, 30-05-2006, sbs.nl)

*'Haha, I did not expect that! Carl is a real jelly-fish! With his silly talk, as if he is something! Bah!'* (Nicole87, 16-07-2005, sbs.nl - about Temptation Island 4)

*'A more stupid person is difficult to imagine ... if she were to stand amongst a flock of sheep, I wouldn't notice ha-hahaha what a stupid woman!!!'* (ZuseJ, 08-05-2006, belg.be)

*'Let's be honest: Temptation Island is an immoral programme. And that's why we watch it: to be able to say 'I'll never do that', and meanwhile we enjoy being a voyeur, hoping that, for ex-*

always easy to distinguish between supporters and critics).

The evaluations are largely on par with the key discourses described above. It is not surprising that the debate about sexual fidelity plays an important role in the discussions of the programme. One of the words that are used most frequently to describe (at least some of participants), is the word 'slut', mostly oriented towards the female participants. On the strength of this, one of the posters calls the entire programme 'Slut Camp'. One section of the viewers sees the female singles as 'sluts', as their assumed promiscuity is in conflict with the traditional monogamous moral values, in the good old tradition of the double standard. While the television text portrays the hedonism of the singles in a mostly positive manner, the attitude of (some of) the posters is more negative. And the partners who (presumably) succumb, are not spared the censure. One of the most striking postings (by Jayatonism) identifies each partner with a specific characteristic. Two are described as 'whores'. The same day a reaction appeared defending (only) one of the women.

It comes as no surprise that the second woman, Bianca Mommen, was not defended. Very soon after the first broadcast, the news that Bianca Mommen (aka Alana) was an erotic masseuse and prostitute, was circu-

*ample Len, will try and make amends in a following programme, understandable in front of the camera' (Bobette, 07-04-2006, femistyle.be)*

*'Bianca, if you read this, you are a very tough cookie!' (Rob, 14-05-2006, goedZO?!.com)*

*'Ah, is that one of the ten girlies who are part of the Slut Camp? Is there not enough going on in your lives? Is it so boring? I find it only a 6/10' (Zagato, 11-04-2006, zattevrienden.be)*

*'I ask myself every year why the participants take part; it is not a real vacation, because there are cameras around you all the time. In effect you are all alone, or in any case together with 3 losers and 8 sluts, with whom you will never go on holiday. And then all the pathetic little kindergarten games: dancing with banana-leaf skirts, a little slutty performance behind a white sheet ... Get them away from me... And why do they get caught in the trap? Yes: litres of alcohol and 8 sluts who follow you all day long only to lure you into whoring ...' (MrBean, 11-04-2006, fok.nl)*

*'Kevin is smart. Matthieu is gross. Len is smart. Lisette has a sweet smile. Bianca is a whore. So is Cheyenne. Björn is naive.' (Jaytonism, 22-05-2006, fok.nl)*

*'Ok, Cheyenne had sex with the Smoothy...but come on, this does not suddenly make her a whore? Though it is sad that she was not honest about this ... Kevin is far too good, and perhaps he would even have forgiven her.' (hardsilence, 22-05-2006, fok.nl)*

*'I have been a client of Alana's. You will have to take my word that she is not a masseuse. She does just what the other girls do, and even better. When you enter the club, you can sit down and take your time making a choice*



lated on some websites, and it also appeared in an article in a major North-Belgian popular newspaper, *Het Laatste Nieuws*. Bianca Mommen defended herself in this newspaper article with the Clintonesque statement: *'I only give massages with my breasts. That is not sex. I have never been paid to have sex with a client.'* These first articles generated an avid online investigation into Bianca Mommen's private life, creating a whole series of texts parallel to Temptation Island's text. In addition, photos and a masturbation video were posted, and there were a whole series of testimonies by clients, contradicting her statement.

More important than this privacy-infringing variation of which is sometimes called citizen journalism, was the abusive tirade that broke over Bianca Mommen's head. An almost endless row of posters insulted her, and her initial reticence and emotionality were held against her. Whenever she was filmed making out with one of the singles, it was seen as final confirmation of her promiscuity. For most of the posters it was unthinkable that her professional work and her relational sphere could be separated. The fact that she was seen as a prostitute brought all the traditional registers about prostitution to the fore in the discussions, resulting in her being dehumanised and objectified, defined as abnormal and deviant, and stigmatised.

*from amongst the ladies. I immediately chose Alana, who was sitting on the couch wearing a see-through bra. When we were walking to the bedroom, I was already excited by the nice bum. In the room we at first had a relaxed talk, and then the action started. After going down quietly she asked whether I wanted to do it without a condom. I wanted that, but that would cost 30 euro more. Nothing was said about a massage, but in any case I did not want that. She asked me not to come in her mouth. After sucking me very nicely, she quickly put on a condom and asked whether I wanted to fuck her doggy-style. Unfortunately, I was so excited that I came quickly. Afterwards we drank and talked a bit. She told me that she did this work mainly to pay for her studies.'* (de gele leeuw, 03-04-2006, whitelinefi rm.nl)

*'An ugly whore who gives a stupid and prudish performance on TV. One should throw such a person in the Willebroek channel.'* (danzig, 11-04-2006, zattevrienden.be)

*'I don't understand this female. On TV she does not even want to talk to a guest, there she is such a prude ... what is the world coming to'* (nXr, 11-04-2006, zattevrienden.be)

*'I fear that her market price will rise now that she has been on TV.'* (electricpunk, 11-04-2006, zattevrienden.be)

*'So, at last Bianca had a good fuck; perhaps she will now keep her stupid wits together. What an impossibly irritating person. Those who talk the most first get the chop. But of course, an escort girl cannot do without. Sorry, Veronica, that the programme is now totally without credibility. It has always been fun to watch.'* (Angeliekje, 25-04-2006, veronica.nl)

*'I find the whole business rather crude and mean, with all the comments. Bi*

A small number of posters spoke out in defence of Bianca Mommen, for example by trying to make a distinction between a 'slut' and a prostitute, but these postings were ignored or countered.

Bianca's denials of both her professional activities and her sexual escapades with Stephen also elicited negative responses. However, it was not only this one participant who was subjected to such condemnatory responses. Other participants who were suspected of lying were also condemned, and their deceived partners then received messages of sympathy. These participants were expected to confess and apologise. If they did not do so, the postings got even more condemnatory. This again emphasises the cultural importance - or even the hegemony - of the traditional monogamous relationship, of sexual fidelity, and of honesty.

In addition to the debate on fidelity, the debate on physicality and beauty is paramount in the postings. In some instances the clips of specific body parts (especially female) were applauded, for example in the posting by eronmiller. Another example is the posting of a still of one broadcast showing the buttocks of one of the single females, and asking whose buttocks they were.

Often certain participants were singled out, and the attractiveness (or lack thereof) of their bodies exhaustively discussed and evaluated. In some cases this re-

*and mean, with all the comments. Bianca's occupation is her business, and it does not mean that the child is a slut.'* (sugababe, 11-05-2006, vt4.be) 'Yes? Then what is your definition of a slut? If a prostitute is not slut, then I don't what is.' (Kuifer, 16-05-2006, vt4.be)

*'There are also porno actors who are married and see sex as business, but who only "make love" with their wives.'* (executegirl, 28-04-2006, femistyle.be)

*'People who lie so glibly do not deserve better.'* (Shirley, 02-05-2006, fok.nl)

*'I ask myself ... if Bianca sees the clips again... how does she feel? Not because of the sex scenes, you know, but because she lied so shamelessly.'* (Amourath, forum moderator, 28-04-2006, vt4.be)

*"hiii, I'm also watching TV :D Really sad for Andries :( Stupid woman that she is! All this lying, I so hate that! Good luck, Andries!"* (Direct\_gek, 24-05-2006, veronica.nl)

*'Melon time again'* (FreCas, 11-04-2006, zattevrienden.be)

*'To quote HUMO: TITS, TITS and again TITS! Whether it is Rebecca or Bianca, they are wiggling there for our visual pleasure...'* (eronmiller, 12-04-2006, vt4.be)

*'She walked face first into a wall, fell down, and afterwards a bus rode slowly over her face ...'* (Kenneth89, 12-04-2006, zattevrienden.be)

*'I would rather go to a toothless crack whore than to stick my prick into Bianca with the cow spots on her legs and her crooked eye!'*(mark25utrg, 21-04-006, whitelinefirm.nl)

*'And I must admit that Rebecca Loos looks better on film than on her photos, even though I find her rather heavy.'* (Amourath, forum moderator, 12-04-2006, t4.be)

sulted in renewed attacks on participants, with Bianca Mommen once again being the target. These discussions are supported by the classic ideals of beauty and slimness. An example here is the debate on whether the 'super-temptress' (Rebecca Loos) was 'fat' or 'stout'. Those singles (and sometimes also the partners) who fit the beauty ideal, were judged in positive light, and called 'pretty', 'nice' or 'sweet'.

Finally, some posters did also mention the production team's management, but these postings were rare. A number of postings showed that the viewers were aware of the production team's interventions. Posters referred to the suggestive pictures during the bonfire evenings, the creation of a specific 'sphere' by means of music, the importance of the montage, the 'mean' interview questions trying to fathom these interventions afforded added entertainment value. This was also a way of displaying their media literacy (or 'savvyness'). However, as Temptation Island is defined as a game that participants voluntarily take part in, the (sometimes) problematic character of these techniques can take a back seat. This key discourse sometimes even result in some posters criticising the imperfect character of these management techniques.

In rare instances the posters critique the (legitimacy of) Temptation Island's management via the

*'Liesbeth tops the show; a real pretty woman ... and not a whore!!' (Tijnus, 17-04-2006, whitelinefirm.nl)*

*'Mieke is the nicest' (Quinten, 19-04-2006, whitelinefirm.nl)*

*'There is one nice guy and that is Len; a sweet thing, not so macho, a bit young, but if all goes well he will grow up.' (Hetechick, 3-04-2006, whitelinefirm.nl)*

*'Ne me quitte pas [Jacques Brel's Don't leave me]... that is too sad. The director is a genius.' (Fendy, 24-05-2006, fok.nl)*

*'It was again set up in such a way that Björn looked especially pathetic. He was let down by two women, and stayed behind on his own, smoking a cigarette.' (kaos, 26-05-2006, fok.nl)*

*'What I find strange: everything Bianca does is broadcast, but Cheyenne's infidelity we apparently missed? Were we asleep, or are the participants strongly type-cast?' (charmed\_angel, 23-05-2006, fok.nl)*

*'The presenters' questions were much meaner this year, but they missed the opportunity to make good use of the footage of the partners having sex, in order to position the partners against each other, as they did the year before. Of course, we do not get a Kenny and a Sven every year.' (Boo\_, 24-05-2006, fok.nl)*

*'The bonfires give us a good laugh. It is surprising what one can suggest with a little cutting and pasting. But they surely are discomfited by the clips.' (Temmer, 25-04-2006, veronica.nl)*

*'I cannot help it, but I found the fact that Eyes Wide Shut was imitated ridiculous. Complete with soundtrack, et cetera. I think that I would have died laughing, but well, in any case, I am not a man.' (Megara, 06-04-2006, vt4.be)*

concept of the game and the trial. The programme (or a facet thereof) is then defined as 'ridiculous' or 'miserable', or the posters give vent to their annoyance. Sometimes the irritation is limited to para-social interactions with the television screen (as in the case of Mikkel), with the poster entering into a dialogue with the 'personages' (participants). In a small number of instances this annoyance leads to fundamental criticism against the production team's (and in particular the presenters') behaviour. The posting by 'believer' is one of the few where the deontology of the programme makers is indeed questioned. The criterion that is applied is based on the seriousness of the emotional and relational impact on the participants, but once again they are reminded of their individual responsibility, and relatively little is said about the structural limitations. Most of these 'critical' readings of the television text (with some exceptions, such as Bobette's postings on *femistyle.be*) in fact refer to a specific aspect, and ignore the all-encompassing character of the production management, which in any case remains hidden from most of the posters.

Besides the criticism levelled against the way in which the programme is managed, as discussed above, the television text is also critically evaluated on a second level. This criticism goes to the heart of the programme concept, as the authenticity and the real-life

*'Pity that people are thrown off balance by pictures and suggestive texts.'* (*ElGrande*, 04-07-2005, *sbs.nl*)

*'I always get irritated when they manipulate the clips during the bonfires. Then I sit and shout at the TV: "No, that's not at all true!!!"'* (*Mikkel*, 16-03-2006, *femistyle.be*)

*'Was anyone else also so irritated by the lady-presenter (at the female camp)? I don't know who she was, but the ones from the previous years were at least a little sympathetic, and if they did instigate a bit of a fight, they were at least subtle about it. But this one TOO evidently stirred up trouble, also about unimportant things, and in fact exaggerated her input to such an extent that it no longer was trouble-stirring.'* (*calcietje*, 15-04-2006, *femistyle.be*)

*'You know, in this series I am over-conscious of the way in which everything is directed: Mieke's letter with the key would really not have come without a tip (+ key) from the producers: trying to make the partners jealous was staged. The whole programme is only insinuation, and if everything goes too well, the producers will intervene.'* (*Bobette*, 24/04/2006, *femistyle.be*)

*'And I actually find that the whole thing can no longer be justified by the producers. OK, the participants ask for this, but surely as a human being, this must kill you?'* (*believer*, 28-04-2006, *femistyle.be*)

*'I always watch Temptation Island, but I now heard that Björn and Bianca only acted. That they did this to ensure a large audience. Is this true? Can someone mail me?'* (*Carlijn*, 10-05-2006, *belg.be*)

*'The TV show is thus totally fake ... they are not at all so prudish as they seem to be.'* (*blueprint1979*, 12-04-2006, *zattevrienden.be*)

quality of *Temptation Island* as reality show is questioned. The contradictions in Bianca Mommen's behaviour, the sensational news that she is a prostitute, and also the presence of participants who have taken part in other television programmes and therefore are no longer considered 'ordinary people', was enough for one group of posters to call the entire programme a 'put-up job'. Despite a number of reflexive postings as defence against this criticism, together with testimonies and behavioural analyses, this criticism is echoed by many posters. In this roundabout way the production management then comes under fire (and heavy, at that) because the credibility of the programme is prejudiced through interventions from the production team - negating the idea of fair play, or the idea of 'ordinary people'. This type of resistance is not aimed against the production team's deontological code, but against the fact that they transcended the programme format, and it is sometimes extremely radical in form and content.

*'Ugh, how bad, to see your fake relationship go down!' (TheVulture, 21-04-2006, fok.nl)*

*'O well, perhaps Veronica did pay her...clever marketing concept...'* (Iola, 21-05-2006, goedZo?!.com)

*'Ridiculous that there is again an Ex-BigBrother in the show. And that Rebecca woman also has to go. I always liked the programme very much, when everything was not yet so fake, but this time I'll pass. It is simply ridiculous. I don't watch it any more. Veronica: continue like this and will chase all (loyal) viewers away ...'* (kimmetje18d, 04-04-2006, veronica.nl)

*'A total put-up job, that Temptation. And an ex-participant of Big Brother is also there! They are all actors!'* (Tim, 1-04-2006, whiteLineFirm.nl) *'Not true ... a friend of mine, temptress Mavis, is NO actress! She works in an accounting office. So, keep your prejudices for yourself!!!'* (Sinneke, 04-04-2006, whiteLineFirm.nl)

*'I don't know if everything always is pre-arranged, as hetchick [another poster] said. Björn was really very sad, and most actors in the Netherlands and Belgium on average cannot act so well. I may be wrong, but his grief looked very real to me.'* (Lucky Luke, 02-05-2006, whiteLineFirm.nl)

## CONCLUSION

Besides entertainment, *Temptation Island* offers many viewers an in-depth look at our culture. The conclusion that they draw from this viewing is often not very optimistic. Both the programme and the viewers who responded online, show a rigid moral perspective on sexual fidelity and monogamy. While the television text still offers scope for hedonism (through the central, and legitimately-defined role of the singles), the online discussions are dominated by a conservative perspective that in some instances escalates to moralisation, intolerance, sexism and stigmatisation, mostly aimed at the female participants.

Through the logic of photo-negativism, where visions of order are photo-negativised into stories of disorder (see John Hartley (1992)), *Temptation Island* confirms the hegemonic interpretation of the ideal relationship. The partners, who one after the other succumb to the pressure, present negative points of identification against which the viewers can measure themselves, enabling them to confirm their own moral value system as presented on the (television) plate. That is the source of the malicious satisfaction as well as the pleasure that the viewers experience when they see how people whom they consider (with all their faults) as inferior, fail. When the partners do succumb, the viewers in addition await the catharsis of the final confession that has to restore social order.

In order to legitimise the pleasure, the viewers enter into a social contract with the programme, allowing them to ogle the (female) bodies, and in particular to tolerate emotional abuse in the name of the game. The programme cleverly creates a distance between the viewers and the participants, discouraging identification through the participants' articulation as 'stupid' (for entering into a situation which will unavoidably lead to their downfall), and through their articulation as being individually responsible. This is further strengthened by conferring an element of play on the happiness (or unhappiness) generated by human relationships. In this respect *Temptation Island* is truly an anti-empathetic programme.

*Temptation Island* also (once again) illustrates how the television system manages to hide its power very effectively, and how it makes the production team's management role largely invisible. The discussion about the authenticity of *Temptation Island* is an important exception in this regard, as it shows that too much intervention from the production team can have a boomerang effect.

All this raises the deontological question of how the members of the production team can justify treating other people in such a destructive manner. The question is not whether the participant's should be protected 'against themselves', which would place us in a paternalistic position. The question is how media professionals can justify - both for themselves and towards the entire media sector - spending two weeks (and more) trying to destroy people's relationships. The argument that it is 'only a game' and that participants voluntarily take part, is in my opinion not a satisfying answer to this ethical question. In this respect, *Temptation Island* shows the need for human-interest journalism, or entertainment-oriented journalism (see Meijer, 2001; Campbell, 2004), so that reality-tv and human-interest programming can be firmly embedded in journalistic ethical systems. In other words, it requires the inclusion of these journalistic ethics in the world of media professionals, beyond the strict definition of journalist identities.

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### Appendix: forums, blogs and feedback pages analysed

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<http://www.belg.be/leesmeer.php?x=3457> (no longer accessible)

femistyle.be:

<http://www.femistyle.be/ubbthreads/showflat.php?Cat=0&Number=311289&page=0&fpart=1&vc=1>

fok.nl: <http://forum.fok.nl/topic/840554>, [844298](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/844298), [848519](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/848519), [849903](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/849903), [851659](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/851659), [852485](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/852485), [854457](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/854457), [854746](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/854746), [856631](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/856631), [858232](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/858232), [860619](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/860619) en [863794](http://forum.fok.nl/topic/863794)

goedZO?!.com:

[http://www.goedzo.com/index.php/2006/04/26/filmpje\\_temptation\\_island\\_dee\\_lneemster\\_b](http://www.goedzo.com/index.php/2006/04/26/filmpje_temptation_island_dee_lneemster_b)

sbs.nl:

<http://www.sbs.nl/modules.php?name=special&site=televisienieuws&sid=1326>

veronica.nl:

<http://veronica.sbs.nl/modules.php?name=special&site=televisienieuws&sid=4835&rubrieknaam>

vt4.be:

[http://www.forum.vt4.be/display\\_topic\\_threads.asp?ForumID=11&TopicID=17887&ReturnPage=&PagePosition=1&ThreadPage=1](http://www.forum.vt4.be/display_topic_threads.asp?ForumID=11&TopicID=17887&ReturnPage=&PagePosition=1&ThreadPage=1)

whitelinefirm.nl:

<http://www.whitelinefirm.nl/node/202>

zattevrienden.be:

[http://www.zattevrienden.be/Alana\\_aka\\_Bianca\\_uit\\_Temptation\\_Island\\_de\\_verboden\\_fotos](http://www.zattevrienden.be/Alana_aka_Bianca_uit_Temptation_Island_de_verboden_fotos)

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*Nico Carpentier* (PhD) is a media sociologist working at the Communication Studies Departments of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and the Catholic University of Brussels (KUB). He is co-director of the VUB research centre CEMESO and a board member of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA - formerly ECCR). His theoretical focus is on discourse theory, his research interests are situated in the relationship between media and journalism, and especially towards social domains as war & conflict, ideology, participation and democracy. His publications include the following books and articles *Médias et citoyens sur la même longueur d'onde. Initiatives journalistiques favorisant la participation citoyenne* (2002, in Dutch & French); *Community media: muting the democratic discourse* (2003); *BBC's Video Nation as a participatory media practice* (2003); *Media in movement, 22 journalistic experiments to enhance citizen participation* (2004, in Dutch & French); *The ungraspable audience*, Ed. (2004, combined Dutch & English); *Identity, contingency and rigidity* (2005); *Towards a Sustainable Information Society. Deconstructing WSIS*, Ed. (2005); *Discourse Theory and Cultural Analysis. Media, Arts and Literature*, Ed. (in press) and *Reclaiming the media: communication rights and democratic media roles*, Ed. (in press). E-mail: Nico.Carpentier@kubrussel.ac.be