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DISCOURSES OF POWER AND REPRESENTATION IN BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES: 1999-2013

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Abstract

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Abstract

This dissertation re-evaluates the ways in which contemporary television documentary practices engage their audience. Bringing together historical frameworks, and using them to analyse a range of examples not considered *together* within this context previously, the main finding is that the use of spectacle to engage the audience into a visceral response cuts across all of the examples analysed, regardless of the subject matter being explored.

Drawing on a media archaeological approach, the dissertation draws parallels with the way in which pre-cinema engaged an audience where the primary point of engagement came from the image itself, rather than a narrative. Within a documentary context, which is generally understood as a genre which is there to educate or inform an audience, the primacy of spectacle calls for a re-evaluation of the form and function of documentary itself. Are twenty-first century documentary practices manufacturing an emotional connection to engage the audience over attempting to persuade with reasoning and logic? The answer contained within this dissertation is that they are.

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Introduction

This dissertation began life in in 2001, two years after the series *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) first aired. Broadcast on prime-time BBC1, the series was billed as “the world’s first natural history of Dinosaurs” (Tim Haines, cited in BBC 1999 *Walking with Dinosaurs* press-pack), and was discussed both in relation to natural history and documentary practices. Confused and irritated in equal measure by this, the series was *neither* natural history *nor* documentary, rather it was a pastiche of contemporary conjecture of the lifestyles of pre-historic life-forms packaged in a series of themed-narratives which utilized the conventions associated with popular factual programming. This began an investigation into both historical and contemporary natural history programming practices and their relationship with the representation of reality.

This research was placed on hold for a number of years, and when returned to, the landscape of popular factual programming (of which the natural history genre is a part) had changed. This led to a re-evaluation of the main focus of the thesis which, rather than concentrating on natural history as a distinct entity, began positing this alongside new forms of popular factual programming which had emerged over the previous decade. The identification in 1999 of the ways in which natural history were being presented within a formatted, entertaining, narrativised context, which remediated older,

sometimes iconic representations, delivered to the audience in a seamless package to wonder at the spectacle presented before us, has affiliations with the ways in which other texts which belong to popular factual programming have evolved. Therefore it was pertinent to return to the initial research inspiration, that of *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) as the starting point and work back from the current year (2013) and pick-out a number of key examples, all of which examined a range of topics and modes of documentary practices.

As the research had, up to now, predominantly focused on programmes made for, and broadcast on, the BBC, all subsequent case-studies were drawn from their archive. This enabled an evaluation of their institutional context, and a consideration of how contemporary dynamics associated with representing reality fit within the remit of a broadcasting institution which still claimed to have public service broadcasting at its heart. In the 2016 *Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation,* Section 6 outlines the public purposes of broadcasting, which includes providing impartial news and information, to support learning of all ages and to reflect and represent diverse, national and regional communities, continuing the Reithian values established in the 1920s. What emerged, when deconstructing the case-studies, was that they are all linked via their use of spectacle in presenting their 'truth' to the audience.

This spectacle takes many forms, from the use of computer-generated imagery to create a sense of wonderment in the audience, to the spectacles of shame associated with poverty-porn. It is proposed that documentary in the twenty-first century relies on spectacle as a staple convention across *all* of the modes of practices examined within this work, and the primary research question posed is; if it has been identified that across a range of examples spectacle is used to draw an audience into a factual discourse in order that they *feel* in relation to a subject being represented, how does that work in relation to a more intellectual form of engagement? Can these entities work together or are they mutually exclusive?

What this dissertation has proven is that they are not, and spectacle can form a legitimate part of the engagement process *without* negating an intellectual response. Not in all cases, but in enough to suggest that factual programming doesn't have to be either education, be informative or entertaining; factual programming can work across all three. In fact, the more sophisticated a text is, notably those which challenge the very discourse of documentary practice itself *do* work across more than one sphere. As Roscoe and Hight (2001) suggest "There is little consensus over how to define documentary, whether it should be considered a genre or style, or understood in terms of the particular stance it takes towards the world." (7) Analysing documentary within these boundaries has created a consensus, at least around the way in which an emotional

engagement works in relation to education, information and entertainment within the BBC.

The dissertation opens with Chapter One, which is a brief overview of the historical development of documentary practices in mechanical forms of representation. Beginning with photography, and leading into film and then television, this 'potted history' highlights some of the issues raised with regards to how this new technological development impacted on the representation of reality within a cultural context. Taking this approach means it is inevitable that it just scratches the surface of how the differing forms of photography have engaged an audience in relation to the representation of reality, and the issues that this raises. However, it is important to acknowledge somewhere how complex this process is and the degree to which representations are manufactured for particular forms of consumption.

Perhaps more unusually, Chapter Two analyses the five approaches used to deconstruct the six case-studies which form the main body of the thesis. The approach adopted has taken the form of a media archaeological analysis to established clear connections between historical ways of seeing and engaging with texts, and contemporary documentary practices. This tangential approach allows for connections not acknowledged in linear, chronological examinations

of documentary practices, and opens up new opportunities for understanding how primary spectacle is in audience engagement, and the differing ways in which it works in contemporary practices. It is an incredibly alluring proposal that visual forms of representation, which are over one hundred years apart, work to engage their audience using similar techniques.

And whilst examining audience engagement is at the heart of this dissertation, qualitative analysis has not been undertaken as the remit of the thesis was to examine the texts in relation to their institutional context and attempting to recreate the contemporaneous viewing experience would have resulted in research data which wasn't accurate and served no higher purpose. Rather a combination of approaches were adopted, and these used to deconstruct the particular case-studies, bringing together a range of approaches which have not be used to deconstruct documentary practices in this context before.

The case-studies are analysed in chronological order, and after *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) the series *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001) was explored in Chapter Four. This text presents the main animal protagonists in both a similar context to *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999), in that they become visual spectacles, *but* in this context their spectacularity is gained through their extreme

animalistic essence in relation to the danger these creatures pose. In other words, the visual pleasure they exude creates a visceral response in the audience of ‘repulsive pleasure’. As Leonard interacts with the animals, we are on a precipice of both wanting our main protagonist to remain safe, yet suffer the consequences of his foolish endeavours of interacting with dangerous creatures.

Although the idea of pornography in relation to exploring the concept of exploitation, objectification and power within televisual imagery is not a new phenomenon, it is more generally used when considering texts exploring poor, working-class communities; in other words poverty-porn. Naturalised to the degree that at the 2013 Guardian Edinburgh International Television Festival one of the panel discussions was *"Poverty Porn"? Who Benefits From Documentaries on Recession Britain?,* illustrating the contemporary trend towards commissioning series which explore those marginalized in society and what function these series play. Whilst natural history has been explored in relation to pornographic discourses previously (Burt 2002; Russell 1999) utilizing this framework in relation to spectacle, natural history and *Steve Leonard’s Ultimate Killers* (2001) elucidates some very interesting findings.

In the year in which the BBC appointed a new Controller of BBC1 (Charlotte Moore, June 2013) and Controller of Factual (Natalie

Humphreys, June 2013) it appeared that factual programming was to be re-evaluated; in an interview in *Broadcast* (2013a) Director of Television Danny Cohen stated:

> Factual on BBC is ripe for reinvention and the next turn of the wheel. The channel will always be driven by drama and entertainment, but there is room for reinvention, particularly in the 8pm to 9pm slot.

However, in the same article one senior executive (who remained un-named) suggested “You don’t build a popular channel out of factual.” (Broadcast 2013a) But, in August 2013, a new BBC development unit was established (The Lab) in order to capitalise on factual strands which *could* be evolved into factual formats. In *Broadcast* (2013b) Humphreys suggested:

> The singular focus of The Lab is to help BBC Factual to make new standout public service programmes that can deliver more to viewers by becoming much-loved returning favourites in the schedules both here in the UK and abroad.

And what had become of the Reithian ideology of public service broadcasting on the BBC in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century? As the founding father of the British Broadcasting Company, John Reith became the first Director General in 1927 when it was

launched as a public corporation. His mantra of education, information and entertainment was at the heart of the BBC, but he rejected entertainment for entertainment's sake and believed it to be "a prostitution of broadcasting." (BBC 2017a) With this paramount, his idea was to have a public corporation which was supervised by a board of governors, making it independent (to a certain degree) from commercial constraints which governed businesses whose profits were driven by shareholder interests. In other words, this was a corporation which would put the interests (or perceived interests) of the public at the heart of its output, rather then worry about doing populist broadcasts to raise a higher revenue.

So, where did that leave the institution at the start of the new millennium? The BBC had had to fundamentally shift as it vied for its position in the landscape of contemporary television, and could not afford the luxury of being exempt from commercial gains. And with this one can argue that a re-evaluation of the remit of its outputs, from analogue, into digital and interactivity, was taking place. Programming which engaged with the Reithian values of old still existed, but alongside these were products that have had to compete within a commercial market, a market which has never been under the pressure of having uphold social, political, cultural and moral values in quite the same context. Inevitably the influence on what is popular on other channels will have an impact on the style and content of the BBC and as far back as 1999 debates focused around

whether the standard of public broadcasting on the channel was slipping. (Jury 1999)

Perhaps the pivotal moment with relation to the change in emphasis was the evolution of the digital channel BBC Choice (launched in September 1998) into BBC3 in 2003. Katharine Everett the original Head of Programming described the intended audience of BBC Choice as “predominantly young people with families: the typical early adopters of multichannel television” (Marketing Week 1998) but by 2003 this had changed into catering for a 25-34 years old market, with amongst other things “youth-oriented documentaries.” (BBC 2004) The emphasis on a more experimental, cutting-edge programming targeting a youth-market could evolve on this digital platform, leaving the established channels of BBC1 and BBC2 to cater for a more mainstream audience, and BBC4 (which emerged from BBC Knowledge in 2002) which had an original remit to engage with national and international arts, music and culture, with the tag of “Everybody needs a place to think” (BBC4 press-pack 2002) targeting an altogether different demographic.

Factual programming has been a perennial concern within the BBC. Back in 2001, 129 jobs were lost as the plethora of docu-soaps produced by the institution came under the spotlight. It was decided that a cull was necessary in order to concentrate on large-scale, one-

off projects which arguably had a greater financial return in international sales. (Wells 2001) This led to the lack of a regular factual programming slot, however the public didn't have to wait too long for the next wave of popular factual programming to emerge.

In order to understand current debates within the BBC, there is a need to contextualise the development of factual programming within the institution over this last two decades, from the millennium onwards. The evolution of scripted-reality formats, the foregrounding of spectacle over content, the rise of reality programming which privileges an engagement with the emotional drama of the main protagonists over the social, political or cultural context of their stories all add to what art critic Brian Sewell suggested was "… a disgracefully dumbed-down" (Hogan and Sewell 2013) genre. *The Guardian* headline of "Brain Sewell: the BBC's factual television is an insult to the nation" (Hogan and Sewell 2013) is one that's hard to ignore, and although series such as *The Only Way is Essex* (2010-) and *Made in Chelsea* (2011-) are not in any way affiliated to the BBC, *The Only Way is Essex* (2010-) winning of the 2011 Audience Award *BAFTA* (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) and subsequent popularity has impacted on the generic conventions now associated with popular factual programming.

If the BBC in the early 2000's was tiring of the docu-soap, whereby a particular location or place of work formed the basis from which to explore the lives of the participants involved in the series, this was only to be replaced on BBC1 by the single-episode format of *ONE Life* (2003) analysed in Chapter Five. (BBC1 2003a) Engaging with the universal themes prevalent in the docu-soap format, the opening episode *ONE Life: Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) was introduced as exploring "everyday people, everyday stories", but rather than these being interwoven in a larger narrative context, the individual films mainly focused on one central protagonist whom we followed on their private journey.

The BBC had a long-held tradition of exploring the lives of British people, and the innovative approach of the Community Programme Unit (1972-2004) was to support members of the public with technical training in order for they themselves to record their experiences with equipment they had borrowed from the unit. Initially broadcast as *Video Diaries* (19991-99) this was expanded into the *Video Nation* project (2014) and the films, which were originally broadcast on BBC2 were relegated to a web-presence only.

ONE Life (2003) was very much in the ethos of this style of programming, which put the protagonists and their experiences, and their ways of looking at the world at the heart of the majority of the

episodes in series one. The press release extolled the "high quality and compelling films which reflect life in contemporary Britain" with "commissioned films from some of the most talented and innovative directors in the UK." The piece goes on to suggest that "some of the films are observational, others are characterised by the director's personal take on a subject, whilst another is narrated by the film's principle character." (BBC 2003a) The first series comprised of seven films, broadcast on Wednesdays at 22.35, reflecting the sometimes challenging subject matter being explored.

In episode seven of series one, *ONE Life: Scared to Leave Home* (2003) the plight of Julie, an agoraphobic is explored. While this is arguably a subject with universal appeal, the observational techniques used to record and then present the experiences of Julie to the audience are somewhat questionable. In the opening scene we are presented with distressing images of the main protagonist in the throws of a panic attack, and although this does in some way capture the essence of the situation, there is no framing of the condition in a wider social or cultural context – we are left viewing the spectacle of distress with no anchorage to anything other than her on-screen suffering.

In this sequence it appears that Julie is alone in the car, suffering her attack and then recording her emotions in a piece-to-camera as she

finally is able to return home from her distressing attempt at leaving the boundary of her village. Reminiscent of the style of filmmaking associated with the *Video Diary* (1991-99)/*Video Nation* (2014) project, the final scene is wobbly and grainy, again suggesting that she has endured this experience alone. However, on closer inspection, we momentarily glimpse a cameraman in the rear of her car, undermining the authenticity of the filmmakers attempt to suggest that this is a solitary journey endured only by the protagonist. This raises questions of truth as the conventions associated with one form of representing reality are used to support a reading that this was an intimate experience, shared by only the protagonist and we the viewer.

In her article 'Towards a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience', Vivian Sobchack (1990) argues for an existentialist approach to deconstructing how the audience view the images they encounter on screen. Positing documentary as an intermediate between home movie and fiction filmmaking, her suggestion is that the more we focus on the actual image on screen, the less likely we are to relate these images back to reality; in other words, in classic narrative we focus entirely on the story-space and ignore the screen, but in home movies we are looking beyond the screen and relating what we see *back* to our own lives. This would concur directly with the decision to use this form of representation at the start of the episode as it immediately gives the audience an emotive

engagement with the protagonist and her anxiety associated with the condition.

In the same year which saw the evolution of the *ONE Life* (2003) strand, the BBC launched the digital channel BBC3, which had a remit to “bring younger audiences to high quality public service broadcasting through a mixed-genre schedule of innovative UK content featuring new UK talent…the channel’s target audience is 16-34 year olds.” (BBC 2013a) Staking its claim for a younger audience from the outset (BBC 2003b; BBC 2003c), BBC3 has been home to some of the more extreme examples of popular factual programming, ranging from *Pissed and Pregnant* (2007), *Bashing Booze Birds* (2007), *Addicted to Boob Jobs* (2008), *Undercover Princes* (2009), *Britain’s Most Embarrassing Parents* (2009), to *Don’t Tell the* Bride (2007-15) and *Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents* (2011-2015). These examples range from formatted reality programming to semi-observational documentaries which encouraged the protagonists to unburden themselves to the camera for an audience to gawp at.

One series, which showcased on BBC3 and traversed the boundaries of docu-soap, with a more reflexive, participatory approach was the case-study analysed in Chapter Six, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005). Directed and produced by filmmaker

Richard Macer it explored life in Psyche, a designer clothes shop located in Middlesbrough. The four episodes were formatted into themes, exploring women's wear, menswear, promotional rivalry and a portrait of Steve Cochrane, the owner of the shop. Episode one, *The Trouble with Ladies Wear* (2005) follows the exploits of staff employed on this particular floor, and exemplifies the ways in which the series represented the dynamics of contemporary shop-work. Concentrating on the personalities of the women, Macer interacts with the protagonists, provoking spontaneous reactions to his sometimes provocative questions. Working in a way similar to other auteur documentary filmmakers, such as Paul Watson, Nick Broomfield and Louis Theroux, Macer manages to ingratiate himself to the degree that protagonists open up to him in ways which seem quite ludicrous when viewed back on-screen.

Appealing to the BBC3 demographic, the series exhibited characteristics which could be considered postmodern in its ironic representation of the world being explored. Its authenticity is somewhat undermined by Macer who constantly appears within the diegesis asking absurd questions and elucidating equally absurd responses. In *The Trouble with Ladies Wear* (2005) we follow the career of new recruit Ruth who is struggling to fit-in to the store. After numerous positions she leaves and we catch-up with her as she embarks on a new career which is as a professional dancer. The

whole story feels contrived and the episode is reminiscent of the BBC2 series *People Like Us* (1999-2001).

People Like Us (1999-2001) evolved from the Radio 4 series of the same name, and followed Roy Mallard, an on-screen, bumbling filmmaker who explored life in 'middle England' in much the same way as Macer in *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005). Only in this series, the issues were played for laughs, and a mock-documentary framework was exploited. In their book *Faking It: Mock Documentary and The Subversion of Actuality* authors Roscoe and Hight (2001) suggest three degrees of subversion at play within texts which exploit the conventions of traditional documentary practices. These range from the benign parody, to critique and onto reflexive deconstruction. Although *People Like Us* (1999-2001) can be situated firmly within the first degree of mock-documentary (parody), with its gentle mocking of the institutions and practices of contemporary popular culture for the audience to laugh at, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) is operating across two of the three degrees. It is a seemingly-authentic documentary channelling the subversion associated with the third degree of mock documentary, deconstruction, whilst at the same time utilising the comedic elements associated with the first degree, parody.

In his book *The Perfect Crime* (2008) Jean Baudrillard explored the death of reality, continuing the work he developed in *Simulacra and Simulation.* (2004) In it he argued that "…there is no crisis of reality. Far from it. There will always be more reality, because it is produced and reproduced by simulation, and is itself merely a model of simulation." (2008: 17) If texts have borrowed from the conventions of documentary to authenticate fictitious representations, it only stands to reason that documentary will inevitably borrow-back from this subversive genre in the construction of its own narratives.

This blurring of the boundaries which sign-post reality from fakery becomes increasingly pertinent when attempting to deconstruct texts which openly meld a factual discourse with fictional elements, yet are considered part of the cannon of factual programming. Becoming perfect examples of a model of simulation produced by a simulation, programmes which generate reality by faking interventions illustrate what Baudrillard argues is the "…subjective illusion, the illusion of the subject who opts for the wrong reality, who mistakes the unreal for the real, or, worse, mistakes the real for the real…" (2008: 53) In *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) there is no suggestion that any of the filmed footage is simulated, in other words *openly* scripted and delivered (with the exception of Macer who as the filmmaker has an obvious agenda), but the style and delivery of the programme suggests that the contents *isn't* authentic. In other words, the real presented as a simulation.

Perhaps beyond the realms of many peoples' experience is that of the life of an alcoholic, the subject of which is analysed in Chapter Seven. Broadcast on BBC2 in 2006, *Rain in My Heart* was filmed, directed and produced by the critically-acclaimed documentary filmmaker Paul Watson, and was an uncompromising exploration of what life was like for a group of individuals dependent on alcohol. An established filmmaker, Watson was responsible for bringing to the small-screen series' including *The Family* (1974), *Sylvania Waters* (1993) and stand-alone documentaries such as the *Forty Minutes* (1981-1994) episode *The Fishing Party* (1985) and *Malcolm and Barbara: A Love Story* (1999). Considered one of the founding fathers of reality television, his fly-on-the-wall series' *The Family* (1974) provided audiences with a glimpse into the seemingly ordinary lives of the Wilkins, an average family dealing with day-to-day issues and life in suburban Reading.

However, in an interview for *The Guardian* (Armstrong 2006) Watson attempts to disassociate himself from the negative connotations now associated with this genre of filmmaking. He claims "People say you're the godfather of reality television…Who'd want to be a godfather to such bastards?" suggesting that he sees himself as working outside this paradigm, and what it now represents. Watson claims that these contemporary incantations of representing reality have:

> …no analysis, no insight, no unexpected side to the story, no light shed. The recent programmes put out by both the BBC and ITV on quarrelling neighbours were truly wretched. Their only function seems to have been to turn the rest of us into Peeping Toms. (Watson in McCann 1998)

This damning indictment suggests he is critical of work which serves to present the audience with mere spectacles – images which have no substantive purpose.

If this really is the case, what is the audiences' relationship with his film *Rain in My Heart* (2006)? John Ellis (2012) explores the possibilities of exploitation in the research he conducted with undergraduate students who question the ethics of working with vulnerable participants. They raise a number of issues including gaining informed consent, the questioning of participants when they were clearly intoxicated and continuing to film when a participant was dying. Are the techniques he used to film, what he describes as "record(ing) an alcoholic's journey either to well being or a miserable death." (Watson 2007) significantly different than the ones he is so critical of? He goes on "Trust, the biggest element in any observational documentary, would need to be created between the individual sufferer and filmmaker." but later in the article describes "As I film on my knees, the slime of warm spewed vomit permeates

my jeans, inexorably moving upwards. My job is to explain, not entertain. Voyeurism this is not. Explaining hell it is!" (Watson 2007)

In her article 'The Spectacle of Reality and Documentary Film' Elizabeth Cowie (no date) suggests "The lure of the spectacle of the hidden revealed has, however, also become a feature of much "serious" documentary and factual television." It is this lure of the spectacle of actuality present within this representation of the hidden world of the alcoholic which raises questions as to the ethics of how to present vulnerable (sick and dying) individuals on screen, and the filmmakers ethical responsibilities.

The final case-study, which forms Chapter Eight, perhaps represents the damning critique by Watson in his charge against new forms of on-screen reality. *People Like Us* (2013) was filmed on-location and billed as a series which explored the lives of young people living on a housing estate in Manchester. Described by the BBC as a "warm and at times unflinching look at the reality of life for young people in Harpurhey." (BBC 2013b) it caused such controversy that series two was relocated to Chelmsley Wood, near Birmingham.

Toby Miller (1998) suggests that "Documentaries marshal systems of representation to encourage a point of view about something." (183)

This raises questions as to why particular points of view are privileged over others and what purpose this might serve? In *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* Herman and Chomsky (1994) argue that the mass media work for the dominant elite who control both production and distribution, and through the media certain discourses are naturalized which serve the interests of the elite. Foucault (1991) also recognises that during certain historical moments, some people have the power to speak on behalf of others – whilst exploring the formation of the penal system, he suggests that knowledge is historically and culturally specific and linked to institutional apparatus. In the case of *People Like Us* (2013) this is arguably the BBC. Working as a regime of truth (Foucault 1980c), where knowledge and power are intrinsically linked, the two discourses join force, validating the supposition presented, making it seemingly truthful.

The *BBC Mission and Value* statement (BBC 2017b) suggests it "enrich(es) people's lives with programmes and services that inform, educate and entertain", harking back to the Reithian ideology discussed earlier. It goes on "Trust is the foundation of the BBC: we are independent, impartial and honest." Alongside this statement is the *Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation* (2016) which notes five public purposes, including "To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all the United Kingdom's nations and regions…[and] To reflect the United Kingdom,

its culture and values to the world", which would suggest that it is placing a marker that as an institution the audience can depend on the representations promoted through its output being honest and reliable. However, this is somewhat discordant to the reception the contributors of *People Like Us* (2013) gave the programme on its broadcast, who suggested that this was anything *but* a truthful representation of their community. (Wheatstone 2013a; Kirby 2013)

Tom Gunning (1997) argues that the cinema of attraction directly solicits audience attention by supplying pleasure through the visual – not the narrative of conventional cinema, rather it's a scopophilic pleasure that suggests ocular engagement rather than an intellectual one. Cowie (1999) also concurs with this when she argues:

> The spectacle of reality involves an entertaining of the eyes through form and light in a showing, and an entertaining of the mind in the showing of something known either as familiar or in a new or spectacular way, or something not yet known that thereby becomes the known. (27)

In the case of the representation of the lives of young people living in poverty in contemporary Britain, *People Like Us* (2013) conforms to the dominant neoliberal political discourse that people living on the margins of society, receiving benefits, are not worthy of the help they are getting. To return to the concept of pornography, introduced to

consider the othering of animals on screen in Chapter Four, the representation of poor, working class British youth arguably works in a similar context – this othering-process allowing the audience to engage with the visual spectacle of extreme behaviours, but in this case, to validate the response that *they* are not worthy of *our* help. In fact they are not *people like us* at all.

The factual discourses explored are an eclectic mix of what is representative within the landscape of popular factual programming, on the BBC in the twenty-first century. The original contribution to knowledge contained within this work is a re-evaluation of the ways in which contemporary television documentary practices engage their audience, and the identification of the primacy of spectacle to encourage a particular form of on-screen engagement, regardless of the subject matter being represented. Bringing together historical frameworks, and using them to analyse a range of examples not considered *together* within this context previously, the main findings are the use of spectacle to engage the audience into a visceral response cuts across all of the examples analysed, and that there is a clear and tangible relationship between contemporary documentary practices and pre-cinematic forms of representation and audience engagement.

Within a genre which is generally considered a site to educate or inform an audience, the primary use of spectacle calls for a re-evaluation of the form and function of documentary itself. Are contemporary documentary practices manufacturing an emotional connection to engage the audience in place of attempting to persuade with reasoning and logic? The answer contained within this dissertation is that they are, *but*, this does not mean that education and information are lost to a less intellectual form of engagement. From computer-generated dinosaurs to the poor, working class residents of Harpurhey, what further binds all these examples together is the institution of the BBC – how do the programmes analysed reflect contemporaneous ideological practices regarding the representation of reality *and* maintain the ethos of a company established in the early twentieth century, but now operating in the twenty-first?

Chapter One: The History of Documentary Practices

Introduction

This chapter will explore the historical development of documentary practices within mechanical forms of visual representation. Starting with photography, then moving on to film and subsequently television, examples of the ways in which these visual forms have attempted to represented 'reality' will be briefly considered. Rather than a chronological overview of technological developments, the chapter will consider examples which demonstrate how each form of mechanical representation has been used within a wider cultural context.

Photography

Mary Warner Marien, cited in Wells (2000: 47) warns of the danger in believing all that early photography historians tell us about the inception and birth of photography. In her book *Photography: A Cultural History* she outlines the evolution of photography, acknowledging Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre as the first to have had announced his invention in Paris, on the 19th August, 1839. In this she charts the collaboration between Daguerre and Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in developing the eventual process, and the concern that the invention would be stolen and accredited to some

other individual also working within this field. This was perhaps not an unfounded fear as British scientist William Henry Fox Talbot was simultaneously developing a process which would similarly capture images from the natural world. However, as Marien points out, although these individuals managed to 'fix' a photographic image, experiments in projection have been cited as far back as Aristotle (384-322BC), suggesting the desire to accurately capture, and *re*present reality as being long-held.

Acknowledging this problematic start in relation to the actual process of photography, once developed and refined, a greater challenge was posed in relation to the philosophy of the evolving discipline. Daguerre was keen to emphasize the importance of the *process* rather than that of the individual in the production of images. In other words, the importance lay in the objectivity of nature reproducing *itself*, rather than that of the intervention of man, which is in direct contrast to man reproducing nature, as in traditional art-practices. Daguerre suggested "…the DAGUERREOTYPE is not an instrument which serves to draw nature; but a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself." (Marien 2002: 23) Whilst Talbot agreed, he also considered the emerging discipline as having the ability to engage more closely with the arts, and produced somewhat metaphorical, subjective images such as *The Open Door* (Talbot, 1844), plate 5 in his *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-1846) series, which explored the application of photography.

Developing within the Victorian era (approx. 1840-1900) amongst great technological and social change, photography became part of the establishment in recording and making sense of this shifting social, cultural and political environment. If prevalent contemporary opinion regarded photography as objective and one of the discourses of sobriety (Nichols 2001: 39), somehow eliciting the 'truth', perhaps it was inevitable that it became the primary tool to record and represent these changes.

Photography began to be used within the sciences to record images which were once unattainable by the naked eye alone, and developments within microscopy enabled scientists to record images of the biological and natural world which progressed scientific knowledge. Both biology and astronomy benefited from these developments, and from around 1840 onwards photography was debated as being an "art-science" (Marien 2002: 26) as many of the images produced had an aesthetic quality alongside being contained within a traditional scientific discourse.

Within the medical world, photography began to be used in a variety of contexts, with practitioners using the medium to record injury and illness, both of the mind *and* body. Images of individuals suffering from forms psychiatric illness were taken as part of the scientific study of their condition in order to try and rationalise how external

characteristics could be manifestations of inner turmoil. This form of typological classification was common in Victorian society, and can be read alongside the popular ‘sciences’ of phrenology and physiognomy. In his article ‘The Body and The Archive’ (1992: 343-388) Allan Sekula discusses the ways in which photography was used to validate the categorisation and labelling of individuals, especially within social deviancy and ‘difference’. Photography was able to assist the recording of anthropometric data, and as systems of data archiving and retrieval grew more sophisticated, an emerging physiognomic gauge was developed to ascertain the characteristics associated with mental illness and social deviance.

In the article, Sekula describes how research became divided, with Alphonse Bertillion developing a filing card system on to which the police recorded individuals’ personal anthropometric details, distinguishing features and contained two photographic images, one side view, one full face. Conversely, Francis Galton worked on composite imagery whereby he superimposed a series of faces, in order to try and determine a biological ‘type’. Whilst the first system concentrated on the individual, the second was founded in Galton’s interest in racial difference, and the idea that genetics could determine not only ones external characteristics, but a predisposition to certain behaviours and conditions.

What affect this had on photography in general was to support a validation that mechanical forms of representation could not only represent the truth, but somehow manufacture it. As John Tagg suggests in *The Burden of Representation* (1987: 6) as the discipline was adopted as part of the state apparatus, photography became the privileged medium by which society was officially recorded.

This was initially used to great affect by the Victorian philanthropist Dr Thomas John Barnardo who used photography to promote his good-works. In 1874 he established a photographic department within Stepney Boys' Home and in the subsequent 31 years over 55,000 images were taken. (McHoul 1991) These had a dual function, both to record the individuals' case history and to raise revenue to finance the charity. Children were recorded upon entry to the institution, displaying their destitute state, and re-photographed several months later after rehabilitation. These images were then put together onto single cards and sold. However, in 1876 Barnardo was officially charged with producing images which were of 'artistic fiction,' and he subsequently moved away from this style of representation.

Even within the seemingly philanthropic nature of Barnardos' work, the use of photography in this context turns individuals into commodities, to be bought and sold, and their image forever on

record also acted as an effective means of social surveillance. (Tagg 1987: 66-102) As others too began to visually document social inequalities and the conditions of the poorest within society, this genre of photography began to pervade the mainstream.

Perhaps central to the distribution of social photography within the Victorian era was the press. Articles had been illustrated using other methods, but introducing photographic imagery to support reports brought an altogether greater sense of authenticity. Photographers including Paul Strand, Jacob Riis and Jack London saw the early potential in photography as a tool for social reform. Documenting conditions associated with homelessness, slum living and poverty, popular photography came perversely to have the opposite of the desired effect. The images were read as supporting stereotypical ideas about the *kinds* of individuals who inhabited these worlds, and it could be argued created 'compassion fatigue', as the images became normalised within mainstream culture, and a general interest in social reform waned.

Alongside this was the tendency to over-dramatize the experience of the reporter, for example in 1866 the journalist James Greenwood went undercover to spend a night in a workhouse for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Readers became enthralled by the danger of his exploits

rather than the social inequality described and illustrated in the report.

With photography laying claims to the real, other disciplines saw the potential of this medium to record and document. Amongst these were anthropologists and ethnographers working both at home and abroad. In 1936, *Mass Observation* was founded by the anthropologist Thomas Harrison, journalist and poet Charles Madge and filmmaker Humphrey Jennings. Their stated aim was to “create an ‘anthropology of ourselves’” (Mass Observation 2005) which would record the lives of ordinary people living in Britain. Working mostly with untrained volunteers, a unique picture of Britain emerged, and the results were documented in the 25 books published between 1937, and the projects decline in the early 1950s. Observers were asked to provide diaries, written pieces, images, photographs and other ephemera to paint an intimate picture of life in contemporaneous Britain.

Perhaps one of the most interesting projects was *Worktown* (1937-40). Seeking to explore, via a range of observational methodologies, the social, political and cultural lives of the people of Bolton, the results were presented under the guise of the fictional ‘Worktown’. Photographer Humphrey Spender was sent to Bolton, and between 1937 and 1938 produced over 900 images which documented all

aspects of the lives of the residents of the City. (Mass Observation No Date) Although the Mass Observation project had lost much of its impetus by 1950, it was re-launched in 1981 and its archive of material has been steadily growing since. This suggests that a return to wanting to explore the everyday, the ordinary, and the banal is growing, and *could* perhaps be charted back to the 1974 BBC television series *The Family*, which, over the 12 weeks it aired, explored the life of the Wilkin family. Never had so much airspace been dedicated to the inner machinations of a working class family before this key moment in television history.

Spender also worked for one of Britain's most successful photojournalism magazine *Picture Post* (1937-58). Its popularity mirroring that of Mass Observation, the magazine captured a large readership with articles which documented all aspects of contemporary British lifestyles, from that of the rich and poor. Articles ranging from social reform, to the treatment of political prisoners sat alongside pictures of the gentry enjoying Ascot races. Perhaps the decline in this genre of popular, social photography coincided with a fundamental shift within 1950s British society which brought the 'angry young men' to the Royal Court Theatre and a resurgence in political activism which engendered action rather than just observation.

Although photojournalism and social documentary photography is once more prevalent, through the pages of daily newspapers and their accompanying glossy weekend magazines, perhaps the most interesting current documentary photography trend is facilitated via the internet on the pages of *Instagram* (www.instagram.com) *Facebook* (www.facebook.com/) and *Twitter* (www.twitter.com). The fundamental difference here, though, is that the majority of the representations are ones which the subject are in control of; in other words they are (mostly) not illicit images taken without consent, rather they are presented to us by the individual as representative of how s/he wants the world to perceive them.

Long after his *Worktown* photography project, Spender appeared to have reconsidered the original remit of Mass Observation/social documentary photography, and in an interview reflected that:

> A constant feature of taking the kind of photography we're taking about – even when people were unaware that they were actually being photographed – was a feeling that I was exploiting the people I was photographing, even when…the aim explicitly was to help them. (Spender in Watts 2013)

In other words, as previously alluded to by Tagg, the subjects became commodities as their individuality was stripped away and their image used for representational purposes only.

So what of photography in the 21st century? Technological advances have meant that the production of images is readily available to the mass market, in a variety of digital forms. Having small, lightweight cameras, cameras on mobile phones and easily affordable digital SLR's has meant that the public are now able to shoot, manipulate and then via the World Wide Web (WWW) or Bluetooth technologies circulate their shots at the touch of a button, effectively turning everyone in to a 'photographer'. But, rather than the accidental and candid shots captured in an analogue world, the reality we are now presenting is more akin to the process Baudrillard described in *Passwords*:

> Such is the story of the perfect crime, which shows itself in the whole current 'operationality' of the world, in our ways of *realizing* those things that are dreams, phantasms, utopias, transcribing them digitally, turning them into information, which is the work of the virtual in its most widely accepted sense. (2003: 67)

We now use imaging technologies once closely associated with the discourse of sobriety to present idealised simulations of *our* truth.

Film

Mirroring early experimentation in the production of photographic imagery, the invention of a technology able to record images sequentially in order to produce moving footage, and then a machine

capable of projecting the images was being developed concurrently by numerous individual. These included George Eastman, W.K.L. Dickson, Louis Le Prince, R.W. Paul, William Friese Greene and Thomas Ince. But perhaps the most famous were Thomas Alva Edison who invented one of the most important cinematic projection precursors, the Kinetoscope (1893), alongside developing the cumbersome Kinetographic Theatre (1893), also known as the Black Maria film production studio, and Louis and Auguste Lumière. (Cousins 2004: 22) Out of the three, it was the Lumière Cinématographe, launched in 1895, which really played a key role in both technological advancement and the inception of actuality filmmaking.

The Cinématograph was a light-weight piece of equipment, roughly the size of a small suitcase, which could be used to film, develop and project moving images. It was hand-cranked, thus removing the need to be powered by electricity, giving the filmmaker the opportunity to shoot footage, light-permitting, outside of a studio. Early experiments were confined to private screenings, but on 28th December 1895 a public screening was held in the Salon Indien, located in the Grande Café, Paris.

These events proved to be so popular that by the end of 1896 the Lumières had sent technicians with Cinématographe equipment to

host screenings all across Europe, including Britain, Italy, Germany and Spain and by 1897 across continents including America, Egypt, India and Japan. Such was the success that in this year the brothers decided no longer to produce and screen films, but rather, concentrate on the manufacture and sale of equipment. Perhaps a well-considered decision, as with the development of photographic equipment, many contenders who saw the profits available in this new and developing field were experimenting with refining film and projection equipment in direct competition with the Lumières.

The original Lumière screenings consisted of a variety of shorts which included the now famous *L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare de la Ciotat/The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (1895), *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon/Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon* (1895), *Le Repas de Bébé/Feeding the Baby* (1895) and *L'Arroseur Arrosée/Watering the Gardener* (1895). This mixture of films which documented the world around using both observational (or what was described as actuality) and staged footage became the template, but it wasn't long before another element was added; technicians began filming in the locations in which the screenings were taking place, capturing everything from everyday life on the streets to important historical events. The audience were now being simultaneously lured-in by the excitement of seeing moving images being projected on screen *and* the possibility that they themselves would be a part of the performance.

By the end of 1897 the Lumière collection had grown to in-excess of 750 films (Barnouw 1993: 13) with many of them documenting the social, political and cultural history of indigenous populations. Audiences in Britain, France and Germany were able to see images from America, India and Australia, compounding their visual understanding of the world at-large. In *Film Style & Technology: History & Analysis* (1992) Barry Salt explored the relationship between early film style and photography, and he appears only to concede that in relation to framing, *some* influence was taken from the previous medium, discussing the staging of depth of field by having elements situated across the plane, as in examples such as *L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare de la Ciotat* (1895).

Salt goes on to explore the evolution of both fiction and non-fiction film form and narrative in relation to technological advancement. In his discussion of actualities, he observed that the earliest influence of actuality techniques on fiction-filmmaking was the work of Francis Doublier. A former Lumière employee, in 1896 he produced a juxtaposed package of footage exploring the Dreyfus case which featured soldiers, a battleship, a grey-haired man and the Palais de Justice, most of which was reconstruction rather than actual authentic footage. (Barnouw 1993: 25-6; Salt 1992: 36) Salt suggested that from these developments, the filming and reconstruction of news-events developed, in what he likened to

contemporary drama-documentary practices, although at this juncture, these experiments were limited.

As both equipment and techniques were refined, cinematic genres evolved, and the language of narrative (and non-narrative) cinema developed. Whist there can be a distinction drawn between fiction and non-fiction film, it would be wrong to suggest that these two types of production were divorced from each other, as from a very early stage both used comparable techniques relating to both form and narrative. However, it could be argued that the link between cinematic performance and the theatre *was* broken, as the development of techniques such as close-ups and focus pulls created a differing form of visual communication, and one which was inherently cinematic.

If it is accepted that fakery and deception had long-been prevalent within documentary practices, with early photographic examples laying the foundation for the manipulation of reality, it was almost inevitable that within a cinematic context the same would occur. Early examples of this include colonial films which generally reinforced popular stereotypes of 'exotic' individuals living unusual lifestyles, often ignoring a more accurate representation, in order to compound the audiences' belief in colonial ideologies; historical events were manipulated and reconstructed and passed-off as being authentic

and foreign locations were sometimes not what they seemed, as in the case of the 1907 African hunting film *Hunting Big Game in Africa* which featured a Theodore Roosevelt look-alike who ‘hunted’ a lion in the confines of a Chicago studio. (Barnouw 1993: 26) Although Roosevelt was never mentioned by name, the allusion to the president’s trip was clear.

But perhaps the most influential example of contrivance in early factual cinema was in Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of The North* (1922). The film, whilst not yet labelled documentary as the term had not come into general parlance until after Grierson used it in a review to describe Flaherty’s later work *Moana* (1926), has courted controversy since its inception, in part due to the use of staged sequences naturalised within the narrative so that the film is read as an accurate portrayal of the life of Nanook and the Innuit community of Port Harrison in Northern Quebec. Nanook himself, although an Inuit hunter was in-fact called Allakariallak, and his wife in the film was recruited for the role. Other duplicitous elements included encouraging Nanook to use older, more traditional hunting techniques, such as spears and knives rather than using guns which, when tracking walrus’ and seals, was much safer as the hunters were at a greater distance from their prey.

The representation which was presented was of an indigenous culture *before* the influence of contemporaneous external factors, and it could be argued that the primary reason for manipulating reality, in *this* context, was to present a narrative which would be perceived as authentic. The majority of the audience would have no direct experience of the culture on-display, and their only understanding mediated via discourses which represented indigenous populations as primitive, and this was certainly reflected in the opening sequence of the film which shows the vast, barren landscapes of northern Quebec. This would have been in direct opposition to the industrial world inhabited by the majority of the cinema-going public, and served to reinforce ideologies around primitive culture, which were still prevalent at the time of release.

In a similar way to which photography was reified into supporting particular regimes of truth, through institutions and their practices, as documentary filmmaking evolved it was also used to promote awareness of particular causes, and explore aspects of society and culture, both at home and abroad. In 1927, pioneering filmmaker and critic John Grierson approached the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), and gained finance for the film *Drifters* (1927) after pitching the idea of exploring of the herring industry, a topic which fell within the remit of the Government Board which was to promote trade and unity within the British Empire. This first film was a success and from here

the EMB Film Unit developed, producing films and marketing material until its demise in 1933 when the Board was disbanded.

On leaving the EMB, Grierson worked for the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit, which was responsible for producing some of the most innovative and experimental public information films of the 1930's. *Night Mail* (1936) drew influence from Soviet filmmaking techniques through its use of visual montage, and celebrated collective labour and the skilled workforce required to deliver the night mail from London to Scotland. Through such work, differing styles of documentary began to emerge, and audiences were subject to eclectic forms of filmmaking which helped to refine and develop the British documentary movement.

However, not all of these film drew popular acclaim. With Grierson claiming "I look on cinema as a pulpit…" (Grierson in Barnouw 1993: 85), perhaps its understandable why some of the documentaries produced during this period were not as popular with the general public as they were with the critics, as the representations, particularly of the working classes were often patronising. *Coal Face* (1935) produced for the GPO, with its innovative use of sound and montage editing techniques *did* somewhat aestheticize the male workers, with close-up shots of their sweat-glistening naked torsos, muscles bulging as they worked the coal seam. However, contained

within the narrative was an acknowledgement of the danger associated with the working conditions of miners, and included were the accident figures of those maimed and killed. This creates a tension between generating a mythic glorification of a traditional working class occupation and the harsh reality of the brutal working conditions miners have to endure on a daily basis.

As more companies saw the benefit of film sponsorship to promote their industries, documentaries such as *Housing Problems* (1935), produced by the British Commercial Gas Association, were made. This was a blatant propaganda piece for a slum clearance and urban regeneration programme, which allowed for the residents of the slums to tell their own stories, an innovative development at the time of production. The stories the residents told were horrific, ranging from babies dying to a rat lying on the face of one woman who was sleeping. And whilst it could be argued that the film is attempting to sell to the working class improvements to their domestic living conditions, this is still a blatant example of a particular ideology being naturalised through the discourse of documentary.

At the GPO Film Unit, production continued until the outbreak of WWII when it was transferred to the Ministry of Information's Film Division, and re-named the Crown Film Unit. Such was the importance of documentary film as a tool for propaganda, whether it

was to raise the moral of the population or to remind Britain of what to do in times of crisis. But, by 1952 it was seen as an unnecessary luxury and ceased under the auspices of a conservative government. During these years the foundations of documentary practices evolved, amid experimentation within factual forms, the eclectic range of subject-matter explored within the narratives and the acknowledged potential that documentary had as a tool for social, political and cultural change.

Whilst contemporary cinematic practices still see documentaries released in multiplexes and mainstream cinemas, these are often sold off the back of particular filmmakers (for example Errol Morris; Michael Moore) with more limited releases of niche-interest films in independent and art-house establishments. That is not to say that contemporary feature-length documentaries don't have the ability to traverse the boundaries between mainstream and independent, as did the award-winning *The Act of Killing* (2013), what many feature-length films now have is a limited cinematic release alongside being broadcast on television. As companies such as Channel 4 and the BBC commission feature-length factual films, it is within their commercial interest to ensure that the film realizes its full economic potential.

Television

It is quite clear that as television became ingrained within British culture, documentary found a new way of reaching a mass audience, and it is within this medium, more than in any other, that factual representation has developed and flourished. Taking a while to establish a foothold in the domestic market, from the reintroduction by the BBC on the 7th June 1946, the launch of the first commercial television broadcaster, the Independent Television Authority (ITA) on 22nd September 1955 and the over-coming of initial technical difficulties including the initial inability to fully broadcast across the UK, it wasn't until the early 1960s that television became an established, mass medium in the UK.

Of both cultural and political importance at this particular moment in television history are the *Television Act* (1954), which facilitated the introduction of Independent Television and the *Pilkington Report* (1962), which awarded the BBC a second channel. The Pilkington Committee were concerned that with the advent of commercial television, the Reithian ideologies associated with public service broadcasting were being undermined, and trivialised, in favour of poor quality programming, being made for large profits. Not helping to confute this position was Roy Thomson, media magnate and majority shareholder of Scottish Television who claimed that owning a TV franchise was "…a 'licence to print money'" (Thomson in Petley

2015: 5) and whilst he was originally chastised for this statement, a general consensus around independent programming at the time seemed in favour of giving the public what it wanted, and it was perceived that what the public wanted were populist programmes which were accessible and entertaining. (Medhurst 2003: 40)

Demonstrating the chasm between the two forms of television, was the private comment made by Hughie Green, Independent Television personality, presenter and linkman; "People do not want three hours of fucking *King Lear* in verse when they get out of a ten-hour day in the fucking coal pits…and fuck anybody who tries to tell them that they do." (Green in Moran 2013: 105) And whilst this might be a crude form of expression, he was countering the vitriolic backlash which was aimed at the service when it came into operation, with Reith reportedly comparing its arrival to that of "…smallpox, the Black Death and the bubonic plague." (Reith in O'Sullivan 2013: 33) This stance is hardly surprising as Reith believed that "Broadcasting is a servant of culture." (Reith in Creeber 2003: 23) and was there to uphold and promote high moral values, which he saw as now being undermined.

It is against this backdrop that the *Pilkington Report* (1962) attempted to preserve the paternalistic ideology of the establishment. However it is interesting to note looking through the *Genome Project* (BBC

2017) the eclectic range of material which was broadcast after the reintroduction of the BBC television service which could arguably be classified as populist. The project lists all radio and television broadcasts, which are contained within the *Radio Times,* published between 1923 and 2009, and whilst there are undoubtedly programmes which did encourage intellectual engagement, for example plays by Chekhov, Oscar Wilde, and J.B Priestly, and orchestral and operatic performances, there were many example of popular light entertainment, from big-band music to magazine programmes, cookery demonstrations and programmes aimed to entertain children.

Further listings reveal a series of occasional programmes exploring documentary films from around the world, feature length broadcasts of iconic documentaries, for example *Song Of Ceylon* (1934) and general interest documentaries exploring subjects ranging from WWII, for example *Close Quarters* (1943) a documentary which reconstructed the experiences of a Royal Navy submarine patrolling off the coast of Norway, to the inner workings of a Magistrate Court (*Magistrates Court* (1948)).

Significantly, the world of work featured in early series' with examples including *London After Dark* (1949)*,* with episode one going *Inside Scotland Yard* and episode two into a *Casualty Ward,* and *War on*

Crime (1960) a three-part series which explored cases from the Scotland Yards archives. Following in this vein, *The Court of Justice* (1950-51) over its five episodes explored the world of the Juvenile Court. What these early example demonstrate is a clear connection to contemporary documentary in the desire to get behind the scenes, to see how ordinary people go about their everyday business in the world of work, and gain a privileged view into the institutions that form the fabric of British society. There are many more examples, which indicates that from the reintroduction of the BBC television service, whilst it can definitely be accused of being London-biased, in that most of the series' exploring institutions are those located in the capital city, there was no shortage of factual programming available for an audience to engage with.

From these early broadcasts the foundations were laid for what were to become established genres of factual production *across* the spectrum of channels now available on digital terrestrial, satellite, cable and on-line television platforms. An interesting early example documented in the book *Armchair Nation* (2013) is that of *Buried Treasure* (BBC 1954-59) with the first episode *The Peat Bog Murder Mystery* (1954) being heralded as both responsible for the upsurge in studying archaeology, helping to create the academics of tomorrow *and* the dumbing down of the discipline, turning the general public into "pseudo hippy-naturalists." (2013: 98) This conflict reflects the inherent tension of a format which whilst being accessible enough to

capture the imagination of the viewing public is criticised by the establishment as undermining the academic credibility of the discipline. And perhaps this tension lies at the heart of Reith's public service mantra of education, information and entertainment – programmes need to stay on the 'right' side of education and not be *too* entertaining in order to retain their (perceived) cultural and critical value.

The example is also of interest as it demonstrates the cyclical nature of programming with *Buried Treasure* arguably acting as a precursor to the long-running Channel Four series *Time Team* (1994-2014). This too, had its critics and whilst it remained relatively popular with the general public right up to its cancellation, some of the academic establishment *had* criticised the way in which the series compressed archaeological processes, which often took months to complete, into a 3-day shooting schedule, making the series not an entirely accurate representation of the discipline. Whilst not the only factual programming format to resurface, it is an interesting example as it survived for 20-years in a highly competitive market place.

In *A Study of Modern Television: Thinking Inside The Box* (2006) Andrew Crisell gives a useful account of the evolution of documentary from the inception of television until around 2003, and furthers this with a chapter dedicated to factual formats which come

under the general umbrella of reality programming. He identified that in the early days of television, presenters were prominent within documentaries, and he proposed two reasons for this; firstly, because of the didactic form which documentaries took, with the audience being *told* about a subject, and secondly the presenter acted as an audio commentator, describing scenes which could not be filmed, mainly due to technical restrictions. (67)

Over time this changed, with technological advancements and changes in presentation-style, from the prevalence of the expository style being replaced with more observational documentaries where the images spoke for themselves, rather than having a presenter mediate on their behalf. He noted that television documentaries now (2006) have a tendency to avoid the use of a "…visible presenter." (Crisell 2006: 70) and in place have a narration or voice-over. And whilst this is true of *some* documentary series, including high-profile examples such as the Attenborough wildlife programmes Crisell cites, since his publication, presenter-led documentary series have once again become in-vogue, but for entirely different reasons from those cited earlier. Rather than having a didactic presentation of the material, presenters are at the centre of the action, becoming involved in the story they are mediating. They are now expected to engage with the subject, in much the same way as filmmakers working in the participatory mode, but often going one-step further.

At the centre of this extreme form of programme making, were journalists such as Roger Cook and Donal MacIntrye, who pushed the boundaries of undercover (hidden camera) investigative reporting to its limit. It has to be noted, however, that hidden camera footage was not only utilised within factual forms of filmmaking, with the majority of early television examples coming from comedy series' such as the American import *Candid Camera* (1948-), where it was used to capture unsuspecting members of the public being duped. In the BBC Timeshift documentary *Watching You* (2003) the history of presenting reality on British television screens is explored and provides a clear account of the evolution of this form of footage being appropriated across generic boundaries, and the way in which it began to be used as an investigative journalistic tool, in current affairs series which included *Man Alive* (1965-1981) *Panorama* (1953-) and *World in Action* (1963-1998).

Whilst Granada televisions' *World in Action* (1963-1998) regularly used hidden cameras to film within hostile environments, and report on issues of social, political and cultural importance (Goddard, Corner and Richardson 2007: 30) it wasn't until the combination of this style of filming was used with "'experiential' undercover reporting" (Goddard, Corner and Richardson 2007: 118) that the genre began to change focus. As reporters went undercover, they had to assume false identities and embedded themselves into situations which were often dangerous if discovered. While MacIntyre

was not the first experiential, undercover reporter, he arguably became one of the most famous, and his series *MacIntrye Undercover* (1999) which took 18 month to make, exposed a series of worlds ranging from corrupt modelling agencies in *Fashion Industry* (1999) to the football violence associated with Chelsea football supporters, in *Chelsea Headhunters* (1999).

Goddard et al noted that “Such techniques depended greatly on the personality of the reporter and sometimes threatened to focus as much on the process of concealment as on the subject of the enquiry” (Goddard, Corner and Richardson 2007: 118) and this could arguably be the pivotal moment at which televisual factual discourses shifted emphasis from a story being mediated *by* a main protagonist to one being mediated *through* one. This strategy of drawing an audience in through the personality of the presenter shifts the focus from the subject to the subjective; from the topic under investigation to the person investigating.

Conclusion

Bignell (2004), discussing the process of identification, highlights the shifting patterns which occur between a viewer and a programme, and argues that “Narrative requires the shifting of the viewer’s position into and out of the television programme, and a rhythm of identification and disavowal of identification.” (97) This process fits

well with the way in which an audience are drawn-in to the narrative of a documentary which is exploring an important and potentially dangerous subject; encouraging an emotional identification with the undercover reporter (who generally in pieces-to-camera tells the audience the process s/he is going through and the danger they are facing), yet *because* the documentary is asking the audience to consider an aspect of the 'real-world' they have to retain *some* critical distance in order to intellectually engage with the subject being explored.

As formats emerged and established practices developed, this move towards narratives which engaged on a dual level, both emotionally and intellectually have become more prevalent, and arguably the emphasis on an emotional engagement has become a primary convention of *all* factual practices broadcast across television. Whilst this might appear a somewhat sweeping generalisation, in an epoch of 24-hour television, streaming web services and an instant access to almost anything, such a competitive market means a programme has almost instantly to draw an audience in, to capture their attention and ensure they continue viewing for the duration of the broadcast. And in terms of the Reithian ideology of education, information and entertainment, contemporary programmes are increasingly prioritising entertainment in order to draw an audience in. The interesting question this then raises in relation to the BBC, is whether this is to draw an audience in, in order to educate and inform them,

or are they merely producing spectacular distractions, which whilst entertaining the masses subtly reinforce hegemonic ideologies which serve the ruling elite?

Chapter Two: Theoretical Frameworks

Introduction

In order to contextualise, explore and deconstruct the ways in which television documentary practice has evolved, a series of theoretical approaches have been used. These provide a basis from which to draw conclusions on how reality is both represented and constructed, and how this impacts on our understanding of the stories being told, on-screen, which purport to offer an authentic representation of the world in which we live. Always, when any attempt is made to engage in presenting a view on the world, a particular political agenda is drawn-upon; the very nature of presenting back to an audience an engagement with reality is inevitably tainted with a particular understanding of the world. Whether this understanding draws upon individual programme maker’s sensibilities, or more broadly represents an institutional agenda, as is argued the case for some of the examples contained within this dissertation, this bias (for want of a better term) cannot be ignored.

Discourses of power are crucial to our deconstruction of what is presented before us as representations of reality, therefore this chapter will start by considering the work of Michel Foucault in order to establish how power and control underpin, in varying degrees, all of the examples contained within this work. Alongside this will be a

consideration of the term pornography and the ideological implications of using this particular word to describe how certain forms of factual programming both represent a subject and position their audience. Documentaries which exploit passive participants who have little to no control over their mediated representations have (potentially) serious political consequences in that they persuade an audience that what is presented is truthful or real; arguably, presenting socio-economically deprived areas such as Harpurhey in Manchester as full of feckless residents who don't deserve welfare assistance supports the neoliberal, right-wing political agenda of austerity measures designed to withdraw help from those who are most vulnerable and in need. When mainstream representations are used to give credence to support a particular (mis)understanding, this serves to reinforce the argument that images have the power to shape an audiences perception of the world *beyond* the frame of the screen.

As this dissertation is concerned with the representation of the real-world, it is therefore pertinent to explore the work of Jean Baudrillard and others who seek to answer questions around the philosophy of what *is* 'reality' anyway? Questions regarding the very nature of our understanding of what reality is informs arguments around how, if we cannot categorically agree to an understanding of what this term means, do we therefore expect to be able to represent it with any credence?

Moving on from considering reality in a philosophical context, the structuralist approach of Bill Nichols is explored, and the set of formal characteristics he developed which are associated with the representation of documentary reality. These have both changed over the course of time, and been challenged by critics who argue that his work is ultimately reductive, but never-the-less still useful in considering how a series of formal conventions have, undoubtedly, become culturally accepted norms in the documentary world.

Two further theoretical frameworks are utilised within the dissertation; one which seeks to determine how the way in which stories are told visually impacts on our relationship with reality and one which explores the relationship between contemporary texts and historical examples. These are, respectively, *spectacle* and *remediation*. Spectacle is of primary importance as it not only defines a particular form of social engagement in a political context, therefore is fundamentally related to discourses of power, but it also describes the process by which emotional affect can be shaped to form particular understandings of reality through the *way* in which stories are told. And it is perhaps this, more than any other theoretical framework, which cuts-across the majority of case-studies which are presented within this work.

Discourses of power and representation

It could be argued that ultimate power in relation to televisual representation lies less in the hands of those who are appearing on screen, than those who manufacture the representations for broadcast. From the subconscious bias at play in determining what is represented, by whom and how to the more overt, conscious constructions of reality which promote particular agendas or represent a particular institutional or political ethos. To consider how power pervades culture, the work of Michel Foucault is useful as he deconstructs the need for the representation of deviance in order to establish social control through governance; this invisible process of subjugation where self-regulation becomes the norm is relevant when considering documentaries which show anti-social or (perceived) deviant behaviours.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* Foucault (1991) described the process by which criminality in the eighteenth century began to be presented within a discourse of morality and be shown to be dangerous not only to the upper classes, but primarily to the working class. This was in order to promote the idea that *they* were the victims of crime, and therefore reinforce the negativity surrounding felons and those whose morals fell below the accepted, contemporaneous norms.

Here, Foucault was analysing the function of the prison system and the evolution of criminality and its control, and went on to explore how certain aspects of criminality have become more 'accepted' and naturalized to the point that they are managed rather than addressed, and in some cases systematically ignored as particular forms of criminality are only committed by the wealthy or ruling elite. And perhaps most interestingly, the concept that criminals and criminality are in fact necessary for the continuation of a functioning police force, and in order for their existence to be to justified, the fear of crime is promoted, and arguably, often exaggerated. Foucault (1980a) noted that "No crime means no police. What makes the presence and control of the police tolerable for the population, if not the fear of the criminal?" (47) and goes on to say:

> If we accept the presence in our midst of these uniformed men, who have the exclusive right to carry arms, who demand our papers, who come and prowl on our doorsteps, how would any of this be possible if there were no criminals? And if there weren't articles every day in the newspapers telling us how numerous and dangerous criminals are? (47)

When considered within this framework contemporary documentaries which present protagonists enjoying their anti-social, deviant and sometimes criminal lifestyles act as a form of social control through governance as the audience rather than being amused by the

feckless behaviour they encounter on screen are appalled as they see others benefitting from their loss. In the case-study explored in Chapter Eight, series one of *People Like Us* (2013), we follow the lives of some of the residents of the Harpurhey housing estate, and in particular Pidge (Paul) whose story is one of the primary lines of action in episode three. Featured in the opening sequence of the series, immediately before we see Pidge on-screen for the first time, the voice-over introducing the area and residents states that “Half the people have no qualifications, and anti-social behaviour is rife.” (00.32-00.38). We then cut to Pidge sat facing the camera and the narrator asking “Are you the resident from hell?” to which Pidge replies “Probably, yeah.” (00.38-00.40). Following this is a round-up of what will be explored in this weeks’ episode with the narration “Landlord Nik Taylor and tenant Pidge face-off in an eviction battle” (01.46-0.1.53) over a sequence which shows Nik loading his car roof with furniture, whilst Pidge looks on, bemused.

We learn that Pidge is a 21-year-old unemployed chef who rents a room for £65.00 per week in a shared house, owned by Nik. There are close-ups of alcohol cans, a cannabis bong in the kitchen and piles of waste in the front garden which Pidge has placed there as a ‘dirty protest’ against his landlord who has, after only eight weeks, served an eviction notice on him. The accommodation appears filthy, unkempt and seemingly in a bad state of repair. We also learn that

since his tenancy began eight weeks ago, Pidge has been arrested seven times (04.43-06.43 and 07.57-08.22).

This sequence is followed by the introduction of landlord Nik, who owns many houses in the area, which he purposely rents out to residents who are eligible to claim Local Housing Allowance. He has a scathing attitude towards those who live in the area and rent from him, claiming that they would "steal the shit out of your arse; not cos they want it, just, just so that you haven't got it. Its no good to them." (06.43-07.57). It is hard to determine in these two scenes who comes off worse; unemployed Pidge who appears content to spend his days living in squalor, drinking and smoking whilst claiming Jobseekers and Local Housing Allowance(s) or landlord Nik who is happy to exploit his tenants, providing accommodation that *appears* barely fit for human habitation.

As neither of them display any moral turpitude, the representations we are presented with serve to anger those viewers who are contributing into the welfare state, as those who take out are seen as reckless and morally corrupt. Explored in more detail in Chapter Eight, this evokes a correlation between those who claim welfare benefits and immorality, and indeed this extends to those who feed off the back of it. Thus, these kinds of representations work as agents which demands the regimes of power in relation to criminality,

social control and the upkeep of morality intervene and restore social order through the oppressive intervention of striping them of (in some cases) their liberty and at the very least, their social standing.

The unemployed in *this* context become a social problem which needs to be cleansed as they fail to reach the moral standard expected of a fully-functioning member of society who acts within the stricture of 'normality'. And further, the normalised body (of which the unemployed are not in their deviant form) is taught to be fearful and to reject the plight of their unfortunate counterpart; Pidge is never presented within a discourse which gives a socio-economic or cultural context to his situation, instead we are presented with his (seemingly) flagrant attitude of self-entitlement.

For Lugo-Ocando (2015), within news media at least, this positioning is manifest in the tendency to frame representations of poverty in relation to subjectivity rather than explore the underlying reasons why poverty exists. By placing the emphasis on personal failing rather than why people are experiencing abject poverty, or how they were cultured into this state, takes the onus off situating it within a socio-political discussion of the inherent inequality ingrained within neoliberal capitalism and the inadequacy of the welfare state system.

In his analysis of power Foucault (1980b) states:

> I believe the great fantasy is the idea of the social body constituted by the universality of wills. Now the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals. (55)

Foucault considers that punitive and medical systems which were developed in the eighteenth century established a system of separating normality and abnormality, and produced subjugated bodies which created a bio-politics of the population; "The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed." (Foucault in Rabinow 1991: 262)

Foucault goes on to argue that discipline is a type of power, a modality, which pervades all aspects of society, and the formation of what he calls "the disciplinary society" can be traced through specific historical processes which include the economic, the judiciary, the political and scientific. (Foucault in Rabinow 1991: 207) However, the most interesting aspect in relation to how we deconstruct documentary is the panoptic modality of power, and the way in which it coerces the body into normative behaviours rather than disciplines it. (Rabinow 1991: 211) If we accept that "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge

constantly induces effects of power" and that power is "Diffused, entrenched and dangerous" (Foucault 1980a: 52) the predominantly negative mainstream representations associated with the lower working and underclass class act as a powerful marker of 'abnormality' and a normative response, as sanctioned by those who are employed to 'protect us' from deviancy, encourages a turning-away from those who *appear* to be breaking legal and moral codes of accepted behaviour.

The more audiences are presented with images, in a factual discourse, which allude to those who are in receipt of welfare benefits as being duplicitous, the more audiences are subconsciously coerced by these regimes of truth (Foucault 1980c) to believe that those who are at the bottom of society's social strata are feckless, irresponsible, often involved in illegal activities, and are more often than not *there by their own making*. And if we accept that the mainstream media does act as a powerful regime of truth (Foucault 1980c), which predominantly functions to support hegemony and serves the purpose of those who are in a position of power, why are mainstream representations of poverty primarily framed within a discourse of self-destruction? Martin-Barbero (1993) suggests that the media has both the ability to transform *and* create reality, so what is the function of promoting overtly negative representations of those experiencing poverty who *appear* to be happy in their status of receiving welfare benefits?

In a climate of austerity politics where government policy is to make cuts to the welfare state and sanction those who fall foul of the system, in order to gain the popularity necessary to support further marginalization of some of the most vulnerable in society, the consensus must first be that in some way *they themselves* are responsible for their situation. And that if they do have to seek help, more often than not, they will fritter this support away being irresponsible and feckless. Foucault (1980c) argues that the "battle for truth" is not about seeking what is true per say (132), rather that:

> Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with what counts as true. (131)

In this way, media which purport to represent reality, which are "charged with what counts as true" and as an audience we can "distinguish true and false statements", become a site whereby ideologies around normative behaviour and our response to *ab*normal behaviour and how to react to it become naturalised. This is taken up in the work of Palmer (2003) in *Discipline and Liberty:*

Television and governance where he discusses “the truth-effects produced by the text.” (4)

Through a series of case-studies which mainly fall into the sub-genre of reality television, Palmer presents the ways in which perceived instances of transgression are punished, through discourse(s) which promote the process of governance. Palmer identifies the evolution of contemporary factual practices and the ways in which ordinary people are presented, sometimes via technologies whereby they were unaware that they were being caught on-camera, and are humiliated and shamed for the gratification of the watching audience. This duality of being both astonished and appalled, laughing at the transgressions we see on-screen, whilst at the same time taking note that *we* don’t want to be the ‘star’ of the next CCTV-style programme, means that we are more than ready to modify our own behaviours for fear of being caught like those we see on-screen.

Whilst Palmer takes examples from the broad spectrum of reality-television, for Lugo-Ocando (2015), within news media at least, this audience positioning is manifest in the tendency to frame representations of poverty in relation to subjectivity rather than explore the underlying reasons why poverty exists. By placing the emphasis on personal failing rather than why people are experiencing abject poverty takes the onus off situating them within a

socio-political discussion of the inherent inequality ingrained within neoliberal capitalism and the inadequacy of the welfare state system.

In *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (2012) political activist and author Owen Jones concurs, arguing:

> Poverty and unemployment were no longer to be seen as social problems, but more to do with individual moral failings. Anyone could make it if they tried hard enough, or so the myth went. If people were poor, it was because they were lazy, spendthrift or lacked aspiration. (xii)

By presenting images of those marginalized in society as *personally* failing, rather than being victims of circumstance, it raises questions regarding the morality of having a welfare system at all. Lugo-Ocando (2015) suggests that the welfare state is "…now not only under attack by those who think that they are inefficient, but are also being blamed for creating a trap that keeps people in poverty." (17) And if the welfare state is constructed within this narrative of failure, and that those in receipt of it are living anti-social or criminal lifestyles, trapped by their own irresponsibility, the logical question would be 'why have a welfare state at all'?

In 2010 *BritainThinks* conducted the survey *What about the workers?* which focused on participants who had all previously identified themselves as working class. What clearly emerged from this was the lack of class cohesion, and in its place stratification, with employed participants keen to distance themselves from the unemployed, whom they saw as lower-class. An othering process emerged, and the language used to describe those they identified in this lower social order is symptomatic of how those claiming benefits and living in poverty are perceived, being variously described as “Sponging off the system”, “Rude and anti-social”, “Lacking self-respect” and as “…people who don’t work and, more importantly, don't want to work.” It was also suggested that working class life was made harder as they are “Brought down by the work-shy ‘underclass’.” (BritainThinks 2012)

Analysing the findings of the *BritainThinks* survey Jones (2012) suggested three themes prevalent in the results, with the third being “…the almost complete absence of accurate representations of working-class people in the media, on TV, and in the political world, in favour of grotesque ‘chav’ caricatures.” (x) If these chav caricatures dominate as the primary representation of the unemployed and those living in poverty, the audience are being encouraged to engage with these protagonists on a purely visceral level.

Again, there is no intellectualization of the socio-economic position of the protagonists, rather they are presented as agents of abnormality, reveling in their position of receiving benefits and languishing irresponsibly in their status. They become a pornographic discourse of (dis)pleasure as we consume the images for the affect they produce, which validates our ability to distance ourselves from them; us as ‘normal, them as ‘abnormal’, facilitating an emotional distance critical to our reading of those in need as not deserving of help.

To concur further, in 2014 *BritainThinks* in partnership with the housing charity *Shelter* conducted the survey *Responding to Public Concerns About Welfare*. It was partly precipitated by the *NatCen British Social Attitudes 32* survey which raised a concern regarding the issue of benefits discouraging people from working, with 59% of respondents agreeing that “most unemployed people could find a job if they really wanted one” (NatCen 2014) and 77% thinking that “large numbers of people” falsely claimed benefits. (BritainThinks 2014) Whilst “large numbers” is not quantified, it is interesting to note that the true figure for fraudulent benefit claims (including official error) during the survey period of 2013/14 was just 2.1%. (Department for Work and Pensions 2016) This staggering overestimation raises important questions regarding why the general public are so grossly inaccurate in their perception, and how they came to these inaccurate conclusions.

To return to Lugo-Ocando (2015) in his assertion that the mainstream media do not show victims of poverty within a failing social and political system, rather audiences are confronted with active protagonists like Pidge, who *work* the social system, smoking and drinking whilst partying in their (albeit poor) accommodation that the audiences' tax has paid for. It comes as no surprise then that respondents *perceive* those in poverty as undeserving, cheating a system which is presented as facilitating a dysfunctional lifestyle. This de-politicisation of unemployment and social stratification feeds into a general discourse of how Foucault (1980b) argues regimes of truth work in their ability to promote normal versus abnormal behaviours and how we conform to these in terms of our reaction when confronted with images of what is deemed 'abnormal' behaviour.

Considering too the notion that presenting images within this discourse creates a disjuncture between those represented and those consuming the representation, Chouliaraki (2006) in the introduction to *The Spectacle of Suffering* talks of Foucault borrowing the term *analytics* from Aristotle, in relation to power, which "aims at describing in detail the complexities of practice and discourse that place human beings in certain relationships of power to one another within a specific social field, such as the field of media and mediation."(7)

Whilst the book explicitly examines mediated *distant* suffering there is an argument to be had which questions how mediated *local* suffering is represented and the positioning of power this encourages within *our own culture*. It is within this context, that Paul Watson's documentary *Rain in My Heart* (2006) is deconstructed in Chapter Seven. In the film he follows four alcoholics who are at differing stages in their addiction, and all receiving treatment from Gillingham's Medway Maritime Hospital. Perhaps the most problematic of the four is Vanda, as through the course of the documentary Watson appears to form a relationship with her and arguably crosses the boundary from objective documentarian to subjective critic. Whilst he openly acknowledges this within the documentary, explaining that he did get emotionally involved with the protagonists, this form of engagement clearly creates an unequal balance of power in which he becomes the figure of authority and Vanda the 'naughty child'. In one pivotal sequence, when she has fallen-off the-wagon, whilst he tells her he is not disappointed in her, rather "…I am disappointed for you…" (35.25-36.21) there is critical judgement in the exchange which places her as a (willing) victim and Watson in a position of (authoritarian) power.

In this context, it raises an interesting ethical dilemma regarding the power that those representing have over those who are represented. Whether this is on an institutional level or more due to the sensibility of the filmmaker, the use of crude stereotyping, or presenting

protagonists in a way which encourages the audience to judge their lifestyle choices, when framed within a discourse of 'truth', these prevalent misrepresentations naturalise particular agendas in a way which often goes unquestioned. This is explored further in *Controversial Images: Media Representation on the Edge* (2013) where Attwood et.al. discuss the various ways in which images have been deemed 'controversial'. Whilst the book analyses a series of case-studies outside of the scope of this work, what *are* raised are a series of questions regarding the moral, ethical and ideological implications of images categorised in this way. What comes through clearly are the power-relations at work when representing in the mainstream media images which have an impact on our understanding of particular social groups. If, when we watch Watson's documentary on alcoholism we adopt his patronising position of power over his vulnerable protagonists, this naturalises the paternalistic assumption that we, the audience are better than those 'victims' who 'fail us' by behaving in ways which are deemed inappropriate, anti-social, corrupt, morally questionable. In much the same way *People Like Us* (2013) inundates the general public with a plethora of representations of those in poverty as duplicitous, feckless and they are there *by choice* suggesting their unreliability and dysfunctional nature.

If we accept that truth and power are intrinsically linked and that regimes of truth act as a form of governance and promote particular

ideological understandings, it could be concluded that it is inevitable that mainstream documentaries, the manufacturers of truth, rely on representations which function as markers of abnormality (and in some cases, criminality), in order to maintain the status quo through the process of governance.

The philosophy of 'reality'

Writing in the 1980s, Fredric Jameson voiced his fears about the consequences of what he called "the disappearance of the historical referent", which would leave us "condemned to seek History by way of our Pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach." (Jameson in Darley 2000: 72) In his analysis of visual digital culture, Darley concluded that we have indeed reached a point when:

> …computer imaging looks not so much to the world itself, as to already existing techniques of mediation, together with their attendant forms and styles. Prior forms, genres and works constitute a referential basis or ground for copying, acts of manipulation and recombination, and efforts aimed at further 'perfecting' and simulating the already mediated. (2000: 75)

Thus, examining the way in which we choose to represent dinosaurs, for example, an extinct prehistoric life form, has much to tell us about the role which new media might play not only in shaping our

understanding of the past but in determining our future relationship to reality itself in the postmodern world.

Looking at the work of W.J.T Mitchell (1998) the geneology of how these prehistoric creatures have remained prominent within popular culture builds upon the myth of the creatures as poweful entities capable of catastrophic damage, whilst at the same time ultimately failures as they were unable to survive extinction. How they are represented in various media forms, from film to comic-book, constantly evolving both culturally and visually demonstrating clearly how maleable and interconnected representation is, as visual technologies advance and contemporary dinosuars become bigger, bolder and more (assumed to be) life-like. However, as is often the case, to paraphrase the words of cultural theorist John Fiske, we take popular texts like *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) (explored in Chapter Three) for granted when we should be taking them to pieces, and in the case of arguably such a ‘frivolous’ example any (mis)understanding(s) are unlikely to have a profound social or political consequence.

Conversely, representations which seek to inform us of how others live their (contemporary) lives, of whom we have no direct lived experience, help to shape our understanding of whom we belive they to be. In this case however, rather than being frivolous, the affect of reading these representations as ‘truth’ can have profound social and

political consequences outside of the frame of the transmission-screen. In *The Precession of Simulacra* (2004) Baudrillard identified four sucessive phases associated with the reliability of images:

> it is the reflection of a profound reality;
>
> it masks and denatures a profound reality;
>
> it masks the *absence* of a profound reality;
>
> it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum. (6)

These phases are defined via three specific epochs, which Baudrillard identified as the *Order of Simulacra*. He proposed that the 'real' existed unproblematically until the *First Order* which went from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution. He proposed this to be an era in which counterfeits and false images were introduced into the social system. Signs became liberated from meaning and became negotiated representations of a falsity that signified something it was not. The *Second Order* coincided with industrialisation and processes of mechanisation which brought standardisation. As technology facilitated mass reproduction, these artefacts which became more readily available started to stand in place of the real; in other words, as signs began to mask the absence of reality, authenticity started to be judged against these copies.

By the *Third Order*, which Baudrillard identified as starting in the twentieth century, and in-which we exist now, signs became completely liberated from the real, and rather than stand in place of the real, have *become the real.* There is a collapse of the real with the imaginary, and in this epoch we simulate our own truths and present them through mediated discourses which are sold to us as representing reality. Documentary as a concept is complicit in this, as it's a culturally defined entity which uses a series of conventions to convince the audience that what they are engaging with is truthful, authentic, real.

To return to Baudrillard quoting Ecclesiastes “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.” (2004: 1) In the case of documentary it could be argued that that *framework* is also a simulacrum as it *pretends* to represent an unmediated reality when in actual fact, what it presents is a simulation of the truth. And in this process of engagement, as the audience accept these mediations *as* real, it is also being subconsciously re-enforced that documentary is a discourse in which truths are told.

Whilst analysing the concept of virtual reality, Žižek argues that it is offered as an authentic experience which is deprived of substance, and ultimately “Virtual Reality is experienced as reality without being so. What happens at the end of this process of virtualization,

however, is that we begin to experience 'real reality' itself as a virtual experience." (2012: 12) Amongst the examples he uses is the analogy between caffeinated and decaffienated coffee; decaffienated coffee looks and smells like the real thing, but is deprived of the element which arguably makes coffee what it is, caffeine. When we drink decaffeinated coffee we none-the-less feel like we have had an authentic, real experience, that we have in actual fact, drank coffee. If we accept that documentary works in a similar way, that we are offered a virtual reality that stands in place of the real, and that whilst engaging with the representations offered, if we feel we have had an authentic encounter with what is being presented, doesn't it become inevitable that we come to belive that the stories we are being told in these particular contexts are the truth?

Modes of documentary practice

While Bill Nichols was not the first to write critically about documentary film per se, his comprehensive work on the history and structure of documentary, drawn from his background in film studies, remains one of the defining approaches to understanding and deconstructing the narrative, form and structure of texts categories as 'factual'. His pioneering and influential work was developed across a number of texts including *Ideology and the Image* (1981), *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (1991), *Blurred Boundaries, Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (1995) and *Introduction to Documentary* (2001). Whilst he continues

to refine his thesis on factual discourses, these early texts were pivotal in his development and concretization of what has become known as the modes of documentary. Whilst it has to be acknowledged that his work has been critiqued and further developed by academics including John Corner (1996), Stella Bruzzi (2000), Brian Winston (1995; 2001) and others, who have identified limitations associated with his methodology, arguably these general categories are still useful in determining the ways in which a text 'speaks' to an audience and how that speech *may* be received.

In *Ideology and the Image* (1981) Nichols primarily explored the relationship between ideology and images and the affect this had on the audience, whilst in *Representing Reality* (1991) the basis for what can be understood as the modes of documentary was developed. In this book he identified four of the eventual six categories, and whilst he takes credit for the naming of the modes he is keen to acknowledge that the parameters of what is defined within these arise from a recognition through both critical reflection and on-going practical (production-based) engagement, with modes developing over time due to both technological changes and cultural factors. Nichols proposed:

> Modes of representation are basic ways of organizing texts in relation to certain recurrent features or conventions. In documentary film, four modes of representation stand out as

> dominant organizational patterns around which most texts are structured: expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive*. (1991: 32)

The asterisk above (in the original text) refers to a note which outlines the development of this (contemporaneous) work on formalising modes from his previous work in *Ideology and the Image.* (1981) He also acknowledges that his original work was further developed by Julianne Burton, which was useful in refining his analysis. Keen to stress that whilst his writing may make the modes *appear* to form a chronological, historical development of factual practices, that all the modes thus identified have been around since the inception of cinema, and:

> Each mode has had a period of prominence in given regions or countries, but the modes also tend to be combined and altered within individual films. Older approaches do not go away; they remain part of a continuing exploration of form in relation to social purpose. What works at a given moment and what counts as a realistic representation of the historical world is not a simple matter of progress towards a final form of truth but of struggles for power and authority within the historical arena itself. (1991: 33)

In other words, what Nichols is arguing here is that older forms of representation, in this documentary context, are remediated, their characteristics reconfigured as they are combined with new elements to form alternative ways of engaging an audience within a factual discourse. And crucially he is also acknowledging that discourses of power impact not only on *what* is presented, but *how* it is presented, implicitly suggesting that *how* stories are told can reflect prevalent (and often hidden) discourses of power, and these impact on how audiences' engage with the representations they encounter. In his discussion on ideology in the introduction to *Ideology and the Image* he asserts:

> Ideology is how the existing ensemble of social relations represents itself to individuals; it is the image society gives of itself in order to perpetrate itself….Ideology uses the fabrication of images and the processes of representation to persuade us that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have. (1981: 1)

Whilst the BBC have been criticised for having a particular institutional/ideological bias, and depending on the perspective of the audience these range from being too liberal, too left-wing, lacking impartiality, being culturally elitist, and so forth (Sewell 2012), the BBC remains one of the UK's most popular broadcasters. According

to the BBC Media Centre (2017) they were, as of the 25th May 2017, reaching a global audience in excess of 372 million across all of their current platforms. And the domestic market as of the first quarter of 2017 (January to March) according to a *statista* (2017) report, rated BBC1 as the most-watched channel, reaching an audience of 56.7 million viewers. Sister channel BBC2 rated 4th with an audience of 51.94 million.

Considered within this context, all of the case-studies analysed had a relatively good chance of reaching an audience, as they were broadcast across the various BBC channels, at differing times in the schedule. But crucially, all were commissioned *by* and *for* the BBC, and thus can be deconstructed to determine how the form and content of the texts conform to the ideological framework established by Reith, which formed the back-bone of public service broadcasting; that of education, information and entertainment. Nichols argues that:

> Images help constitute the ideologies that determine our own subjectivity; images make incarnate those alternative subjectivities and patterns of social relation that provide our cultural ideals or utopian visions. (1991: 9-10)

In the case of the BBC, in their capacity as the defining British public service broadcaster, one of its primary functions is arguably to engage with and present back to an audience issues of social,

cultural and political interest, and importance, in as unbiased a way as is possible. However, this is a utopian position and fundamentally flawed as he goes on to say:

> Documentary, like other discourses of the real, retains a vestigial responsibility to describe and interpret the world of collective experience, a responsibility that is no small matter at all. But even more, it joins these other discourses (of law, family, education, economics, politics, state, and nation) in the actual *construction* of social reality. (1991: 10)

And this is crucial as here Nichols is acknowledging the artifice that is inherent in the creation of texts which purport to represent reality. While the BBC as an institution may promote the mantra of impartiality, and trade on the ethos of its public service broadcasting remit, it is not divorced from hegemonic ideological influence, and the stories it chooses to tell, and how it chooses to tell them reveals much about the political ideology at the heart of the institution. Nichols identified three criteria by which a text could be analysed in relation to the concerns raised; "from the point of view of the filmmaker, the text and the viewer." (1991: 12) and it is in an analysis of the text itself which reveals much about the concerns of the BBC and the ideological position it takes in constructing narratives around a range of differing subjects, from the authored documentary *Rain in My Heart* (2006) explored in Chapter Seven, to the representation of

the (extra) ordinary lives played-out on screen in the *ONE Life* (2003) series analysed in Chapter Five.

As Nichols further developed his work on modes, in *Introduction to Documentary* (2001) he expanded upon his original thesis of four, and introduced two further categories; participatory and performative. Stressing once again that he was not engaged in producing a historical analysis of documentary practices, rather his work aimed to identify the strategies which filmmakers have adopted/developed in order to represent reality. In the book he asked a series of questions relating to the concept of documentary, and in Chapter Six, 'What Types of Documentary Are There?' (2001: 99) he worked through the (now) six modes, which he described as "a loose framework" (2001: 99), giving an overview of the aesthetics associated with each mode, alongside questioning the ways in which they developed their narrative engagement and gave key examples of texts belonging to each category.

Nichols was also keen to stress that whilst texts can be said to operate within a particular mode, that these were not mutually exclusive and whilst a text may predominantly use one particular style, it can also take from the other modes as and when appropriate. For example, if one of the defining features of the expository mode is the use of didactic narration to steer the audience into reading the

images on-screen in a prescribed way, its also not uncommon for contemporary documentaries belonging to this mode to include sequences which are associated with the observational mode, namely footage which appears to have been shot with no intervention by the filmmaker, with the original, synchronised sound in-tact:

> A film identified with a given mode need not be entirely so. A reflexive documentary can contain sizeable portions of observational or participatory footage; an expository documentary can include poetic or performative segments. The characteristics of a given mode function as a *dominant* in a given film: they give structure to the overall film, but they do not dictate or determine every aspects of its organization. (2001: 100)

Whilst modes may come in and out of favour, what remains a constant is the status of the representation as a mediator of reality, the mode being a strategy used to present a discourse which purports to represent the ‘real world’:

> New modes signal less a better way to represent the historical world than a new dominant to organize a film, a new ideology to explain our relation to reality, and a new set of issues and desires to preoccupy an audience. (2001: 102)

Audience is main the focus of Annette Hill's (2008) analysis of modes in *Documentary Modes of Engagement* where she examines the way in which (contemporaneous British) audiences engage with current television documentary practices. Her work identified not only the ways in which audiences responded to differing modes, per se, but how in individual documentaries differing forms of engagement were encouraged due to the eclectic mix of strategies now at-work in mainstream documentary.

Hill also identified the cultural context of documentary, and acknowledging the specific response identified in British television audiences, she says "…what is understood as documentary in one country can be quite different to the classification of documentary in another country with different production contexts and traditions." (2008: 231) Implicating the audience-reception in the identification of texts *as* documentary, and also as a *specific form* of documentary Hill argued that there is no one particular *kind* of viewer, but many kinds who bring their own cultural baggage to the interpretation of documentary forms.

In her research she also concurred with the general assumption that certain documentary forms attract particular audiences, in relation to socio-economics and gender, and the impact these audiences have on the development of factual discourses on British television. As

broadcasters want to capitalise on as wide an audience as possible, it becomes inevitable that remediation across generic boundaries occurs, and in relation to documentary, it's the characteristics associated with popular factual programming that have arguably had the most impact. (see Winston 2000; Corner 2002) Whilst popular factual draws upon generic conventions associated with other forms of popular programming, such as soap opera, light entertainment and drama, the impact this has had on traditional documentary forms has not gone unnoticed on audiences who recognise the changes and in the research Hill conducted, do not always think the changes are a positive move, arguing that there is a dumbing-down within *some* documentary practices. (2008: 221)

It is against this backdrop of a knowing, eclectic audience that a re-evaluation is needed of the ways in which Nichols modes engage an audience in relation to representations of the real. If, as Nichols argues above, all modes are acknowledged *as* representing the real, the differences relate to structure in that each utilise differing strategies, and that these come in and out of favour, how can this be ratified against Hill's (2008) findings that "Observational documentaries are perceived by audiences as performative."? (2008: 224) In Nichols' original work (1991) the observational mode "…stresses the non-intervention of the filmmaker." (38), and later he goes on to say "All of the forms of control that a poetic or expository filmmaker might exercise over the staging, arrangement, or

composition of a scene became sacrificed to observing lived experience spontaneously." (2001: 110) And whilst questions of authenticity have been raised in relation to this mode; whether the protagonists modify their behaviour because of the presence of the camera, there is the implicit acknowledgment that whatever action the camera captures would have happened *whether it was there or not*.

In contrast:

> …performative documentary freely mixes the expressive techniques that give texture and density to fiction (point-of-view shots, musical scores, renderings of subjective states of mind, flashbacks and freeze frames, etc.) with oratorical techniques for addressing the social issues that neither science nor reason can resolve. (2001: 143)

This modes emphasis on the evocative, expressive representation of a subject, which often lacks objectivity, is in direct opposition to the seemingly un-stylised representational strategies used with the observational mode which trades on its ability to bring to the audience unadulterated authenticity. However, the respondents to Hills survey were arguably using the term performative in a different context to how Nichols intended the mode to be read. Whilst the "performative turn" has been explored by Hill (2005; 2008) and Corner (2002) in previous work, one of the questions asked in the

survey was whether they agreed or not that “…people acted up…” (2008: 223) in certain genres of factual programming. In this context, whilst acknowledging *some* of the (traditional) perfomative techniques associated with this mode, what Hill is referring to is the way in which *performance* is articulated through the central protagonists; if we accept that protagonists in observational documentaries act as though the camera *were not* there, in contemporary observational documentaries they act as though the camera *were there.* In this example, its oxymoronic to suggest that on the one hand reality is represented via a strategy which encourages objective authenticity, yet (perceived) subjective construction lies at the heart of the performance of the central protagonists.

Given the modes were developed over a number of years, and documentary practices have subsequently evolved, with contemporary mutations such as the docu-soap not even in production when the original thesis was conceived, its inevitable that direct application of the framework is problematic. However, as a method for describing particular formal properties and how these relate to narrative engagement, they remain a useful tool, and one which has direct application to all of the case-studies examined within this work.

Spectacle

In his work on early cinema, Tom Gunning argued that audience engagement occurred through the filmmaker's desire to show rather than tell a developing narrative. In *The Cinema Of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde* (1997) he noted it was " ...an exhibitionist cinema" which featured "...the recurring look at the camera by actors..." which "is here undertaken with brio, establishing contact with the audience." (1997: 57) In summing up, Gunning explained:

> ...the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle - a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself. (1997: 58)

Later in the article Gunning asks himself what happened to this form of filmmaking, and mused that from the period 1907 to around 1913 "…*narrativization* of the cinema" (1997: 60) occurred and psychological realism took president over what could arguably be described as a breaking of the fourth wall. That is not to say that spectacle became completely redundant, but rather than the hypermediated presentation which dominated primitive cinema, what became the institutional mode of representation was the immediacy of classic Hollywood narrative which seemingly drew an audience

into a world where the boundaries of production were hidden from sight.

But this drive away from spectacle and into a more immersive, narrative-based experience is not as simplistic as this would suggest. In *Spectacle, Attractions and Visual Pleasure* (2006) Scott Bukatman acknowledges that Gunning's essay has been "immensely important to the study of visual culture as well as the cultures of sensation and sensationalism." (55) However, comparing Gunning's seminal essay with that of Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) Bakutman identifies the role of spectacle in Mulvey's essay and the similarities between her and Gunning's work. And there are clear correlations between how Mulvey identified how women are looked-at on-screen, and certain other forms of representation on television. Mulvey claimed "Going far beyond highlighting a women's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into spectacle itself." and this can be said to be true of the form of engagement encouraged when watching the case-study explored in Chapter Four, *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001). The animals, sought out for how effective they were at killing their prey, turned them into a spectacle in much the same way Mulvey identified classic Hollywood cinema turned women into spectacles themselves.

What draws together Gunning and Mulvey in the work of Bukatman is the acknowledgment of the continued presence of spectacle; for Mulvey spectacle (in the female form) was dangerous, as it formed a narrative disruption and had to be contained; for Gunning it will always be present but in a diluted form from the original context identified in the pre-cinematic, non-narrative mode. The commonality between Mulvey and Gunning lies in the acknowledgement that whist spectacle is a *distraction* it also forms part of the *attraction* of the text and therefore whilst creating a disruption to narrative flow, is still intrinsic to the pleasure associated with engaging with the visual. In *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001), the ethological (intellectual) discourse is disrupted with visual spectacles of exoticism, and displays of violence. However, these are ultimately contained within the overall narrative structure of the programme.

Whilst both Gunning and Mulvey were discussing film in a cinematic context, arguably since its inception, television has traded on being a medium which was often considered as immediate, in a way in which the cinema never could be. (White 2003) Television audiences were able to engage with live broadcasts, and if not always live, often the pre-recorded content had had a studio audience present at the time of making. That is not to say that aspects of content which appeared to be live were not highly rehearsed (and often on delayed transmission), but the intimate nature of the domestic television broadcast, combined with the often direct-address of presenters or

acts looking straight into the camera, out towards an assumed audience, meant that some of the spectacle associated with the cinema of attractions was remediated into this new technological context. And developing this with regard to contemporary documentary practices, a convention which emerged through the BBC Community Programme Unit was that ordinary members of the public were able to tell their stories through a direct address to camera, in a way which has equitability to how Gunning discusses pre-cinema uses the look to engage an audience. (1997: 57)

An established practice within mainstream documentary across both film and television sees protagonists filmed against a plain backdrop either commenting on the footage we have just witnessed or expressing their feelings regarding what we have seen, and they themselves have been through. Perhaps one of the most interesting uses of this strategy is by the American documentarian Errol Morris who developed the Interrotron (1997), which is a device that facilitates the interviewee looking directly into the interviewers face which has been superimposed onto the front of the camera. The resulting image captured is that of the close-up face of the protagonist who is seemingly addressing the audience directly (as they talk to Morris). He has used this across both his cinematic and television work, and in the UK examples such as *One Born Every Minute* (2010-) and *24 Hours in A & E* (2011-) are amongst the longest running series which utilise this strategy.

The case-study *People Like Us* (2013) begins each episode breaking the fourth wall in this context, directly addressing the audience in the assertion, made by 18 year-old Amber Wakefield that “You’ze might think you know people like us, but you don't know nothing yet” (01.19-01.24) after we have witnessed a montage of images which are edited to affect a visceral response which arguably fulfils the expectations an audience has of the anti-social behaviour generally associated with inner-city housing estates. Combining the work of Sobchack (1999) Gunning (1997) and Baudrillard (2004) it could be argued that in the majority of cases, within a documentary context, the audience have no real experience of what is actually being played-out on screen; if Baudrillard is correct in his assertion that we deconstruct and understanding mediated representations of reality with reference to other representations we have experienced, our engagement with the ‘surface’ of an image and the affect it produces feeds into how we respond to the world *outside* of the mediated frame.

Sobchack suggests that the more we focus on the image the less we relate it back to our own lives, and the intercutting of the opening sequence of *People like Us* (2013) presents a montage of a-typical behaviours without any socio-political context. Gunning assert that the pleasure gained via the cinema of attraction is ocular, more akin to scopophilia, and the affect of watching spectacles of bad-behaviour feeds into the visual pleasure we gain from watching

documentaries which are categorised as poverty-porn; images which illicit visceral responses ranging from incredulity to anger and rage.

Both Foucault and Baudrillard drew on the work of Guy Debord, the French Situationist whose seminal work *The Society of the Spectacle,* originally published in 1967, presented his concept of spectacle. Situated within a Marxist context Debord argued that “All that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (2002: 12), which correlates directly with the philosophy developed within *The Precession of Simulacra* (Baudrillard 1993) and forms a foundation from which to analyse the culpability of the image in duping the audience into reading representation *as* reality. Developed through a series of points, Debord argues, with clarity and insight, the affect the commodification of society has had on social, cultural and political life, and the importance now placed on having rather than being, and more problematically *appearing*. The projection of the idealised, constructed self, which stands in place of an authentic representation of reality, dominates twenty-first century popular culture in all its mediated sources.

The opening points of his work argue that:

> 4 THE SPECTACLE IS NOT a collection of images; rather, it's a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.

> 5 THE SPECTACLE CANNOT be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm – a world view transformed into an objective force.
>
> 6 UNDERSTOOD IN ITS TOTALITY, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something *added* to the real world – not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the heart of society's real unreality. In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life. (2002: 12-13)

The perception that documentary is a source of knowledge which can to be relied upon to deliver objective information is completely undermined if analysed within this context. Documentary forms a social relationship between the images transmitted and the audience who engage with them (point 4, above), and whilst there may not be a *deliberate* distortion of the information being presented (point 5, above) the very act of presenting information in this context (utilising culturally defined codes and conventions associated with the representation of reality) turns the information being presented *into*

objective truth. In this context, *People Like Us* (2013) not only becomes a mediated representation with which an audience can engage on a visceral level, but one which lies at the heart of Debord's "real unreality" (point 6, above) in the assertion that spectacles are both the outcome and the goal; these manufactured representations of a community which stand in place of the real, for an unknowing audience *become* the real.

In 2003, Geoff King convened *The Spectacle of the Real* conference at Brunel University, which saw a gathering of academics delivering papers critically exploring the concept of spectacle and the representation of reality in it's wider social and political context. One important theme to emerge from this conference was the identification of the relationship between spectacle and reality in all its manifestations, and the cross-cultural hybridity of works which remediate the codes and conventions associated with one media-context, to present reality in another. In King's paper he identified the strategies used by news broadcasters in the aftermath of 9/11 to re-present the image of the Twin Towers' destruction as a "Hollywood Movie." (authors own conference notes, 2003) After the initial footage was broadcast, the sourced images were repackaged and edited into sequences which re-appropriated the ways in which Hollywood disaster movies presented their spectacles of terror, thus blurring the line between fictional discourse and the representation of reality.

While this may appear somewhat outside of the scope of the documentary examples explored within this work, the process of re-appropriation and remediation associated with spectacle used in this way has direct correlation with the case-studies contained here-within. An immediate and obvious example is the use of the iconic scene from Attenborough's *The Trails of Life* (1990) in episode three of *Walking with Dinosaurs,* (*Cruel Sea* 1999) as identified in Chapter Three; the way in which reality, in this context, is represented remediates the spectacle of danger already ingrained within the imagination of a natural history audience as it draws upon an iconic moment from this particular genre of programming. And in this context, what is most relevant, is that the genre *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) was utilising to authenticate *itself* as a series which *does* represent reality, was a genre which *we do* accept, generally unquestioningly, the narratives as presented, are authentic and 'real'.

The publication which came out of this conference continued the debate and highlighted the complexity of what spectacle is and how varying interpretations can be drawn upon to deconstruct contemporary texts. Lockwood (2005) for example explores the relationship between early forms of phantasmagorical spectacle and the ideological implication of representing that which is not present, in relation to the representation of reality, and specifically contemporary images of terror. Aaron (2005), also discussing images of terror, draws upon psychoanalytic film theory to deconstruct the

role of the spectator in their complicit acceptance of images which are lacking in authenticity; spectators willingly suspend their disbelief and accept, as real, images which are placed before them in a self-reflexive act of “artful forgetting.” (215) And whilst Aaron makes reference specifically to cinematic examples in his work, this framework applies equally to televisual audiences who are active in their acceptance of the simulated reality they are presented with.

To return to the case-study in Chapter Four, *Steve Leonard’s Ultimate Killers* (2001)*,* the audience are presented with simulated spectacles of danger; each week, our intrepid hero goes in search of the most dangerous creatures on the planet, and has a deadly encounter with them. To disavow within this process of engagement, in other words to accept that these are manufactured situations, would be to question the very foundations by which the audience make sense of the world, and if the cultural conventions associated with the representation of reality are in-tact, why question the spectacle of reality they are confronted with? This concurs with Darley (2000) who argues that engagement with pure forms of spectacle requires passivity:

> Spectators are solicited and engaged in that case at more immediate and surface levels. And I dare to suggest that such engagement entails something of a shift in sensibility towards far more involvement with surface appearances, composition

> and artifice – towards too, increased connections with more directly sense-based aesthetic experiences. (4)

In *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001), the sense-based aesthetic experience promotes a visceral response in the audience of wonder/horror/fear/anxiety/amusement as our warrior is confronted with arch-enemies from the natural kingdom, who could potentially inflict pain, injury and in the worse case scenario, death.

King (2005) himself takes up this important aspect of the image *as* spectacle, in and of itself, acknowledging that alongside the socio-political context runs the engagement of audiences with images that act as pure wonderment. This is developed by Pierson (2005) who argues that visual reconstructions ask you to admire them as authentic and also admire the skill of the visual representation, in and of itself. Again, this aspect is crucial to the example cited above, as audiences are engaged through the visual spectacle of the main protagonist in situations of potential danger, that whilst not *re*constructions, they are very much manufactured *constructions* (or arguably contrivances) of situations that in some cases would be highly unlikely to occur in the 'natural' world.

Whilst all of the approaches explored thus far are applicable to deconstructing televisual examples, in the introduction to *Spectacular Television: Exploring Televisual Pleasure* (2016) Helen Wheatley

defines what *she* believes *spectacular television* is and what pleasure is gained from engaging with it. Acknowledging the ways in which class are embedded into differing types of spectacle, she identifies wildlife programming as "…designed to be aspirational and to draw on established upper-middle-class taste and cultures" (6) with reality-programming and popular documentary series drawing on "more working-class traditions of spectacular presentation" (6) which take inspiration from vaudevillian and performance-based traditional entertainment forms. Wheatley clearly presents the development of spectacle across television history, and draws upon a number of key academics to present the parameters of her research. Of particular interest are John Thornton Caldwell and Mimi White, whom she critiques, taking elements of their work to form the basis of her re-evaluation of how spectacle operates across British television.

From Caldwell, Wheatley examines his re-evaluation of John Ellis' glance theory (1982), which comes under the umbrella of approaches commonly referred to as medium theory, spearheaded by the academic Marshall McLuhan who in 1964 wrote the influential *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Ellis formed an approach which was an oppositional response to the cinematic gaze theory, in which he argued that television audiences were a distracted audience, in part due to the segmentation encountered by flow. However, Caldwell critiques this assertion and proposes that rather than television audiences being distracted (in opposition to

cinematic audiences who were drawn into their medium) that there is more commonality between the two mediums than is generally acknowledged. In particular Wheatley draws from Caldwell's work the idea that television can be a visually engaging medium, working similarly to the ways in which cinematic forms visually engage their audience, working hard to attract the attention of the viewers through their use of a tele-visual (formal) language.

In this context, the visual pleasure associated with the institution of cinema traverses the boundaries of medium, and television can become 'spectacular' as it elicits audience engagement through its visual address. And whilst Caldwell historicises this process, arguing that perhaps there was *some* merit in the glance theory when analysing early, more primitive forms of television, Wheatley suggests that this is not, in-fact, the case, and that throughout history 'spectacular' television has always existed. (2016: 5)

White also challenges establish theory in relation to audience engagement with television and taking Gunning (1997) as a starting point provides another re-working of the cinema of attraction to incorporate television as a medium in which *showing* has as much validity as *telling,* and that rather than an audience merely *glancing* at the screen, they are visually drawn-in to the spectacular nature of the on-screen images. In *The Attraction of Television: Reconsidering*

Liveness (2003) White explores examples of live broadcast which predominantly use static imagery which somehow captivate the audience and draw them into the screen without the artifice generally associated with the concept of visual spectacle; no fast edits, just gentle, moderately static images which*,* through their relative banality, manage to engage an audience into a televisual gaze as oppose to a televisual glance.

But what if *showing* becomes *the* critical tool, for a wider social, political and cultural engagement? If the thesis of the televisual gaze is correct, and that audiences are draw-in to a medium in which spectacles replace critical engagement, this would concur with Neil Postman in his assertions that television is a site where entertainment takes priority *whatever* the subject being explored. In *Amusing Ourselves To Death* (1987), he explores American television and argues that "American television is, indeed a beautiful spectacle, a visual delight, pouring forth thousands of images on any given day." (88) He goes on "Moreover, television offers viewers a variety of subject matter, requires minimal skills to comprehend it, and is largely aimed at emotional gratification." (89); any genre of programming, from hard-news through to children's light entertainment, operates at this affectual level:

> The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as

> entertaining, which is another issue altogether. To say it still in another way: entertainment is the supra-ideology of all discourse on television. No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure. (89)

If Postman is correct in that we are captivated by entertainment and fail to look beyond the surface of this form of spectacle, what effect does this have on factual discourses such as documentary? For the BBC, broadcasting within the ideological remit of information, education and entertainment, if, for example, a programme is not immediately *entertaining* will the audience tune-out to find a more engaging or amusing spectacle? Discussing the concept of truth, Postman states "Truth does not, and never has, come unadorned [....] Each culture conceives of it as being authentically expressed in certain symbolic forms that another culture may regard as trivial or irrelevant." (1987: 23) In British television culture, established documentary forms are perceived as being sites where the truth *is* told; these are culturally-negotiated forms of representation which generally remain unquestioned. But if, as Postman argues these cultural forms are tainted with the burden of having to amuse and entertain within their discourse, and that they have not to be intellectually 'challenging', what effect does this have on both *how* subjects are mediated to the audience, and which subjects take priority?

Remediation

In their book, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2000), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin argue that digital visual media can best be understood by examining the ways in which they relate to earlier technologies of representation, a relationship which is a complex mix of homage, critique and revision. They also suggest that this process, which they refer to as *remediation* takes two main forms: immediacy, in which the presence of the medium is downplayed in order to achieve an effect of transparency and realism, and hypermediacy, in which the medium is foregrounded and draws attention to its own artificiality.

They argue that in order to understand more fully the cultural significance of new media technologies, there is a need to focus on the nature of their relationship with earlier technologies of representation and already existing media forms. Moreover, they believe that by examining the various ways in which these new and old media interact with each other, valuable insights can also be gained into how we relate to these different kinds of media and interpret the differing ways in which they mediate reality.

For Bolter and Grusin, this relationship between media technologies is to be understood as a two-way, interactive process of recombination, reconfiguring and refashioning in which technologies

borrow freely from each other and media forms are endlessly recycled. They refer to this constant interplay between new and existing media technologies as remediation and although they argue that it can be considered to be one of the defining features of the new digital media which emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, they also point to its widespread use as a cultural practice in Western countries, and to its long history which they illustrate by means of a wide variety of examples. Moreover they examine how the process of remediation is directly related to the history of representation itself and to the twin styles or strategies of representation which have emerged over the course of the centuries, namely: (transparent) immediacy and hypermediacy. An overview of some of the key characteristics which are identified as being typically associated with each of these styles can be found in the table overleaf.

IMMEDIACY	HYPERMEDIACY
Ignores/denies the presence of the medium	Draws attention to the presence of the medium
Conceals mediation process and producer	Foregrounds mediation process and producer
Transparency	Opacity
Seamless	Fragmentary
Unified space	Heterogeneous space
One point of view	Multiplicity of points of view
Medium made to disappear	Medium foregrounded
Is often referred to as duping viewers into believing they are looking through a window onto the world	Normally thought of as alerting viewers to how the illusion of reality is created

Based on Bolter and Grusin (2000)

Successive developments in visual media, for example painting, photography, film and television, have all claimed to offer the means of better satisfying our desire to recreate the illusion of immediacy, of providing us with what is commonly referred to as a window on the world. Indeed, each new medium is normally sold to us as an innovation on the basis that it is an improvement on its predecessors

precisely for this reason: it will provide more natural colour, more life-like images, etc. When the new medium becomes a serious rival for the socio-cultural prestige formerly associated with the older media, and/or a probable competitor in economic terms, the more traditional media typically respond by attempting to refashion or remake themselves in its likeness, by imitating and incorporating wherever possible aspects of its innovative features but without drawing attention to the source. Thus, for example, Hollywood films now routinely make use of digital compositing techniques to remove unwanted elements from scenes involving special effects or stunts, erasing anything in the finished product which threatens to disrupt the illusion of immediacy for the film viewer.

However, there is also another style of representation with an equally long tradition which Bolter and Grusin refer to as hypermediacy, a style in which the aim is to draw attention to the medium itself, deliberately highlighting the fact that what we view is not a transparent window on the world but merely a mediated representation. The idea of this form of representation is, in short, “to make the viewer acknowledge the medium as a medium and delight in that acknowledgement” (2000: 42) and the fragmented heterogeneity of a new media text, such as a World Wide Web page, could be considered to be the epitome of hypermediacy.

As Bolter and Grusin have argued, the relationship between older media forms (such as television, film, and the printed page) and New Media forms (such as computer animation and the World Wide Web) is a complex and constantly evolving process and our relationship with it a complex negotiation between wanting to be drawn into the text and yet delight in its construction. Perhaps best illustrated by recent interactive cinematic developments, such as the *Secret Cinema* franchise which (generally) takes older films and projects them into a cinematic event which demands audience participation: the epitome of dichotomy, juxta-positioning a traditional (passive) narrative experience and a live, interactive performance, the boundaries associated with contemporary cinema are torn-apart and we are encouraged to experience an affective dimension more generally associated with pre-cinematic performances of the late nineteenth century and the primitive cinema of the early twentieth century.

With remediation at the heart of these interventions, the audience are at once drawn in yet thrust out, through the complex interplay of immediacy and hypermediacy. And whilst it cannot be said that this is the same experiential relationship viewers have when watching *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) for example, the case-study explored in Chapter Three, as there are no demands upon the audience to be part of a performance, the affect produced is equitable as the

strategies used produce the same shifting from immediacy to hypermediacy, from inside the text to outside the text.

This also works in a similar way with texts that appear to knowingly subvert the conventions associated with particular practices. As previously noted, there are established codes and conventions associated with differing modes of documentary, which are generally used to encourage particular forms of engagement with the stories being told. In the expository mode for example, a passive unquestioning engagement is encouraged, in contrast to the more open, reflexive mode. However, there are documentaries which appear to traverse the boundaries in their use of form which confound the audience and somehow ‘slip’ between the twin states of immediacy and hypermediacy.

As documentary became an established form, it was inevitable it would be used to trick an audience into believing fictional narratives were real. Filmmakers began to use the form to tell fictional stories which the audience were encouraged to engage with *as though they were real*. In this sense, the audience willingly subjugated themselves into believeing what they saw to be ‘true’ (discounting examples which genuinley did dupe audiences, for example Orson Welles 1938 radio drama *The War of The Worlds* which utilised the conventions of news broadcast so authentically it was reputed to

have caused mass panic with listeners who believed it to be a truthful representation of actual unfolding events).

Thus, the case-study explored in Chapter Six, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005), presents an interesting example of a text which, whilst arguably a genuine documentary, does oscillate between the twin states of immediacy and hypermediacy as it takes the banal, established subject of many docusoap series, that of life in the work-place, but reframes it within a discourse associated more with mock-documentary. The use of irony in the form of filmmaker Richard Macer with his on-screen persona and detatched voice over, is reminisent of the BBC series' *People Like Us* (1999-2001) and *The Office* (2001-03) which both subverted the conventions associated with the established reality-television genre of the docu-soap. Just as you are drawn into the day-to-day dramatics of life on the shop-floor of an established fashion boutique, Macer pulls you out of your comfort zone and your attention is drawn to the constructed nature of what you are seeing.

However, this jarring oscillation does raise interesting questions above a mere critique of how the representation of reality is a construct; it raises interesting questions as to reality *itself* being a mediation in much the same way as Baudrillard suggested in his hypothesis of the simulacrum. With (arguably) extreme characters, volatile relationships and situations which questions our

preconceived ideas of what this particular industry is like, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) presents an intriguing remediation of both documentary form and (reality) content.

Chapter Three: *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999)

> "Every age creates prehistory in its own image." Adams (1999: 16)

Introduction

Natural history has been a staple genre on British television for many years. Encompassing a range of texts from the anthropomorphic programmes featuring Johnny Morris, through to the didactic style of David Attenborough and more recently the proliferation of computer-generated extravaganzas such as *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999), the genre has managed to retain a foothold in an increasingly diverse schedule. However, generic codes and conventions have dramatically altered in response to a number of variables including an increase in the range of television channels on offer, and an increasingly competitive market.

What this chapter seeks to do is examine the form of these changes. With reference to the concepts of spectacle and remediation, it will explore some of the ways in which *new* natural history is presented, focusing on the *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) franchise. It will not, however be suggesting that so-called blue-chip (high budget) natural history texts are no longer in production, rather that the range of programmes being made often supersedes traditional generic

boundaries in their attempts to capture the imagination of a contemporary audience. As noted by Wildscreen chief executive Jane Krish "The great thing about blue-chip is that, unlike pets and vets, they have a very long shelf life…" (cited in Clarke 2000:10) suggesting that repeated viewings (and potentially, international sales) are possible from a single blue-chip text, constructed utilising traditional codes and conventions. In this sense, it could also be argued that *Walking with Dinosuars* (1999) is a classic example of a blue-chip natural history series, however it is also an excellent example of *new* natural history programming.

Nevertheless, there are notable advantages related to *some* of the more contemporary texts, such as the 'pets and vets' programmes mentioned above, as their relative cheapness and quick production turn-around times mean that they are economical to produce, which off-sets their limited, long-term commercial value. As commissioning editors of specialist natural history channels (Discovery, National Geographic, Animal Planet) have more airtime to fill, it could be argued that the cheaper options are becoming increasingly attractive.

Traditional codes and conventions

The natural history genre encompasses a wide variety of programmes, but what all have in common are the codes and conventions used to enable the audience to understand the *kind* of text they are watching. Genre specific codes and conventions imply

the way in which an audience *should* read a text, and in this instance, as part of a larger body of works which purport to be representing reality, they are closely linked to the documentary tradition.

The texts tend to utilise a limited range of conventions, and follow a similar format in terms of content delivery. Viewers are encouraged to read the text in a specific way; the relationship between the viewer and the text becoming more didactic, as the space for individual interpretation by the viewer is minimised. This results in a critical distancing from the text, as the viewer is encouraged to be a passive observer rather than an active interpreter. However, it should be noted that this passivity is carefully controlled through the use of formal elements which encourage specific visceral responces in the audience. In other words, the viewer is not encouraged to question the veracity of the story being told, whilst at the same time being cued to respond the the story in specific ways.

This cue is often provided by the strong musical score that underlies the majority of the action on screen, with the viewer encouraged to have a specific emotional response to the programme. Natural history is a genre that relies on our engagement with the image presented to us on-screen, whether this is a close-up of a microworld not normally visible via the naked eye, or a view of a snow leopard, so rare that it takes months of tracking to film. What the audience are ultimately being asked to do is emotionally connect to the natural

world in ways which we, as humans, can relate to. This is why anthropomorphism is so prevelant in this genre of programme making, creating empathy via these artificially constructed cues.

The use of didactic narration is a common generic feature, enabling chunks of information to be related to the viewer in an economical way. No amount of visual persuasion could explain the history of the dinosaur, for example; we need the accompanying voice-over as a link to the visual images. Often displaying strong expository elements, events are explored and historical developments charted, with the narration tending to be paternalistic, and authoritative. Academic superiority is often established by the use of experts drawn from a variety of fields who validate the point of view being expounded. The authoritative commentary by an omniscient narrator is combined with the objective discourse of scientific knowledge (facts and figures) and peppered with touches of anthropomorphism.

It has to be noted, however, that often the narration is not performed by an academic authority, but someone from other fields of 'performance'. *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999), for example was narrated by Sir Kenneth Branagh, who is acknowledged for his acting, directing and screenwriting credits, rather than his work within the discipline of natural history. Familiar voices bring a credence to

what is being presented and adds an air of authority where perhaps it could be argued there isn't one.

In *BBC Drafts In Stars To Save Wildlife TV* (2000) Katy Elliot describes the move towards the production of more celebrity-led programmes, featuring individuals who *sometimes* have a tenuous link to the genre, via other television work. These have included *Ground Force* (1997-2005) gardeners Charlie Dimmock and Alan Titchmarsh, *Vets in Practice* (1997-1999) vets Trude Mostue and Steve Leonard and *A Fish Called Wanda* (1998) actor John Cleese. Other British celebrities who have no previous link to wildlife but have presented one-off specials include *Robot Wars'* (1998-2001) Phillippa Forrester, ex footballer Ian Wright and *Eastenders'* (1985-) actors Ross Kemp and Tamsin Outhwaite.

However, natural history has always has its stars, most notably on British television David Attenborough, who has become the perceived authority figure of the genre. However, *his* exploration of the natural world still leaves the *issues* at centre-stage, unlike this new development which often focuses on the celebrities' experience of nature, rather than nature itself.

Techniques associated with the observational mode of documentary practice are also used to encourage the breakdown of the barrier between a subject, the representation of this subject, and the audience. Natural history series endeavour to achieve this by taking the viewer into locations and situations that they would not generally be have access to. An attempt to show material as unadulterated as possible is a primary focus, promoting the idea that the action would have taken place regardless of the camera. And the primary *subject* matter is an exploration of the natural world, with the texts typically focusing on living things (most commonly animals or plants) in their wild state.

Narrative conventions include following the patterns established by particular natural cycles, such as the changing seasons or of individual life forms, showing birth, growth, reproduction, maturity and death. Historically, programmes have been shot on location, showing the living things interacting with their environment, possibly as part of a larger ecosystem. However, it has always been common to ‘stage’ action in studios where conditions are easier to control and manipulate.

In general, the natural history genre has been quicker than most to make use of new technological developments to provide viewers with access to what would usually remain inaccessible. Many wildlife

documentary series have made a particular feature of the fact that they are offering viewers a privileged, almost voyeuristic, glimpse of a world that would normally remain hidden, for example David Attenborough's *The Private Life of Plants* (1995) which even alludes to secrecy in the title.

Over the course of time, these new visual technologies have impacted on what viewers are willing to accept as being authentic in the context of representations of the natural world. Time-lapse or slow-motion sequences, infra-red or heat-sensitive imaging, the extreme close-ups of macro photography, all of these have become accepted means of portraying the reality of the plant and animal kingdoms, even though they show aspects of nature that would not normally be visible to the naked eye, and are manipulated forms of reality, presented to the audience as authentic representations.

Overview of contemporary generic forms

As established, natural history as a genre explores a range of issues relating to the natural world. Examining topics as diverse as the solar system, exploring the Kalahari Desert, to the mating habits of the shrew, these texts tend to concentrate on the natural world of the *here and now*. However, a relatively recent trend which has emerged, has been to examine the natural history of *the past*, resurrected via new technologies of representation. Using a combination of computer generated images, animatronics, archive,

and newly filmed-footage, programmes claim to be able to offer the viewer a glimpse of the past; an even more privelidged view into a world which we have no direct lived experience of, or indeed access to.

Alongside this glimpse into a past world came an opportunity to experience interactivity, provided you had the necessary technology available to achieve this. At the turn of the millenium there was a push towards producing interactive televisual experiences to capitalise on the changing technological landscape and provide a unique selling point (USP) which made series' stand-out. The convergence of television and the internet to both supplement a viewing experience and provide an alternative platform has gone from strength to strength, but the first BBC series to fully capitalise on this relationship was the series *Walking with Beasts* (2001). Receiving a BAFTA Interactive Award in October 2001 *before* the series first aired, digital viewers were able to experience the first interactive application developed for a factual programme. Live interactive elements, which were available whilst the programme was being broadcast, included being able to substitute the dramatic narration of Kenneth Branagh for a more scientific narration delivered by Dilly Barlow, who was a presenter on the BBC science and technology series *Horizon* (1964-) and a range of 'windows' displaying extra information whilst the main programme continued to play in a 'video window'.

However, this is not the full extent of the changes. New technologies have opened up a way of examining and presenting the *contemporary* world. The same technology that has enabled the past to 'come to life' has been used to visualise the contemporary natural world which until now we could only imagine. In the BBC series *Space* (2001) CGIs were used alongside filmed footage, a dramatic score and a film-star presenter (Sam Neill) to explore the solar system. It could be argued that the series lacked the austerity generally associated with explorations of the solar system, and by using an actor popular at the time of production and himself tenuously associated with science fiction films, through the *Jurrasic Park* (1993-2001) trilogy and the space film *Event Horizon* (1997), it could be suggested that in attempting to be populist it produced a rather dumbed-down science series. In combination with the spectacular scenery, which provided the audience with images beyond the realms of their imaginations, brought to life on-screen, it drew heavily on the *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) format to engage the audience and take them on a visceral journey.

As spectacle began to once again pervade the natural history genre as a primary point of engagement, the concept of how deadly nature and the natural world could be once again became a mainstream staple, although one could argue that the *Survival* (1961-2001) series often traded on this concept throughout the series' history. (Bousé 2000) However, ever-present on the outskirts of the genre, nature as

other, showcasing spectacular events has always had a place within the genre. From the early work of Jean Rouch, to the Italian filmmaker Gualtiero Jacopetti and the more contemporary examples of Godfrey Reggio, what all these filmmakers had in common was that their productions were distributed as cinematic releases, operating outside of the televisual mainstream.

Tending to remain specialist viewing, examples of anthropological and ethnographic films often highlighted what the western world perceived as representative of the natural world, and all that entailed. Films which charted extraordinary rituals carried-out by traditionally dressed indigenous populations, alongside such natural disasters as freak weather conditions and problems created by the direct intervention of humankind on nature. Many of the films were comprised of juxtaposed segments, edited together in a seemingly arbitrary manner, with the viewer being taken on a spectacular, visual, often visceral, ride, gaining little insight into the political or ideological implications of the situations being represented. (Goodall, 2006)

The contemporary reincarnation of this sub-genre of natural history takes the form one step further by placing a presenter in a central role. S/he encounters dangerous situations in place of the viewer who vicariously lives out the fantasy of danger in the safety of their armchair. Spectacle arises from the dramatic images of these up-

close and personal encounters with the unpredictability of nature, and will be further explored in Chapter Four *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001).

The impact of technology

As established, the natural history genre has always been quick to exploit new technologies in order to bring the audience privileged glimpses into a world generally inaccessible to the naked-eye. Whether filming underwater, in the dark or within exotic locations, one of the defining features of the genre is its ability to bring to the audience authenticity created via the presentation of the natural world in its natural-state. However this natural-state no longer needs to *actually exist*, for new technology has afforded the genre the ability to *re*present nature *as it might have been*, in addition to *as it is*.

Using technology previously associated with the film industry (primarily computer technology), the break-through series was the BBC co production *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999). Sold to more than 38 countries world-wide, it became the most-watched documentary ever broadcast on US cable television and was the nineteenth most-popular UK programme ever (up to 1999) according to BARB figures. (BBC 1999a) Although not the only series to exploit new technology to render 'visible' the 'invisible', it was the only one to *fully* utilise this form to produce texts which seamlessly combined a number of techniques which did, in fact, resemble the Cartesian notion of a

window on the world, and will be explored in greater detail in the case-study below.

By framing the creatures within a documentary context which trades upon its ability to produce authenticity and accuracy, the viewer is not only in awe of the *re*presentations, but is encouraged to read the images as truthful which is what the Channel 4 series *Extinct* (2001) also did when it used CGI's and animatronics to reanimate creatures that were also extinct. The series followed a conventional expository format with reconstructions illustrating an investigation into why certain species had become extinct. Although the series could be considered spectacular in the same way the *Walking with…* (1999 and 2001) series were, the impact of the images was diminished as the reconstructions used were for *illustrative* purposes only and any sense that the viewer was glimpsing real-life was lost. The investigative form the narrative took drew the viewer *away* from the world the (dead) animals inhabited and attention was drawn to the mystery of their extinction.

This use of reconstruction in contemporary natural history documentary is becoming an increasingly common feature. For example, in *Land of The Mammoth* (2001) (the follow-up documentary to *Raising the Mammoth* (2000)) thirty minutes-worth of computer generated sequences illustrate what has been learned

from the expedition of Arctic explorer Bernard Buigues, as he excavated the remains of a woolly mammoth in Siberia. Commissioned by the Discovery channel, the documentaries followed the work of the Arctic explorer and his attempts to excavate the remains of a woolly mammoth in a twenty-three-ton block of ice. In the second documentary, the remains are examined, further trips to Siberia covered and finally a computer simulation of how this new research impacts on our understanding of the existence of mammoths in the Pleistocene era.

As more texts incorporate computer generated images and animatronics to visually reconstruct “impossible photography” (Darley 2000: 108), this may result in it becoming a (new) convention of the genre, and perhaps ultimately detract from the images inciting a sense of (visceral) spectacle, as they become a norm, with their presence naturalised within unfolding narratives.

Although using new technology in this context is not restricted to representations of a bygone era, it would appear that this *kind* of subject matter lends itself more readily to the intervention of new technology. Rendering visible the invisible is a role that can easily be fulfilled by new technology, and productions such as *Prehistoric Park* (2006) which saw the naturalist Nigel Marvin collecting extinct creatures to form a ‘prehistoric park’ and *The Future is Wild* (2002)

which predicted creatures that *may* inhabit the earth in 200 million years time, exploiting these technological developments. Using a combination of CGI animation and live action footage it is inevitable that this will impact not only on traditional generic conventions, but also the actual *subject matter* viewers expect to find explored within contemporary natural history texts.

New natural history: The Walking with Dinosaurs (1999) phenomenon

It could be argued that in the year marking the countdown to the start of the new millennium, the BBC did not appear to be in the best of health. During 1999, the Corporation had seen some of its star talent and top executives defect to commercial television (Robins 1999) and was involved in a major battle with ITV about the latter's poaching of some of its most highly successful programme formats. (McCann 1999) There was a continuing debate about whether standards of public broadcasting were slipping (Jury 1999) and widespread discussion about the wisdom of the Corporation's decision to expand into New Media. All of this caused one journalist to suggest that the acronym BBC might be more accurately rendered as "Barren, Banal and Confused." (Robins 1999: 22) In mid-September 1999, the viewing figures for BBC1 were registered as being at their lowest for two years (Gibson 1999a) but less than a

month later, a six-part documentary series began which was to breathe new life into the schedules of the ailing channel.

According to Tim Haines, the producer of the series, *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) represented “the world’s first Natural History of Dinosaurs” and the truly innovative feature of the series was that it would provide viewers with “a window into a lost world”, allowing them “to believe that they [were] watching living, breathing creatures in their natural habitat.” (*WWD* press-pack 1999) The cover of the press-pack which accompanied the series confidently proclaimed that it was to be “The biggest thing on television in 200 million years.” Certainly it was the most expensive documentary series the BBC had ever been involved with at the time, at a reported cost of some six million pounds. Everything about the series was to be the biggest and best. It would show “the most spectacular creatures” and would make use of “the latest scientific thinking” and “state-of-the-art’ technology including advanced computer animation and animatronics.” (*WWD* press-pack 1999)

An impressive array of academics and technical experts were involved in the project which took over two years to bring to fruition. Seven palaeontologists had been employed as scientific advisors and more than 100 other academics from various fields had been consulted. Over a dozen animators from the award-winning company FrameStore had worked together with a small army of sculptors,

animatronics experts, sound designers and location crews to transform the original idea into televisual reality. The various contributions which all these groups had made to the creation of the series was explained in a 50-minute documentary, *The Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs'* (1999), which was screened along with the series in October 1999.

Another key innovation was to have a BBC Online website www.bbc.co.uk/dinosaurs (no longer available) linked to the series, which, according to BBC marketing information had nearly one million hits in the first week of transmission. Accessible from mid-September 1999, information was added to the website week-by-week as the programmes progressed, to create a vast educational resource. As well as articles written by experts, and facts and figures about the dinosaurs featured in the series, the website had more interactive aspects such as games and a forum where visitors could ask questions or make comments. In addition, there were three opportunities to chat live online to experts and those involved in the making of the programme. A BBC book to accompany the television programmes was the first of what was to become a long list of merchandising spin-offs, which according to Gibson (1999b) were reportedly expected to make in excess of 60 million pounds for the corporation.

Peter Salmon, the then-controller of BBC1, had predicted that the series would "dazzle audiences with the breadth of its imagination and the quality of its scholarship." (*WWD* press-pack 1999) Certainly, if viewing figures are to be believed, then *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) was an astonishing popular success. According to BARB there was an audience of 15 million for the first episode broadcast on 4th October 1999, with another 3.91 million tuning in for the repeat on the following Sunday, making it by far the most watched science programme in British television history. (*The Guardian* 1999c) The reception from television critics, however, could best be described as mixed. At one extreme there was wild enthusiasm (see Boucher 1999; *The Guardian* 1999a; Matthews 1999; Steel 1999; Viner 1999) and at the other, utter contempt, with the reviewer Jacques Peretti dismissing the programme as "A high-tech Sooty show." (1999: 2)

At least two journalists drew parallels between the subject matter of this series and aspects of the dire situation in which the BBC found itself; Lawson (1999) commented that:

> The fact that the BBC is seeking to recover from a period of bad publicity and uncertainty over its role with a programme about an all-powerful force which became extinct is unlikely to have been missed by senior executives. (1999: 17)

whilst Adams noted:

> *Walking With Dinosaurs* may have ostensibly been about the ancient past, but its real purpose was to suggest that in the

> digitalised (*sic*) television future the Beeb was not prepared to be easy prey for circling rivals scenting blood. (1999: 16)

Many others, though clearly impressed by the glossy production values, expressed minor or major reservations about the way in which the series presented mere speculation as scientific certainty. (see Banks-Smith 1999a; Brown 1999; Hanks 1999; Kellaway 1999; Lawson 1999; McKie 1999) Perhaps the most damning criticism was to found in a newspaper article written by Dr Paul Barrett, a palaeontologist from Oxford University who had been consulted on his specialism for the series. In his opinion, the BBC had "missed an excellent opportunity to produce a world-class science programme, and gone for the softer option of making a dinosaur soap opera instead." (1999: 8) There was also a certain amount of cynical comment from media journalists like Banks-Smith who suspected that the possibility to exploit the appeal of the series for younger viewers would not be lost on the BBC Worldwide executives responsible for the licensing of merchandising tie-ins: "I begin to think" wrote the journalist that "the whole thing is geared to selling chocolate dinosaur eggs to five-year-olds." (1999b: 22)

Bolter and Grusin argue that the two styles of representation (immediacy and hypermediacy) often coexist within media forms, and that effectively what we find is that many visual technologies display a tendency to "oscillate between immediacy and hypermediacy,

between transparency and opacity." (2000: 19) Moreover it is this oscillation, this switching between styles, which these theorists believe can provide "the key to understanding how a medium refashions its predecessors and other contemporary media." (2000: 19) The following analysis will demonstrate exactly how this oscillation works in practice and what it can tell us about the dynamics of the relationship between television, film, computer animation and the World Wide Web as they are played out within the various *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) texts.

Deconstructing the dinosaur

There can be no doubt that the key influence on Haines as producer of the television series was the genre known as Natural History documentary, with the press-pack dubbing the series "the extinct *Life on Earth.*" (BBC 1999b) The comparison makes an intentionally humorous reference to an earlier critically-acclaimed BBC series (first shown in 1979) but also attempts to position *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) within this tradition of high-quality natural history programme-making epitomised by the work of David Attenborough. There seems to be some evidence that *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) could be classed as an affectionate homage to earlier BBC wildlife programmes. Thus, for example, the opening sequence of episode three *Cruel Sea* (1999), in which a monstrous marine reptile, liopleurodon, unexpectedly pounces on a dinosaur, bears an

uncanny resemblance to one of the most memorable incidents from another of Attenborough's triumphs, *The Trials of Life* (1990) in which a killer whale suddenly surges out of the waves to gulp down an unsuspecting seal. The distinctive movements and sociable behaviour of the meerkats made famous in the documentary *Meerkats United* (1987) are also clearly the inspiration for the Leaellynasaura colony in episode five, *Spirit of the Ice Forest* (1999).

It is also worth noting, however, that the BBC discourse surrounding the series also acknowledged the fact that for the vast majority of television viewers the more obvious cultural reference point for *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) would have been the Hollywood blockbuster movie *Jurassic Park* (1993) and its sequel *The Lost World* (1997). Perhaps somewhat ironically, as if to emphasise this fact, *Jurassic Park* (1993) was broadcast on BBC1 only two days before the first episode of *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) was screened. To further strengthen the connection, an article which appeared in *Radio Times* to accompany the screening of the first episode of the series was entitled *Jurassic Parklife.* (*Radio Times* 1999) This kind of discourse was also reflected in other newspaper articles and reviews relating to *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) in which journalists drew constant comparisons, both implicit and explicit, between the factual television series and Spielberg's filmic fantasies. In *The Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs'* (1999), the behind-the-scenes documentary which demonstrated how academic

expertise had been used to ensure the scientific rigour of the series, allusions to Spielberg’s work continued, and whilst Spielberg’s creations are never referred to explicitly, statements such as “That's why you won’t see *our* diplodocus eating from the treetops” (28.16-28.20) are clearly intended to encourage the audience to draw comparisons between the factual (BBC documentary) and the fictional (Hollywood film).

So whilst the series was officially labelled as natural history documentary, it was also linked to a popular cinematic tradition of representing prehistoric life, effectively meaning that it was positioned between two sets of codes and conventions, relating to different genres and different media technologies. As indicated above, this mixing of fictional and factual genres appears to have made many critics rather unsure, at least, about how to approach the programmes. *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) drew upon already existing forms of televisual and cinematic representation and refashioned them via digital technology to produce a new kind of hybrid genre, a remediation which both celebrates and critiques the ways in which earlier technologies of representation have attempted to portray reality.

As already established, natural history documentary as a genre is celebrated for its engagement with, and portrayal of the natural

world, and it is typically expected that programmes of this genre will focus on living things (most commonly animals or plants) in their wild state. Thus when, for the first time, a series of this kind takes the extraordinary step of focusing on an extinct life form, it raises a whole series of fascinating issues about what the meaning of immediacy and hypermediacy in this context might be. Bolter and Grusin's observation about how viewers judged the reality of the computer-animated creatures in *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *The Lost World* (1997) is relevant:

> Because no one has ever seen a living dinosaur, the viewer is invited to measure the graphics by what she regards as plausible for such huge animals, although her sense of plausibility comes from other films and fiction. (2000: 154)

Haines, in making *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999), realised that in order to create the sense of immediacy that he wanted, what he called his "window into a lost world", he needed to ensure that his dinosaur protagonists did not depart too radically from their digital predecessors as envisioned by Spielberg, since this image was still fresh in the minds of viewers.

More importantly, however, Haines understood that viewers would also measure his televisual treatment of an extinct life form against the model of immediacy that had come to be associated with natural history documentary as a genre and in making the series he

deliberately set out to imitate aspects of this, wherever possible. The series used the usual narrative conventions of such programmes, as mentioned previously, following the patterns established by particular natural cycles, such as those of the changing seasons or of individual life forms, showing their birth, growth, reproduction, maturity and death.

The images were also accompanied by a voice-over which used the typical linguistic features of the genre, featuring the well-known actor and film director Kenneth Branagh, which provided further evidence of the high-profile status which the BBC accorded the series. One might also read this use of Branagh as an intriguing intertextual allusion. Much was made in both the popular press and in the *Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs'* (1999) of the idea that Haines and his technicians were bringing the dead back to life, so who better to narrate the successful outcome of this process than the man who had directed *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) and starred in this film as the scientist seeking the secret of reanimation?

Since historically natural history programmes have been filmed on location, showing the living things interacting with their environment, a number of suitable habitats were found and filmed as the backdrop to the various episodes in the series. Specially created animatronic models of the creatures to be included in the various episodes were

filmed in these locations so that they could be used for close-ups. Meanwhile the computer animation team at FrameStore worked on the digital dinosaurs for the series, modelling these on archive footage of living animals. The same company was also responsible for the final process of compositing, described in the booklet published to accompany the series as “the marrying together of real and virtual footage into a seamless whole” (*Radio Times* 1999: 49) and at first sight, this is exactly the impression that television viewers get.

However, on closer examination, each episode proves to be, like the series’ hypermediated website itself, a particularly intricate collage of fragments of disparate representations, including numerous clips from earlier wildlife documentaries showing real creatures believed to have formed part of the dinosaurs’ ecosystem. Examples of this include clips of insect life (dragonflies, damsel flies, dung beetles, tree grubs, butterflies); sea creatures (jelly fish, shoals of fish, sharks, horseshoe crabs); plant life (flowers, ferns); reptiles (snake) and the wildlife of the African savannah which concludes the final programme. The complex interaction between these different mediations and the varying degrees of authenticity that they represented proved confusing for at least one experienced television critic, as his description demonstrates: “Computer graphics generate the water and vegetation of the planet at that time while animatronic models reproduce the dinosaurs. [...] Winged creatures fly above

what seems to be real water before landing in a tree." (Lawson 1999: 17)

Given that, as Bolter and Grusin put it: "Whenever one medium seems to have convinced viewers of its immediacy, other media try to appropriate that conviction" (2000: 9), it was only to be expected that Haines would borrow heavily from both this televisual tradition in representing his own computer-animated creatures, and contemporary cinematic developments, in order to convince viewers of their immediacy. However, the aspect which distinguishes these digital creations from their filmic predecessors also proves to be most interesting in the context of remediation. There are numerous instances in the series when the dinosaurs are shown on screen in a way which imitates typical wildlife documentary styles. Thus the scenes involving representations of dramatic life-and-death encounters between predators and prey, such as a chase between some utahraptors and an iguanodon in *Giant of The Skies* (1999) are made to look as though they have been filmed in slow motion. In *Death of a Dynasty* (1999), comments relating to the physiology of the tyrannosaurus are accompanied by what appears to be a visual of the dinosaur produced by heat-sensitive imaging technology. Instances like these not only imitate particular televisual styles associated with the wildlife documentary but might also be said to celebrate certain distinctive aspects of older technologies of vision.

On reflection, perhaps the most interesting aspect of the series is the way in which it also chooses to reproduce the shortcomings and

flaws associated with traditional media in an attempt to convince viewers of the immediacy of what they are viewing. This forms an interesting contrast to the way those working in computer graphics often operate since experts in this area:

> …do not in generally imitate “poor” or “distorted” photographs [...] precisely because these distorted photographs, which make the viewers conscious of the photographic process, are themselves not regarded as realistic or immediate. (2000: 28)

Thus, for example, in *New Blood* (1999) and *Spirit of The Ice Forest* (1999) respectively, footage of cynodonts and leaellynasaura which has supposedly been shot under cover of darkness have the grainy, imperfect monochrome quality of night-time footage. There are also a number of instances when the viewers’ attention is apparently drawn to a particular shortcoming of the technology required for filming; namely, that the camera lens is not always able to offer us the flawlessly transparent window on the world that it should. Thus in *Time of The Titans* (1999), the image appears to go cloudy as the hot breath of a meat-eating utahraptor steams up the lens whilst in *Death of a Dynasty* (1999), as the camera moves in for an extreme close-up, the roaring tyrannosaurus seems to shower it with saliva, which again obscures the lens.

Analysis of these two incidents reveals the complexity of the interplay here between immediacy and hypermediacy. The viewers’ initial

impression that this is unmediated reality is proved false when their attention is drawn to the camera lens and from there to the camera which, it would appear, has been filming the scene. However, at the same time, the interaction between the subject being filmed and the camera lens seems to add a different kind of authenticity to the scene; the camera was apparently so close to the action that it became part of it.

Then immediately, viewers are forced to rethink these representations of close encounters with dinosaurs and to recognise them as a juxtaposition created by digital manipulation. For paradoxically, the moment that seemingly promises viewers the kind of authenticity they most desire in a wildlife programme is, in fact, the moment at which they are forced to acknowledge its status as mere fabrication, a perfect example of the oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy, between transparency and opacity. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the scene with the spitting tyrannosaurus should have become the most repeated image of the series, for it seems to symbolise what Bolter and Grusin identify as “the twin preoccupations of contemporary media: the transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves.” (2000: 21)

Reflecting on the reasons why viewers are so enthralled by Hollywood films like *Jurassic Park* (1993), which make use of digital special effects, Darley (2000) commented:

> It is the bizarre nature of the imagery, rendered so faithfully, that [...] *denies and simultaneously points to* the highly sophisticated artifice involved in its production. It is *both* the bizarre and impossible nature of that which is represented and its thoroughly analogical character (simulation of the photographic) that fascinates, produces in the viewers a 'double-take' and makes him or her want to see it again, both to wonder at its portrayal and to wonder about 'just how it was done.' (emphases in original 115).

Deconstructing the construction: The Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs' (1999) documentary

The Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs' (first broadcast in October 1999 shortly after the first episode of the series) can be read, on the one hand, as the BBC's attempt to respond to that viewer curiosity, the desire on the part of the audience to know exactly how the illusion of televisual immediacy was created. The documentary functions as a showcase for the talents of those who were involved in making the series and foregrounds a process of media creation in which technology such as computers and cameras take centre stage. At the same time, however, the programme is also clearly intended to

be a means of validating the series' claim to be fact-based documentary realism, and extensive footage of palaeontologists and other expert witnesses explaining how various aspects of current scientific research have influenced decisions concerning how prehistoric life was portrayed in the series is used as a means of authentication.

There are many sequences in the programme in which viewers see computer animators and academics engaged in dialogue and these can be read as an attempt to suggest that *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) represents the successful integration of these two very different discourses. Closer analysis reveals, though, that like the series itself, the documentary oscillates between the twin states of remediation; it makes extensive use of the established codes and conventions of immediacy but also alerts viewers to its status as a hypermediated textual construction. However, whereas the unresolved contradiction which lies at the heart of the series is only occasionally exposed, as though this were a momentary, inadvertent slip, it is openly celebrated in *The Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs'* (1999), a postmodern text which not only plays with established codes and convention relating to form and content but also draws attention to its own status as a remediation in a highly self-conscious fashion from the very outset.

Immediately following the spectacular effects of the opening sequence originally used for the series, an animated utahraptor appears dragging the words 'The Making Of' onto the screen underneath the usual title. This is followed by the typical images viewers might expect in a documentary about the making of a wildlife series, including a production crew (who are the real production crew of *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999)) who are seen setting up their equipment and preparing to film on location. The cameras roll as a tyrannosaurus and her young come into view but the programme-maker (later revealed to be series director and producer Tim Haines himself) stops the filming. Unhappy about the scene, he offers some directorial guidance to his prehistoric leading lady before commencing a second take.

As even this very brief sequence illustrates, the documentary (or perhaps this might more accurately be termed mock-documentary, a genre of documentary which is explored in more detail in Chapter Six) initially establishes a directly parodic relationship with the series as the new version of the opening credits deflates the rather overblown pomposity of the original. However, the scene which follows suggests a rather more complex intertextual relationship between series and documentary since it playfully exposes the bogus claims to immediacy offered to viewers by *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) (and, one could argue, by all wildlife documentaries). Indeed both computers and television cameras feature prominently

throughout the documentary, as if to emphasise that they, in fact, are the real stars of the show. Older media representations of prehistoric life forms (clips from *The Lost World* (1925) and an unidentified television documentary) are used as evidence of how previous attempts at capturing the reality of these creatures have failed.

For the purposes of an analysis concerning remediation and the ways in which media technologies interact with each other, one of the most interesting aspects of this television programme is its use of features which are reminiscent of the hypermediated style more typically associated with the new media, in particular the aesthetics of the World Wide Web. As a medium, television has been described as “the greatest synthesizer, turning to its purposes features drawn from all previous media” (Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1990: 96) and it has always borrowed heavily from other media rivals, constantly adding new visual styles to its own repertoire with the intention of persuading viewers of its immediacy. It is still this quality, identified by Flitterman-Lewis as its “peculiar form of presentness – its implicit claim to be live” (cited in Bolter and Grusin 2000: 188), that constitutes television’s particular claim to superiority over other traditional media forms such as film, for instance. The rise of reality television and the phenomenal success of this genre of programming which is still going strong in 2018, are evidence of the continuing popular fascination with this aspect of the medium.

However as viewing figures generally continued to drop as a result of the contemporaneous proliferation of various forms of home entertainment, television executives were also aware of the need to retain the interest of the younger audience who were becoming more used to the windowed and multi-mediated look of the computer screen. Not surprisingly, then, there seems to have been a deliberate attempt made in *The Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs'* (1999) to replicate the distinctive appearance of this 'new' medium on several occasions by splitting the screen to show three images simultaneously on screen. However since in every case these are interrelated, what viewers see is a much less radical form of montage than would be typical of the usual fragmented heterogeneity of a computer screen which might combine written text with video clips, still photographs and graphics.

At other times, the television screen is filled entirely by the digital animations generated by the computer and the two separate media spaces appear to have converged completely. On several occasions, however, there seems to be a conscious attempt by the programme producer to disrupt this illusion of convergence by ensuring that there is a visible reflection of the computer animator in the computer screen, so that viewers see a composite image of a human face superimposed on the digital animation.

The programme also seems to have tried to borrow another feature typically associated with new media forms, namely non-linear narrative. This is done by splitting the major part of the documentary into seven fragments, each of which focuses on a different aspect of the production of the series. Every section is clearly delineated with a separate title and opening sequence and although they are all related to the general topic of the series, each can function as a self-contained information unit, like entries on a multimedia encyclopaedia. The opening and closing sections of the documentary are largely made up of a montage of sequences taken from the series, that might be referred to as edited highlights inviting viewers to marvel at the visual spectacle that constituted a major part of the appeal of *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999).

However, this attempt at remediation ultimately fails because the documentary's voice-over effectively functions as means of anchoring these fragments, imposing a linear sequential structure on them and guiding viewers along a particular narrative pathway. This highlights perhaps what was, at the time, one of the crucial differences between the medium of conventional broadcast television and that of the Internet - the potential possibilities for interaction which they were able to offer the individual. Interactivity with television had until recently been limited to live studio debates, phone-ins or letters. Although new, future technological developments would allow viewers a plethora of opportunities to

become a more active audience, from the ability to chose camera-angles in sporting events, to emailing and tweeting programmes live or to webcast and fully interact with a programme as its airs, at the time of *The Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs'* (1999) this interaction was still very limited in comparison to the World Wide Web users' ability to navigate independently.

The role of the Walking with Dinosaur (1999) website

The official BBC Online *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) website became active in mid-September 1999, and amongst the many and varied offerings for site visitors was the chance to view a trailer for the series, prior to its television screening, still a relatively new concept at that time. The trailer made obvious intertextual allusions to Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) with its soundtrack reminiscent of the scene in which the thunderous footsteps of the gigantic tyrannosaurus are first registered as ripples in a glass of water and then heard approaching. Although the website no-longer exists in its original form, the link does still take visitors to a site exploring all-things dinosuar-ralated. The variety of formats in which these (original) resources were presented provided an idea of the potential which the web had to integrate and absorb all other more traditional media. Written texts, graphics, icons, images (including still photographs and video clips) and sound were used to present an eclectic mix of detailed facts and information about prehistoric life,

glossaries of terminology, extracts from the *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) series, jokes, children's paintings and interactive games and puzzles. Hyperlinks connect to other sites likely to be of interest to visitors including a related notice-board and, perhaps inevitably, the BBC Online Shop which carried a full range of *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) merchandising covering everything from books to cuddly toys.

Like many other media organisations in the 1990s, the BBC developed its website in order to complement its more traditional media products and although it was immensely popular with many different sectors of the audience, this new medium was at the time conceived of as a support for the Corporation's television and radio broadcasting, rather than the rival it could be considered today. Perhaps, then it would be more accurate to speak of the *Walking with Dinosaurs'* (1999) website as an interactive supplement to the television series rather than wholly a remediation of it. For although the website did indeed contain some of the images from the original series these made up only a very small percentage of the network of resources on offer, many of which expand upon aspects of prehistoric life only touched upon in the television series. Indeed visitors to the website may have been initially surprised by the fact that a significant proportion of the material it contained was presented in the form of written texts which at first sight closely resembled book pages or articles from journals. However, the crucial

difference between the traditional print medium and this kind of remediated text were pointed out by Ted Nelson, one of the originators of hypertext:

> Remember the analogy between text and water. Water flows freely, ice does not. The free-flowing, live documents on the network are subject to constant new use and linkage, and those new links continually become interactively available. Any detached copy someone keeps is frozen and dead, lacking access to the new linkage. (Nelson in Landow 1992: 59)

It is, then, the fact that resources on World Wide Web are refashioned to function as a vast interconnecting network which proves to be the most radical aspect of this form of remediation. For as Heinz Pagels has argued, “A network has no “top” or “bottom”. Rather it is a plurality of connections that increase the possible interactions between the components of the network.” (Pagels in Landow 1992: 25) This leaves the website user free “to choose his or her own centre of investigation and experience” and “not locked into any kind of particular organisation or hierarchy.” (Landow 1992: 13)

Curiously, given that much was made in the BBC *Walking with Dinosaurs* press-pack (1999) of the use of the state-of-the-art digital technology in the production of *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999), the

images taken from the series (whether still or moving) proved to be one of the least memorable features of the website. For whereas in the televisual context of the codes and conventions of wildlife documentary, these digital creations gave an impression of spectacular immediacy, once embedded as mere fragments in the hypermediated website, their visual impact became minimal. Ironically, it is only when they are repurposed in a way that emphasises their status as hypermediated representations, for example when they appear as characters in the computer games or as brightly coloured cartoon-like icons indicating hyperlinks, that they succeed in capturing our attention.

Bolter and Grusin have commented that despite the seeming lack of significance of this kind of technology, “web cameras are in fact deeply revealing of the nature of the Web as a remediator” (2000: 204) and certainly this was true in the case of this particular website. One of the website hyperlinks led to a page showing images produced by a web camera, apparently trained on some exotic location. In the web camera window, silhouetted against a bright orange sky (it appeared to be sunrise or sunset) one could just about make out in the distance the head and neck of some huge prehistoric creature stretching up out of a forest of trees. This, then, could be considered as a particularly intriguing example of what Darley refers to as “impossible photography” in which “the computer has been used to produce the effect of photo-realistic representation in a scene

that is conceptually fantastic in character – a scene that could have no direct correlate in real life." (2000: 108)

For although web camera technology normally suggests transparent immediacy, offering Internet users an unedited stream of images of some location in the physical world, what we had here was hypermediacy. This web camera simulation which reveals our fascination with media is the aspect of the website that most closely resembled the 'double-take' or oscillating effect produced by the television images of the spitting tyrannosaurus in *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) or the sequence of the crew filming on location seen at the start of *The Making of Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999). Yet again, transparent immediacy passed into hypermediacy before our very eyes.

Public Service Broadcasting or presumptuous folly?

If it is to be acknowledged that this was the first BBC series to *fully* embrace the posibilties of the World Wide Web, and to experiment with the conventions associated with natural history in its re-appropriation of them into a (digital) context which encouraged the audience to suspend their disbelief and whole-heartedly embrace what they are presented with on-screen as being truthful, factual, authentic, where does this fit in the ideological context of public service broadcasting?

If both Robins (1999) and McCann (1999) were correct in their analysis that the BBC were struggling, and overall viewing figures were in decline (Gibson 1999a) there needed to be a radical shift in their broadcasting approach to claw-back both the talent which had defected to commercial television, and the audience. Reflecting back to the *Television Act* (1954) and the introduction of Independent television, the monopoly once enjoyed by the BBC was again under-threat, and in the earlier period in television history it had been "forced to innovate in order to restore its audience share and maintain its legitimacy." (Mills 2016: 5) Mills goes on to argue that "…the relative autonomy it [the BBC] once enjoyed from corporations and the logic of the market has been steadily eroded since the 1980's." (1990: 9)

This point is crucial as it's an explicit acknowledgment that in order to survive in a competitive market, the BBC *had* to provide an audience with content which drew audiences in, and if this meant producing mainstream populist programmes then so be it. Perhaps Hughie Green was correct in his assertion that people didn't want what Reith would have argued was good for them; rather they wanted engaging, exciting television that offered them an entertaining distraction. (Green in Moran 2013: 105) And *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) did just that, but arguably it also did more; on the one-hand it was an exciting, big-budget extravaganza which provided an escapist spectacle, *but* via the accompanying website material was provided

which *did* fulfil an intellectual engagement with the subject of palaeontology. Whilst the website was populated with competing discourses, which included marketing opportunities to gain further revenue though book sales and other sources of income-generation, there was access to a wealth of academic material which certainly fulfilled the education and information aspects of the public service remit of the BBC.

With viewing figures revealing it be the nineteenth most-watched UK programme to-date [2001] and sales reaching 38 countries whatever criticism levied that the series was lacking in academic credibility and that it was all-spectacle and no substance, clearly didn't affect drawing in a world-wide audience, and a second series being commissioned off the back of its popularity (*Walking with Beasts* (2001)). Whilst the series was at the time the most expensive (co)-production in the history of the BBC, and according the *Guinness Book of World Records* (2017) the “Most expensive television documentary series per minute” costing “…over £37,654 ($61,112) per minute to produce…with each episode having a running time of 27 minutes, cost[ing] a total of £6.1 million ($9.9 million).” (Guinness Book of World Records 2017), it didn't have a detrimental affect on the overall profits of the BBC with their distribution arm, BBC Worldwide sales increasing from £409 million in 1997/98 to £420 million in 1998/99 and £464 million in 1999/2000. (BBC Worldwide Limited 2001) By 2000/01 this had further increased to £520 million

and whilst it is difficult to extrapolate the profits the *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) franchise generated, it would certainly seem that it made a positive financial contribution and added to the international portfolio of the BBC.

The *BBC Annual Report and Accounts 2000/2001* (2001) stated:

> BBC Worldwide's strategy focuses on exploiting brands on a multimedia, multi-territory basis. Our global brands (eg *Teletubbies, Tweenies, Top of the Pops, Walking with Dinosaurs*) now yield an increasing percentage of our business. Overseas business now accounts for 42% of all our business. (24)

concurring that the brand was very much entrenched in the BBC's international presence. This being the case, it was a shrewd move by the BBC to invest in a series which was arguably informative and educational, and most definitely entertaining and spectacular, with an appeal universal enough to capture a world-wide audience. The allure of dinosaurs cuts across gender, age and culture and Mitchell (1998) made an interesting point when he suggested that whilst children appear to be the *principle* audience for dinosaurs that in-fact not all children are engaged by them. He relates his own experience, admitting he didn't engage with the dinosaur until he was an adult and had watched *Jurassic Park* (1993):

> It wasn't until I saw *Jurassic Park* that I finally got the point. Dinosaurs, I realized, were just as saturated with romance and adventure as the dragons. I had just been looking for the romance in the wrong place – namely, in the real lives of dinosaurs, which, apart from occasional episodes of spectacular violence, were probably quite dull. There was romance aplenty, however, in the activities surrounding dinosaurs – in the heroic quest-romances in search of their bones, the intricate detective work of their reconstruction, the magic of their visual resurrection…The romance was to be found, in short, in the history of the dinosaur image that you have just read. (213-232)

What Mitchell had identified concurs with the notion that it is the *visual* image of the dinosaur that holds the major appeal, and that Haines, when he compares *our* dinosaurs with that of Spielberg's (*The Making of Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999)) what he is in actual fact doing is cleverly drawing the audiences' attention to the spectacularly iconic images so ingrained in popular culture. Therefore, in this context, to prioritise entertainment, in order to draw an audience in to inform them and educate, would appear to have been a wholly appropriate strategy by the BBC to use. *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) had enough visual appeal to engage on a visceral level, and *did* use the framework associated with natural history series. However, the educational remit, whilst not absent from the

series itself, flourished in the supplementary extra-diegetic material which was available on the web.

Conclusion

Natural history has developed, and arguably flourished (judging by the plethora of digital channels dedicated to the genre) by remediating the codes and conventions of a variety of genres in order to survive in the twenty-first century television schedule. However, this has meant that some of the hybrid forms which have developed often bear little resemblance to the iconic programmes generally associated with the natural history genre, as it has had to develop a new aesthetic to cater to the demands of a changing audience.

The role of new technologies of representation and the demand for a more immersive, interactive experience has led on to the development of series' which utilise cutting-edge technology which has previously been limited to use on Hollywood blockbuster film productions. However, this in turn brings with it its own problems, as the spectacle of the visual image often overshadows the very 'history' being explored. As we are *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) it is easy to forget that this was billed as "the world's first natural history of Dinosaurs" providing the audience with a "window into a lost world", in order to make us believe that what they were watching were "living, breathing creatures in their natural habitat." (*WWW* press-

pack 1999) Jasper James, series producer for *Walking with Beasts* (2001) was asked to comment on the accuracy of the series, in light of the negative response by many to the *in*accuracy of *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999). He replied: "Our position is very much the same as last time. It is speculation, but it is very, very informed speculation." (*Radio Times* 2001: 39) This illustrates the tension created by a series promoted as the first *natural history* of dinosaurs, the main protagonists of which are creatures with no real-life referent. In other words, a simulacrum, which produced a sense of wonderment in the viewer, whilst *at the same time* exploiting the institutional codes and conventions afforded a text, situated within a documentary context.

Having to be everything to everyone, natural history could no longer survive on the curiosity of the audience alone. Peter Jones, chairman of the independent wildlife production company Green Umbrella stated: "natural history will never be new or revolutionary like *Big Brother*. It works by pushing the boundaries but retains the best of what came before." (Various [*Broadcast*] 6 October 2000: 19) Talking before the *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) phenomena took off, this new breed of blue-chip production which incorporates cutting-edge technological developments, pushing the limits of audience expectation, is equally *if not more* revolutionary than *Big Brother* (2000-). Move over reality TV, *new* natural history is here.

Chapter Four: *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001)

> "Time for me to get to grips with one. Carefully. Picking up piranhas is like handling a cocked and loaded gun. With a hair trigger." Steve Leonard (BBC 2018a: 02.30-02.39)

Introduction

Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers (2001) was the fourth factual production for the BBC that the titular veterinary practitioner worked on. Starting his career as one of a group of final year veterinary students recruited to film the BBC docu-soap series *Vets School* (1996) he subsequently went on after graduation to take part in *Vets in Practice* (1996-2000). During this time he also starred, with his fellow graduate Trude Mostue, in *Vets in The Wild* (1999), and took part in two episodes of the popular BBC1 travel series *Holiday* in 1997. It is safe to say that on BBC television, at least, Leonard was a recognisable figure. Coming across on-screen as adventurous and fun-loving, he was perhaps the perfect choice to present a new series which got the presenter up-close-and-personal with some of the most feared creatures on the planet to see which ones were the "…strongest, fastest and deadliest." (BBC 2018b)

The series had six, thirty-minute episodes, which saw Leonard visit a variety of locations to see the species in action, and to also personally engage with them in differing ways. This chapter will begin by exploring the format of the series, which present the creatures as purely spectacles of danger, in a similar way in which early natural history films of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did. Discourse around the natural world has often traded on spectacle and danger, but, this series' whole premise was to find the most lethal killer in a variety of different contexts, therefore the *primary* mode of engagement is with the visceral affect that arises from this particular form of ocular engagement. And whilst the series did arguably inform the audiences as to which was the most deadly chemical killer, for example, what they were really engaging with was Leonard placing himself in what could be perceived as perilous situations. Each week viewers tuned in to see their favourite vet put himself at risk, and survive the world's most deadly encounters.

And perhaps this was the key to the success of the format; that an already familiar audience were not necessarily tuning in to gain information about the creatures, rather they were watching to see Leonard himself. The rise of the docu-soap format had resulted in the some of the more engaging protagonists of series' becoming household names, gaining a life in the media which extended beyond the boundaries of the original programmes themselves. According to Kilborn (2003):

> …the docu-soap enjoyed unprecedented success for roughly a four year period (1996-2000). During this period docu-soaps were virtually omnipresent in the early evening schedules of mainstream, broadcasters (especially BBC 1). (87)

This supports perfectly the suggestion that Leonard would have been a familiar figure on the BBC, as the original *Vets* series' spanned the entire four-year period. The strength of Leonard as a docu-soap contributor was not only his affable personality, but also his intellectual and practical skill-base; it would be impossible to graduate as a veterinary practitioner without these attributes. This made him a marketable commodity, and as his popularity grew the BBC capitalised on their new 'star' by giving him further opportunities to showcase his personality and veterinary abilities. This aspect of the series will be examined in relation to the rise of celebrity culture, and the impact this has on factual programming in general.

The final section will position the earlier examination of spectacle in relation to how the series works as an example of factual programming. If, as suggested this is merely a visual spectacle, made to provoke a visceral reaction rather than intellectual response, where is this placed in relation to the BBC's public service broadcasting remit of education, information and entertainment?

The spectacle of nature

Natural history as a genre is littered with examples of spectacle; ranging from spectacular vistas and scenery of such visual magnitude they induces a physical response to what is on screen, creating an emotional engagement that can be profound and long-lasting, to displays of such animalistic violence that we may wish to place our hands before our eyes and hide from the horror displayed on screen. What both of these examples have in common is their ability to engage the audience at an ocular level in a similar way in which Gunning (1997) argued the cinema of attraction worked. Rather than being engaged by a narrative, the audience is attracted by an image in and of itself and the pleasure from viewing this image comes from the emotional affect it generates.

Both Jonathan Burt (2002) and Derek Bousé (2000) acknowledge that since the inception of natural history, spectacle has played a prevalent role in the genre, through examples such as safari and hunting films. Featuring animals feeding, fighting and hunting these ran alongside others in which the animals were themselves prey, victim to human hunters. In others male and female protagonist, much like Leonard, interacted with caged or sometimes wild animals, displaying their skills at taming dangerous and exotic creatures. Films such as *Fighting Roosters; in Florida* (1898), *Pianka and Her Lions* (1899), the distressing *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903)

produced by Thomas Edison and *Buffalo Hunting in Indo-China* (1908) are all early examples of this form of filmmaking.

In his book, Burt (2002) explores the complex relationship the audience has with viewing animals, firstly in general, and then on screen. He cites the work of Catherine Russell (1999) who argues that:

> Ethnography, zoology, and pornography share a common disciplinary technology of vision that seeks to control, contain, and master the field of the Other, but in doing so, they produce a supplementary discourse of violence and wildness. The field of the Other is rendered exotic and erotic precisely by virtue of the apparatus of vision. (120)

What is relevant here is the acknowledgement that there is an unequal balance of power in relation to what is being represented (the animal kingdom) and the function of that representation. In *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001) the premise of the series is to present a "discourse of violence and wildness" which ensures that the creatures presented are "rendered exotic and erotic", clearly illustrating the way in which Russell argues this form of engagement works. Developing the work of Mulvey (1975), and critiquing the central concept of audience positioning in apparatus theory, alongside considering Foucault (1990) and his work on panopticism,

Russell (1999) explores the way in which animals are engaged with across a variety of differing visual media contexts.

She suggests that:

> In the panopticon, the content of the image, which apparatus theory failed to analyze beyond gender codes, is not only rendered as “other” but represented as entrapped and incarcerated. If “visibility is a trap,” viewer *and* viewed are drawn into a relation of power and subjugation. (122)

This lays out the idea that the act of seeing when that sight has been facilitated illicitly (as in the panoptic mode – the viewed don't always know that they *are* bing viewed, only the *potential* is concrete), when considered in these terms, can be regarded almost akin to an act of violence in itself.

This creates an inevitable imbalance of power in favour of those watching over those being watched. In *Steve Leonard’s Ultimate Killers* (2001) the animals are presented within a discourse which prioritises their aggressive behaviour, emphasising how lethal they are, and are therefore reduced to one element representing them as a species. By emphasizing their aggressive nature, they become visceral spectacles to be consumed outside of their wider social structures. As Bousé (2000) notes “Ever since Muybridge, kill scenes

have remained wildlife films' chief guarantor of authenticity, just as the obligatory "cum-shot" has in XXX-rated adult films." (43) Establishing the spectacle of death as a primary point of engagement in this genre of filmmaking, Leonard is drawing on historical convention in his fascination with how effective a killing-machine particular species are in relation to a number of pre-defined categories, creating a competition whereby the declared winner is the one who most effectively disposes of their prey.

Considering further this mode of engagement with the series, Russell (1999) notes that pornography is "a privileged model of the gaze, for it is a cultural practice that produces its object, sexuality, by enacting imaginary means of possessing the image." (122) What Leonard does clearly aligns with this. In the series he is placed in imaginary scenarios whereby he survives his deadly encounters, therefore possessing the *idea* of the dangerous creatures, the (stereotypical) images as presented to the audience in this context. Russell (1999) continues: "The exoticism of animals lies somewhere between the excitement of the sexual spectacle and the otherness of the ethnographic subject" (122) creating a tension in that the creatures are presented as wild/exciting/dangerous, which makes them desirable. But at the same time we want to dominate, to possess them, rendering them as impotent, which is what makes *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001) an interesting example when analysed within this particular framework.

The series exploits the genre's fascination with death (or potential death) and draws on established tropes of the natural world being full or dark and dangerous creatures. It also plays with discourse around man conquering nature, having supremacy over all s/he surveys; it is a conceit that Leonard can take on the animal kingdoms 'ultimate killers' and walk away unscathed. Whilst he does do just that, there are examples in the series whereby it is presented as though his life *may* be in danger, through the use of dramatic editing and fast, non-diegetic music. In episode five *Deadly Defenders* (2001) part of his quest is to track down the most dangerous species of Rhino. After explaining what it is that is so dangerous about them, including their razor-sharp horn and their sheer size and weigh when charging, Leonard and the crew meet a crash of white rhinos whom they are able to get quite close to, before explaining that it is in-fact the black rhino who is the more dangerous of the species.

Off in search of them Leonard in voice-over states: "White Rhino are far more calm and placid than their notoriously evil twin cousins, the black rhino." (BBC Worldwide 2018a: 20102.09-02.15) As Leonard and the production crew go off to track the black rhino, slow, deep electronic music underscores the scene creating tension as they walk further into the bush. Leonard explains that it is difficult to identify the Rhino as white or the "psychotic black" (BBC Worldwide 2018a: 02.40) before getting too close. "So, were we walking up on a black or white rhino?" (BBC Worldwide 2018a: 02.46-02.52) At 02.57 we

hear “run” and the footage becomes shaky as the crew all flee from the charging rhino and Leonard states: “Yup, it was black” (BBC Worldwide 2018a: 02.59-03.01) whilst heading towards a tree which he and the crew climb. In the charge sequence, which last a total of eleven seconds the music changes to an up-tempo electronic percussion piece and there are in-excess of ten quick edits (its difficult to determine exactly how many as the footage is shaky and the images distorted). With the use of emotive language, such as “evil twin cousins” and “psychotic black” combined with the ominous then frenetic non-diegetic music, fast edits and hand-held camera work, this becomes a spectacle of danger, and one which is framed to feel as authentic as possible.

Burt (2002) takes this idea of authenticity up in his analysis of early films, again using pornography (Russell 1999) to suggest a correlation between the two forms of filmmaking:

> The parallel with pornography does have some significance at the point of action because, however contrived the context, there is no dividing line between the simulated and real for animal conflict or other forms of violence such as hunting. (43-44)

As Leonard and the film crew go in search of the black rhino, there is no doubt that they are placing themselves in a potentially dangerous situation. Of course, this comes with the caveat that there will be

personnel, out of camera-shot with tranquilizer guns ready to shoot the rhino if the situation were to become life-threatening. But just as pornography cannot fake the coveted cum-shot, there is no guarantee here that someone won't get injured, or worse killed, if something unexpected were to happen. The situation may be a simulation but in this instance the inherent danger is real, and part of the spectacle comes from the anticipation that perhaps this time, something *may* go wrong.

These simulated spectacles of danger, having the potential to actually develop into authentic encounters with death are made more engaging though the use of the adventure-narrative structure of having an intrepid 'hero' go on a quest, risking life and limb in order to bring us the answer to the question "…which are the strongest, fastest and deadliest animals." (BBC 2018b) This will be explored further as the role of the Leonard as celebrity presenter is analysed.

Documentary and celebrity

As has been previously outlined, Leonard was approached by the BBC in his final year at veterinary college to take part in a new series, *Vets School* (1996). Such was its success that a follow-up was commissioned, *Vets in Practice* (1996-2000), and he was chosen as one of the newly qualified veterinarians to star in this. As both these series are examples of the docu-soap genre, over the

four-year period which Leonard featured on-screen, the audience got to know his character, and had an opportunity to warm to his enthusiastic, affable personality. And perhaps part of the success of these two series was that whilst they had all the defining characteristics associated with the docu-soap genre, focusing mainly on the relationship between the protagonists, they had the extra draw of featuring a profession which required a depth of knowledge to gain entry into, and a credible skill to work within.

In his identification of what essentially the docu-soap genres' focus is, Kilborn states:

> In the final analysis, all programming in the docu-soap category is more character- than issue- oriented. In *Vets in Practice,* for instance, it is matters of human interest, particularly collegial and vet/pet-owner relationships, which remain the focal point of narrative interest. (2003: 98)

He later goes on to say:

> Just as audiences form strong bonds of attachment to the leading characters in their favourite soaps, so too in docu-soaps it is the audience's growing sense of identification with characters which constitutes one of this sub-genre's principle appeals. (2003: 103-104)

If Kilborn's assertions are correct, that the audience start to identify with the protagonists, and that primarily the function of a docu-soap is to play-out human relationships on-screen, combined with the relevant skill-base, approaching Leonard to star in a new natural history series seems an obvious choice.

In *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* Stella Bruzzi (2000) states that:

> The defining paradox of docusoaps is that they purport to be interested in the excessively ordinary, whilst at the same time having reached the level of success and notoriety they have done by the discovery and promotion of 'stars' – individuals who, more than those around them, transcend and achieve an identity beyond the series that created them. (92)

In relation to this paradox, Leonard himself presents an interesting case. If, as suggested, the docu-soap is based around characters playing out their day-to-day lives and the primary point of audience engagement is through vicariously living out their dramas, Leonard had much more to offer the BBC than his affable personality. His skill as a veterinary practitioner, authenticated before the eyes of the audience through both *Vets School* (1996) and *Vets in Practice* (1996-2000), gave him credibility and was therefore a perfect choice to head a series which explored the animal kingdom. Drawing on his discipline knowledge, his adventurous personality and his on-camera

skills, it could be argued that the BBC had created not just a celebrity, but as Bruzzi (2000) suggests, a (real) star.

But what constitutes a star? It is important to establish the difference between the two competing entities, celebrity and star, as arguably what Bruzzi *actually* refers to in the quote above is celebrity, exemplifying what Boorstin (1961) identified when he argued "Celebrities are made by the people…we forget that celebrities are known primarily for their well-knownness…the celebrity is usually nothing greater than a more-publicized version of us."(83) This is what the docu-soap was arguably producing when it took ordinary members of the public and, because of their engaging personalities, projected them into the media limelight. The only difference between those now being seen on-screen and the general public were that the former were being given opportunities because their personalities had been showcased on national television; the majority of them were not trading on any skill other than their engaging personality.

Boorstin (1961) goes on to suggest that celebrities are constructed and controlled via various competing discourses, for example the media, public relations and advertising industries, and pseudo-events are created to manufacture publicity to keep them in the public eye. Before moving on to explore celebrity in more depth, the distinction should be made between this and what a star constitutes. Dyer

(1998) has written extensively in this area and has suggested a number of ways of approaching the concept; as a social phenomena; as ‘image’; as ‘signs’; but the major defining factor between that of a celebrity and a star, is that a star has a skill or craft and has worked their way up through the ranks, building on their success in order to reach the top of their game. In other words, a star has a tangible ability which marks them out from their peers and is not dependent merely on an engaging personality.

Refining this concept, Rojek (2001) has traced the evolution of celebrity and has suggested a number of differing forms which this can take. Interestingly, he dismisses the word star, instead using the word celebrity in differing contexts to describe the various routes by which fame is achieved. Perhaps to alleviate the competing discourse which star versus celebrity suggests, in a contemporary media landscape the traditional notion of star, which might once have had a greater cultural currency than celebrity, is no longer higher up the social hierarchy. Indeed, it could be agued that in some media contexts, celebrities wield far more power in their role as social influencers, making them more valuable in terms of their economic status.

Out of Rojeks’ (2001) proposed categories, of most relevant in relation to Leonard and an analysis of the docu-soap genre are

achieved celebrity and *attributed celebrity*. Achieved celebrity can be considered as the equivalent to what would traditionally be associated with the term star. Gaining this status involves skill and a competitive environment whereby the individual has to work to achieve their desired goals. They build on their expertise, refining their craft until they reach the top of their game. Attributed celebrity has equitability with the pseudo-event, as proposed by Boorstin (1961), as fame in this context is largely due to a self-fulfilling process whereby the media creates and promotes the individual, and through this process the individual becomes more desirable and as a commodity starts to have both economic and cultural currency. This form of celebrity is clearly what emerged from the docu-soap genre for those protagonists lucky enough to have an engaging personality. These individuals were able to capture the attention of both the audience and surrounding media discourses, which give further publicity beyond the boundaries of the original programmes' themselves.

It is important to make the distinction between these two categories of celebrity, as Leonard is an interesting case whereby he arguable traverses the boundaries of *both*. He is undoubtedly a household name *because* he was a protagonist in a docu-soap series; it is highly unlikely that he would have reached the level of fame he has without starring in a television series. However, whilst the series' he participated in *are* examples of docu-soaps, they focused on an

profession whereby those working had to have an attribute, a skill, a craft, nothing to do with their personality; if they didn't have this, they failed, and that could potentially be the end of their chosen career.

Luckily Leonard had both the personality and veterinary ability, and the BBC chose to utilise his talents in a way in which they could capitalise on both of these, alongside engaging a potentially new audience who were interested in natural history. Therefore Leonard, in his professional capacity as a fully-qualified veterinary practitioner authenticates the discourse proposed in the series *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001) as he had academic credibility in the field of animal welfare. He was not just another example of an attributed celebrity cashing in on their newly-found celebrity status, or indeed an achieved celebrity who, working outside of their achieved status, were tuning their hand at presenting and voice-over work, and had no direct experience of the representations they were mediating.

Increasingly, if not presenting, then in voice-over, achieved celebrities are being used to sell factual discourse; even the title of the series under analysis bares the name of the star *before* indicating what the content will be. Selling off the back of an audiences' fascination with a celebrity, sometimes (but not always) creating some kind of intertextual link, maximising the potential audience. In his think-piece, Richard Hewett (2014) observes:

> Where once the television documentary was the reserve of actual experts in their field, as typified by art historian Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* (BBC, 1969), today such efforts are increasingly remote islands in an unending sea of celebridocs.

He goes on to ask:

> …questions with regard to the nature of the modern television documentary, not least of which is: are we watching due to a genuine interest in the subject matter, or because of our familiarity with/liking for the presenter.

Hewett raises some interesting questions regarding the way in which celebrities are given the opportunity to pursue interests, within the factual discourse, *outside* of their expert field of knowledge, and whilst this perhaps takes away the opportunity for genuine experts to gain a foothold in the market, there is value to be had going on a journey of discovery as we, the audience vicariously experience for the first time, through the celebrity also experiencing for the first time, something which we might not have been interested in if it were not for the fact that our 'favourite' celebrity was presenting the programme.

As factual genres come in and out of favour, new ways of capturing an audience are needed, and the use of celebrity endorsement via their engagement with the genre supports what Taylor and Harris

(2008) argue is the valuable cultural currency afforded to the 'personality'. They argue that:

> The role of the television personality combines with the structure of programmes to reinforce televisions role as an ideological support for commodities….They play their part within several additional layers of commodification. For example: 1. The programme's celebrity presenter literally becomes an individual brand. (152)

Whilst this is most likely over-stating the case with Leonard, there is some mileage to support that his value as a commodity does lie in his professional status and the credibility this affords the projects he works on. The BBC quite strategically picked up on his ability to engage an audience in a genre which was arguably under-represented in terms of professionally credible presenters, and used this to their advantage. As Leonard's career has progressed he has managed to negotiate his private veterinary practice with that of his television career, ensuring that all the projects he has subsequently worked on are endorsed through his status as achieved celebrity (star), rather than relying on his affable personality.

Educating entertainment?

Broadcast on Sunday evenings in the 20.30 slot on BBC1, *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001) had respectable viewing figures, which according to BARB (Broadcast Audience Research Board) started out at 5.62 million for episode one, and peaked at 6.59 million during episode five. Over the broadcast duration the lowest the viewing figure dropped too was 5.49 million, making it a relatively successful programme. At its peak, the programme was ranked 8th in the BARB Top 30 of the weekly programmes broadcast, and the lowest it ranked was 26th. Whilst there was a drop at episode four, the figures recovered to over a healthy 6 million, suggesting that the series was captivating enough for the audience to stick with it for the duration of the six episodes. (BARB figures purchased)

The first time the veterinary practitioners name had been used as part of the title of a series, the BBC listings magazine the *Radio Times* advertised it as "The star of Vets in Practice and Vets in the Wild begins a new six-part exploration of the world's most lethal animals." (BBC Genome Project 2017) Reflecting Leonard's status as a household name, the opening credits supported that this was a narrative which would be mediated via his on-screen engagement. Lasting twenty-five seconds, the opening had Leonard in long-shot, mid centre of the frame, running in khaki shorts and a shirt though a desert landscape which is predominately brown and orange.

The non-diegetic music, which comes in and underscores the sequence, are the opening bars of the 1997 hit *Fire Starter* by The Prodigy. Setting the musical tone as fast-paced, the editing is matched with in-excess of thirty cuts made in the twenty-five seconds, leaving the audience in no doubt that what is to follow is a high-octane journey, mediated by Leonard who will take centre-stage in the action. The sequence starts with Leonard running, he is being watched by an eagle, then spat at by a snake. He is attacked by a cassowary, and then we see a shark. It cuts to Leonard in a wetsuit in open water and the scene ends with the on-screen graphics “Steve Leonards” (00.21) before seeing him leaning against a tree, panting, face centre frame in close-up looking directly into the audiences eyes before cutting to the on-screen graphics “Ultimate Killers” (00.24). There is absolutely no doubt that Leonard is as much the focus of the series as the animals themselves, so where does this align with the public service broadcasting remit of education, information and entertainment?

It has been suggested that the series, on the whole relies on spectacle to create an ocular engagement in order to illicit a visceral response. If this is the case, the emotional affect produced by the series undermines an intellectual engagement, as the visceral mitigates against being drawn into this as an educative experience. That is not to suggest that the audience are not presented with information which supports and develops Leonard’s choice as to why

the creatures he has chosen *are* the ultimate killers, but arguably, the audiences' fascination is with the visual representation of the deadly creature and not the facts and figures explaining why this is so.

In episode five *Deadly Defenders* (2001) Leonard is exploring creatures which use defence as a kill-strategy. He is examining the cassowary, a giant flightless bird which can weigh in-excess of 58 kilogrammes and grow to heights of two metres. With the ability to run at around 50 kilometres per hour and jump almost 1.5 metres vertically, the cassowary is an incredibly imposing creature. Combined with sharp claws and the propensity for charging at and kicking their victims, as a defender this was a natural choice for Leonard to showcase. In a scene running just thirty seconds and coming straight after the opening sequence of the episode, Leonard faces his first encounter with this week's ultimate killer.

The scene begins with non-diegetic violin music and the head of a cassowary pops up into frame. It then cuts to an overhead shot of hands holding a defence board up, almost like a giant wooden shield. As we follow what is revealed to be Leonard walking forward, the beady left eye of a cassowary is shown in close-up, before we cut to a shot from behind Leonard which shows him and the bird, in the same compound, facing each other off. Suddenly, the music changes to a fast tempo, electronic score and the edits become faster as the

bird starts to attack Leonards board, taking running jumps, kicking out, as we hear under the music Leonard going “urgh” when the impact is felt by him. The attack part of this sequence lasts a mere fifteen seconds, but there are in-excess of eighteen edits, creating a heightened emotional response to what is essentially, if you watch it back carefully, just three shots repeated at differing angles to suggest that the bird was frenziedly attacking Leonard.

The opening of this episode, clearly signposts that the audience can expect a fast-paced programme which is mediated via an already familiar first-person, who places himself within the dramatic action. Leonard is not there just to deliver didactic information to the audience, he is there to experience how deadly the creatures potentially are, and the audience are invited to vicariously engage with his adventure. This in turn creates a visceral engagement with the series which arguably prioritises the adventure-narrative over the educational context. And this perfectly illustrates what has been suggested earlier in relation to pornography. As this natural history series trades on the extremes of animalistic behaviour, it needs the equivalence of the cum-shot in-order to satisfy the visual pleasure associated with viewing of this genre of programming, and this is provided up-front, leaving no doubt in the audience mind that the programme will foreground action over education.

This form of representation generates an imbalance of power, which always places the viewer in a privileged position over that which is being viewed. In this context, trading on the visceral response of the spectacle, feelings ultimately take president over intellectual engagement, and *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001) arguably reduces the creatures featured back to an exotic status. This is a highly entertaining series, which whilst not wholly reliant of spectacle in the same way Gunning (1997) suggests the cinema of attraction is, clearly utilises this form of engagement, within a factual discourse and the result is an adventure-narrative which trades-off education in favour of entertainment.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the series was considered a success by the BBC, as Leonard went on be further commissioned to make *Steve Leonard's Extreme Animals* (2002) the following year. Utilising the now familiar format, this follow-up saw him seek out creatures who made their homes in the most hostile environments on earth, suggesting that the BBC saw no issue with presenting animals within a discourse of entertainment, which prioritised the audience engaging with them on a visceral rather than intellectual level.

Capitalising on the success of an earlier series, Leonard epitomises the way in which factual formats began to create celebrities out of the

protagonists who featured in them. The rise of the docu-soap saw ordinary members of the general public rise to fame, in what Boorstin (1961) argued was a process of self-fulfilling prophecy, created by the media, for the benefit of the media. The BBC had quite clearly given Leonard a platform with which to show-case his talents, not only as a veterinary practitioner, but as an affable personality who was up for an adventure. And this intertextuality arguably generated at least *some* of the audience for the series, as the docu-soap format Leonard was famous for encouraged audiences to form bonds with particular protagonists, creating within this genre an empathetic form of engagement rather than an intellectual one.

Combining a presenter who some of the audience had a previous bond with, and a narrative which explored the extreme animalistic nature of some of the planets most deadly creatures, within a format whereby Leonard enthusiastically got up-close-and-personal, heightened the use spectacle within the series. Whilst the situations were arguably simulated, in that it is highly unlikely that Leonard would otherwise have gone into a compound with a cassowary in order to provoke an attack, the unpredictability of the natural world was still present and added a further frisson of excitement to the visual spectacles being played-out on screen. In this sense, these were spectacles of reality, and in this context what was being prioritised in relation to audience engagement was, pure and simply, entertainment.

Chapter Five: *ONE life* (2003)

"*ONE life* is shaping up to be the *Wife Swap* of documentary strands: brilliant "watercooler TV", week in, week out." Butcher (2003: 94)

Introduction

In the autumn of 2003 the BBC launched the *ONE life* strand of stand-alone documentaries, and according the Todd Austin, Strand editor, they were "…commissioned films from some of the most talented and innovative directors in the UK." (BBC 2003a) He explained: "Some of the films are observational, others characterised by the director's personal take on the subject, whilst another is narrated by the films principle character." (BBC 2003a) This chapter seeks to examine what Austin claimed was at the heart of this opening series, which was "…an unflinching view of the realities of everyday life…moving, thought-provoking, revelatory and ambitious in the range of subjects it covers." (BBC 2003a)

This chapter will begin by examining the over-arching thematic explored within series one, and consider whether the episodes are reflective of what is pronounced by the introductory voice-over as "Everyday people, everyday stories now on BBC1." (*Lager, Mum and Me* (2003): Tx 24/09/2003) From here the opening sequence will be

deconstructed, as this places a marker of expectation, and how the series sets itself up to reflect individual experiences which are universal in appeal. Completing this section will be a close textual analysis of *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003).

Lager, Mum and Me (2003) is interesting as a case-study, not only because it is the opening episode of the series, and sets the tone of the *ONE life* strand, but also it explores alcoholism, which is covered in more detail in Chapter Seven, *Rain in My Heart* (2006). This affords the opportunity to reflect on the way in which alcoholism is represented in these two quite differing texts. *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) tells the story through the eyes of twelve year-old Nanzer, the daughter of an alcoholic who, with the help of the filmmaker Min Clough, also the daughter of an alcoholic (father), opens her heart as to the reality of living with a parent who suffers from this addiction. Following her mother Diane on her journey, the documentary explores Nanzer's relationship with her mother whom she hopes will finally detox and be the parent she desperately wants her to be.

Writing in the *Radio Times* Polly Toynbee argues that the episode is:

> …more a fly-on-the-wall than a proper documentary because it gives no facts and figures. It features no experts to guide us. It's all touchy-feely human interest, which is fine, but it lacks substance. How many people are there in this alcoholic state?

> Is it getting worse? Which treatments will work if any? These are the questions without answers that most viewers will turn to one another and ponder. (2003: 31)

But will they? Toynbee is making the assumption that in order to be a "proper documentary" the audience need to be presented with objective factual information, rather than an experiential, subjective engagement with a disease that many audience members will have had no direct, lived experience of. She argues that without such discourse they run the risk of turning into "…prurient peepshows." (2003: 31) Relating this to the public service remits of education, information and entertainment, what Toynbee appears to be alluding to is that in order to be taken seriously *as* a documentary the subject needs to be approached with an educational remit or it runs the risk of degenerating into entertainment.

The final section of this chapter will explore this in further detail, asking where is the line drawn between creating an emotional engagement by allowing an 'ordinary' voice to mediate their experience of a painful subject, and the gratuitous use of this form of documentary to titillate and entertain the audience.

ONE life (2003) series thematics

The first series of *ONE life* (2003) comprised of seven episodes, each focusing on a different subject, mediated using a range of techniques. In 'BBC1 tackles modern Britain with new documentaries' (Deans 2003) Strand editor Austin is quoted as saying that the series will provide the audience with "…fantastic stories and characters, but they won't know what the subject is every week. We'll be trying out different methods and different approaches." And whilst this was undoubtedly true, the range of topics covered in the seven episodes ranged from exploring alcoholism, to finding love in the dwarf community, to tackling bullying in primary school and a personal account of agoraphobia, there were a number of universal themes prevalent across all the differing stories being told. Whilst an audience may not be interested in the story being told, per se, what Austin aimed to provide across all the episodes was an engaging narrative using a variety of techniques to draw audiences into a story which they may otherwise, not necessarily, have watched.

All the episodes were broadcast on Wednesdays at 22.35 on BBC1, with a duration of approximately 42 minutes, which includes the opening sequence and end credits. By scheduling them in the late peak slot, which runs from approximately 20.00 to 23.00 there was the expectation that the documentaries would reach an adult

audience, which would have enabled the filmmakers to explore themes which might have been unsuitable for a younger audience. However, none of the films in this first series featured anything which could be considered controversial, either in their form or content; rather, what they all have in common is their mediation of a subject through an emotional connection; the telling of a story through the subjective eyes of a protagonist who is involved in the situation. By fostering an emotional connection to the narrative via the use of central characters, the audience are taken on a journey which facilitates a subjective understanding, rather than creating an intellectual engagement, an aspect which Toynbee (2003) questions regarding their categorisations *as* documentaries.

The primary concept which can be identified as running throughout series one, is that of love. Love as a noun describes strong feelings of affection, both physical and emotional, and also taking a great interest or pleasure in something, which includes more inanimate pleasures such as listening to music or attending the theatre. Whatever the pleasure, it stirs a deep emotional desire and the fulfilment of this desire is at the heart of the first six documentaries in the series. In the opening film, *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) it's the love of a child for the mother she has, but also whom she *could* be if she manages to detox and remain off alcohol. It's the love of a mother for her daughter, whom she is willing to try for and put aside her own needs for that of her daughter. And in this first film, it is also

a search by the filmmaker Clough, her own father an alcoholic, as she journeys with Nanzer, for a redemptive 'happy ending'. At the start of the film Clough explains that when she was the same age as Nanzer she didn't tell anyone of her fathers alcoholism, and perhaps by facilitating Nanzer in her journey Clough gets to voice what *she* went through in her (similar) situation, vicariously standing in for other audience members who too kept quiet about their family secrets.

The involvement of the filmmaker seeking something alongside the main protagonist links this first documentary to the fifth in the series, *Diary of A Delinquent* (2003). This episode focuses on the life of (now) 22-year-old Bianca Jones whom the filmmaker Mags Gavan has been following since the age of twelve. Bianca's family life had been torn apart through drug use, parental neglect, child abuse and the disappearance of her father, whom she is searching for in the film. At the age of thirteen she was released from a secure unit for children after slitting a mans throat with a broken bottle and in the intervening years has been convicted of further violent crime, shoplifting and has overdosed three times. Bianca's story is that of a child seemingly out of control. Gavan started capturing her growth into the rehabilitated woman she is today.

The power in this film lies in the authentic relationship between the filmmaker and Bianca, who whilst she openly admits is now a close friend (01.46), is able to remain at a critical distance and does not shy away from documenting the severity of her crimes and her own frustrations at her behaviour. Whilst staying with her, Bianca steals her car, only returning two days later when she is caught by the police (28.38-30.29). Gavan pieces-to-camera her disappointment at what has happened, and Bianca's subsequent return and their making-up is captured in an emotional scene where she explains she trusted Bianca only to be let-down by her. She traverses the boundary between filmmaker, documenting a life in turmoil, and friend, who wants to help rescue her from the destructive path she is on.

When audiences are presented with anti-social behaviour, often a primary emotional response is one of anger and frustration; often films documenting troubled teenagers present cautionary tales and act as a form of governance, reinforcing the view that if perpetrators are not going to help themselves, why should we care what happens to them? Protagonists are rarely presented as victims of their socio-cultural environment; instead they are presented as spectacles for the audience to distance themselves from. What Gavan achieves in this film, through the obvious affection she has for Bianca and the time she has invested in documenting her life, is to facilitate a positive emotional engagement by mediating between the audience

and subject; in other words we are drawn into Bianca's world through the relationship she has with Gavan and this helps negate the preconceptions an audience may have coming to watch a film about a troublesome teen.

A New Life For Delise (2003) openly documents the unconditional love of a parent to her child. Delise, named after her mother Rominas' sibling who died of cancer, was herself diagnosed with the same condition aged eight. After undergoing treatment she had to have both kidneys removed, has been on nightly dialysis for over two years and is about to have her mothers kidney transplanted. The documentary follows their journey, from Delise being positive about the medical procedure to her abject terror on the day of the operation. Both parent and child are given access to cameras to record their feelings about what Delise is currently going through and their hopes for the future.

Whilst not all families undergo such a traumatic experience, the theme of unconditional love, alongside self-sacrifice and hope are intrinsically tied-up in this narrative. The sections of the film in which both Delise and Romina separately document their feelings draws upon Sobchacks (1990) argument that home movie footage facilitates the audience reflecting back what they are seeing onto their own lives, so whilst they might not have undergone such

trauma, they can identify with the universal nature of family loyalty, unconditional love and sacrifice and reflect back on what they would do in a similar situation, and how they feel about those whom they love. In this context, the subject matter of the documentary bears little relevance; it's merely a conduit to soliciting an emotional engagement with a series of higher concepts.

Perhaps the most blatant example of exploring love is in episode two *Size Doesn't Matter* (2003). It follows the story of Caroline Miller who was born with achondroplasia, which was at the time of broadcast the most common form of dwarfism. (BBC 2003a) At 28-years-old, she lives on Jersey and has never met a fellow dwarf, and the documentary charts her journey to meet other dwarfs both on mainland Britain and in America in the hope of finding friendship and maybe love. In her quest we meet her friends and family and are taken on her transformative journey, witnessing her confidence growing as she becomes more self-aware and accepting of who she is. Whilst she appears relatively confident from the start, its not until she begins talking about her father that perhaps things are not as relaxed as they seem. Born to average height parents, Caroline has average sized siblings and she is the only child in the family unit to have been born with achondroplasia.

During a piece-to-camera, she explains that when Caroline was eighteen, her mother suffered a stroke which took away the ability for her to communicate through speech; something she misses as she believes its important for a daughter to be able to talk to her mother, more so than a father (22.06). She goes on to say she couldn't tell her father she was getting in touch with other dwarfs as she was frightened as she assumed he would disapprove. Asked off-camera if she thinks her father has a problem with her condition (22.50), Caroline is keen to stress that her father has told her that both he and her mother never treated her any differently than her siblings; interestingly, she explains she was *told* she wasn't treated any differently, not that she *knows* or she *remembers.* And why would a adult aged 28 assume a parent *would* disapprove of the opportunity for their child to meet a community they were a part of? This presents somewhat of a confliction; whilst she undoubtedly feels loved and accepted by her family and friends, she thinks her father would disapprove of her wanting to find fellow achondroplasias.

This information, which is presented later in the film perhaps helps to explain why, at the start of the film, Caroline voices her own fears of meeting people of restricted growth. She explains that when she sees people of restricted growth on television it's a shock, as whilst she is aware that this is what *she* looks like when she looks in the mirror, she is fearful when confronted *outside* of this context (01.35-02.09). As she is the only resident of Jersey who is not of average

height, and has not previously been encouraged to meet other members of the restricted growth community, perhaps her fear is not surprising. Thus her quest takes her on a journey of self-discovery, acceptance and the need to feel part of a community that *she* can relate to; not one which accepts her *as she is* but one that accepts her for *who she is*.

The turning point in the documentary comes when she attends the final night disco at the Birmingham meet. Her voice-over stating: “I have achieved something I have wanted to achieve for the past 28 years. And I don't feel like an outsider, I feel like one of the gang.” (24.48- 24.58) This is arguably a concept which is easy to empathise with, and cuts across the film as a whole. Whilst members of the audience may not belong to a particular minority group, or be living with a condition which means they feel outside of mainstream society, the desire to be accepted and given support to be who we are is the underlying message implicit within the episode.

This is also at the heart of episode six *Beating The Bullies* (2003), which follows a series of new recruits at Heatherbrook Primary School in Leicester as they undergo peer-mediation training in an attempt to tackle bullying. Identified by the school as an issue, an external agency is recruited to train a group of pupils who have successfully interviewed for the volunteer positions of mediators,

some of whom have been victim to bullying themselves. The documentary features interviews with the pupils as they relate their own experiences and why they want to be a part of the programme, and what they hope to achieve from it. The audience are taken on the children's journey and are witness to a mediation session after a playground fracas results in a child being accused of kicking his friend in the face. As Jordan and Stephanie, the newly-qualified, eight-year-old child mediators are left to bring the warring pair to resolution, we are witness to the transformative effect this form of intervention can have.

At the start of the session (33.02) six-year-old Joe denies having scratched and kicked his friend Reece, calling him a liar and telling the group what he understood had happened. However, by the end of the session, he admits his guilt and is ready to apologise and they both shake hands and move on (36.17). The session facilitates Joe to understand how Reece felt to be called a lair when he denied kicking him, and Reece tells Joe he knows he didn't mean to hurt him, thus acknowledging that it was just a spat which got out of hand. When Joe is asked how he thought Reece felt being called a lair, he becomes visibly upset and says “sad” (34.03), but at this point is still unwilling to apologise, saying “I never say sorry to people.” (35.05) Reece on the other-hand is keen to say sorry and move on. Both children are given a voice and the mediators present back to the children what they have said, and when Stephanie asks Joe “How do

you expect people to be your friend if you don't say sorry when you fall out?" (35.01-35.14), he thinks this over and says he wants to shake hands with Reece and will say sorry after. When asked what changed his mind he replies "just being in here." (35.37)

The documentary demonstrates quite clearly how empowering listening can be, and that to affect change, time and effort needs to be put in. The mini-mediators apportioned no blame, and both Reece and Joe left the room having resolved their conflict through empathy and understanding. There were no raised-voices, no 'telling-off', one child wasn't labelled 'the trouble-maker' and the other 'the victim'. It attempts to bring the playground community together so that all who are a part of it can have a happy and productive experience, and as an allegory represents best-practice of how we should all behave, not just being the reserve of children in their school yards.

Perhaps the most divisive, and in some ways problematic episode of series one is *Rat Attack* (2003) which focuses on the city of Liverpool and its rat population. It presents both the love for and loathing of rats; the love of those who keep rats as domestic pets and the loathing of those who suffer them as vermin. Filmmaker Nicholas O'Dwyer ventures across the city, meeting various people, who relate their experiences on-camera and discuss how they feel about rats. The problem with this approach is that whilst it *appears* that rats are

presented as both friend and foe, its unclear as to the real function of the film. Presenting a visual spectacle of rats running amok detrimentally affecting the lives of Liverpool residents, the film plays on the stereotype of rats as vermin, having no redeeming features. And whilst this might be the case for those who are experiencing unwanted infestations, the tokenistic inclusion of 'rats as pets' is undermined by the choice of rat-advocate; a quirky couple who kiss their furry-friends (18.34) and take them on day-trips to the seaside (22.53). Introduced at 16.25 grooming a rat on her knee with a toothbrush, the couple Sue and George explain their love of rats, to the degree that they won't go away on holiday and leave them. They bury their deceased pets in the garden and explain that losing a rat is like losing a member of their family, as we cut to a shot of their home-made cemetery which is a shrine to their lost animals (24.52-25.31).

Towards the end of the documentary we see their current favourite rat, Munchkin, accompanied by the narration "No teeth, no jaw, one eye, a poor prognosis for Munchkin." (27.41-27.48) Presenting a pathetic spectacle in opposition to the brutal force that is the wild rat enables the audience to empathise and perhaps start to see that rats *can* be loved, albeit only in their impotent, crippled form. Discussing his condition, they are rationalising whether they are "…keeping him for us or for him…" and whether he still has any quality of life." (28.00-28.27) These are questions many pet owners face when they

come to make decisions about the end of life care for animals which have had a significant role in their lives. It is framed as a conversation taking place in a car, and whilst there are some close-ups of a rat being petted, it's an easy leap to replace 'rat' with something else which has been of significance in the audience members life.

The conclusion to this story begins with a close-up of Sue and George's garden shrine, now bearing the name of Munchkin; "The worst thing was telling Sue, I found him when I came downstairs, I found him dead in the cage…the worst thing was telling you, deciding the words to use…" (34.47-34.53). The seriousness and profundity come across and whilst there are further pet rats crawling on the couple as they talk, its does not undermine the love they have for a creature which has been presented for the majority of the documentary as a pest, with the main quest of all the protagonists aside from Sue and George, being to kill them.

In total, the couple, who are the *only* advocates of rats, who present *anything* positive, are on-screen for a total of 6 minutes and 46 seconds out of a possible total of 39 minutes and 34 seconds, making their contribution a mere 16.42% of the documentary. Clearly weighting the narrative in favour of rats as a problem which needs to be solved, the dichotomy created is unfairly weighted and

the overall effect is that rats have little redeeming features other than in the lives of those who could best be described as 'quirky'. Rats are the enemy, the antagonist, a matter to be dealt with, clearly established in the opening sequence with a voice over telling us that rats are all around, our constant (albeit usually invisible) companions and that "…when you die they will quite possibly eat you." (01.21) These are the creatures we love to hate.

ONE life (2003) series one opening sequence

The same opening sequence is used for all seven episodes in series one, with the only difference being the individual title of the episode, which is indicative of the content of the documentary. The sequence is comprised of four separate shots edited together and lasts approximately thirty seconds in length.

The sequence starts with a low, wide angled shot with a shale beach in the foreground and a wall in the background, over which the tops of eight beach huts, of differing colour are visible. The sky, which takes up approximately one-third of the frame, is bright blue with a few pale clouds. From top right of the screen a mid-shot of a man wearing jeans and a dark jacket walks into frame, and as he proceeds, his head and upper body are overlaid with a red circular outline marking him out for attention. This outline fades-up from pale red and becomes more vivid as he walks. Approximately a fifth in

screen-height, as he walks across frame the mobile camera tracks forward across the shale to behind him as he walks forward. Coinciding with the red outline becoming more prominent at the top of the screen, the BBC logo fades into centre-bottom, approximately one-eighth in size, and fades out just before we cut to the second shot, which is a man in pale clothing, no helmet, riding a bicycle towards the front of the screen, down the left hand side of the frame.

The cyclist is also approximately one-fifth in size, and in the foreground across the bottom one-third of the frame, the slats of a wooden gate run across, with an open, golden coloured field containing three trees and in the distance what appear to be the tops of building to the right of the frame. In this shot the top quarter of the frame contains the sky which is still vivid blue, but with more cloud coverage. As the cyclist moves forward, and increases in size, the pale red circular outline appears over his head and upper body, becoming more prominent red as the camera pans from right to left.

Next we cut to an overhead shot of a red roof, typical of a modern housing estate. The house is large, and sits in a plot containing a drive and garden, and dominates almost two-thirds of the right hand side of the frame. To the left of the house is a road, devoid of traffic and on the far left of frame are the ends of two drives, one of which contains a car. In the bottom left on-screen, what appears to be a

female figure is pushing a pram up the road, and as the camera pans across the frame, from right to left, another female figure comes into shot at the top of the road, walking towards down the bottom of the frame, and the shot is opened up to reveal more of the two driveways. As the shot is taken from over-head there is no visible sky, however the shot is bright and evenly lit. As the camera pans across, the pale red circular outline appears over the top of the female and partially covers the pram, deepening in colour as she moves forward.

From here we cut to the fourth shot, which is four youths playing football on a concrete space marked out for sports. They are contained within the space as there is a metal fence, much taller than the figures, surrounding the area, and there are street-lights illuminating their game both within the play area and outside. The sky is visible in the top half of the frame, graduating from a pale grey colour down to vivid amber, where the sun is setting in the distance. In the background there are two prominent high-rise housing blocks, and other buildings which suggest that this is an urban environment.

The play area takes up approximately half of the bottom of the frame and the figures are in the centre taking up one-third of the space. Dressed in jeans and casual clothing, there are two black youths, one of which is female and two white males. As the ball is passed

between them the camera moves slowly from right to left, and the white male who is to the far left of the game has the pale red circular outline superimposed over his head and upper torso. It stays on him for three seconds, deepening in colour before then he moves out of the circle to chase the football. The circle, which is placed to the left of centre-screen, remains in place and to the right of it, red capital letters N and E fade up, in sequence, followed by white letters spelling out the word 'life'. Behind the text, the football game fades out of focus and a trombone shot is used to foreground the words ONE life. As ONE life fades out, it is replaced by the fading-in of the title of the episode, the white lettering half the size of the series title, but remaining in the centre of the frame. In the background a fifth youth comes into shot from the centre-mid left of the frame, as the ball is passed over to them.

Throughout the opening sequence, the accompanying music is an original orchestral piece, composed by Howard Davidson, featuring piano and strings. The slow, melodic rhythm matches the movement created both in-frame, as all of the filmed sequences are played-back in semi-slow motion, and via the camera-work creating a gentle transition into the episodes, which does not drive any emotional expectations regarding whether this will feature an uplifting story or be more dramatic/traumatic in nature.

It is clear from the opening sequence that the series was attempting to draw in an audience from across the viewing spectrum, regardless of age, class or gender. Whilst the 22.35 broadcast slot would preclude a universal audience, those in their later teens are connected to the series through the inclusion in the final section of the young adults playing football. Both male and female audiences are reflected, though arguably there are predominantly more male figures than female, however, both gender do feature.

The four shots used cleverly take the audience through the course of a day, and whilst not strictly in chronological order when deconstructed further, the opening and closing sections do appear to reflect opposite ends of the day, with the beach-scene suggestive of dawn and the football of dusk. In the opening we see a lone male walk across the frame, and the colour of the sky reflects the early morning sun. We move on the cyclist who, whilst the length of shadow would suggest it is later in the day, being to the right of him and relatively long, the sky is bright with fluffy white clouds and could be either mid morning or afternoon. The overhead shot in the third section reveals no sky, but the lighting is bright and the two figures walking cast no shadows, which would realistically reflect mid-day lighting. The final shot of the sequence has a darker sky, and the illuminated street-lighting, whilst not entirely necessary as the sun has not fully set, does give a sense of closure as we are now ready to move on to focus on the episode itself.

This strategy enables the sequence to be split into sections which communicates the universality of the series to particular audiences. Taking them in chronological order, the first is set on a pebbled beach, and has an isolated male figure as the key point of interest. If it is agreed that the time of day appears to be early morning, and the age of the man is unclear as he is partially obscured by his size and placement on screen, the only information we have is how he moves and his clothing. With his hands placed in his pockets, drifting across the screen, this could be representative of an older person, perhaps someone who has retired by the sea? Or it could be someone who is out of work, an isolated figure seeking something which is just outside of his grasp; two possibilities which would engage two differing audiences.

The second figure works in a similar way to the first, as it is unclear how old he is, although he does appear to have a beard and his clothing of pale cream colours and what appears to be a cardigan would suggest he is middle aged or older. He is not wearing any clothing associated with cycling and does not wear a helmet, which suggests a relaxed attitude and places him into the category of someone who is riding more for pleasure than for fitness or someone who uses this mode of transport for getting to and from work. He is again isolated in the relatively barren environment, but the muted colours of his clothing makes him blend more than the first figure, and perhaps suggests that these stories involve unassuming

individuals who, whilst they may seemingly blend into the background, have interesting and relevant stories to tell.

The third section features two female figures, one pushing a pram up the frame and the other walking on the opposite side of the road down the frame. The lone female is dressed in black with a camel coloured coat, which suggest formality; perhaps she is a professional woman as compared to the one pushing the pram who is more focused on family life? As it is difficult to establish the age of the single woman, perhaps we can assume she is older and the juxta-positioning of these two figures suggests that the stories are relevant whether you have a young family, whether your family has grown or indeed, whether you have a family at all? The houses on the estate are large and in good order, with well-manicured lawn areas, suggesting wealth and a particular social status; these can be read on the one-hand as aspirational, and the other as achievement, appealing to women who both live in this kind of environment and those who perhaps wish to live there.

The final part, which features a game of football between three male youths and a lone female, is drawing in a younger audience, and as the action takes place in an urban environment is suggesting to them that the stories being told will have resonance with the lives not only of the older generation, but the younger one as-well. It is interesting

that this is the only demographic which is seen as group, rather than as isolated individuals, who are all playing a game together. The strategy of isolating a single protagonist is still used, but he is able to break free from the isolation created by the red circular outline, as whilst it remains on-screen to form the first letter of the title of the series, the male is seen in the background moving away from it to continue his game. This representation allows us to subconsciously acknowledge that ordinary individuals may have extraordinary stories to tell, members of our extended communities who we *see* but *don't* see.

The range of locations, from the inner-city urban landscape to the idyllic golden fields of the British countryside subconsciously connects through class particular audiences, creating resonance through which to draw-in these separate demographics. In order to get the audience to engage with the series, it has to sell itself that the stories it tells speaks to *them*. Why would an audience watch a series which features “Everyday people, everyday stories” (*Lager, Mum and Me* 2003) if they have no immediate, visible connection to their own lives? What this opening sequence suggests is that these stories cut-across social boundaries and their appeal are universal in the fundamental thematics being engaged with. And non more so that the first ever episode of the series, *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003).

Lager, Mum and Me (2003)

Winner of the 2004 Flaherty Documentary BAFTA, *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) explores the relationship between twelve-year-old Nanzer, and her thirty-nine year old alcoholic mother Diane, as she prepares to go into detox. The film follows both their journeys and the narrative is further mediated via the director/producer Min Clough who relates her own experience of having an alcoholic parent. Starting prior to Diane entering the clinic, in the first two minutes we are introduced to the form of the film and the main protagonists. Nanzer has been given a small camera in-order for her to film her feelings regarding her mothers' alcoholism and how this has affected her life. She uses this to do personal pieces-to-camera, in the style of a video diary, and also to film her mother and the journey she is going on.

Diane, whilst being the most active protagonists in the film, as she drives the story forward, does not have access to any technology; she is presented via footage captured by Nanzer, Clough and a third camera-person whom we don't see. The use of this third camera-person creates an interesting dynamic in relation to audience engagement, and exploring the structure of the documentary reveals how seemingly innocuous strategies encourage particular forms of understanding in relation to the authenticity of the material presented.

Using Nichol's (1991; 2001) work on identifying particular strategies associated with modes of documentary practice, it is quite clear that *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) adopts a multi-modal approach in order to develop the story. The film opens with Nanzer being filmed as she learns to use the hand-held camera she has been given, before we cut to her actually using the camera, and her voice over explaining that the woman she is filming is her mother, who will be entering detox to come off alcohol. We then cut to Nanzer in the front seat of a car next to Clough whom she explains she is making the film with; this footage appears to be filmed with a camera attached to the car dashboard. This opening sequence cleverly introduces the story, the main characters and their function, and signposts to the audience the visual style which will be adopted to tell the story.

We are going to be taken an a journey, where Diane is attempting to achieve a goal, Nanzer is expressing how she feels about this from her perspective and her helper, Clough, acts as an anchor moving between both Nanzer and Diane on their respective journeys, but also relating this back to *her* own childhood experience of having an alcoholic parent. This creates three possible points of identification through which to engage with the narrative; the child who is *experiencing* situation, the victim *going through* the situation and the adult who is *reflecting back* on the (and her own) situation. Clough acts as the intermediary between mother and daughter, *whilst at the*

same time goes on her own journey, reflecting back on her own childhood living with a parent absented through alcohol.

Nichols (1991) identified that the use of handheld cameras denotes a level of on-screen authenticity, and aesthetically validates the information being related. Prevalent in the observational form of documentary, footage captured is assumed to have been what would have taken place if the camera had not been at the scene to witness it. However, there are slippages from this, as the camera is used both as a tool to record interventions *and,* it could be argued, as a form of therapy, in the video diary sections Nanzer records. *Cinéma Vérité* relies on interventions created by the filmmaker to reveal the truth about a situation, and the way Nanzer uses her camera to discuss her feelings towards her mothers alcoholism and the direct affect this has had on her life, is often mediated through the lens of *her* camera, both when Diane is present and also absent from the scene.

At 04.44 Nanzer, recording a personal piece-to-camera admits she doesn't tell anyone how she feels; she doesn't tell friends as she doesn't want them to feel sorry for her, and if she tells her Nan (whom she lives with) she is told to tell Diane, but she says "I don't want to upset my mum, and I'm glad I have actually got a camera to talk to, cos like, then I can rewind it and see how I felt that day and

everything.” (05.58-06.10) This comes straight after a scene where Diane is asked by Clough if Nanzer is angry with her as she has arranged to meet her and has not turned up:

> …err, shh, well when I spoke to her on the phone, cos I did speak to her on the phone, and she was angry with me over the phone, so I put the phone down, as she was shouting at me…she just says to me please don’t do it no more, so I says I can’t promise you that. (04.29-04.54)

The distancing affect of communication through technology appears to facilitate Nanzer being able to open-up to Diane and reveal her true feeling of how her alcoholism impacts on her life. Just like the telephone, which enables Nanzer being able to express herself honestly, the camera acts as a device through which she can hide-behind in order to reveal the feelings she is unable to express in face-to-face conversation with her mother. The camera in this film both facilitates and reveals the truth, and becomes a cathartic medium by which Nanzer can express the emotional turmoil she is unable to share with others in her life.

Throughout the course of the film, a third camera captures moments where Nanzer is setting her camera up to record, and this is often inter-cut with her original filmed footage, mixing the two styles of filmmaking to reveal the process of manufacture; in this context the film is a hypermediated form of documentary, with one camera

revealing the process by which another has captured reality. Generally associated with more reflexive forms of documentary, which encourage the audience to consider their relationship with the truths being played-out on-screen, this process adds a layer of authenticity and encourages the audience to read what they are seeing as the truth in *this* particular story. By revealing the mechanics of how this story has been made, seeing Nanzer getting to grips with how to film, encourages a way of reading the screen akin to what Sobchack (1990) argues the inclusion of home-movie footage in documentary does; that is, that the amateur aesthetics of domestic footage encourage the audience to reflect back on what they are seeing on-screen and consider how it relates to their own lives, thus adding a layer of authenticity to the film being played-out. This clever use of reveal by the third camera allows the audience the privileged view of seeing what we are encouraged to read as domestic/amateur/home-movie footage being captured, and it is the aesthetics associated with this form of filmmaking which encourages the audience to read, as-real, what they are presented with.

Education, information or entertainment?

Writing in the *Radio Times* (2003: 31), Polly Toynbee suggested that *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) was more an example of fly-on-the-wall than “proper documentary”, arguing that it lacked facts and figures and had no experts to guide the audience through the issues being

raised. Not withstanding that the BAFTA committee awarded it one of their top accolades as the winner of the 2004 Flaherty Award, this demonstrates the difficulty of identifying just what *is* a documentary and subsequently what the function of a documentary is, when it has thus been defined as one. Toynbee argued that the episode lacked substance as it was too “touchy-feely” (2003: 31), but is there validity in suggesting that just because a documentary does not conform to the more conventional expository mode, it does not deserve to be categories as “proper”?

To be “proper” in Toynbee’s definition appears to suggest that documentary validity comes from its engagement with facts and figures; a didactic presentation of statistics, or evidence, supporting and developing a narrative. In this context, what she is suggesting is that documentaries should prioritise education or information in order to avoid the accusation of being merely examples of an entertainment format. However, education does not preclude emotional understanding and the strength of *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) is that it presents *what it is like* to be a victim of alcoholism. Facts and figures relating to alcohol abuse are easily obtained through external sources, via leaflets in doctor’s surgeries, the World Wide Web, support groups and a plethora of other places. What is *not* so readily available is the personal impact alcoholism has had on both the victim and their immediate family, and the documentary

presents a personal insight into this under-represented aspect of the disease.

Presenting the consequences of alcoholism in the context of a human-interest narrative allows the subject to be mediated within a discourse which encourages a more empathetic response in the audience. By utilising the formal strategies explored above, the documentary allows the vulnerability of both Nanzer and Diane to come through, and does not prioritise one discourse over the other. Nanzer is given the technology through which to communicate with her mother, ask her questions and present her and the situation as *she* sees it. Whilst Clough, also filming the story, resists expressing *her* feelings towards Nanzer and Diane, rather she uses their situation to make comment on how it was for *her* as a child experiencing her own fathers' alcoholism.

Clough only expresses positive feelings towards Diane, and remains non-judgemental throughout the film. She empathises with Nanzer when she explains:

> My Dad was an alcoholic, but when I was twelve, like Nanzer is now, I never told anyone. I loved him but hated it when he drank. He didn't live with us, but it didn't stop me from remembering the effect that alcohol had on our lives. (02.07-02.20)

And also displays understanding for Diane: “As a child I found it hard to see why Dad couldn't stop drinking, but the older you get the more you begin to understand. Alcohol is highly addictive and easy to get hold off.” (10.04-10.16) This comes straight after talking with Diane’s mother Beryl, who herself does not think Diane will be able to manage detox, and throughout the film expresses her doubt over her daughters ability to recover.

Clough even goes in search of Diane when she fails to visit Nanzer the day before she is due to be admitted into rehab, and whilst she does express her disappointment “It was now early evening and I was feeling worried about Diane, but also disappointed in her. She had let Nanzer down again, and maybe Beryl was right, she wasn't going to go into detox.” (18.07-18.20) Clough does this for Nanzer, as in the previous scene Nanzer had confided in her that she believed if her mother did not turn up, she wouldn’t go into rehab, and if she didn't get the help she needed, she “…is going to end up killing herself.” (17.48-17.53) Clough finds Diane, takes her back to her home to pack her bags and drives her to Beryl’s house where she is staying for the night before being driven to detox the following day.

Entering the clinic, Clough visits Diane daily and follows her progress whilst keeping in touch with Nanzer, taking her to visit her mother

whilst she is in rehab. Diane is filmed as she goes through detox, and here in the film we are shown the process by which an alcoholic withdraws and how they are supported both mentally and physically. As Nanzer has been willing her mother to succeed, the audience are drawn into also wanting this through the vicarious process of engagement we have with her; her twelve year old daughter, whom she no longer has custody of, has been Diane's main advocate remaining positive that her mother will achieve the goal she so desperately wants her to achieve, so she will be the mother she deserves.

We are taken on an emotional journey through the film; we learn snippets of information which go some way to explaining why Diane is the way she is, we learn some of the consequences of what being an alcoholic parent means, and we learn some of what it feels like to be a child of an alcoholic and the impact it has on their life. The lived, emotional consequences of this disease are presented within a personal discourse via Diane and both Nanzer *and* Clough, with the past and present colliding through these two children of alcoholic parents. Ultimately redemptive, narrative closure sees Diane surprise Nanzer on her return from rehab whilst she is holidaying at the seaside. The obvious love she has for her mother is reflected in her screams "mum, mum, mummy" (39.50-39.59) as she runs across the beach having spotted Diane, flinging herself into her arms.

This is the happy ending we have all been rooting for, and in the final sequence we see Nanzer and Diane walking down a canal towpath with Clough in voiceover explaining “Its been five months since Diane stopped drinking, and she continues to deal with each day as it comes.” (39.50-41.02) Cut to Nanzer in voiceover “My mum is doing perfect, I really am proud of my mum, and I really do hope that she’s going to make it this time.” (41.02-41.10) Creating an emotional engagement with the consequences of living with alcohol is not undermined by refusing to deal with statistical facts and figures; the reality of alcoholism is mediated via the *experience* of what it is to be both an alcoholic and the child of an alcoholic. If the remit of public service broadcasting is to educate, inform *and* entertain, arguably *this* episode in the *ONE life* (2003) series quite clearly fulfils the first two remits of this concept.

Conclusion

The *ONE life* (2003) series, across all of the seven episodes, explored a variety of different topics, and utilised a range of approaches through which to engage the audience. The publicity material clearly stated that these were films which explored contemporary life in Britain and that each reflected the filmmaker or main protagonist’s point of view; this was not a series which conformed to a particular form or explored a series of related narratives. (BBC 2003a) But never-the-less, the films did have a

defining thread which ran across six of the seven episodes; that of love. Love and its multi-faceted definition was a point of engagement through which the films could be accessed, regardless of whether the main storyline was one which, as a member of the audience, they were generally interested in or not. And perhaps this is both the strength of the films and what some would argue is their weakness; rather than presenting an authoritative tract, churning out seemingly objective evidence, they were subjective testaments which pulled at the heartstrings of the audience in-order to deliver an experiential narrative through which to engage with the topics.

With this a fine line *is* sometimes trod between gratuitous emotional manipulation, through the use of spectacle to engage the audience. Toynbee in her review of the series suggested that without presenting the facts and figures surrounding a topic, there was a danger the films would fall into becoming mere peep-shows (2003: 31), and arguable at times the films *do* use this strategy of engagement, and this does detracts from being drawn-in to a subject, and rather the audience *do* remain at surface-level at some points. However in the overall context of a documentary, this *can* work; in *Scared To Leave Home* (2003) at the start of the documentary Julie is filmed having a panic attack in the middle of an agoraphobic episode, and the close-up of her extreme anxiety makes for uncomfortable viewing.

Coming before the audience has had a chance to make any emotional connection with her, seeing her experience an attack presents a mere curiosity; a spectacle of pure emotion devoid of any real context. However, throughout the course of the narrative we *do* build a connection with her, and whilst it may remain somewhat annoying that she cannot overcome her fear and anxieties we do develop an understanding of what living with this condition is like for a *particular* individual; whether the audience are able to turn micro into macro is beyond the scope of this analysis. But what is without doubt is that the series remit to present “Everyday people, everyday stories” as suggested in the voice-over introduction to the series’ first episode, *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) was fulfilled, and unarguably they managed to educate and inform along the way.

Chapter Six: *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005)

> "This is Middlesbrough, if you are not from here you might never get to come here. But it's got docks, chemical works and Psyche, a new clothes store that's going to be the best in Britain. Well that's what this man says. He owns it." Richard Macer (*The Secret Life of The Shop* 2005: 00.04-00.17)

Introduction

In April 2005, BBC3 began to broadcast a new documentary series made by the filmmaker Richard Macer. *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) went out in the Sunday evening 21.00 slot and comprised of four episodes, each of which concentrated on a different aspect of Psyche, a Middlesbrough-based clothing store. Owned by Steve Cochrane, the machinations of life both working in and owning a store were explored over the course of a year, with Macer capturing the behind-the-scenes drama not usually seen by the members of the public who frequented the business.

Already an established documentarian, Macer had produced and directed four previous films which had been broadcast on BBC television; *Jordan: The Truth About Me* (2002), *Jordan: The Model Mum* (2002), *Jordan: You Don't Even Know Me* (2003) and *Shaun*

Ryder: The Ecstasy and the Agony (2004). All of these films focused on individuals already in the public eye, who had courted controversy in some way, and all had Macer follow the main protagonist around for periods in-excess of six months, in order to capture aspects of their daily life. Within these intimate profiles the celebrities interacted with Macer as he recorded their exploits, arguably embedding himself within the narrative as a filmmaker who rather than merely observed, quite clearly helped to drive the narrative forward with his participatory, and performative style of work.

Although the films Macer made exploring the life of Jordan arguably form a trilogy, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) was his first full-length BBC series. Filmed in the same style as his previous work, perhaps because it was grounded in a work-based location, this allowed him more freedom to create a narrative which he could shape. This undoubtedly *is* a documentary series, but, the construction and representation of reality is shaped by Macer and arguably traverses the boundaries of accepted practice, and this chapter will begin by exploring what these boundaries are.

Whilst acknowledging that this is *not* a mock-documentary, it *does* exhibit some of the characteristics associated with this reflexive form of filmmaking, and a comparison between *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) and the BBC mock-documentary series *People Like Us*

(1999) is used to contextualise the analysis of key scenes from the series. This analysis is then used to consider how, within a public service broadcasting remit, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) remediates some of the (mock) conventions associated with the representation of reality, and how reality can thus be considered to be manufactured within this context, and the implication this has on the viewing experience.

No documentary tells the whole truth; documentaries are cultural products, shaped by (often unconscious) ideologies in the mind of the filmmaker. However objective a documentary may appear, it has to be read as one particular interpretation amongst many, and no documentary can lay claim to the definitive truth. Perhaps if read in this context, the playfully postmodern techniques used by Macer, whilst creating a somewhat ironic engagement with the text, signpost that whilst these films might not be educational in relation to the industry of retail, what they reveal is a sophisticated meta-narrative which encourages the audience to deconstruct the very discourse which purports to represent reality itself.

(Mock) documentary practices

In Chapter Two (Modes of documentary practice: 76) a general overview of documentary modes was given, and the ways in which these have impacted on the politics of representation. In her work on

audience engagement Hill (2008) usefully identified some problematics associated with how documentary is perceived, and perhaps the most interesting in relation to *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) was that “Observational documentaries are perceived by audiences as performative.” (224) It appeared that the contemporaneous audiences Hill interviewed could not distinguish between a mode which historically attempts to hide the role of the filmmaker and foreground the unfolding action, and one which foregrounded the role of the filmmaker in the construction of the representation of reality, whether that be through direct interventions on-screen or via aesthetic techniques.

However, this was not wholly due to the respondents misunderstanding of the historical term. Hill’s (2008) work appears to raise two further issues in relation to the notion of what performative means. Firstly, Hill (2008) herself was using it to examine whether or not audiences perceived that the protagonist featured within a documentary “…acted up…” (2008: 223); secondly she herself was therefore using it out of its originally defined context. This subversion of a term associated with a specific mode of documentary practice creates tension, as performative morphs into what would be more generally associated with the definition of performance, per se. That Hill (2008) undermines the original meaning in this context reflects the eclectic nature of contemporary documentary practice which combines, re-configures and melds together elements associated

with a range of visual methodologies, and the fundamental difficulty of trying to define what documentary actually is.

The Secret Life of The Shop (2005) can be said to reflect this coming-together of associated practices, which makes it an interesting and relevant case-study; it is an observational documentary, whereby a filmmaker spent an extensive period in situ in order to capture reality as it unfolded before the camera. It has characteristics associated with the observational sub-genre the docu-soap; it is set in a work environment, and follows the lives of those who are employed there. It is a participatory documentary; the filmmaker interacts with the contributors, and helps develop the shape of the narrative. It is also a performative documentary. Through the direct involvement of the filmmaker, the course of the narrative is fundamentally changed, and what is witnessed by the camera has a direct correlation with the filmmakers presence; in other words certain storylines would not have developed as they did, but for the intervention of Macer himself. That withstanding, the ironic use of popular music tracks to encourage the audience to read the text in a particular way, further takes away a level of objectivity and adds an ironic underscore to many of the scenes, and it could be argued that in this context, the series crosses the performative/reflexive border as its difficult *not* to engage with certain scenes *without* acknowledging that they are constructed.

This postmodern, eclectic use of differing modes creates an interesting relationship between the text and the audience; on the one hand the series utilises conventions associated with drawing the audience in, to accept that what they are seeing is authentic, juxtaposed against the distancing strategies of Macer (often inappropriately) interacting with the protagonists on-screen, and the ironic use of voice-over and music. This melding together of narrative and stylistic features often makes the reality of the action unfolding appear contrived, and it is this context which makes it interesting and relevant to explore in relation to the mock-documentary framework, as proposed by Roscoe and Hight. (2001)

In their book *Faking it: Mock-documentary and the subversion of factuality* (2001) Roscoe and Hight developed a framework by which mock-documentary could be identified, and the specific relationship these differing forms of text attempted to engender with their audience. They identified the ways in which factual and fictional texts were increasingly blurring their boundaries and raised a series of general problems associated with academic discourse around what constitutes a documentary in the first place. In the introduction, they argue that established academics such as Derek Paget and Bill Nichols have under-theorised the mock-documentary and have categorised texts which would generally be associated with the reflexive mode *as* mock-documentary (2001: 2), and propose that their book *only* examines texts which are clearly identified as

fictional. They also discount any text which is defined as a hoax; one which upon original release was designed to dupe both the media and general public into believing it was truthful.

Whilst this provides a clear body of work with which to establish a framework, and there is little doubt that reflexive texts are legitimate forms by which to engage with and represent reality, so clearly deserve to be labelled as documentary, there is an argument to be had around the relationship between fictional forms which *are* making reference to the real world to make a more philosophical argument about the representation of reality, in and of, itself, and factual texts which purport to engage their audience in a similar way. That is not to argue that *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) falls within this category, rather, it suggests that the relationship between fact and fiction texts may not be as clear as Roscoe and Hight (2001) suggest, and that this framework is *also* useful for considering how factual texts utilise conventions associated with mock-documentary practices. In a wonderfully postmodern turn, fictional texts are borrowing from factual discourses, which in turn are borrowing back from this re-appropriated form; this relationship of remediation and the construction of reality will be developed further in due course.

Roscoe and Hight (2001) proposed three categories by which a text can be defined as mock-documentary, outlining that their

“…approach essentially involves identifying three main ‘degrees’ of ‘mock-dockness’…which are derived especially from the type of relationship which a text constructs with factual discourse.” (64) Degree 1 is *parody*, and presented as a benevolent form as it takes an aspect of popular culture and gently pokes fun at it. It utilises the codes and conventions associated with documentary, but not to engage the audience in a reflexive process of questioning the very representation of reality itself. Degree 2 is *critique*, which whilst not being fully engaged with the reflexive process, does include elements which could engage an audience to question the validity of the representations they are consuming. Roscoe and Hight suggest this is an ambivalent form as examples parody the subject matter explored within the text. In other words, they are more critical in terms of their representation of the subject being explored. Degree 3 is *deconstruction*, and texts within this category are considered hostile in their appropriation documentary techniques. Mock-documentaries which are identified as deconstruction are questioning the very validity of the documentary/factual discourse itself, and its relationship with reality. And in the same way that Nichols (1991; 2001) argued that texts operated across the modes he identified, mock-documentary works in the same way, whereby a text can oscillate between the degrees.

Of most relevance in relation to *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) are degree 1, parody and degree 3, deconstruction. When discussing

parody, Roscoe and Hight (2001) suggest “These are fictional texts which both make obvious the fictionality (the audience is expected to appreciate the text’s comic elements) and are comparatively muted in their challenge to the nature of the documentary project itself.” (68) They continue: “The humour in these texts, then, comes in part from the contrast between the rational and irrational, between a sober form and an absurd or comic subject.” (68) The series does make obvious its fictionality, in relation to the construction of a (real life) narrative which demands the audience read what is presented before them as ironic at certain points. When Macer disrupts the action by asking inappropriate questions or making duplicitous observations it is difficult not to snigger as it is glaringly obvious he is poking fun at those who he is filming.

In episode three *Jobs for The Boys* (2005) two rival employees who are competing for the same post have just found out the interviews are in few days time. Macer visits John at home as he discusses the situation with his wife Charlie. They are both concerned that John doesn't have enough time to prepare, and the conversation leads on to a general discussion regarding how exploited Charlie feels John is at Psyche.

> Charlie: “He’s more or less on the minimum wage, you could basically go and work in Greggs and get the same wage as what you're getting now.”

> Macer: “Yeah, but he likes clothes not pasties.” (23.26-23.38)

Whilst on the surface this could be read as a tongue-in-cheek comment, it comes off the back of John and Charlie discussing, in all sincerity, their unhappiness at the situation. Macer behaves like a naughty child, creating a disruptive intervention at the expense of two protagonists, which belittles their obvious concerns. And it is at these moments that the brilliance of the series is show-cased; it cleverly parodies the banality of the docu-soap, where the minutiae of everyday life becomes the dramatic central focus, through the intervention of inappropriate questioning which draws attention to the text as a construction. You laugh at the absurdity of the comment, which draws you away from the narrative and into a space which allows for critical reflection.

This audience repositioning transforms the text into a deconstruction of the factual genre itself. Roscoe and Hight (2001) suggest of documentaries which operate as deconstruction that:

> Their central distinguishing characteristic is that even if they focus on other subjects their real intention is to engage in a sustained critique of the set of assumptions and expectations which support the classic modes of documentary. (72)

If it is accepted that *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) does parody the docu-soap genre, then the subversion of the characteristics associated with this form of programming act as a mechanism for

questioning the genres relationship with reality and its very status as a factual discourse. It also raises questions as to the function of this form of programming, as the audience who sit and engage with the banality of watching others live their lives out, on-screen, are suddenly taken out of the narrative and placed in a position where they can reflect on what it *actually* is they are engaging with.

Whilst the series *could* have been analysed in relation to the established participatory and reflexive modes of documentary practice, these delimit the playful, postmodern nature of the work. The strength of the series lies in its relationship with other texts which *are* examples of mock-documentary, specifically the earlier BBC2 series *People Like Us* (1999-2001) which itself openly parodied the docu-soap genre. Operating within degree 1 of the Roscoe and Hight (2001) scheme, it followed the lives of the everyday public whilst they engaged in their work, each episode following a particular individual and their associated colleagues, showcasing a different occupation each week. The eclectic range included a managing director, estate agent, solicitor, teacher, a police officer, a journalist, a mother and a vicar. Each thirty-minute episode was structured around a main protagonist who was followed by the (fictional) presenter Roy Mallard (Chris Langham) who interacted in a similar way to Macer. The primary difference between the two series is that Macer filmed his own work, whereas Mallard acted as an off-camera mediator/presenter. Both interjected at various points in the unfolding

narrative action and both provided a final voice-over to the finished episodes.

The similarities between the two series are striking, and it is difficult not to draw reference to *People Like Us* (1999-2001) when examining *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) as it playfully remediates the cringe-inducing interaction between the presenter/filmmaker(s) and their subject. Whilst *People Like Us* (1999-2001) clearly utilises comedy to parody the docu-soap, whilst avoiding deconstruction of the factual genre itself, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) takes this one level further and the remediation of a mock-documentary in this context creates a clear argument to support that the series *does* work as an example of deconstruction. However, this is not in the same context as a (traditional) reflexive documentary, as it primarily draws its inspiration from a text which is *outside* of the factual discourse itself.

The Secret Life of The Shop (2005)

Whilst there is a clear connection to be made between *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) and *People Like Us* (1999-2001), the series can also be positioned within a body of work associated with auteur filmmaking. This is developed further in Chapter Seven in relation to Paul Watson, and will therefore only be touched upon here, but the films Macer had produced up to *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005)

combined with his working practices deem it appropriate to consider him within this framework before moving on to examine the series itself.

To date, Macer had made four previous films, three exploring the life of ex page-three glamour model Jordan, and one following Happy Mondays lead singer Shaun Ryder. All of these required him to spend an extensive amount of time with the main protagonists, following them during their daily lives and building up a relationship with them. All of the films used handheld cameras, had synchronised sound, and Macer himself was part of the narrative via off-camera questions, opportunistic moments where he was drawn on-screen by the protagonists and the use of his voice to narrate the finished films. In a review for his new series, taken from the *Manchester Evening News* (2007) Macer explained: “Becoming their friend was a very important part of winning their trust. I was just left to film and I’d work the same routine as they did.” He naturalised himself into their environment, winning their trust so that he could film and interact with them as if *he were one of them*. He became their friend, their confidant, but ultimately he was their witness, capturing on camera things which he would not have had access to if he hadn’t ingratiated himself into their world.

Unlike the hapless methods associated with the klutz (Dovey 2000) filmmaking techniques of Broomfield and Theroux, rather than acting up to provoke a reaction, Macer managed to create interventions from *inside* the world he was examining. His interjections reflect how relaxed both he is and the protagonists are with him, as he is able to make comment which could be deemed inappropriate in the context of a filmmaker making an observational documentary series about the working life of a shop. He is able to shape the course of the narrative, as he plays members of staff off each other in order to heighten (the already present) conflict. This aside, his films quite clearly stand alongside those of both Broomfield and Theroux, also auteur documentarians, in that they reveal aspects of a world that generally remain hidden, and this hidden world is gained access to by techniques which have now become synonymous with each of the filmmakers, and are reflected in their oeuvre.

And it is the hidden, ordinary-world that links *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) with that of both the docu-soap and the mock-documentary television series *People Like Us* (1999-2001). Evolving out of a Radio 4 comedy broadcast between 1995 and 1997, the premise was similar to that of a docu-soap, with the added inclusion of an off-screen presenter, who followed the action being filmed and interjected at pertinent points, often causing disruption to the narrative. Perhaps working in a similar way to the auteur documentarian Nick Broomfield, the (fictional) Mallard irritated his

contributors into reacting to his presence; his subjects were openly bemused by how ridiculous he was, and the comedy was derived through Mallards absurd observations.

An excellent example of how parody is used as a primary point of engagement occurs near the start of episode three, series one *The Police Officer* (1999). Mallard is accompanying PC David Knight as he goes about his daily routine. Travelling in the car to work with him, Mallard asks Knight what he expects of his day ahead:

> Knight: “Unlike most people when they go to work, I have no idea yet what the day will bring.”
>
> Mallard: “Right, does that make you feel apprehensive?”
>
> Knight: “What about?”
>
> Mallard: “Well, about what may happen.”
>
> Knight: “Well, I don't know that yet, I have no idea.”
>
> Mallard: “Oh, yes.”
>
> Knight: “That's what I’m saying.”
>
> Mallard: “Yes.” (01.35-01.47)

As the episode continues, a narrative theme which develops is that perhaps police officers are not seen as intellectually bright within the wider community. This opening scene therefore acts to set up the

premise that there may be some validity in the crude stereotype which the police are keen to challenge. As Mallard follows Knight into the locker room for his change-over from member of the general public, into PC Knight, the voice over continues with Mallard stating "This is not just a matter of turning up for work, for Dave each shift begins with what amounts to a ritual transformation every bit as significant as that undertaken by a minister of religion or a clown." (02.11-02.22)

The absurd comparisons used to describe this process, whilst *are* fundamentally examples of "ritual transformations" are quite clearly working at the level of gentle mockery rather than biting satire. The juxta-positioning of law and religion with the circus is poking gentle fun at established cultural institutions, rather than openly ridiculing them. As the narrative continues, Mallard follows Knight whilst walking the beat, and they encounter a woman who lives above a shop with a faulty alarm system. She is in the street, trying to speak to Knight over the noise of the alarm:

> Knight: "We cannot really do an awful lot until we find out where the owner is."
>
> Woman: "Oh well he wont give a toss straight, fat bastard."
>
> Voice Over (Mallard): The single mother who lives in the flat above is keen to get the problem rectified.

Woman: “It's the third time it’s happened in the last fucking week.”

Voice Over (Mallard): This is the first time this has happened and she is feeling weak.

Woman: “What is the point in a fucking police force then?”

Knight: “Look, this is really not helping is it?”

Muffled dialogue…

Woman: “Use your truncheon or something, I don't know.”

Voice Over (Mallard): Because she is short of sleep she is tired.

Woman: “I tell you it’s doing my fucking head in.”

Voice Over (Mallard): And worse still there are problems with her head.

Knight: “Please calm down.” (05.10-05.44)

The audience can quite clearly hear what the woman is saying yet the voice over misinterprets this, and the humour is derived from Mallards irrational interpretation of what she is saying. She is quite clearly criticizing the ineptitude of the police in not being able to locate the owner of the shop and later questions the function of the police in general, but the primary point of engagement is the

discrepancy between the character dialogue and the voice over interpreting her words.

These three examples demonstrate comparable techniques which encourage a particular audience engagement with the series *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005). In the first example Mallard was interacting with his protagonist, attempting to elucidate information which would inform the audience to how Knight felt about the start of his working day. Knight demonstrated a clear inability to engage with Mallard at this level yet Mallard continued this line of questioning. Macer also uses this technique whereby he interacts with his protagonists and allows them to expose themselves, on-screen, in ways which would not have been possible but for his interventions.

During his year filming Macer was able to forge a relationship with his protagonists and they certainly seemed comfortable with his presence. Perhaps in this sense they were lured into behaving authentically, reacting as they would have if he wasn't there, as they believed he wouldn’t take advantage of them. In the opening episode of the series, *The Trouble with Ladies Wear* (2005), Macer explains in voice over “It was an emotional time in ladies wear, and I got caught in the middle.” (02.06-02.08) This opening position clearly signposts that Macer himself would be part of the narrative drama, and this was not a purely observational documentary. Whilst there

are numerous examples spanning all four episodes where Macer interacts with Psyche staff, during this opening episode an incident with a member of the general public sets the tone of the series.

Running a total of three minutes, and starting at fourteen minutes in, Macer in voice-over states “Kerry had a problem in ladies wear. A woman had got herself trapped in a Ted Baker top.” (14.00-14.06) The top is clearly too small; it has numerous shoelace straps which go over the shoulders and cross over at the back. She has managed to get them to cross over at the front and is now stuck. Macer follows Kerry into the changing room and films the action, asking “Has she put it on wrong?” (14.19-14.20) Whilst Kerry is attempting to sort the straps out, Macer points the camera down, in a close-up shot, to the woman’s protruding stomach; this is clearly unmotivated and is not following the natural course of action (14.35), which would lead the audience to read that Macer is alluding to the woman’s current predicament being in some part due to her being overweight. That the top was the incorrect size and the straps are hideously complicated is arbitrary now this visual reference has been created.

Kerry leaves the changing room to see if there is another top, and is followed by Macer:

> Kerry: “I’ve got the giggles, that's why I’ve had to come out.”

Macer is heard laughing in the background, and we see Kelly on screen giggling.

Macer can be heard saying a muffled “god”.

Macer: “Are there any other’s?”

Kerry: “I’ll go and have a check.” (14.43-14.58)

They both return to the changing room and Macer continues to film the woman as Kerry tries to help disentangle her. Both Kerry and Macer (who is seen momentarily reflected in the mirror) are openly amused by the situation. The woman is clearly embarrassed, and as Kerry leaves, Macer asks “Are you alright?” to which she replies “Yeah”; she is clearly not alright as she has her head in her hands and looks visibly distressed (15.38-15.41).

Outside Macer catches up with Kerry, and as she turns towards him asks:

Kerry: “Right, really now, what am I going to do?”

Macer starts to laugh.

Kerry: “We’ll just have to cut it off.”

Macer: “Could you not, cant you just, couldn’t you just pull it over her head?”

Kerry: “I cant.”

Macer: “Sorry?”

Kerry: “I cant.”

Macer: “Why not?”

Kerry: “Cos it was all, you could hear it ripping.”

Macer starts to laugh again (15.42-15.58).

Returning to the changing room Kerry proceeds to cut the woman out of the top, and is openly sniggering. Macer then asks her “Has this happened to you before?” (19.28-16.30) When the straps are finally cut, Macer returns to the close up shot of her bulging stomach.

Kerry clearly feels there is camaraderie at work between herself and Macer; they giggle together at the woman’s distress and she even asks his advice on what she should do. Whilst Macer is as much a part of the action as both the customer and Kerry, *he* isn’t the one who is representing Psyche. In this scene Kerry has openly derided a customer, laughing at her misfortune, and this creates a negative reflection on both herself and the shop in general. Going one stage further than the fictional Mallard, Macer not only allows his protagonists to expose their true self on-screen, he seems to positively encourage it by joining in with the unfolding drama.

In the above example Macer was drawn into the action by Kerry, but in *Tantrum and Tears in Mens Wear* (2005) he jumps into it without invitation, and this leads to conflict within the narrative. A competition between rival salesmen Jammer, who is described in voice-over as "the dresser to Middleborough's celebrity elite, big hitters like the towns local football stars and Real Madrid's Jonathan Woodgate" (03.50-03.55) and Paul who "was only nineteen, already had three kids and a pregnant wife. He was a selling machine." (04.01-04.06) Moving between the men, Macer winds them up, telling each of them separately that the other thinks they are the better salesman, and when they fail to bite, pushes it further asking whether its irritating that that their rival considers themselves the better man. Seeing an opportunity to use this to increase sales, owner Steve Cochrane decides to set the men a challenge, with the winner getting a bonus and a bottle of champagne.

After 48 hours the competition culminated in Paul being declared the winner, much to Jammers obvious anger. As he walks away from his colleagues, the voice-over states: "The game was up for the king of the sales floor and he didn't like losing. While Paul celebrated, Jammer was sulking on the stairs. He refused to toast his victor." (21.20-21.32) Even boss Steve tries to get Jammer to come and have a glass of champagne, but he still refuses. Victor Paul is clearly unimpressed by Jammers reaction, claiming "He's spat his dummy right out he has, he's a big baby." (21.54-21.57) So perhaps it's

rather ill conceived for Macer to intervene in the situation. He follows Jammer and the following exchange takes place:

> Macer: “You’re a bad loser Jammer.”
>
> Jammer: “I’m not a bad loser, I’ve nothing to prove.”
>
> Macer: “You've got everything to prove.”
>
> Jammer: “He’s won so fuck, I’m not bothered.”
>
> Paul: “He’s a big puff, with a pointy head.” (21.58-22.10)

As the party continues, Jammer is visible in the background working, and once again Steve tries to get him to come and join in, and Jammer refuses. Steve then pours a glass of champagne and passes it to Macer who makes his way over to Jammer:

> Voice Over (Macer): I thought maybe Jammer would take the champagne from me.
>
> Macer: “Everyone’s a winner.”
>
> Jammer: “If you don't fuck off I’ll crack your jaw in a minute. Rich, just fuck off now.” (22.43-22.56)

Jammer obviously felt comfortable enough to (over) react to Macer, threatening him in a wholly inappropriate way, but one which the audience could clearly see coming. After 48 hours of rivalry, and tensions mounting, Macer could have predicted that the situation

would turn volatile. He himself had added to this by winding the two men up, and after spending an extensive period of time with the protagonists would have been aware that there were potentially negative consequences when Jammer lost the challenge to his nineteen-year-old rival. Macer's direct interventions heightened the tension, and just like Broomfield who always seemed to manage to get his protagonists to lose their patience in front of the camera, Jammer also gave Macer the money-shot, in his petulant over-reaction. Under any other circumstances, this form of behaviour may have resulted in formal action being taken against him, as an employee behaving in a threatening manner whilst at a place of work. And again, concomitant with the previous example, this not only reflects badly on Jammer himself, but Psyche as his employer, and suggest that it is not only ladies wear that has a problem with their staff, but menswear too.

The second example taken from *The Police Officer* (1999) highlights the gentle mockery at work through the use of form, creating ironic juxtapositions to poke fun at the police force in general. *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) also uses a variety of formal elements to create tension between what is shown on screen and how Macer wants to position the audience and read the narrative action. Through the use of both editing techniques and the inclusion of non-diegetic music, he is able to create tension between what is represented and how the audience engage with this representation.

In the overview of episode one *The Trouble with Ladies Wear* (2005) Macer in voice-over explains: “I started off in ladies wear. Steve told me it had a reputation for the women falling out. I soon found out why.” (01.10-01.17) Whilst on the surface this would not appear a particularly controversial statement, the accompanying visuals to the words “I soon found out why” is a mid-shot of a female shopper in the changing room trying on an ill-fitting extremely low cut red dress, and is using her hands to hide her exposed cleavage. As she covers her breasts with her hands, the diegetic sound returns and she is heard to say “Oh dear” (01.19), clearly embarrassed by how she feels in the dress. This comedy juxta-positioning of the different meanings of the term ‘falling out’ works in a way similar to that of the mock-documentary, and undermines what could potentially be a serious issue of work-place conflict. It also serves to set the tone of the series, that what we are going to see will be subtly poked fun at.

Throughout all four episodes, music is used as a device to either support a comedic reading of the action it is underscoring or as an ironic counterpoint; it is rarely used as a filler which has no motivation or connection with the unfolding narrative. The clever use of popular music tracks ensures the audience is aware of the non-diegetic influence and draws attention to the constructed nature of the text. Continuing with episode one, the opening story illustrates what Macer suggested is the key characteristic on the ladies wear floor: conflict. Laura is unhappy as to why a co-worker has been promoted

over her. She arranges to see Steve to discuss her position, and reveals she has a particular issue with Kerry. Whilst discussing Kerry's recent promotion to the assistant buyers position relates "…but out of everyone, she's had the most customer complaints, and I'm not trying to bitch about her, because I am her friend." (05.19-05.24) Laura is in tears, and whilst Steve tries to manage the situation is unable to resolve it to her satisfaction.

As she leave the office, a complex mix of diegetic and non-diegetic sound emanates from the screen:

> Voice Over (Macer): Steve had made up his mind. But if Laura thought she would get some sympathy from her friend Kerry, then she was wrong.
>
> As the voice-over stops the lyrics of the song come in "You're as cold as ice"; it then cuts to Kerry.
>
> Macer: "How do you feel about the fact that, you know, Laura was upset with you?"
>
> (Under this we hear the lyrics "Willing to sacrifice our love")
>
> Kerry: "The same when we all got interviewed to be supervisor, and obviously I got it, and everybody else congratulated me, yet Laura was in tears again and didn't speak to me for a few days then. So to me I've just seen it all before."

(Under this we hear the lyrics “You never take advice”)

Kerry: “But, what, what can I do apart from obviously lose out on the position to keep her happy?”

(Under this are the lyrics “Someday you’ll pay the price I know”)

Then it cuts to Laura working alone on the shop floor.

(Under this are the lyrics “I’ve seen it before it happens all the time”)

Laura: “Apparently I heard that Catherine had put my name forward but he’d said he didn’t think I’d be committed to the job, because I, I was thinking of going away and doing acting and things but I’ve never told him that so I don't know why he would think that. So somebody else must have told him. So.”

Macer: “I wonder who that was?”

Laura: “I do as well”

(The lyrics under this dialogue are muted, but when it cuts to a long shot of Kerry talking to Ange the lyrics resume: “You’re as cold as ice”)

Voice Over (Macer): I don’t think the other staff were happy that Laura had gone to see the boss behind their backs. I could see what was coming. (06.33-07.39)

The use of the Foreigner track 'Cold As Ice' (1977) was an inspired choice, and whilst it adds to the drama of an already emotional situation it also brings in a comedic element due to its dramatic hyperbolic status within this context. The two friends are at-war over opportunities to further their career, and lyrics which include the words "cold as ice" and "willing to sacrifice our love" creates a drama around what is essentially a (competitive) work-based friendship. Macer has created the perception that their relationship is in crisis, and the lyrics "Someday you'll pay the price I know" feel positively Shakespearian when considered within this context. Macer has over-egged the situation in order to embellish the drama, in much the same way as docu-soaps trade off their primary form of audience engagement, which is to present what is essentially the mundane, as entertainment.

In the third example taken from *The Police Officer* (1999) the comedy is derived from the discrepancy between what we hear on-screen and the interpretation via Mallards voice over. The non-diegetic voice over undermines the diegetic voice and creates a tension between what is emanating from the screen space and how this is interpreted and then fed back to the audience. The way in which the voice over is used to concretise how the audience are encouraged to read what is presented before them is crudely achieved in the mock-documentary, as the audience can clearly engage with the process of reconstruction, and this is where the comedy emanates. In *The*

Secret Life of The Shop (2005) the process is more subtle, but nevertheless present as a device which Macer uses to subtly critique what is being presented to us.

An excellent example of this occurs during episode three *Jobs for the Boys* (2005), which is in part set during the Christmas period. Whilst the children's department does not feature as a primary location, Macer in voice-over states: "On the children's floor, Santa's grotto was experiencing a bit of a slump." (10.34-10.38) Although this might be factually correct, and the department is indeed under-performing, the accompanying visual is Santa, sat reading a newspaper. As the shot gets tighter, it becomes a close-up of the newspaper headline he is reading, which states: "The baby ripped out of the womb by a killer". This juxtaposition of Santa, sat in the children's wear department, reading a wholly inappropriate article which alludes to the death of a baby creates a moment of irony that builds on the narrative which has thus far concentrated on how dysfunctional Psyche is. Not only are members of the sales staff feckless at times, it seems Santa is getting in on the act too.

But it is the final episode that perhaps provides the key as to where this dysfunction emanates from. In the opening voice-over Macer states his fascination with the owner of Psyche, Steve Cochrane, and in *The Cook, the Lover and the Revolutionary* (2005) he attempts to

untangle what motivates him as he shadows the owner in the final few months of filming. In all the filming up to this point Cochrane comes across as earnest, determined and committed, and the audience has been given no reason to question that what he says is not serious. But in the opening five minutes we learn more about him than in all of the previous three episodes; before he met Alex, his current girlfriend of six months, he was a womaniser who by his own admission had a "horrendous drug habit" (05.25-05.26). He has grand plans for Psyche, wanting to open a 420-capacity restaurant and conference suite on the roof, complete with helipad, and has a special guest he wants to open his new facilities.

Apparently with the backing of the Mayor of Middlesbrough and the local council (09.09) he intends to invite the Cuban communist revolutionary Fidel Castro. As Macer canvases opinion from members of Cochrane's staff, they discuss in all seriousness why this wouldn't be a good idea. This creates a surreality to the whole premise, that a serious discussion would ensue regarding the pro's and con's of asking Fidel Castro to open a restaurant in Middlesbrough.

> Macer: "Why do you think he wants him?"
>
> Alex: "Well."
>
> Macer: "Is Steve a communist?"

Alex: “No.”

Unknown: “What do you think Dean? Fidel Castro coming to the shop?”

Dean: “Well, why the hell would he come to a clothes shop? There’s no point in like saying, like, yeah, I’ll come.”

Unknown: “He lives miles away.”

Dean: “He’s never been out of the Cuba in how many years?”

Alex: “I know he hasn't.”

Dean: “So what he gonna do? Oh, no, no I’m gonna go to Middlesbrough to a clothes shop. Bollocks.” (09.09-10.03)

This is comedy of the absurd; is there a joke that we, the audience are not in on to make the staff take this proposal seriously? It adds further discord to reading the series as an authentic factual discourse, and places it firmly within the realms of parody, as the juxtaposition exemplifies what Roscoe and Hight (2001) suggest is “…the rational and the irrational, between the sober form and an absurd or comic subject” (68) inherent in this form of work.

Later, whilst Macer is filming at Steve and Alex’s home:

Voice Over (Macer): After dinner, Steve went upstairs to find Alex and I was left alone downstairs. Twenty minutes later, something strange happened. He summoned me.

Steve: “Richard”

Macer: “Sorry?”

Steve: “Can you come up, I'd like to show you something.” [muffled dialogue]

Macer: “You want to show me something?”

Steve: [muffled dialogue]

Macer: “Blimey.”

Macer is confronted with Steve and Alex sat up in bed.

Voice Over (Macer): But it wasn't the drawings done by Steve’s five-year-old son that he wanted to show me. It was the letter to Castro.

Steve begins to dictate to Alex what he wants to say and she writes it down (13.02-13.42). He goes on to muse what it would take for Castro to come to Middleborough, and discusses Castro’s relationship with democracy (13.42—14.55), and then we hear Macer (in voice-over): “I though Steve’s appreciation of Castro was lost on Alex and I was at a loss to know why they were writing to him in bed, and why they wanted me to film it.” (14.55-15.06) Perhaps in some small way, this final episode of the series which focused on the man behind Psyche, gave context as to why those who were employed within the company had predilections towards peculiarity themselves.

> Documentary attempts to create a position for audience in which we are encouraged to take up unproblematically the truth claims offered to us. Although we would argue that a documentary mode of engagement does mean a participation in a contract with the filmmaker through which we agree to accept the representations as 'real' and 'truthful', the process of negotiation still involves some consideration of the believability of the text. (Roscoe and Hight 2001: 23)

The Secret Life of The Shop (2005) presents the narrative discourse through a variety of reflexive techniques, which makes accepting the representations, as captured and re-presented not as simplistic as the above quote would suggest. It is clear to see how irony is used, but what is not always clear is what this ironic stance is drawing attention to? Roscoe and Hight in their schema suggest "Mock-documentary: To present a fictional text, with varying degrees of intent to parody or critique an aspect of culture or the documentary genre itself." (2001: 54)

But what Macer has produced is a documentary which arguably deconstructs the genre of documentary itself. And in addition to this, parodies the plethora of docu-soaps which had been a prevalent precursor, and purported to represent the world of work when in

actual fact they were no more than an excuse to encourage real-life protagonists to live their emotional turmoil out, on-screen.

> Take any aspect of British life – it could be shopping, travelling, eating, pet-care or clubbing. Find a contained location where a manageable cast of characters will engage in these activities or, more importantly, interact with the Great British Public. Keep an eye out for the one or two characters who will become your 'stars'…It's not essential, but in the first few episodes you will need at least one shouting match and the commentary, 'unfortunately all did not go well for Tracey…That's about it. (Bethell quoted in Kilborn 2003: 100)

Bethell sums up quite clearly the parameters of what became the docu-soap genre and other than *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) being limited to four episodes, the series quite clearly exhibits many of the aspects associated with this genre of programming.

So if it is agreed that Macer *was* to a certain extend producing a 'real-life' critique of the factual genre itself, his work in this context clearly fits, as proposed, in the mock-documentary schema in relation to both degrees identified as deconstruction and parody. In their discussion of parody, Roscoe and Hight (2001) suggest that "Postmodernism can be crudely characterised as being concerned with surfaces (rather than depth) and style (rather than content)." (29) As Macer appears to be deconstructing documentary/factual

discourses *alongside* presenting a narrative which revolves around the emotional machinations of life in Psyche it arguably becomes uncertain as to *how* Macer is asking the audience to engage with the series. The oscillation between deconstruction and parody raises the question, what is the function of the series in relation to the public service broadcasting remit of education, information and entertainment?

The text clearly remediates the codes and conventions associated with both documentary practices *and* fictional films. The use of montage editing techniques to create ironic juxtapositions which *do* attempt to generate a particular meaning; the use of popular music to make ironic suggestions as to the how the scene being played-out should be read; the contrived interventions of Macer himself which change the course of the narrative; all of these are elements which have been manipulated in order to construct a reality for the audience to engage with.

Perhaps a contemporary audience no longer has the same relationship with what was traditionally associated with the reflexive forms of documentary as they are so familiar with the breaking of the fourth wall, and the use of other aesthetic devices to draw attention to the idea that they are watching constructed reality, that this mode no longer has the same cultural currency? It is routine to see a

production crew on-screen, to have a voice from the side shout questions at the contributors who look straight into the camera and ‘talk’ to us, the audience, to have music used to make an ironic point, to include animated sequences, and seemingly random shots which would once have jarred the audience into a different state of mind.

In their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* Bolter and Grusin (2000) argue that the process of remediation revolves around the complex relationship between emerging forms of media attempting to claim their primary status over older forms of media, which respond by attempting to reposition themselves as (still) relevant and significant in the ever-changing world. This process involves both new and older media recombining, reconfiguring and refashioning in order to capture the attention of the market, and as discussed previously in Chapter’s Two and Three, takes two forms in relation to strategies of representation; immediacy and hypermediacy. Television is an interesting media in relation to this, both as a technological and cultural form, as Bolter and Grusin (2000) argue: “…it [television] has always borrowed freely and diversely from other media.” (185)

Stating numerous reasons as to why television as a technological form is inherently hypermediated; you control the technology, depending on the channel of broadcast you are interrupted with

advertisements that take you out of the viewing space and the images broadcast are not photo-realist (although this is a contentious position in 2018 with the advent of 4k digital broadcasting). Nevertheless there is an argument that some genres of programming *do* encourage the affect of immediacy. Bolter and Grusin suggest:

> Transparency is the style favored by dramas, soap operas, daytime talk shows, and certain “real-life” programs, while hypermediacy is the style of most news and sports programming, situation comedies, special events such as beauty pageants, and commercials. (187)

But this is also somewhat problematic, as they go on to state:

> Whether transparent or hypermediated, all television programs present the experience of watching television as itself authentic and immediate. Even when television acknowledges itself as a medium, it is committed to the pursuit of the immediate to the degree that film and earlier technologies are not. (187)

Therefore, television is arguably a hypermediated experience as the technology is (partially) controlled by the user, is not always convincing in relation to photo-realism and depending on the genre of programming can be a fragmented, heterogeneous experience. But it is also an immediate medium, as certain genres of programming either trade on their sense of immediacy due to their ‘liveness’ at the

time of broadcast, or their use of strategies of representation which encourage the audience to be drawn-in, in much the same way as classic Hollywood narrative works. But again, this is not so simplistic as it might first seem; live sports events oscillate between the twin strategies of immediacy and hypermediacy in that the sport itself is ‘live’ and creates an affect of immediacy, but is generally presented within a hypermediated framework.

And it is this concept of oscillation which is most relevant in relation to *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005). It utilises established conventions of documentary practice in order to convince the audience that the representations presented are authentic/real; that what has happened before the camera is a true record of the events, as they occurred. *Yet*, it clearly draws on techniques which are the antithesis of this, and encourages the audience to come out of the text and really consider the images *as presented*. The ways in which it remediates the codes and conventions of mock-documentary practice, and in particular draws inspiration from the series *People Like Us* (1999), encourages a more reflexive form of engagement with the series.

This remediated form of representation arguably encourages a more critical engagement with not necessarily *what* is being represented, but acts as a critique of the representation of reality itself. When the

BBC launched BBC3 its stated remit was to “bring younger audiences to high quality public service broadcasting through a mixed-genre schedule of innovative UK content featuring new UK talent…the channel’s target audience is 16-34 year olds.” (BBC Three Service Licence 2013a) Arguably *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) fulfils this remit as its sophisticated construction can be read on two levels in relation to public service broadcasting. On a superficial level it acts as a form of (factual) entertainment, drawing on the conventions associated with the docu-soap, trading on conflict and drama to push the narrative forward. Whilst on a more subversive and sophisticated level, it acts as a deconstruction of the very genre of programming it purports to represent – factual reality. In this form, it is attempting to engage with audience in an educative context, albeit one which they, the audience, have to work at themselves. This is not didactic education, rather it's a sophisticated form of interpolation derived from the remediation of a form of programming (the mock-documentary) which would seem, at first glance, to be the very antithesis of *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005).

Conclusion

On the surface, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) could be read a somewhat ironic and amusing docu-soap, which foregrounds the emotional drama of life both working in, and owning a clothes shop.

However, to leave it as that severely delimits the sophisticated interplay at work in the text, and undermines its relationship with the (de)construction of the representation of reality within a factual discourse. The remediation of characteristics associated with the mock-documentary genre reveal a postmodern interplay between discourses which would ordinarily be considered the antithesis of each other; that of the representation of reality through a factual genre and the fictional construction of the representation of reality through a fictional genre.

Perhaps perfectly illustrating the thesis of Baudrillard in his book *The Perfect Crime* (2008) this series practically demonstrates that reality is, in fact, dead and that “There will always be more reality, because it is produced and reproduced by simulation, and is itself merely a model of simulation.” (17) As the boundaries between what is real and what is not are further broken down, it stands to reason that the discourses charged with representing reality will become increasingly blurred, and more fluid.

Baudrillard’s argument that “…subjective illusion, the illusion of the subject who opts for the wrong reality, who mistakes the unreal for the real, or, worse, mistakes the real for the real…” (2008: 53) is pertinent, as *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005) uses parody to draw attention to the constructed nature of the series, and is playful

enough that the audience takes what is presented before them with a pinch of salt. This is achieved through various techniques, including Macer himself directly participating in the narrative space, involving himself in the emerging conflicts and (seemingly) forging allegiances with the protagonists he is filming. In this way he is openly interfering with the narrative discourse, and in some instances, can be said to have influenced the course of the narrative. If, in episode two, *Tantrums and Tears in Mens Wear* (2005) Macer hadn't tried to get Jammer to join in the celebrations he may not have broken down and behaved aggressively on-camera.

Further ways in which Macer clearly manipulates the representation of reality are through the use of ironic voice-over, often juxta-positioning what he is saying against images which have a double meaning. These moments of comic double entendre again draw the audience out and the affect is one which draws attention to the text as a construct, as this has been manufactured to raise an ironic eyebrow at. In a similar way, music is used to both illustrate the action and make critical commentary, and unlike classic Hollywood narrative where music is used to enhance emotional engagement, here it is used to create a sense of dissonance, creating a space in which, once again, it is possible to engage with the text *as a text*, and not just an unmediated representation of reality.

Whilst the series can undoubtedly be considered as part of the factual genre, the relevance of it lies not in that it is just another example of an auteur documentarian exploring a topic which has been seen in countless douc-soaps before it. It is the way in which it remediates the representation of a mock-documentary reality to draw attention to the very fact that reality, in and of itself, as presented within a factual discourse, is merely a construction, a simulation which stands in place of what is real, whatever that real may be.

Chapter Seven: *Rain in My Heart* (2006)

> "I just lost that remoteness that I have as a filmmaker…I get emotionally involved with people but I manage to stand back and observe and I get a lot of criticism for that, but if some of us don't record it, no-one else will learn about it." Paul Watson (*Rain in My Heart* 2006: 35.01-35.20)

Introduction

In 2006 BBC Two broadcast *Rain in My Heart*, a 100-minute documentary directed and produced by the established auteur factual-filmmaker Paul Watson. It centred around the work of Dr Gray Smith-Laing at the Medway Maritime Hospital in Gillingham, North Kent and followed the lives of four of his patients, all dealing with alcohol dependency issues. Focusing solely on Dickens Ward, Watson spent a whole year filming, with his stated aim to "…record an alcoholic's journey either to well-being or a miserable death." (Watson 2007) After broadcast the film received critical acclaim winning the Mental Health Media Award (2007), Prix Europa Non-Fiction Award (Berlin) for Television Programme of the Year (2007), Best Humanitarian Film Award at the Leipzig Film Festival (2007) and the Grierson Award for Best Documentary on a Contemporary Issue (2007). The following year Watson also won the Alan Clarke Special Award BAFTA (2008) for Outstanding Creative Contribution.

Whilst acknowledging that it certainly seemed well-received at the time of broadcast, on critical reflection the documentary makes for uncomfortable viewing *not only* because of the truly harrowing scenes of the main protagonists in the throws of their addiction. Rather it is the intervention of Watson himself which raises significant concern. In order to analyse his interventions this chapter will begin by exploring Watson as an auteur, considering whether his involvement *within* the narrative is justified if he is to be defined within this context. Does Watson cross the ethical line between objective filmmaker and prurient voyeur, not only in *what* he films but *how* he films it, and does his status as "…elder statesman (and *enfant terrible*) of British documentary-making…" (Quinn 2013: xiii) facilitate this?

As the film progresses we gain insight into the troubled lives of the four patients: Vanda Eastdown, Mark Taylor, Nigel Wratten and Toni Bailey. As they are presented in extremely vulnerable states, it raises questions regarding the bio-politics of the body. Whilst it is inevitable that to show the extent to which alcohol degrades the body it *has* to be presented within this discourse, but it is the way in which cinematography is used to emphasise this, which raises questions of whether it goes beyond merely recording reality, and begins to *create* reality. With the emphasis on close-up photography we are being drawn into the screen and bare witness not as objective observers,

but as subjective participants and this raises questions regarding how we view these abhorrent bodies which are displayed on screen.

The final section of this chapter will consider where the film is positioned in relation to public service broadcasting; if Watson’s claim was that the film would be a no-holds barred exploration into the reality of alcohol addiction, what aspects of this are the primary focus of the film? In *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003), analysed in Chapter Five, the documentary presented from the outset that the remit of the film was to record the relationship between Nanzer and Diane, facilitated by Min who was connected to the story via her own childhood experience of having an alcoholic parent. The focus was on emotional education; what the film lacked in facts and figures was made up for by presenting a particular connection between a daughter and her mother going through the process of entering a rehabilitation centre. In contrast, Watsons’ presentation of alcohol addiction derives its narrative focus from an institutional perspective as all participants are linked via Smith-Laing and were all patients in the Medway Maritime Dickens Ward. In this context the film does manage to critique the support systems in place both within the National Health Service and a wider community context. But to what extent, and what cost? Is this lost within an over-arching narrative which focuses on the experience of addiction presented as a spectacle, and rather than challenging what addiction is *really* like

does the film merely reinforces bio-political norms around the deviant body?

Auteur exploitation?

In 1974, Watson made the ground-breaking observational documentary series *The Family*. Broadcast on BBC television, it was innovative in both scope and style as it followed the Wilkins, a Reading-based family who had responded to a call for participation in a new series which explored everyday life in contemporary Britain. The family were filmed for eighteen hours a day over a three month period, and whilst it was broadcast over twelve-weeks, filming continued concurrently so the family were subject to the public response to the already broadcast episodes as they were still being filmed for future ones. And whilst Watson vociferously claims not to be the founding father of reality television, rejecting the claim that his was the first fly-on-the-wall reality television series arguing "flies bring in disease" (Watson in Warman 2008) he is undoubtedly one of the most prolific, and high-profile British documentarians to have worked in this genre of programming, whether *he* accepts that claim or not.

His career has been founded on capturing intimate portraits of the lives of his chosen protagonists, from the working-class Wilkins family, through to four Conservative-voting City men taking a Scottish holiday in *The Fishing Party* (1986), the machinations of an

Australian family being run by the matriarch Noeline Baker Donaher in *Sylvania Waters* (1993), and a four-year study of the effects of Alzheimer's dementia on the lives of Malcolm and Barbara Pointon in *Malcolm and Barbara – A Love Story* (1999), which was followed-up in 2007 with *Malcolm and Barbara – Love's Farewell* (2007).

His films often go up-close-and-personal with the central protagonists in order for themselves to reveal the truth of who they are and how they live, and Mair, writing in *The Guardian* argues Watson "…is making documentaries that matter." (2007b) Later in the article he adds:

> Others never match up to his own high standards, many fall by the wayside, again like many great film-makers, Paul is no team player. But you know when you see a Paul Watson film. He is the auteur par excellence. (2007b)

And by definition, Watson *can* be considered an auteur. Now an established critical theory, the concept that the director of a film could be considered a creative artist in their own right was championed by the French film director, author and critic Alexandre Astruc. In his seminal essay 'The Birth of The New Avant-Garde: La Caméra Stylo' (2015) published in *'L'Écran française* (1948) Astruc made a strong case for re-considering the film director in the same critical context as a painter would be regarded or a novelist, when engaging with their work.

Debates ensued, and in 1954 the François Truffaut essay ‘Une Certaine Tendence du Cinéma Français’ (2015) was published in *Cahiers du Cinéma,* which took Astruc’s initial idea and proposed that film be given the same status as other established art-forms, that its unique audio-visual language be recognised and that directors *were* able to use the medium of film to express their own “obsessions”. By 1957, this had been further developed by André Bazin in his essay ‘La Politique des Auteurs’ (1985) helping to establish a way of approaching the cinema which centralised the importance of *certain* directors. It has to be noted, however, that this way of considering the importance of the director was conceived through examining a particular range of films, produced in a particular institutional context, at a particular historical moment; these were Hollywood mainstream films of the 1940s and 1950s.

Two categories were proposed; the *auteur*, who managed to turn the work of others into their own personal statement, with a particular distinct vision, which was recognisable over a significant number of films. The other category was the *metteur-en-scene*, which whilst being technically competent, these directors were unable to develop a cohesive world-view or style across their work. Originally developed as a way of approaching the cinema, and not conceived as an applied theory, it wasn’t until the American critic Andrew Sarris (1992) published ‘Notes on The Auteur Theory’ in *Film Culture* in 1962 that an attempt to formalise the concept was developed.

Not withstanding the problems associated with the theory itself, per se, Sarris proposed three areas to determine whether a director could be considered an auteur. These were firstly that auteurs needed to be technically competent "…the first premise of the *auteur* theory is the technical competence of the director as criterion of value." (Sarris 1992: 586) The second related to the personality of the director:

> The second premise of the *auteur* theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature. The way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels. (Sarris 1992: 586)

The third area was more esoteric in that Sarris suggested that:

> Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a directors' personality and his material…Its not quite the vision of the world a director projects nor quite his attitude toward life. It is ambiguous, in any literary sense, because part of it is embedded in the stuff of cinema…Dare I come out and say what I think to be an *élan* of the soul? (Sarris 1992: 586-587)

It is without doubt then, that Watson fulfils the definition of what is suggested to be an auteur. He is quite clearly a technically competent filmmaker. Mair notes that: "Paul lives his films. Literally.

He has retooled so his “crew” is just him and a digital video camera.” (2007b) This is concurred by Watson himself:

> I’ve held the camera for my last six or seven films…It’s so liberating. I’m on the deck, and sure, the vomit goes on your knees when he throws up but you’re right down there. Camera crews are great for dramas and they play with the f-stop brilliantly, but they don’t see your point of view. (Watson in Armstrong 2006)

However, technical competence is not limited to being able to use the actual equipment. Rather it also refers to how technically competent a director is of communicating their vision in a wider production context. Whilst discussing the Channel 4 reboot of *The Family* (1974) in 2008 Watson argued that the contemporary incantation had more in common with *Big Brother* (2000-) than his original series, where “My credit list was five people, where there’s 100 on this…I exaggerate to make a point, but it’s a vast outside-broadcast dehumanising process.” (Watson in Warman 2008) Arguably, Watson working within a small team facilitated his ability to retain his particular vision, going right back to his work in the early 1970s where he was clearly the driving (artistic) force behind the programmes he directed.

Which leads on to the second auteur criterion which deems that there are recurrent features which are recognisable and are related to how the director thinks or feels. To take Watson's work which can be categorised as relating to an observational form of filmmaking, there is the use of hand-held cameras, a predominance of diegetic sound, the use of close-ups and extreme close-ups to strengthen the emotional impact of the narrative, some use of voice over, and a breaking of the fourth wall. This is achieved in different ways, including both the accidental *and* intentional capturing, on-screen of either the production crew or Watson himself. In the opening episode of *The Family* (1974) Watson is sat at the kitchen table with the Wilkins discussing how the series came about, what they hope to achieve and the mechanics of how the series will be filmed (01.10-04.18). This strategy also opens *Rain in My Heart* (2006) with Watson in his home attempting to find a hospital trust who will cooperate with his project and delivering pieces-to-camera outlining his frustration that, because of reality television presenting negative portrayals of their subject, authorities are reluctant to allow him to film (00.00-01.22).

Both opening sequences quite clearly express the remit of the projects and what Watson hoped to achieve. This recurrent feature of reflexivity in Watson work also includes the pieces to camera in which his protagonist's reflect on their situation, for example in the opening episode of *Sylvania Waters* (1992). This opening episode

explodes onto the screen with an argument between matriarch Noeline, her husband Laurie and Noeline's son Michael, over his upcoming sixteenth birthday party. At 02.05 minutes in, Michael appears in a piece to camera, explaining who they are before introducing his mother at 02.30 who explains that what we see is what we get, like it or not. This reflexive breaking of the fourth wall has become a standard feature within contemporary documentary practice and Watson uses this in his work to subtly re-enforce that what we are seeing accurately reflects what occurred at the time of filming. And perhaps the most interesting example of reflexivity is where Watson *himself* makes critical commentary on what we are seeing, expressing his own opinion on the situation, and leads on to the third criterion of the auteur theory.

This rather esoteric criterion alludes to the tension created between the director and his work, and whilst this appears somewhat obtuse a statement, it is perhaps here where Watson excels and truly seals his fate as auteur. There is a tension created between what we see performed on screen by the protagonists, and the way in which Watson presents this performance through his carefully constructed cinematography. He further re-enforces this juxtapositioning between the protagonist and his (Watson's) own opinion through his subtle intervention of asking questions which, at first appearance *may* seem quite innocuous, but on reflection are value-laden at best, and critically judgemental at worst. Perhaps *because* he is considered the

doyen of observational documentary, the “elder statesman” (Quinn 2013: xiii) who according to Peter Moore, ex Head of Documentary at Channel 4 claims “…is a legend, one of the greats of this generation, if not the greatest. For young film-makers, he’s a marvellous icon.” (Moore in Rampton 1995) he gets to push at the ethical boundaries he is often so critical of.

Whilst he is keen to distance himself from a genre of programme-making whereby he claims all those who work within it are “bastards” (Dammann 2006; Plunkett 2008; Baker 2006: 55) Watson is himself producing work which raises questions regarding the ethical nature of his practices, and whether he is so far removed from the genre he is so keen to dismiss. *Rain in My Heart* (2006) is an excellent example of how Watson as auteur clearly presents *his* opinions in what was supposed to essentially be a documentary about the truth of alcohol addiction.

Unlike Nanzer in *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) who is expressing her opinion about what she and her mother are *actually* experiencing, Watson has no former connection to the patients he is observing, therefore no pre-established emotional connection to what we are presented with on screen. And whilst it is acknowledged that *all* representations are mediated therefore cannot be truly objective, Watson claimed that this would be:

> …a serious film, I make documentaries which are about real things that happen...this is a serious look at real people going through an illness while the National Health looks after them and I am trying to find out what the social causes of alcoholism might be. (*Rain in My Heart* 2006: 00.48-01.16)

Whilst the opening sequence of his piece-to-camera, reflexively exposing his filmic journey (00.00-01.22), places him directly into the narrative space suggesting that this *is* mediated via him and his presence *will* be on-screen with the main protagonists, it does not signpost his paternalistic interventions with the vulnerable patients he has privileged access to. The most problematic of these are the on-screen relationship's he has with Mark and Vanda, with whom he has more direct interaction with. In *This Much Is True* (2013: 27-28) James Quinn notes that: "There is a line of narration in *Rain in My Heart*, where you say, 'If some of us don't record it, none of us will understand it.' That's almost your motto"" and Watson replies "Yes…as filmmakers, we are there to use our privileged access to make records of 'things that happen', and, by doing so, inform the world." However, Watson directly intervenes with the "things that happen" arguably in ways which could have a detrimental affect on those who have trusted him and opened their lives to him.

Throughout the course of the film Vanda opens up to Watson and reveals personal details of her past, including her relationship with her father. Early in the film she talks of him being a “bastard”, and that he is still in her head, but says she does not want to talk about it now. Watson replies “that’s fine, that’s fine, absolutely fine” (07.08) but continues with “but he is one of the monsters, one of the monsters in your head, could that be responsible for drink?” (07.09-07.15) pushing her beyond where she initially wanted to go. This is taken up again between 38.36-39.13 where she explains that her father sexually abused her, but her mother didn't believe her, so she slashed her wrists and was taken away by the police and sectioned. Throughout this sequence Vanda is clearly drunk, and Watson asks if she is sorry she opened up to him:

> Vanda: “I’m a little bit pickled, so…”
>
> Watson: “I’m taking advantage of you?”
>
> Vanda: “Obviously”
>
> Watson: “Oh, right, we’ll talk tomorrow when you are sober and you can tell me whether you want it in or out.” (38.36-39.13)

The day after Vanda reflects back on her shock of finding herself buying vodka, but no more is mentioned regarding her confession until 44.42-50.39, where she open up further regarding her family, including her brothers death. This section is edited together from two interviews as Vanda is seen in differing states of sobriety and clearly

has changes of clothing. This is a carefully constructed piece of editing designed to create narrative flow, but demonstrates quite clearly how orchestrated the film is and how in control Watson is of the overall structure.

As the course of Vanda’s narrative continues we see her get more aggressive as her alcohol consumption increases and from 1.29.24-1.31.02 Watson begins interviewing her, dressed in a bathrobe, with a towel over her hair, smoking a cigarette in close-up shot:

> Watson: “Over the months I have been filming, is there anything you have told me that wasn't exactly true?”
>
> Vanda: “No. No point in lying, never have lied, what’s the point. You’ll always get found out in the end so don't bother. No.”
>
> Watson: “So can I assume that everything you said about that which pushed you into drinking is true?”
>
> Vanda: “Yes. For definite. I don't even know how you are questioning that, that that’s disrespectful to me Paul.”
>
> Watson: “I’m not being disrespectful but I have to just check with everything.”
>
> Vanda” “Well, just, that is just, to me that's disrespectful because. I wouldn't say something like that if it wasn't true.”

Vanda moves out of shot to walk into her bedroom and continues:

> Vanda: “Oh, God, Paul you've had as much as I’m going to give.…when you can bring everything back up, I’m disgusted, I don't need to discuss it anymore, he was a paedophile, he was a rapist.”
>
> Watson: “Come on, take my hand.”
>
> Vanda: “I don't want to.”
>
> Watson: “What?”
>
> Vanda: “I don't want to, I don't want to.”

We then cut to Watson in a piece-to-camera (1.31.02-1.31.28):

> Watson: “He’s dead, so I can’t libel the dead, but her mother is alive, and I, you know I have to be aware of the sensitivities there, and if Vanda’s going off at the deep-end and there’s no truth in these allegations then, you’re in some fairly heavy waters.”

Watson is quite clearly questioning his contributors’ integrity, on camera, and visibly upsets who the audience can clearly see is an extremely vulnerable woman. In Quinn (2013) Watson justifies this scene arguing that “The question caused her real pain, but it had to be done. Filmmakers have a responsibility to their audience.” (24) but what of their responsibility towards their contributors who are

emotionally vulnerable? Watson's attempt at damage-limitation comes in the next scene:

> Vanda: "How did I get into this situation? Phwhoar, because I was a girl?"
>
> Watson: "No, you were pushed into by a father who was despicable."
>
> Vanda: "He wasn't my father, he was a bastard."
>
> Watson: "I don't want what you're going through to be rubbished by people, everything I've filmed has been a true account where your drinking wine and getting ill."
>
> Vanda: "He should be rotting in hell now." (1.31.29-1.32.02)

He is attempting to appease her by suggesting that the question was justified in order for the audience to view her as a credible witness, as Mark in a previous scene had already described how duplicitous alcoholics are, lying to get their own way (40.30) making a clear correlation between an alcoholic and disreputability. He has gained the trust of Vanda and used this to encourage her to open up to him, allowing him to witness her *as* an alcoholic and then appears to abuse this trust by question her authenticity. He claimed he wanted to understand what the social causes of alcoholism might be, and when he is presented with Vanda's trauma, he seems unable to accept that she is telling the truth.

In his interview with Quinn (2013) Watson claims: “I try to be honest. I never ask people to trust me. But I do expect it.” (36) Later on he is asked about the most raw thing he has filmed, and relates back to when he filmed Malcolm being washed in the last few months of his life in *Malcolm and Barbara: Love’s Farewell* (2007). “You must be looking at things like that through the viewfinder of the monitor and thinking ‘This is awful, ‘ but, at the same time, a bit of you is thinking that this is –“ Watsons reply “Good telly? Yes, I think so. In the sense that it serves the overall purpose. It's informative of the subject. And remember that directors are employed to make films, *not to be social workers.*” [author’s own italics] (37)

So Watson expects to be trusted, but makes no claim to be in a position to support his contributors in the process of capturing their reality. But his interventions with Vanda clearly overstep the line from objective filmmaker into subjective critical commentator and he is not equipped to manage the consequences of this; he has made an emotionally vulnerable woman distressed and angry with his intrusive questioning, driving the narrative in a particular direction other than the one which would have occurred naturally without his intervention.

Watson clearly believes that he has the right to make critical commentary as demonstrated early on in the film when Vanda returns to alcohol having been discharged from hospital. Whilst she

says she is not ready to return home, this is overridden by Smith-Lange who discharges her, and in the following scene Watson finds a note pinned to her door, which is slightly ajar (34.05). We cut to Watson back in his home delivering a piece-to-camera, pondering what he should do next. When she returns he embraces her, kisses both her cheeks and tells her “you look fabulous.” (34.27) She replies with “fandabidooooozzzzy” and has clearly been drinking. He asks her what this is in her bag, and a bottle of alcohol is revealed. Cut back to Watson at home explaining to us what we are seeing, then back to Vanda’s flat where he tells her “You silly girl.” (34.41) He places both hands on her shoulders and tells her its not his job to stop her drinking, and we see him walk out of frame with a clearly exasperated expression on his face.

This physicality, his kiss and his hands on her shoulders, places the audience in an uncomfortable position, as Watson appears now more friend than objective recorder of reality. Whilst it is not unusual to foreground the role of the filmmaker in contemporary forms of observational documentary, to physically *touch* a contributor in what could be argued is an intimate way does suggest that the objective boundaries between the observer and the observed have been crossed. However, if this is read in context with his statement from Quinn (2013) “I never ask people to trust me. But I do expect it.” (36) this could be read *not* that Watson himself has lost his objectivity regarding the bigger picture, but rather *Vanda* has.

He has ingratiated himself into the life of a vulnerable woman who has clearly experienced a series of dysfunctional relationships, and by becoming 'friends' with Vanda has engendered an atmosphere of safety and trust in-order to gain access to her in ways which would have not been possible without her cooperation. But is this strategy appropriate when dealing with vulnerable adults who are arguably not in a position to give informed consent, due to their fractious state of mind? From 44.06-44-12 we see Vanda passed out in her flat and Watson is feeling her face and upper body, clearly checking for a pulse. His touching of her when she is not in a position to stop him, in a state of extreme vulnerability feels awkward and inappropriate, but perhaps is included as it visualises the dilemma he *appears* to be wrestling with as he struggles to retain the objectivity needed to continue to film.

In a further piece to camera he admits he *has* lost that remoteness he has as a filmmaker, and we watch him recording Vanda continuing to drink (35.01-35.20). This device of capturing the cameraperson on screen filming their subject works in the same way as in *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003), where perceived authenticity is generated through this signposting that unmediated reality *is* being captured. However, in this context it also clearly works as a way for Watson to attempt to create a critical distance between himself and Vanda and return to filmmaker rather than 'critical friend', using the

viewfinder to remove himself from the story-space. But, Watson's objectivity does not last:

> Vanda: "So you're very, very disappointed in me then Paul?"
>
> Watson: "No, it's not for me to be very, very disappointed. I am disappointed for you because I really did believe that you'd made up your mind that all that time in hospital."
>
> Vanda: "I had made up my mind and I still have made up my mind. The only difference is is today, I can't be doing with today, that's it." (35.26-35.55)

In voice over Watson explains it took the first hour to compose himself in order to be able to film objectively again, to record whatever "these people choose to do to themselves." (36.49) That he is presenting their control over the situation as a choice is an interesting word to use, as Vanda has told him she drinks to expunge the demons inside her head so to assume it's a choice is naïve. He goes on to say he saw how painfully thin she was "…and all I could see was a drunk on the street." (37.05) Filmed at home again, with his head in his hands, Watson reflects:

> "Oh Christ, what a day, what a day. Your subject does the very thing that they say they are not going to do, she drinks, I knock over the drink, I wish I could say that was deliberate but it wasn't, and then, she decides to tell me, the monsters in her

> head. Why? I don't know. Nerves of the day, the heightened tensions that were going on, her being pissed, I don't know, but she told me and I filmed it." (38.09-38.36)

There are two interesting elements to this reflection, firstly that he calls Vanda his subject, disempowering her in the narrative as a *person* and placing her as a topic of curiosity. Perhaps crucially, revealing his subconscious relationship with her *as* one of observer and the observed, with whom he *can* critically distance himself enough from in order to impose *his* opinion of her behaviour into the finished film. The second element is that he expected Vanda to do as she said she would, confounding his expectations, and he is thrown by that, which is an unusual position for an observational filmmaker to take; perhaps this reveals his desire for a particular narrative closure and Vanda is not fulfilling this as she turns once again to alcohol.

It is not only with Vanda that Watson pushes the ethical boundaries. Mark Taylor is a fragile alcoholic who during the course of filming is admitted into a psychiatric ward as he has self-harmed (1.06.43). Taking this into consideration, during an alcoholic episode filmed in Mark's flat, the following exchange takes place after Watson sees him down a half pint of wine in one gulp:

> Watson: "Mark, come on, that's just crazy."

Mark: “That’s the way I drink”

Watson: “Are you showing off for the camera?” (1.12.14-1.12.29)

It is a patronising and provocative assumption that Mark is playing up for attention, and one which Watson has no right to suggest to a vulnerable individual who, in the next scene, reveals that the previous Tuesday he slit his wrists whilst sober. The fresh wounds are a serious reminder that Watson is dealing with people who are living with mental health issues far beyond their control. Raising his arm Mark says:

Mark: “You see what I could have done?”

Watson: “Do you feel proud when you hurt yourself afterwards?”

Mark: “No.”

Watson: “Do you feel angry?”

Mark: “No.”

Watson: “Do you feel dirty?”

Mark: “No.”

Watson: “No what?”

> Mark: "I feel dirty, I feel, I feel like I have let everyone down, I feel…no I don't wanna be this person, I really don't. I don't wanna be this person."
>
> Watson: "Mark, your daughter told you on her birthday that she loves you. Doesn't that mean you've got some responsibilities now? Someone in your life is actually saying 'Dad, I love you.' How old is she?"
>
> Mark: "Thirteen now."
>
> Watson: "Don't you think every time you go to harm yourself, every time you take a drink?"
>
> Mark: "Every time I do it."
>
> Watson: "Just think to yourself."
>
> Mark: "I never…the photo I've got of her on top of the fire, every time she, she's the first one in my thoughts." (1.13.41-1.15.07)

Towards the end of this exchange Mark is shot in extreme close-up, tears running down his face, and it is difficult to read this beyond exploitation; an established auteur documentarian using a vulnerable alcoholic's daughter to try and shame him into quitting the booze.

Watson claims:

> I think all of my films ask you, after they've tried to explain the realities of the situation, to make a decision: where do you stand on this issue? Where do you stand in relation to these people? And that's very disquieting, because it means you have to come off the fence. (Quinn 2013: 25)

In regards to *Rain in My Heart* (2006) Watson does not allow the audience the space to come off the fence and make up their own minds, as he is too busy guiding them to judge the patients through *his* eyes. He continuously attempts to distance himself and his work from what he considers is an exploitative genre of documentary, that being reality television, yet by imposing his often-critical opinion within the narrative, he has produced a film which is not as dissimilar as he would like us all to believe.

The spectacular body

Whilst it cannot be ascertained that Watson set out to present the patients he had access to *consciously* within a bio-political framework, situated within a discourse of governance, what is clear is that the body *as* presented in his film, *can* be read within this context. This is both through Watson's active interventions within the narrative itself, as examined above, with his inclusion of the (sometimes reflexive) critical commentary of what *he* sees, and also through the way in which he *displays* the bodies of all four of his alcohol

dependent protagonists. His intended aim of the film was not to present a morality-tale of the consequences of alcohol addiction, but he nevertheless does so, through the manner in which a spectacular engagement with the body is encouraged. This is not in the same way that *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) (see Chapter Three) encourages a sense spectacle in relation to visual wonderment, rather, in a way in-which the audience are encouraged to feel a repulsion, are turned-off, ashamed and even fearful of the image of the body as presented within this context.

If we agree with Foucault in his supposition that historical processes were developed in order to subjugate the body and normalise prescribed behaviour to discourage what was perceived as deviant by those in power (Foucault 1980b; Rabinow 1991) and that the mainstream media acts a powerful regime of truth, Watson is in an incredibly powerful position of having access to present the body in such as way that it either conforms to or breaks moral codes of accepted behaviour. Martin-Babero (1993) argues that the media is able to both transform *and* create reality, and Watson's presentation of these four alcoholic bodies is a manufactured representation which, whilst it does reveal *some* truth, cannot be said to reveal *the* truth. However, that is what Watson claimed he set out to achieve; unlike *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) which was an (openly honest) subjective representation of a *particular* experience of alcoholism,

what *this* film purports to engage with are the wider issues of alcoholism in a socio-cultural context.

The techniques Watson uses to present the body range from full-shot to close-up and extreme close-up, which invite the audience into the frame, removing any form of critical distance available to *contemplate* the images; rather we *consume* them, and this consumption leaves us feeling sick and fretful. Watson uses his powerful position to create an emotional response of revulsion at what we see, and this position is concurred through his narration which supports his/our position of power, over the alcoholic (dysfunctional) body which is weak and deviant. Our visceral response is encouraged through an ocular engagement, working in the way which Gunning (1987) proposed in *The Cinema Of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde*, and this powerful emotional response acts within a precautionary tale of what will happen if *we* take the deviant route rather than conform to (prescribed) normality.

From the opening sequence of the film, Watson uses graphic images of the four alcohol dependent patients, introducing them as inserts in-between footage of himself telephoning health authorities to try and get a hospital trust to work with him on his film. This runs in total from 00.00-02.00 and the following inserts are used, with all but two having Watson's continuing narration running over the top: Nigel

Wratten at 00.39 lying on his side having a tube inserted into his mouth, hooked up to machinery with medical staff working around him; Mark Taylor at 00.45 sat on a hospital bed with Dr Gray Smith-Lange and Dr Rami Sweis talking to him; Mark returns at 01.00 in extreme close-up, tears rolling down his face saying “you don't understand, people just don't understand”; Vanda Eastdown at 01.03 in extreme-close-up, clearly intoxicated with her eyes half closed, bringing a drink to her mouth; Mark again at 01.17 with his head in his hands, crying; Nigel returns at 01.22 with his distended abdomen being examined by Dr Gray Smith-Lange; Vanda returns at 01.27 in full-shot on the telephone “you just don't understand, you don't understand, you don't understand”; Toni Bailey at 01.40 in a close-up of her in side profile in a hospital bed hooked up to multiple tubes. All of these images are taken from scenes shown later in the film.

From the outset, the protagonists are presented as entities, de-personalised, and are used as illustrations within Watson’s opening narration which claims “…this is a serious look at real people going through an illness while the National Health looks after them…” (01.04-01.10). Watson then goes on to introduce each protagonist, in turn, with a close-up image on-screen and non-diegetic music playing in the background, of deep bass tones reminiscent of John Williams musical motif for the shark in *Jaws* (1975). First to be introduced is Toni: “Toni binge-drinks, mindless orgies of booze, pernicious parties, she must quit, or die” (02.26-02.33); then Mark: “Mark, his

poisons vodka, two bottles a day" (02.33-02.39); next Nigel: "Nigel has been dry for ten years, but alcohol has left him damaged" (02.39-02.45); lastly Vanda: "Vanda drinks to wash out the monsters that mess her mind" (02.45-02.55).

By doing this, Watson is able to present an immediate impression of the protagonists, based on how *he* sees them rather than allowing them to introduce themselves. The language he uses combined with the close-up imagery re-enforces that these people are not here to gain our sympathy, and whilst the formal techniques *do* draw the audience into the film, it is not to create empathy; it is to *reject* their deviance. This de-personalisation strategy enables the audience to see the patients as illustrations of the potential consequences of immorality. This is juxtaposed against the way in which the medical specialists are introduced, which is in their office, in an oblong box against a black screen, with their full name visible on-screen: Dr Gray Smith-Lange at 04.05 and Dr Rami Sweis at 22.56.

Both Toni and Nigel die during the course of filming, and Sweis describes when he was called to attend Toni, relating how blood was coming out of her body, over footage of her in a hospital bed, clearly unconscious. This is then cut to her in extreme close-up being interviewed by Watson:

> Toni: "I'm not an alcoholic, so I don't need help."

Watson: “What is an alcoholic?”

Toni: “What do I class as an alcoholic? Someone who can’t go a day without a drink.”

Watson: “ But, there are times when you can’t go without a drink.” (22.45-23.45)

At 24.36 we see a mid-shot of her unconscious, on life support, with Sweis in voice over describing the graphic details of her condition. This shot is returned to at 25.42 where Sweis says she is guaranteed to die if she drinks again which at 25.55 the screen fades up with the words “Two days later Toni was dead” and replaced at 26.05 with “Toni Bailey was 26 years old.” This is the first time we learn of Toni’s last name, giving her a whole identity *after* she has died, therefore personalising her at the moment we can no longer empathise with her *on screen.* What we are left with are images of her abhorrent body, comatose, alone, with Sweis’ narration relating “she was only a young girl with a bucket half-full with blood, and this was her third, and blood everywhere, and she was just white as a sheet.” (24.31-24.42)

Presented within a discourse of tragedy, Nigel is afforded a more nuanced identity, but this is through the body of the wife he leaves behind. We are encouraged to empathise with the remaining family,

as they are the living victims, suffering because of a situation which was outside of their control. Whilst Nigel is presented in varying states of deterioration, and Watson does film the moment of his death, it is a much more dignified representation than Toni, perhaps due to Nigel having repented, not having had a drink in the last ten years of his life.

Nigel is not present in the film after the opening sequence (00.00.39) until 50.39 when we see a funeral cortege, with James Blunt's 'Beautiful' (2004) playing, before fading out to the voice of Nigel's widow Kath Wratten reminiscing over when she first met him. We are then taken back over the last few months of his life, where Smith-Lange is working to save him with the aid of a liver transplant. The film cross cuts from past to present, interspersing images from the funeral and after his death with his hospital treatment, and culminates at 1.04.00 where Kath is told by Smith-Lange that Nigel has gone beyond medical intervention and that in 24 hours he will be taken off life support. This is devastating news, and whilst Kath in Smith-Lange's office is cut between Nigel on life-support, it is Kath who is presented as the victim, and who elicits sympathy; she as the normal body as victim of the deviant body, a clear warning to those who choose deviancy that long after they are gone, the devastation of their actions are still felt.

The scenes of Nigel's death are played out between 1.04.40-1.05.57, and cross-cut from Kath stroking Nigel's comatose head, Smith-Lange asking Kath if she wants Watson to continue filming, and Watson in a piece to camera. His voice over is as follows:

> Watson: "What right have I to film Kath's grief? Why am I asking you to watch Nigel die? Kath needed someone to be with her, maybe because the television camera had become some sort of a prop; a prop, that can become very important, rather like a deep, but silent friend. Yes, her grief is personal but she wanted the camera to witness the consequences of alcoholism a disease that's robbed her of a very nice man, as she says, he never hit me, he always worked. But, filming her grief, we'll see, if it survives the cutting room, then I will know it was right."

Her grief does make the film, and we witness the devastating effect Nigel's death has on both her and their son Stephen. But interestingly, this all comes *before* Watsons' piece to camera above. From 51.23–51.56 Nigel's coffin is seen entering the church, and there are close-ups of the general congregation, Stephen (their son) and Kath, who is seen with her head in her hands, bowed forward at 51.46. This scene is returned to from 56.13-57.25, and at 56.22 we see Stephen in close-up crying in the congregation, tears falling from his face. This is then cut to another close-up of him, at home, playing

video games then we see Kath discussing the financial hardship the family now face. This is intercut with Stephen playing shoot-em-up video games and Kath discussing the negative effect Nigel's illness and death has had on him.

We return to Kath from 57.52-58.21 who explains Stephen was expelled from school and college, has no job, and spends his days playing video games. She is worried that he is withdrawn and of the long-term consequences this will have on him. Before Watson's reflective piece to camera, which starts at 1.05.01, we return one final time to the funeral and from 1.03.37-1.03.46 we see two grieving women clutching at Nigel's coffin, emblazoned with a memorial wreath spelling out the word 'Dad' in red and white flowers.

As Nigel, Kath or Stephen are not returned to in the film, Watson's refection appears somewhat duplicitous: "But, filming her grief, we'll see, if it survives the cutting room, then I will know it was right." (1.05.44-1.05.52) At this point in the documentary, which he has edited together, he *knows* her grief has made the final cut, so what are we to make of this statement? Is this Watson's attempt at re-framing the footage of Nigel's death less as a voyeuristic spectacle and more a compassionate act? It makes little sense other than to absolve himself from the accusation that he is, in fact, exploiting a dying man and his grieving family. If the role of an observational

documentarian is to objectively record and present what has been played out before the camera, why infect the film with his own subjective reflection, making an emotional connection between himself and the very act of recording reality?

But Watson is *not* an objective observational filmmaker; he is an established auteur whose presence in many of his films is felt through direct on screen interventions and via his particular use of cinematography and editing style. As previously acknowledged, Watson is keen to distance himself from what he perceives is an exploitative genre of filmmaking, and this piece to camera is clearly attempting to get the audience to empathise with him over the dilemma he faces, and further compounds the affect a dysfunctional (dying) body has on the functioning (recording/grieving) bodies.

Straight after Watson's speech there are a series of quick cuts, which are as follows: 1.05.52-1.05.56 Kath stroking and kissing Nigel's unconscious face; 1.05.56-1.05.58 the Dad wreath; 1.05.58-1.06.00 Kath in close-up smoking a cigarette; 1.06.00-1.06.02 Stephen on bed playing video games; 1.06.02-1.06.04 a teenage girl sat in mid shot staring blankly at the screen (this unidentified teenage girl is present at the funeral but is not introduced in the film). This is the conclusion to Nigel's story, closing with the lasting affect that the dysfunctional body has on the (remaining) functional bodies, and it is

at this point Mark’s story becomes the focus of the film. The scene cross-cuts between Mark’s stepfather trying to gain entry into Mark’s flat and Mark’s mother, in close-up, crying, relating her anger and hate towards her son, and the fear she has that Mark will end up killing himself (1.06.09-1.06.42). Watson has cleverly segued into the same trope, positioning the functioning body of Mark’s mother as helpless victim and re-enforcing the detrimental (wider) consequences of the dysfunctional body *outside* of itself.

Mark clearly has mental health issues. During the course of the film he is admitted to a psychiatric unit, has attempted to slit his wrists and his family discuss that he is unable to function by himself; close-up shots of his filthy, unkempt flat are shown which re-enforce this narration. Mark is presented as a liability and by his own admission he keeps letting people down (1.07.22-1.07.24). Marks stepfather, over a close-up of Mark’s mother crying states:

> “We can’t allow him to destroy us, because that's not going to happen, and to not know what’s going on in your own home, whether he is alright, whether he is a coma, drinking, whether he has trashed your house, whether he has left the front door open and your pets have escaped, so, we had to put him out of the house.” (1.10.39-1.10.57)

Watson creates a discourse whereby any sympathy felt for Mark's illness is not manifest for him, rather it is for his family, reflecting the position he took with Nigel; Mark (as Nigel) the alcoholic is not *victim*, he is *perpetrator* and the audience are presented with the consequences of his actions outside of *his* suffering. But that is not to say we *don't* see Mark suffer, as the film clearly presents Mark in extreme states of distress.

The most profound of these comes after the scene previously explored where Watson goads Mark into admitting he feels "dirty" (1.14.02) after an episode of self-harming which leads to further alcoholic binges. Having already been shot in close-up vomiting into a bucket (1.11.02), he is seen again downing half-pint glasses of red wine (1.16.35; 1.17.18) before he begins violently retching and Watson has to bring him a bucket (1.17.38-1.17.58). At 1.17.58 Vanda returns and she too has been drinking and reveals she has separated from her boyfriend. At 1.19.18 Mark is back, on the telephone, his mother in voice-over relating her fears that he will return to a dark place, before we hear Mark slur into the telephone. This cross-cuts to his visibly upset mother, and back to Mark, crying on the telephone with snot running from his nose down his face. This degenerates into him muttering incoherently, weeping with his head in his hands (1.20.43). Elements of this are repeated until 1.27.19 where we see Mark with wine spurting from his mouth, and he reaches for the bucket and we hear him vomit. All throughout the

sequences we hear the testimony of Mark's mother and her husband relating the difficulties they have had accessing the relevant services for Mark to make a recovery.

At 1.28.31 Watson returns for another piece-to-camera which is intercut with images of Mark crying, rolling around in his flat, in despair, and the further three protagonists are each shown as they are mentioned in the narration:

> "It took me a long time to get the trust of Mark to be in his company. And its not that I am a vampire, or a bat looking to suck his blood, I just want to understand the nature of his problems and how he survives. It is like watching, some poor animal in distress, you think 'I shouldn't be here witnessing this moment', Mark, Vanda Toni, Nigel - two deaths out of four people, but I think we have to watch it to understand it, not just skip across like stones being skimmed across water, I think that would be an abuse of what Mark has allowed me when going through the depths of despair." (1.28.31-1.29.24)

But Watson *is* failing to just "witness it", he shapes and comments on "it" and by doing so disables the audiences ability *to* just "watch it" objectively. His narrative construction, cinematography and editing techniques, alongside his participation within the story takes away the space for an audience to personally reflect on what they are

seeing. By placing himself as “witness” he is in a position of power/authority over the victim, who is presented as weak and feckless. Mark is on a solo mission of self-destruction and whilst Watson clearly documents this, alongside the devastating consequences it has on his family, he has no moral right to pass-judgement on his actions just as we, the audience, do not either.

Whilst Vanda is seen in various states of vulnerability, the most shocking consequence of alcohol dependency on her body is how violently profane she becomes, using expletives when she is angry and distressed. Becoming more aggressive, she bangs the telephone receiver up and down, muttering, “you fucking cunt” (1.18.22-1.18.33), and tells Watson “He’s a cunt for doing that, he’s a cunt for doing that.” (1.19.23-1.19.17) She is distressed as her boyfriend Andy has left her for another woman, and is in a vulnerable state, but it is still a shocking spectacle to see her react in this way, and again raises questions as to what the documentary is *really* about. Arguably this *is* the reality of alcohol dependency, but from the opening sequence Vanda has been marked as deviant through the language she uses.

During her introduction (02.45-02.55) she is presented on-screen, passed out, and after Watson’s voice-over she can be heard saying the words “fuck, fuck, fuck”, which gives an immediate impression of

her as morally deviant; whilst it is becoming more socially acceptable for women to use language historically associated with masculine aggression, she is still arguably breaking a linguistic social norm. Vanda is presented as out-of-control, as alcohol has robbed her of the ability to function 'appropriately' in her response to stressful situations. Out of all four protagonists, Vanda's appearance is the least visually shocking; Nigel has jaundice and a large, distended stomach and looks extremely ill; Toni is shown in a coma, hooked up to life support machinery; Mark is overweight, dishevelled, is seen vomiting and he too, clearly looks ill; and whilst Vanda is painfully thin, she shows little of the physical ravages seen on the others. Therefore one of the ways in which her body can be cast as morally deviant is through a linguistic turn, effectively making the correlation between alcohol and the degradation of femininity. Combined with Vanda's admission that she has regretfully been unable to have children, this concretises the sacrifice you make when deviancy is chosen over morality.

But is it education?

Watson set out to make a film which "…record[ed] an alcoholic's journey either to well being or a miserable death" (Watson 2007) and whilst he openly acknowledges that whilst filming he "…just lost that remoteness that I have as a filmmaker…I get emotionally involved with people but I manage to stand back and observe" (*Rain in My*

Heart 2006: 35.01-35.20) this would suggest that he sees himself as someone who, on the whole, manages to retain a critical distance within his work and presents the truth as it evolves before him and his camera lens. Whilst the film clearly does show the reality of what life is like for an alcohol dependent patient and in two of the case studies, their family, this is a partial representation shaped by Watson himself rather than the protagonists he has filmed. Although the observational form of filmmaking is never ideologically neutral, often masking the manipulation of the story, as presented, via a range of means including the very act of who to film, where to film, how to film and then how to construct a story in the editing room from all the footage gathered, what *is* constant within this form of filmmaking is that the filmmaker generally remains *behind the camera*, quietly recording the action as it takes place.

In *Rain in My Heart* (2006) Watson is a constant within the film, and this is sign-posted from the very beginning where he is openly discussing his struggles getting a Health Authority to allow him to film. He is in front of the camera *before* the main protagonists are seen, and signals *his* importance in what he purports is to be "…a serious look at real people going through an illness while the National Health looks after them." (00.48-01.16) Traditionally observational documentaries do not, per se, draw attention to their status as a construction; there may be shaky camera work, patchy synchronous sound, the odd boom in frame, and so forth, but they are not reflexive

in the context that they are asking the audience to acknowledge their artifice, and question the construction of reality as presented. John Corner (1996) has suggested that Watson's earlier work, *The Family* (1974), is "domestic vérité" (47) and draws on Winston (2001) in his analysis of the series. Whilst *Rain in My Heart* (2006) is a stand-alone documentary (not a series) and the narrative emerges from an institution (the National Health Service) rather than a particular family, the focus *is* on the personal, with Watsons intended aim to explore, through engaging with four patients of the Medway Maritime Hospital, the socio-political context of alcoholism, in relation to how the National Health Service supported patients and the social causes of the disease.

This was a documentary which set out to explore a wider socio-political context through the capturing of a set of personal experiences, and Corner suggests that Watsons saw *The Family* (1974) in a similar context:

> …it was aspects of contemporary family life and the reflection of larger political and social shifts within it rather than a specific interest in the Wilkins themselves which was considered to be of primary interest. (Corner 1996:47)

But this creates an inherent tension in *Rain in My Heart* (2006), as the way in which Watson has filmed the protagonists and interjected himself in the narrative structure, results in the focus shifting from an

exploration of ‘the bigger picture’ into a subjective engagement with the protagonists (and their families) themselves.

There are moments within the documentary which clearly do raise social and political issues; Smith-Lange discusses funding issues, the lack of community support for his patients when they leave hospital, the lack of joined-up services to support other addiction needs such as dealing with mental health issues, the actual degradation alcohol has on the body; Nigel’s widow Kath explains the economic strain on the family and the emotional consequences of his death; Mark’s mother and step-father discuss their difficulties accessing community services which would support Mark in his recovery, the lack of support for families coping with alcohol-dependant relatives, and the difficulties dealing with social services.

However, these are undermined within the overall narrative structure, and are a secondary to both the spectacular representations of the deviant body and Watson’s personal interactions with the protagonists themselves. Whilst Mark’s family reflect on the lack of support for Mark, articulating their points clearly and rationally this is overlaid against images of Mark downing a half pint of wine in one-go, vomiting in a bucket, examining his freshly-stitch slashed wrists, and extreme close-ups of his crying, snotty face. Rather than these images supporting the audience’s engagement with the narration,

they provide an ocular distraction, taking the focus *away* from what is being said, onto what is being shown, and as a consequence the informative element is lost to an emotional engagement with the images themselves (1.26.43-1.28.21).

So where then is this film positioned in relation to the public service broadcasting remit? To return to Corner (1996) and his discussion of Watson and vérité, if *Rain in My Heart* (2006) is read within this context, it clearly *does* fulfil what is expected of a documentary within this mode of filmmaking. One of the defining features of this mode of practice is the direct intervention, within the narrative, of the filmmaker themselves and Winston (2001) defines this as "the critical mark of cinéma vérité" (184) and Barnouw (1993) that the "…*cinéma vérité* artist was often an avowed participant." (255) They shape the course of the narrative by bringing protagonists together, creating situations and manufacturing discussion in order to reveal a higher truth, which may be social, political or cultural. Barnouw (1993) goes on to say "…that artificial circumstances could bring hidden truth to the surface." (255) and perhaps Watson's interventions into the narrative-space can be justifiably considered within this context. Nichols (2010) states "Cinéma vérité reveals the reality of what happens when people interact in the presence of a camera" (184) and *by* interacting, often goading his protagonists in ways which give rise to questions around whether his technique is ethically justifiable, he *does* manage to reveal the poignant 'truth' of what life is like for

four alcohol-dependant patients and their respective families. Nichols (2010) goes on to say “If there is a truth here it is the truth of a form of interaction that would not exist were it not for the camera.” (184) And *that* is the strength of Watson’s work, when read within *this* context.

If the film is considered as an example of cinéma vérité, it quite clearly *does* educate the audience, but not necessarily in the conventional context expected, and the way in which Watson claimed he set out to. Just as *Lager, Mum and Me* (2003) presented a subjective account of the relationship between a daughter and her alcoholic mother, *Rain in My Heart* (2006) also presents a subjective account of Watson’s examination of the lives of four alcohol dependent patients, all under the care of Smith-Lange. There *is* truth in the harrowing footage Watson encourages his protagonist to deliver, but this *must* be approached with caution; whilst he captured raw, unadulterated emotion, he constructed this into a narrative which can be read as a morality tale, a warning of the dangers associated with excessive behaviour. If read as an example of cinéma vérité, an authored mediation, which it quite clearly *is* then *Rain in My Heart* (2006) works to educate within a framework of governance, and presents an affective warning of the dangers of alcohol abuse.

Conclusion

Whilst it is easy to be critical of Watson's rejection of his work being the antecedent of modern British reality television, it is an understandable position for him to take, as he sees the modern incarnation of the genre as exploitative, turning the audience into voyeurs who want nothing more than to watch conflicts erupt on-screen. (McCann 1998) In some ways, however, his work is not dissimilar to that which he criticises. *The Family* (1974) showed conflict and strained relationships; *Sylvania Waters* (1992) erupted on-screen with an argument between the central protagonists and continued by exposing the strained relationship's in the wider family circle; *Malcolm and Barbara: Love's Farewell* (2007) broadcast the dying moments of Malcolm; and *Rain in My Heart* (2006) presented the broken, dysfunctional, and sometimes aggressive bodies of the victims of alcohol abuse. Each of these undoubtedly encourage voyeurism, albeit for sometimes very different reasons.

And whilst *Rain in My Heart* (2006) does raise issues regarding how ethical Watson was in his filming of the vulnerable patients he ingratiated himself into the lives of, if his work is read rather as a example of cinéma vérité than an observational, or even participatory documentary, then it makes sense as to *why* he pursued a particularly aggressive form of questioning. Aggressive in that he pushed obviously vulnerable individuals to the brink of breakdown;

Vanda in his questioning her of how truthful her confession regarding her father was and Mark by using his daughter to blackmail him into stopping drinking. Whilst these scenes are uncomfortable to watch, Watson provokes his protagonists into displaying an emotionally integrity which perhaps would not have been displayed without this interventionist technique.

If cinéma vérité reveals a higher form of truth through intervention then *Rain in My Heart* (2006) is an excellent example of work in this genre of filmmaking. However, what the film also does is place this 'truth' within a discourse of governance. By presenting spectacles of the broken body, which act as a morality tale for those who choose to take the path of deviancy, 'truth' in this context serves as an effective form of hegemonic power.

Chapter Eight: *People Like Us* (2013)

> "Youse might think you know people like us, but you don't know nothing yet." Amber Wakefield (*People Like Us* 2013: 01.19-01.23)

Introduction

In the summer of 2013, BBC3 aired season one of *People Like Us*, which was billed as a "Documentary series about young people growing up on a housing estate in Manchester." (BBC 2017d) Filmed entirely on location in the Harpurhey area, the series followed chosen residents within this geographical location, exploring their personal, domestic, work and social lives. It situated itself as a series which would provide an accurate representation of the residents and their surrounding estate, and in the opening sequence Amber Wakefield in voice-over states "They say the area is just full of rough families, but I don't think its such a bad place." (*People Like Us* 2013: 00.08-00.13) This is a direct counterpoint to the images of youths riding bikes and Segways; a close-up of a terraced street and child's bike abandoned next to a pushchair with someone sat on their doorstep with what appears to be a can a lager. This announcement that "…I don't think its such a bad place" suggests that there is a discrepancy between how the residents perceive themselves and their lifestyle and how the audience are positioned in relation to this.

This chapter will begin by exploring this positioning in a neoliberal context with regard to mainstream representations of poverty. The series follows established tropes which encourage the audience to distance themselves from what are perceived as dysfunctional bodies in what Lorey (2015) argues is a discourse of "biopolitical governmentality." (23) Lorey takes the concept of precarity to frame the argument that in order to gain collective consensus in a political environment which encourages individualisation, those transgressing the norm must be sited as deviant and a threat to the normal body.

Generally associated more within the neoconservative ideology of creating collective consensus in order to govern, the way in which the representation of poverty fits into this framework by creating an enemy *not outside of* British culture, but rather *inside* supports the introduction of austerity measures and the dismantling of welfare state provisions, as those in receipt of it are perceived to be personally responsible and more often than not, feckless and duplicitous.

This political context will be used to analyse storylines featured in the series, exploring the way in which family and employment are used to create sites of conflict, and reinforce negativity around the poor, and how class-conflict is engendered and used as a further distancing strategy. But what the makers of the series failed to

recognise, was that those whom they were representing within this discourse would *not* recognise themselves on-screen, and the residents' fight-back will be briefly explored, as they attempted to claw-back dignity for a community which was felt to have been misrepresented, with the series primarily focusing on the dysfunctional elements of the area and marginalising the good.

Whilst the residents were arguably correct in their assertions, nevertheless there *were* what can be perceived as spectacles of bad behaviour displayed within the series. The final section will begin by explore whether these representations were merely pornographic exploitation, situated outside of a socio-cultural or socio-political context and feeding back into the arguments around neoliberalism, before considering where this series was in relation to the public service broadcasting remit of education, information and entertainment.

The neoliberal agenda and representation of poverty

In October 2014 the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI) published research conducted by Valentine entitled 'Inequality and class prejudice in an age of austerity' which "…look[ed] at the changing attitudes towards unemployed people in Britain in the context of austerity." In the opening statement the brief suggested that:

> …after a period of sustained economic stagnation, unemployment and poverty are increasingly seen as a personal failing, rather than as a result of entrenched socio-economic inequalities – a perception which is likely to legitimise further policies of retrenchment in the future.

Citing Jones (2012) as a critical commentator who had identified the trend of appropriating the word 'chav' to demonise certain factions of the working class, Valentine concurred with the research cited in his book, and found "…respondents were most likely to blame individuals for their worklessness. This in turn encouraged negative attitudes towards welfare provision." (Valentine 2014) Valentine found:

> …middle class respondents tended to identify and condemn 'chav' culture so as to validate and re-affirm their own superior social position. Working class respondents were more likely to identify and condemn 'chav' culture and worklessness in order to distinguish themselves from it.

A salient finding, Valentine (2014) identified that respondents created a critical distancing from themselves as functioning working and middle classes and those they deemed as abnormal/deviant. In other words, the findings are concomitant with the ways in which Foucault (1980a; 1980b; 1980c; in Rabinow 1991) argued the subjugation of the body worked in his analysis of power. If mainstream

representations of those in poverty show individuals who are happy to languish in their status of unemployment, often living in squalor and partaking in anti-social or illegal activities, it becomes inevitable that the mechanisms which facilitate their dysfunctional lifestyles will come under attack. Lugo-Ocando (2015) supports this assertion when he argues that the welfare state is "…now not only under attack by those who think that they [welfare state provisions] are inefficient, but also are being blamed for creating a trap that keeps people in poverty." (17) But, in many mainstream representations of those who are in poverty, it is presented as a *trap* they seem happy to remain within.

The identification by Valentine (2014) of class-consciousness in her research is pertinent as Wright (2015) in *Understanding Class* suggests:

> …there is near universal sense that economic prospects are bleak, that life under capitalism for most people has become more precarious and its likely to stay that way for some time to come, and that in the wake of this crisis the state must retreat from its earlier expansive role. (232)

In other words, if as suggested the state must relinquish its expansive role, in order to gain collective agreement on the dismantling of the welfare state, those in receipt of it must first be

demonized so that this withdrawal seems more palatable and less brutal.

And this is in line with the original neoliberal agenda of privatization and individuation. Harvey (2007) notes that:

> While personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and wellbeing. This principle extends into the realms of welfare, education, health care, and even pensions…Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings (such as not investing significantly enough in one's own human capital through education) rather than being attributed to any systemic property (such as the class exclusions usually attributed to capitalism. (76)

In other words, the neoliberal political agenda does not acknowledge the inherent social, cultural and political disadvantages individuals have growing up in economically deprived areas, often lacking access to educational opportunities and living in disenfranchised enclaves. Therefore the media, acting as an established regime of truth (Foucault 1980c) inevitably perpetrates the myth that supports a general reading of poverty within this dysfunctional framework.

But if neoliberalism purports to make citizens individual and personally responsible for their own destinies, how do you mobilize collective thought in order to justify demonizing an entire community? Harvey (2007) argues that neoconservatism:

> …in no way depart[s] from the neoliberal agenda of a construction or restoration of a dominant class power. But they seek legitimacy for that power, as well as social control through construction of a climate of consent around a coherent set of moral values. (95)

In the case of those living in poverty and receiving welfare state benefits, that is via a discourse of their immorality and a threat to the morality of the rest of the population. Just as the neoconservative ideology encourages a collective agenda around fear *outside* of the nation-state, creating a climate of fear in order to justify political decisions around security, what *this* encourages is the notion of the enemy *within,* and this enemy in the context of the abolition of the welfare state, is the poor.

Lorey (2015) in her book *State of Insecurity* argues similarly, suggesting that contemporary society operates within a framework of the precarious; in order to subjugate citizens they have to be on the edge of precarity, which "…can be described in its broadest sense as insecurity and vulnerability, destabilization and endangerment." (10)

She identifies three elements to the precarious, and the third which, governmental precarization, is the most interesting in relation to the ways in which poverty is represented in contemporary mainstream media, with the evolution of this form of governing leading to "…governable biopolitical subjectivations…" (13). In other words a neopolitical system which encourages individualisation to inspire all citizens to feel responsible for themselves in relation to health and employment, negating collective responsibility over the welfare state.

This self-governing is a form of subjugation which is encouraged as it takes the responsibility off the state to not only *not* provide for individuals who may be in need, but actively encourages the myth that the underclass are only there as they have been irresponsible in and of themselves. Therefore mainstream mediated representations are:

> …constructed as a threat against which a political community must be protected, immunized. Legitimizing the protection of some generally requires striating the precarity of those marked as 'other'…the threatening precariousness can be turned into the construction of dangerous others, positioned respectively within and outside the political and social community as 'abnormal' and 'alien. (14)

This:

> Domination turns existential precariousness into an anxiety towards others who cause harm, who have been preventatively fended off, and not infrequently destroyed, in order to protect those who are threatened. (21)

which supports the suggestion that the neoconservative collective ideology of othering groups in society is now targeting a perceived enemy *within* rather than the usual enemy *outside*, and this enemy is the poor whom we must destroy in order to save ourselves from moral and financial bankruptcy.

This biopolitical governmentality (Lorey 2015: 23) allows for the neoliberal condition of allowing each individual to feel liberated, and responsible for their own destiny *yet at the same time* engenders particular modes of thinking around collective agreement, and by presenting those in receipt of welfare benefits as personally responsible it galvanises individuals into a group mentality of rejecting their plight as it is one of self-managed choice. The fear around those 'taking more than they should', being duplicitous, feckless and undeserving make us question why society *as a whole* should support these individuals through their own taxation, through the extra burden they place on the National Health Service, and so on. In this context the deviant body is threatening the normal body and therefore the deviant body must be turned away from, and

rejected, and via this discourse, the turning-away can be done with a sense of moral superiority.

People Like Us (2013)

Made by the independent production company Dragonfly Film and Television Productions Ltd., which was a subsidiary of the Shine Group until 2014 when it became part of the Endemol Shine Group, the first series of *People Like Us* (2013) was first broadcast on BBC3 in the Wednesday evening 21.00 slot from February to March 2013. On their website, Dragonfly (Nd) describe the series as "A warm, unflinching and laugh-out-loud funny peek into the challenging lives of young people and giving them a voice to talk about the issues they face and tell their stories in their own words." The website also boasts that series one "…was BBC THREE's highest-rating debut factual series of 2012 by an independent production company." (Dragonfly Nd)

And whilst it can be argued that the series did give the contributors a public space to share their private lives with the general public, this section will deconstruct the narrative discourses presented around the representation of family and employment to consider how these might impact on a general (mis)understanding of those living in areas of economic depravation and the lifestyle choices that they make. *People Like Us* (2013) followed a number of resident, some of whom

were seen across all six episodes, and others who featured in only one. Therefore the chapter will move across the series accordingly, following the narrative progression of individual stories rather than deconstructing one specific episode.

Family dynamics

Family dynamics are a primary focus across all episodes of *People Like Us* (2013) and this section will examine a representative sample of these to explore how they subtly reinforce the inherently dysfunctional nature of the Harpurhey community, which acts as a metonym for all areas of economic depravation, at large. The concept of family is important in understanding how those who appear to transgress what is perceived as being morally correct can be used to reinforce negative views around the moral turpitude of individuals living in deprived areas, and the (perceived negative) choices they make regarding their attitude and behaviour.

Of all the family dynamics represented across the series, there is only one which could be described as traditionally nuclear; that is a unit containing both mother and father figures living in the same domestic space, with children. This is the Wakefield family, owners' of the Wishy Washy laundrette who feature across all six episodes. The majority of the other families consist of single parents, of varying ages, living within differing domestic situations. These include

nineteen-year-old Jamie and his mother Donna (episode one and five); nineteen-year-old single-parent Nicola and her mother Kathleen (episode two); 21-year-old single-parent Ryan and his mother (episode two); nineteen-year-old Dale, his younger sister and his mother (episode two); 22-year-old single-parent Sherelle and her three-year-old son Cairell (episode four); and brother and sister 21-year-old Pidge and 29-year-old Katie (episodes three and four) who live on the same street. This section will begin by considering the family dynamics of the Wakefield household, before moving on to examine Nicola and Kathleen before concluding with Dale and Lisa. These are representative of the family structures present across the six episodes of series one.

The Wakefield household comprises of mother Karen, her partner and children's step-father Paul, eighteen-year-old Amber and her sister eleven-year-old Maddy. Whilst Amber calls Paul by his first name, Maddy refers to him as Dad and he appears to be an integrated member of the family, albeit on the periphery and this is subtly reinforced by both the way in which the female members of the household speak to and of him, and also how he discusses his place in the family unit via his personal pieces-to-camera. In episode two Amber, three of her friends, and Karen Wakefield are getting ready for a night out, and footage is shown of Amber helping her mother with her makeup as Karen reminisces about the great nights they have shared. The back-drop to this shows all the women drinking

alcohol (including shots) in preparation for leaving the house, and culminates in Amber and her friends being filmed by Karen whilst singing “I have a penis, I shake it in the morning, I spray it on the night, yeah, I have a penis, I shake it in the morning, shake it, and spray it, it at the night, I spray it, I spray it, I spray it, whey.” (16.31-16.50) Whilst singing, the girls mime shaking their ‘penis’ around, laughing and having fun.

Straight after this, in a piece-to-camera Amber explains that her mother was “…a right one when she was younger, she is probably just living her past, but now she never gets older, she just lives with the time…” (16.51-17.00). This suggests the perception she has of Karen is less of a mother-figure and more a peer, concurred when Amber tells Karen “Look, MILF [Mother I’d Like to Fuck] or what, yes!” (17.08-17.11) which is not an acronym generally used by a daughter to describe her mother. At the end of the scene, the women are shown leaving the house, walking unsteadily whilst carrying their drinks into the back of a waiting minibus. This whole scene runs from 15.30-17.38 when the women arrive at their destination.

Whilst the women are travelling, the scene cuts to Karen in a piece-to-camera explaining that she is dreading Amber leaving home to go to drama school as she is the rock of the house (17.25-17.28). This again subtly suggests in Transactional Analysis terms their

relationship is not one of parent/child, or even parent/adult; rather it is more akin to adult/adult or even child/adult as a responsible parent wants their child to succeed in their endeavours and does not want to hold them back due to their own fear of losing them. To further reinforce this, as a parental figure Karen should consider either herself or Paul as “the rock of the house”, rather than her teenage daughter.

This fear of loss is raised again later in episode two when Karen says “I don't want her to go, its my worse nightmare” (34.56-34.58) and after Amber reveals she has made the decision not to go to London Karen is visibly relieved and tells her “I know you wouldn't cope” (50.50- 50.52), “I’m not ready for you to leave anyhow. I don't think I am ready yet, I don't think I will ever be ready for my kids to leave home, will I?” (51.37-51.43). Rather than empowering her child, Karen is happy to hold her back, unable to let her realise her potential and flourish outside of the family unit, for fear of her own loss. This representation of motherhood as stifling, selfish and disempowering is dysfunctional and highlights Karen’s inability to act as a responsible parent.

This inability to act responsibly is further reinforced in episode four as the Wakefield’s are having issues with eleven-year-old Maddy, who is about to leave junior school and start high school, and is pushing

at the family boundaries. However in a piece-to-camera Amber reveals that Maddy has had little of the structure *she* had as a child, astutely ascribing her problematic behaviour with a lack of parental control. This once again positions Amber in the place of 'responsible adult' juxtaposed against her inefficient mother who fails to provide the necessary boundaries a child needs to thrive. Revealing Maddy has never had a set bedtime, the scene then cuts to Karen, Paul and Maddy in the car, driving in the dark to the park with their dog.

> Maddy: "What time is it?"
>
> Karen: "Its very late Maddy."
>
> Maddy: "Yeah, but what time?"
>
> Karen: "You're talking two o'clock gone."
>
> Maddy: "Is that how long have I've been awake for?"
>
> Karen: "Yeah, its ridiculous, all this crap 'can I come to the park with you, and take the dogs.'" (39.10-39-26)

Both Karen and Paul display a lack of parental responsibility in not providing a reasonable structure for Maddy and enforcing this. Karen claims "its ridiculous" that Maddy wants to come out at 2am, yet both parents allow her to come rather than saying no.

The way the two scenes are juxtaposed suggests a correlation between a lack of effective parenting and the negative behaviour of

their child, reinforcing stereotypical claims that those growing up in areas of economic depravation lack strong, positive parental role-models and that this is (partly) responsible for perpetuating the disenfranchisement of those being raised there. How can children raised in chaotic family households learn to be model citizens, taking responsibility for their own lives when their parents allow them to do as they please? Whilst this is a simplistic and somewhat contentious claim, analysed within the context of this being yet another negative representation of parenting, it acts to reinforce that those labelled chavs are ineffectual moral failures, and are further othered as they are perceived as the antithesis to us, the fully-functioning parent.

And this is not the only instance of Karen's inability to protect Maddy, and act as a moral guardian to her child. In preparation for attending her school-leaving prom, she is taken to Stax, a local hairdressers, described in the voice over as "…well known as the local talking shop, and conversation is not always aimed at customers Maddy's age." (21.54-21.59) Whilst she is having her hair made-up the conversations she is privy to include clairvoyance, the success of the *Fifty Shades* trilogy (E. L. James 2011-2012), and the sex life of married couples, with Donna her stylist going on to say: "Really when you think about it, most married couples, its one of them isn't it, pull my nighty down when you have finished. It gets a bit boring doesn't it? I think once you stop playing games, it gets boring." (23.29-23.42)

As Donna continues to curl Maddy's hair, with Karen sat listening and nodding her agreement, the conversation continues:

> Donna: " I think most fells stray with prostitutes, because basically the women don't do what they want them to do."
>
> Karen: "Yeah, that probably is the main reason. "
>
> Denise: "Well perhaps he isn't doing his job properly, never mind…"
>
> Donna: "No, no, no, no, no, its because their wives won't do it"
>
> Denise: "Listen, if a woman's bored in bed…oh, come on, come on"
>
> Donna: "No Denise, no Denise, don't forget, they have fantasies and a lot of woman won't do it where they can go and pay for it to be done, which is fair enough, 'cos they have always been around haven't they, even in the Roman times they were around." (23.52-24.19)

Whilst this is a wholly inappropriate conversation for an eleven-year-old child to be a part of, Karen appears oblivious, allowing her daughter to hear adults discussing issues of a sexual nature. Rather than protecting her, she is placing her in a position of vulnerability which further reinforces her position as an ineffective parent, lacking the basic skills needed to raise a child.

While the Wakefields may *appear* to be a relatively cohesive nuclear unit, this position is further undermined by Paul who is partner to Karen and stepfather to Amber and Maddy. During the scene in episode two where the women are getting ready for their night out, he claims “I hate being in a house with them all, I mean, talk about fucking make-up ‘Paul, put my eyelashes on for me’; you know what I mean, its fucking hanging.” (16.05-16.13) And whilst this may be a tongue-in-cheek comment, his use of profane language (04.03) both in front of, and in relation to, his family, is still relatively shocking.

By episode three the future of the Wakefield household is in jeopardy as Paul has been asked to leave the family home. In the opening sequence in a piece-to-camera Paul claims “My favourite saying to her now is, Kaz, are these yours?” (01.43-01.46) whilst sticking two fingers up at the camera, grinning. This is followed by scenes which show the family in their domestic environment, with Paul saying the women pick on him, concurred by Karen calling Paul “psycho Sid”, criticising him for smoking in “my house” (04.03), and generally berating him. (3.18-4.28) Amber explains the couple are “always bickering, always moaning” (04.23- 04-26) and later explains that Paul:

> “…works very hard, we can't like fault him for that, I mean once one rooms been decorated, he just goes onto the next room, then that room, what he did previously needs doing

again. Once he gets up to do it, I'm not gonna get up and do it, because he has already up doing it." (23.53-24.11)

And as Amber speaks, she begins to laugh, obviously aware of how Paul is taken advantage of in the household. Earlier in the episode we learn that Karen has back problems, and throughout the series Paul is shown taking on the majority of both the domestic chores and launderette work, whilst we see Karen socialising with her daughters, lying in bed and generally seeming to have little responsibility other than to please herself. The montage which follows Ambers piece-to-camera shows Paul engaged in home maintenance, whilst Karen is shown in pyjamas in bed with Maddy listening to music and generally relaxing around the house.

So it comes as no surprise that Paul is unhappy with his current situation and as his moods have become an issue, Karen has asked him to leave. Maddy explains "My dad, 'cos he has to do a lot of work sometimes, he can get in really bad moods where we all fall out with him, and then we just don't want to know him." (30.48-30.57) However, when the situation calms down Karen wants Paul to return to the family, and acknowledges he does do the majority of everything, and Amber highlights the family's worry that if Paul fails to return, they will have no-one to fix the laundrette machines and do the other chores he has become responsible for. Thus, the nuclear family unit is represented as exploitative; Paul has become

emasculated and his function reduced to merely providing domestic service, at the behest of the female members of the household.

Later it is revealed that the couple have split up many times, and that often extensive periods of time have elapsed before they came back together. Paul believes that whilst Karen loves him, she would not miss him if he didn't return and reveals “I just want a normal family like most other people have like, you know what I mean, decent like” (32.55-33.02), before explaining that his own childhood was dysfunctional and included being beaten and bullied both at school and at home. He clearly suffers from issues of low self-esteem and whilst it generates an understanding as to why Paul would continue in his dysfunctional relationship with Karen, as he claims he wants to provide them with the opposite to what he had, he appears to have gravitated towards another situation where he is victimised and taken advantage of. By 45.29 the family are reunited and Karen and Maddy both express their happiness that he has returned in what appears to be a genuine display of affection towards Paul.

As this is the only (traditional) nuclear family in the series, it acts as a representation of what families in this area are like, and whilst on the surface they appear to be fully-functioning, and perhaps suffering issues which are common to other nuclear families across Britain, what is actually revealed is a lack of parental guidance in favour of a

mother who wants to be friends with her teenage daughter rather than encourage her to fulfil her potential and follow her acting dream and attend University. Alongside this is a dysfunctional relationship between the parental figures of Karen and Paul who perennially break-up and swear at each other in front of the children. Paul, the male figure is constantly undermined verbally by Karen and her daughter Amber, and his primary function in the family is represented as being the person who is responsible for carrying out the menial chores both at home and in the laundrette. Altogether, it is not a positive representation of a fully-functioning family unit, and in episode four Amber sums this up by saying “My mum is the boss, Pauls role was sort of, not slave [laughter], but he does all, like washing, the delivery in the shop, he is just always like too busy…” (05.09-05.24); it is not just what Amber is saying it’s her laughter at Pauls’ expense that drives home the lack of respect he is afforded. However, respect has to be earned and Pauls swearing and temper are equally as problematic within this context.

In direct counterpoint to the relationship Karen and Amber share, are the mother/daughter Nicola and Kathleen. Also featured in episode two, the two women are constantly in conflict and show little love or respect for each other. At few points during the series do Nicola or Kathleen say anything positive regarding the other, and in their feature episode Nicola is seen moving away from her mother to establish a new life with her child away from Kathleen’s negative

influence. Whilst it could be argued that this is an extreme representation of a dysfunctional mother/daughter relationship, it is naturalised into the overarching discourse as being just another family unit whose story is being told. Thus it appears that this *is* representative rather than exceptional, further reinforcing that the Harpurhey community has little to offer in terms of positive family dynamics, and that the resulting dysfunctional “young people of Harpurhey” (BBC 2017d) are a product of their upbringing.

In a poignant piece-to-camera Nicola explains “When I first found out I was pregnant, me and mum was arguing, like all the time, as we always do, and I was like ‘I’m getting rid of it’, me mum said ‘if you have an abortion, I’ll disown you.’” (05.54-06-08) We have already learnt that Nicola had not planned the pregnancy and that at the time she had attended college for three years, alluding to her having a focus despite her seemingly fractious family life, and she subsequently had her child before her “…life just went crashing down.” (05.29-05.31) Throughout this segment, Nicola is in the middle of an argument with Kathleen who is supposed to be babysitting that evening, but is rather reluctant to get involved:

> Nicola: “Me mams got one of those personalities where she changes, she’s not a very nice person to get along with, no.” (04.34-04.41)
>
> Kathleen: “Hey Nicola”

Nicola: “What?”

Kathleen: “You left the parcel behind, and you need to get her ready for bed, and you need to get her to bed.”

Nicola: “She won't go bed at this time.”

Kathleen: “Make sure she’s got a clean nappy on, and put her in bed. Why should you get out early, and leave the child to us? I don't think so, we got things to do.”

Nicola: “Have you now?”

Kathleen: “Yes we do.”

Nicola: “And what’s that?”

Kathleen: “Not sitting in here all night babysitting.”

Nicola: “’I’m not babysitting.”

Kathleen: “Get her ready, get her pyjamas on, and get her in bed and settle her down, and I’ll babysit.”

Nicola: “But that's too much.”

Kathleen: “What do you meant that’s too much?

Nicola: “That's not what I call babysitting. You should be babysitting my child until I go out.”

Kathleen: “You should wear condoms, you know what I mean? She’s a big responsibility, the next time you’ll wear a condom.” (04.24-05.18)

The exchange demonstrates Kathleen’s lack of engagement with both her daughter and granddaughter; she gave Nicola an ultimatum regarding her pregnancy, which resulted in her changing the course of her life, leaving college to support herself and her baby, and yet appears to begrudge helping her daughter. Later in the episode Kathleen does admit to worrying about Nicola, explaining she didn't have an easy life, coming from a large family of Irish travellers, and whilst she was brought up by her stepfather Barry (from whom Kathleen is now estranged), himself addicted to drugs until Nicola was sixteen and currently sleeping rough whilst waiting to enter rehab for alcohol addiction, her biological father (whom she has never met) is residing in prison for murder (20.03-20.25).

It was also previously revealed that Kathleen is illiterate, unable to read and write (04.29), which creates a further distance from her as an efficient mother figure and the audience. She is represented as a feckless, illiterate mother with a drug-addicted partner, who begrudges helping her daughter out yet claims “…she [Nicola] is a single mum with a baby and she is going to do the same thing as I have done, bring her kid up, and make sure she has a good life…” (20.26-20.36). It is unclear from what has been revealed in the episode so far, what exactly this “good life” is, and whether Nicola was provided with any positive role models in her life. This will be returned to later when analysing the lack of remorse or even

understanding Nicola has in relation to her shoplifting in the following section (representations of employment).

By the end of the episode Nicola has moved out of the area, claiming she wants to leave her existing family behind to start a new life away from Kathleen and Harpurhey. Her number one priority is her daughter Crystal:

> “you gotta have a lot to love, loves the main part, you got, you gotta have love, like with me I never had love in my life, never, me Dad I did yeah, but with me mum I didn’t, so all my love, that I’ve got to give for years has gone on her [Crystal].” (48.01-48.21)

Which completely undermines Kathleen’s perception of her daughter’s life and Nicolas reality of it. And whilst this may elicit *some* empathy from the audience, as this is revealed with only eleven minutes of the episode remaining (full duration: 57.11), when placed within the overall context of Nicola’s story and her attitude to benefits and shoplifting, it is difficult to engage with her in a sympathetic light.

In contrast to the first two representations the relationship between Dale and his mother Lisa is a positive, functioning one. Currently unemployed, in the opening credits he is described as “a budding DJ, entrepreneur, currently living with his mum...but if he makes it big,

will he stay or will he go?” (01.44-01.56) In his first sequence (08.17-10.40) this is revealed:

> “I absolutely love it round here, I’ve got my family around me, my friends around me, that's everything I need…if I had the choice to live anywhere in the world, it would be Harpurhey…a lot of people make their money and go, but I’m staying at home.” (09.07-09.30)

In the same sequence in a piece-to-camera, Dales mother Lisa says, “…I’ve always been proud of Dale, and I always will be.” (10-18-10.21) In the two minute twenty-three second section we see Dale in a social situation, out with his friends in a pub, playing pool and generally having a good time and also at home where he is broadcasting his up and coming radio station from. In this domestic environment we see Lisa and Dales younger sister Abbie sat on the sofa (interestingly, Dale is broadcasting from the living-room which is a family space) and at 22.10 one of his friends comes around to support him whilst he is on the radio.

It is quite clear just from the brief introduction that whilst Dale is unemployed, he has tried a variety of initiatives to find himself work, and has ambition is to become successful. He has an active social life, with friends and family who support him, which is counterpoint to Nicola who has a fractious relationship with both mother Kathleen and stepfather Barry, and appears isolated from the wider

community. Whilst we do see Nicola out with Crystal she is always on her own with her daughter. As Dales' story continues, these positive attributes are reinforced, and just how close a relationship he has with his mother.

In an emotional piece-to-camera, he reveals that whilst he had the chance to meet his father, he has chosen not to (36.10-37.39):

> "I don't know me dad, me mum left him when she was pregnant with me, 'cos, apparently, he's just, you know is a bit useless. When me mum first asked me if I wanted to meet him, I felt angry, in a way that, I wanted to hit him, but I don't know why. Maybe, maybe it might have been because he upset me mum and that, so I think its just best that we don't see each other. It's his loss, if he wanted to see me he could, but I don't want to see him. Me mum *is* me dad, and that, that, that's whose in my life and who's brought me up." (36.47-37.22)

This bond between mother and son is represented as functional; they clearly express love and respect for each other. Lisa wants Dale to succeed, in contrast to Karen with Amber, stating she (Lisa) does want Dale to leave home one day (10.14), suggesting she is aware of the conventional parental boundaries, and can let go of her child in order for him to achieve his ambitions.

Whilst Dale is not always successful in his endeavours, he continues to try. He organises a club night in town, and remaining constantly upbeat about all the ventures he instigates, manages to only make £6.00 in total profit from this (13.36-15.28 and 17.41-19.26). We also learn that he is an amateur boxer, and is training for his third fight, although training is not going as well as it should and his coach believes he is not putting the required effort in to prepare for the match, and suggests he might call the fight off (29.32-30.31). However, Dale turns this around and the match remains scheduled to take place (49.28-49.42).

Supported by Lisa, his Nana, friends and the Wakefield family, Dale enters the ring, but not before he has had words of motivation and a kiss from his mother (57.11-52.54). Unfortunately, Dale loses the fight, and the end sequence reflects their opening as Dale once again reiterates how positive their relationship is: “Whatever I do throughout me life, or whether I succeed or fail, I think that my mum is always going to be there, no matter what.” (55.15-55.22) “I want her to be proud. I think she should be, she’s done a good job.” (56.02-56.06)

Whilst these three examples are not the only family units featured in the series, they are indicative of the range of representations present and highlight the way in which dysfunction is prioritised over function.

It could be argued that only one of the three examples represents a fully-functioning family unit, that being the relationship between Dale and his mother Lisa, with the other representations exhibiting problematic elements which reinforce negative stereotypes associated with areas of economic depravation. Showing fractious family-relations, especially those which feature parent/child dynamics helps perpetrate the mythology which surrounds what has been termed ‘chav’ culture, and rather than address the socio-political context which has facilitated the disenfranchisement of whole communities, instead the documentary series’ focuses on the (arguably) negative behaviours of those living lives on the margins of society. This inevitably creates a rift between the functioning-audience and the dysfunctional-protagonists and supports the neoliberal agenda of encouraging people to be accountable for their behaviour and punished for digressing when they are perceived as outside of the norm, not only through the withdrawal of welfare assistance, but in the case of dysfunctional family dynamics, through a denial of empathy as the audience look on and see that (bad) parents who have (bad) children have merely reaped what they have sown.

Representations of employment

According to 'The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto' (2017 7/8) one of their five Giant Challenges was that: "We will govern in the interests of ordinary, working families." It goes on to state:

> …the work of the government under her [Teresa May's] leadership will be driven not for the benefit of a privileged few but by the interests of ordinary, working families: people who have a job but do not always have job security; people who own their own home but worry about paying the mortgage; people who can just about manage but worry about the cost of living and getting their children into a good school.

Throughout the remainder of the report, what was stressed was that ordinary *working* families were to benefit under the auspices of Conservative rule, reinforcing the ideology that functioning members of society were *working*, whether they be part of a family unit or living singular lives.

As already established, a mainstream neoliberal political turn has resulted in the general consensus that individual responsibility takes precedent over all aspects of how people live their lives, and that state-intervention, including the welfare state system, primarily functions to serve only those who are deemed 'worthy' of any stop-gap provision, as they have previously paid into the system and are using it as a temporary measure, not as a lifestyle choice. Therefore,

the attitude to employment in areas of economic depravation becomes a site of contention when it is perceived that residents are happy to continue in their status of receiving state intervention with no (perceived) attempt to gain meaningful employment, and in some more extreme examples, seem happy to illicitly (and sometimes illegally) supplement their benefit claims without any sense of shame or regret.

Whilst *People Like Us* (2013) does include a range of protagonists, both employed and unemployed, the overarching thematic tends towards a representation of a community inhabited by protagonists who generally lack (or have unrealistic) ambition, have an ambivalence towards working, and *appear* to be happy spending their days languishing, socialising with friends and neighbours, smoking, drinking and watching television. This again serves to reinforce their futile existence, which we, the functioning taxpayer facilitates. And whilst it could be argued that the Wakefield family are exempt from this category, as owners of a seemingly viable laundrette business (supported by a scene from episode two when Amber asks to borrow £20.00 and Karen is seen pulling out a substantial wad of money, which she describes as “bits of loose change” (34.18-35.00)), they are often used as a juxtaposition to reinforce how negative the behaviour of some of those who reside in the community is.

An excellent example of this occurs near the start of episode two where the Wakefield family are reviewing CCTV footage. Discussing how they have never seen so many “weird” people since they owned the laundrette, they highlight a particular incident that is playing out over the CCTV footage they (and we) are watching. An elderly female customer is seen using the waste bin located in the shop as a toilet; initially it was assumed that she had urinated, however it is suggested that she may have also defecated. They also reveal this is the third person who has been caught doing this. Perhaps not the most controversial of activity, but it certainly breaks social norms and suggests that members of the community lack respect and to a certain extent, dignity.

Further occurrences of petty stealing at the launderette are captured, and in episode four the suspected theft of clothing from a service wash by a previously-banned customer occurs. This escalates whereby Karen and Paul drive over to her house to confront the suspected thief, whilst the neighbours stand on the street watching. This scene is played out from 33.21-35-51 and returned to between 37.14-38.40 when the police are called to help intervene in the situation. The voice-over states: “They [the police] have brought a healthy amount of back-up.” (37.27-37.29), which includes a squad car, riot van and a Range Rover. Three police vehicles for a middle-aged woman who is suspected of stealing laundry does seem somewhat excessive for both the nature of the crime and the

suspected criminal. This over-exaggerated police response subtly reinforces that the neighbourhood is a dangerous place, and perhaps even the pettiest of squabbles could lead to something more sinister which would warrant such a visible police presence.

Rather than present the business as a positive experience for the Wakefields, it is used to showcase how dysfunctional the neighbourhood and the residents are. In episode two, the Wakefields discover that a customer has stolen pictures off the wall of their shop (12.06-12.58), with CCTV revealing them being placed into a bag. Whilst Karen is aware that this is a petty crime she is angry that someone would feel it is acceptable to go into their shop and steal from them:

> Karen: “It riles me up all this crime thing, proper riles me up, gets me really mad really. If I was to run of the country, my phrase would be ‘an eye for an eye’ whatever anybody did, they’d have it done back to them.” (12.51-12.58)

However, this whole scene is used to juxtapose Nicola’s story, who herself appears comfortable stealing, as she claims the benefits she receives are not enough to live on. Smiling, whilst she explains further:

> “When you’re in there, you get the sugar rush of going I’m getting it, I’m getting it, and I’ve got it, and then when you’re getting out the doors you’re thinking, whoah, what have I

> done? And you think you just want to get it out your bag and go look I got this from your shop, take it, I'm right with ya, but then you get out and you think, its just mad, you just want to dance outside and go, I've done it." (11.07-11.32)

The voice over explains she used to sell on some of the items she stole, but kept others:

> "If I'm gonna rob summat it would be a daft thing in my house like the candle, and St Tropez make-up which is really dear. What else? The wallpaper, and the carpet, and that lamp, which is broke now. That's it. Yeah. Oh, and the clock there. I'm not stealing from somebody, I'm stealing from the company." (11.37-12.06)

This scene is directly followed by the Wishy Washy sequence, detailed above, starting at 12.06 where pictures have been stolen off the launderette wall. Exposing her naivety, Nicola is unaware and seemingly unconcerned that there is a face to the victims she is creating through her theft. And whilst the items stolen from Wishy Washy are only pictures off the wall, Nicola is also stealing arbitrary items such as candles, make-up and a wall clock, not the essential items one would expect after her claim she is unable to live off what she receives through the welfare state system. Had she been stealing nappies, or essential food items, this would still have been

illegal, and *arguably* immoral, but somewhat less problematic than stealing items which are not essential for survival.

Here Nicola is exposing a culture of entitlement in a situation where a neoliberal political agenda would consider her as *un*entitled. She is a single-mother, receiving benefits, after never having paid into the welfare state system herself, yet is critical of the support she is being given to her as it does not afford her the lifestyle she desires. Directly after Karen discusses how she feels about the theft from her laundrette (12.06-12.58), Nicola returns.

> Nicola: “I go shoplifting because I can’t live on the social like, with what I get.”
>
> Off camera voice: “Some people would say that wrong, and that you should get a job, you should pay for it.”
>
> Nicola: “Yeah. Urm. Which you're right, I don't blame people thinking, saying its wrong to shoplift, and you should get a job. It’s not a very nice thing to go shoplifting. I’m not gonna be shoplifting all my life, definitely not.” (12.58-13.27)

This creates a critical distance between the audience and Nicola and delimits the potential to feel anything other than frustration and anger for someone who is essentially a victim herself. The narrative reveals Nicola to have had a dysfunctional, fractious upbringing within a large

travelling community, by an illiterate and seemingly uncaring mother and drug-addicted stepfather. It therefore might come as no surprise to the audience that Nicola has an unconventional moral framework. However, the direct inclusion of a victim (Karen, the owner of Wishy Washy) who is subject to the crime Nicola commits, negates Nicola *herself* as the real victim in this situation; victim of her unconventional upbringing and loveless relationship with her mother. It reinforces that dysfunction behests further dysfunction and supports the neoconservative collective demonization of those who live outside of the hegemonic moral framework. Rather than attempt to understand transgression, it is turned away-from and left to fester in some hinterland where understanding is not sought and support is denied.

In further support of this, one of Nicola's final scenes shows her smoking whilst she reveals she is unable to put the heating on for herself and Crystal as she is behind with the payments. Clutching her smart-phone, and claiming she cannot afford the £13.00 per week needed to pay off her utility debt, audiences are left to wonder where her priorities lie. It is revealed when she explains:

> "It's expensive to have a baby. People, the social and the MP doesn't know that. You can't start putting your baby in Primark clothes 'cos you wear it. I think the baby should be wearing a nice decent pair of shoes on their feet, summat nice and designer really. That's how much I, that's what I pay for her.

> Well, I love TK Maxx, I absolutely love that, that's good, see you can get designer clothes but cheap in there. Its £10.00 for a pair of Ralph Lauren, like jeans, and stuff, so it is, it is cheap in one way to put your kid in designer clothes if you root through." (38.38-39.22)

This compounds her as irresponsible; she is a feckless thief, who is happy to steal what she desires and spend her benefits on designer clothing rather than heating. The audience are thus justified in their turning-away from her, as she is the epitome of the 'undeserving poor'.

Further examples of this discourse of irresponsibility include 21-year-old Pidge, the unemployed chef who is seen smoking, drinking, taking drugs, and trashing his landlords house all whilst in the receipt of welfare benefits, and 22-year-old Sherelle, who is attempting to stay out of trouble for the sake of her three-year-old son Cairell, having served prison time for dealing Class A drugs. On the surface Sherelle *does* appear to be conforming, but is somewhat apathetic to actually getting herself out of the benefits culture and into work. In voice-over and piece-to-camera during episode four she explains:

> "No I don't work at the moment, but I'd like to find a job, like, soon cos its rather boring…sometimes it pisses me off just not doing nothing, waiting, just sitting there waiting for my son to finish school. I'd like to work in a hospital me, be a nurse or

something, cos I just like, when I watch like operations and that, I like to watch it. Nothings stopping me from doing that, but, it’s just, I don't know where to start, where would I start, I don't know. I’d have to go to Uni and all that, but, yeah, its never too late is it?” (32.11-33.08)

Sherelle *says* she would like to work to relieve the boredom she feels, admits there is nothing stopping her and whilst it *is* plausible that she does not know how to start researching working in the health care sector, the majority of her time on-screen features her not engaging in anything other than hanging around and socializing. In her final scene she admits that if she didn't have Cairell she would most likely be back in prison, which reinforces her lack of real commitment to find meaningful employment, and ergo become a fully-functioning member of society (51.10- 51.37).

Although Nik Taylor is not a Harpurhey resident, he owns properties which he rents out in the area and features across the series, proffering his opinion on both the residents and the neighbourhood at-large. Whilst he could be considered as representing gainful employment, he is a figure of derision; his tenants do not like him and he is largely a figure of fun. Commanding little respect, this merely serves to reinforce the lack of social skills prevalent within the area; whilst he is seen maintaining his properties on a daily basis, and

appearing generally affable with his tenants, they spend their time laughing at his expense whilst expecting him to help sort out their problems. One such problem is the letters issued to tenants Mandy and Katie, by the local Council who wish to discuss their antisocial behaviour.

Caught between the council complaining to him as their landlord, and his tenants complaining that they have been treated unfairly, Nik is on the receiving end of both parties. Evolving throughout episode four, the situation culminates in Mandy and Katie having to attend a meeting with both the local police and council officials which results in their being told if they cannot control the visitors who loiter outside of their houses, they will be removed. The meeting was also attended by Nik, as their landlord, and unlike Mandy and Katie, he dressed formally for the meeting, signalling his understanding of the gravity of the situation and his taking of the process seriously (41.06-42-18 and 46.40-48.06).

Despite his involvement in his tenants' problems, which in the example above were purely of their own making, residents are openly hostile towards him. Sherelle, whose mother Katie (above) was helped by Nik, claims "Nik, the landlord, he thinks that he is welcome on the street, because he's got a few [9] houses on the street, but, no-one likes him." (Episode 4: 12.53-13.02) During this

sequence Nik attempts to interact with Sherelles' three-year-old son Cairell who is playing on the street. Whilst Nik bends down to talk to him, Cairell turns his back and cycles off, displaying a blatant lack of respect which arguably reflects his extended family's hostile opinion of Nik. Once again, the (negative) community values are seen as being engendered across generations.

Throughout episode three, Nik is subject to unemployed tenant Pidge laughing openly in his face; whilst only residing in Niks' property for eight weeks, Pidge has been arrested seven times and is now in the process of being evicted. During a tour of the property Pidge shows the camera crew a vacant room where a previous tenant left dog excrement on the carpet. Pointing to it Pidge says: "And then there's the landlord. There he is, sat next to his nappy. Horrible bastard." (07.01-07.07) Whilst Nik openly admits he targets tenants claiming welfare benefits, the squalor they live in *does* appear to be caused more by themselves than a lack of landlord engagement, again subtlety reinforcing that those who are in receipt of benefits languish in self-created chaos. In a sequence which includes a piece-to-camera Nik claims:

> "I've lived in a lot of different places around England, but Harpurhey is about people not working, only getting out of the bed quite late in the day, and smoking weed and going to bed really late. If you're working then you are probably Polish, or

> come from some other part of Britain to do the work, because the locals can't work because they'd lose benefit if they did work. That's what the benefit cultures about, and that's what you're paying your taxes for." (19.10-19.35)

This is somewhat problematic, as Nik himself is exploiting the system by targeting those who *are* in receipt of welfare benefits thus cashing in on the system which he is clearly identifying as corrupt.

To reinforce his position, in episode four Nik has to inspect Mandy's home to establish whether, as has happened with a previous tenant, a cannabis farm is being cultivated at the property. Whilst nothing untoward is found he does offer the following opinion:

> "This area, many people smoke cannabis, because people are using the stuff its got to be produced by somebody, somewhere, so yeah, I would say the two local industries for Harpurhey, was growing weed and stealing other peoples weed when it was grown so that's like one business, and then stealing copper." (25.04-25.28)

Which encapsulates the dominant representation of the community, reinforcing stereotypical connotations associated with areas of economic depravation; namely that residents are predominantly unemployed welfare state scroungers, who fritter away their money (and lives) drinking and smoking, who lack ambition and are happy to supplement their incomes engaging in illegal activities. As Nik states

in the series opening sequence: “There’s a well known local expression, they’ll steal the shit out of your arse, not cos they want it, just, just so that you haven’t got it. “ (00.26-00.31)

Pornographic exploitation?

Almost a year before broadcast, local newspaper the *Manchester Evening News* (2012) carried a report which promoted the filming of the series, with the headline ‘The Only Way Is Harpurhey in Manchester’s answer to TOWIE’. Perhaps in a now somewhat ironic comment, local ward councillor for Harpurhey Pat Karney was quoted as saying “This show will put Harpurhey on the map. We get a lot of negative press, but I think this will prove that the area is full of good, honest people.” A year later the headline was somewhat different; ‘You’ve been warned: People Like Us team want a second series.’ (Wheatstone 2013c) In this report it is claimed “Campaigners say the six-part series, which ended on Wednesday night, portrayed their neighbourhood as an ‘urban hell-hole’” with Karney this time saying:

> I hope the BBC don't waste any more public money doing down Harpurhey…we have got a lot of people who really want to celebrate all the good in our community which went unseen in this appalling programme. (Wheatstone 2013a)

Further local newspaper reports attempted to redress the balance and mitigate the bad publicity. ‘Forget ‘People Like Us’ – welcome to the real Harpurhey’ (Kirby 2013) showcased the positive aspects of the community with local resident Paul Woods claiming “This television programme is an assassination attempt” and Blackley and Broughton MP Graham Stringer arguing that the series showed “…a distorted and false picture of life in Harpurhey which makes life for one of the UK’s poorest communities even more difficult than it already is.” As the series aired, a local meeting was convened, and Stringer explained:

> Part of the anger at the meeting came from the fact that they [local residents] felt they had been sold a false prospectus by Dragonfly TV, the production company responsible for the programme. They were promised the programme would celebrate the community. Instead it perpetrated the lie that ‘half of all Harpurhey residents have been in Strangeways [prison]. (Kirby 2013)

Quite clearly, many local residents were angry by what they deemed was a misrepresentation of their community which perpetrated negative stereotypes of what life was like living in an area of economic depravation. In *The Independent* newspaper, it was claimed that:

> Two hundred angry residents attended a public meeting this week to vent their frustration at the six-part BBC Three show, which is has attracted one million viewers and features binge drinking, anti-social behaviour and an alleged benefits culture. (Brown 2013)

Series contributor Lisa Walker, who's son Dale was featured in episode two claimed he was misrepresented as unemployed as he was in actual fact on a two-year apprenticeship. And once again ward councillor Pat Karney is cited, this time saying: “They have gone for extreme entertainment to chase ratings and are oblivious to the damage they are doing to the community. It makes Harpurhey, which is a normal working class area, to be a hell hole.” (Brown 2013) And whilst other articles carried a similar narrative (BBC 2013; Seale 2013) even going so far as to suggest it was structured to represent a ‘real-life’ *Shameless* (2004-2013) (Kelner 2013) with resident descending on MediaCity the BBC’s headquarters in Salford, (Wheatstone 2013b) other reports appeared not so damning in their critique, but were unquestionably problematic.

Of these, Wallaston (2013) writing for the *The Guardian* claimed “It’s not all doom and gloom in Harpurhey – it’s just like Shameless, with real people.” Opening the article he stated “I’m feeling privileged and dull after watching People Like Us (BBC3)” and whilst he concluded

that the series didn't feel patronising or exploitative, he ended the piece arguing:

> It’s Shameless, basically, only real. And because they are real people, not actors, they’re chubbier. Oh yes, that’s the other thing it made me feel, as well as privileged and dull: thin. A boring, skinny, shandy-drinking, posh, southern ponce.

Whilst this *could* be read as self-deprecation, the article is playing to the chattering-classes and does little to redress the balance of the inherent misrepresentation of an entire community whom he deconstructs within the review via a series of scathing observation. He first examines market trader Jamie, musing whether he needs to be more like him:

> I’ll propose to my girlfriend, even though I’m fooling around with a few other people too…I’ll stumble in pissed as a fart….my mum won’t come to the wedding though, she thinks my girlfriend is a bit…how can she put this (given that my girlfriend is sitting here)…a bit…stupid. Mum will also tell her, with more than a hint of pride, I will continue to bed other girls, and in six months we won’t be together. And she’ll be right…because I’ve never felt anything for her at all (apart from her boobs, obviously). I’ll leave her sobbing on a park bench. Hmm, you know what, I’m not sure I want to be like Jamie after all.

After Jamie, Wollaston moves on to Chris and Nikki, then David and Dale, before concluding with Amber Wakefield, who in the opening episode is preparing to go on holiday. He explains:

> …[Amber] is off on a hot holiday with the girls. Shagaluf. By the end of their 10 days away they have been barred from the nightclub, McDonald's, their own hotel, everywhere. Amber's mum Karen is dead proud. It's a nicer kind of pride than Jamie's mum's pride.

Clearly the review is not meant to be taken seriously, but it does encourage the reader/audience to look on at these lives with a certain level of distasteful amusement reinforcing once again that these are *not* 'people like us'. They are inhabitants of another world, one which we are happy to observe from a distance, patronisingly poking fun, but not necessarily engaging with on a social, cultural or political level.

However, Brady (2013) also writing for *The Guardian* astutely argued that: "The government has failed this [Harpurhey] community, and it is deeply unfair to then write off the residents and their lives using the same old middle-class narratives assigned to the poor." The neoconservative agenda of rallying the audience into believing what they are seeing is an accurate portrayal of a community not only in economic depression, but is presented as being morally bankrupt to-

boot in-order to push a neoliberal agenda of austerity politics. Brady continued:

> BBC3 is supposed to have a remit to educate young people, but one of the worse side-effects of programmes such as this is that they encourage young viewers to laugh at those less fortunate than themselves. Of course, channels have a duty to entertain too, but in a climate where these people are set to suffer the most under the current government, it feels a tad unethical to use them, for laughs on top of everything else.

Brady recognised that the BBC had a duty of care to educate the demographic engaging with their output, yet they have undermined this by perpetrating crude stereotypes associated with the (mis) representation of the poor, working classes. And whilst it could be argued that in a more competitive market the public service broadcasting remit whilst still in existence, weighs more heavily towards the entertainment factor, this should not be at the expense of attempting to represent reality in the nuanced way (in which) it deserves.

By concentrating on spectacles of anti-social behaviour any engagement with education is undermined, as these narratives are divorced from any obvious discussion of *why* the residents behave as they do. Whilst it is possible to make connections between the attitudes and behaviours of some of the protagonists, it is left to an

active audience to do this. Taking the example of Nicola, piecing all the elements of her back-story together, which are presented through a fragmented narrative; her childhood within the travelling community, her continuing fractious relationship with her illiterate mother, the only male parental figure we know of who is her step-father, himself having had drug and alcohol issues throughout her childhood, it is not inconceivable to assume that some of her more challenging behaviour, especially in relation to stealing and her prioritising material goods over basic needs such as heating her flat, comes from her dysfunctional upbringing. That is not to suggest that *all* members of the travelling community raised in this manner would hold the same mores and values, but in this instance it *could* be argued that the effect on Nicola has impacted on her attitude to life.

However, as discussed above, any understanding is also negated by the way in which she is presented within the narrative. Juxtapositioning her story against that of Karen Wakefield and the incidents of stealing from her shop, take away the audiences' desire to empathise with Nicola who is arguably just as much a victim herself. Therefore we are left with the surface of the text predominating, as images of pornographic exploitation provide a visceral response rather than encouraging an intellectual one.

Conclusion

People Like Us (2013) is described on the BBC website as "…a six-part documentary series [in which] the young people of Harpurhey tell their own stories in their own words." (BBC 2013c) and whilst it is undoubtedly true that the contributors were given space to showcase their lives, on-screen, what was problematic was the lack of social, cultural or political context and the narrow range of contributors who represent the Harpurhey area in general. However, it was clear from the voice-over which accompanied the opening sequence that the agenda of the series was not designed to educate the audience, rather it was a voyeuristic glimpse into their lives, a snap-shot of un-contextualised entertainment.

Opening every episode the narration explains:

> "Ten years ago a Government report branded it the most deprived neighbourhood in England. Things have got a bit better since then, but life around here is still no bed of roses. Half the people have no qualifications and anti-social behaviour is rife. People round here might not be the poshest, but they are not lacking in spirit. They're just trying to get on with life, be themselves and follow their dreams. For one long summer, the young people of Harpurhey let us into their secret world. Showing the good times, and the bad. This is how it really feels growing up the hard way." (00.14-01.18)

This sets the tone for what is to follow. The audience are cued to expect that the series will be located in an area of economic depravation, that life here is hard and that residents are uneducated and have a predilection towards behaving badly. It was about showing rather than analysing, and what they chose to show was a narrow section of the community behaving in ways stereotypically associated with poverty-porn.

But it quickly became clear that there was a discord between how the residents of Harpurhey perceived themselves and the actual series itself, and many were not prepared to let their community be misrepresented within this context. That this misrepresentation was a common trope within other contemporary documentary series' which claimed to explore the reality of working class life in Britain made no difference, so perhaps it was partly because it was sanctioned by the BBC that the residents felt let-down. The emphasis on entertainment rather than the education or even the information aspect of the public service broadcast remit resulted in a series which focused mainly on negative elements within the community, which was biased and unfair.

If we accept the neoliberal framework, presenting poverty and unemployment within this context becomes naturalised as it supports arguments around the justification of the removal of the welfare state

as individuals are perceived as responsible for their own social and economic positions. As Foucault (1980c) established, the media in their position as a regime of truth provide governance over the masses who accept that what they are not only being told, but being *shown* is a truthful representation and a marker of deviance which needs to be controlled and sanctioned. As a fully-functioning member of society, watching spectacles of anti-social behaviour acts as a marker of difference and it becomes easier to reject the plight of those less fortunate than ourselves as we can justify this by claiming that ‘they don’t deserve our help as look, they don’t even help themselves’. To return to the very title of the series, they are not “People Like Us,” rather, they are deviant spectacles which we, an audience, are not.

Conclusion

The dissertation analyses the ways in which contemporary television documentary practices within the BBC engage their audience, contextualising them in relation to the company's engagement with the public service broadcasting remit of education, information and entertainment, and their relationship to the concept of spectacle. These have all been analysed against established notions of how reality is represented within factual discourses, with the chosen examples engaging with a range of social, cultural and political issues.

The overall analysis spans a fourteen-year period, from 1999 to 2013, opening at a pivotal moment in history, with the series *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999). This was the first to fully embrace digital technologies and create a virtual world outside of the programme itself, via a comprehensive website and accompanying (marketed) ephemera. This extended period in time gives the dissertation scope to engage with a variety of documentary texts, broadcast across the BBC's various channels, ranging from natural history to adventure narratives, to authored documentaries and on to the representation of working class communities on screen.

The breadth of subjects explored within the documentaries enables a bringing together a series of historical frameworks, and using them to analyse a range of examples not considered *together* within this context previously, the predominant, and arguably unique finding is that the use of spectacle to engage the audience into a visceral response *cuts across all of the examples analysed*, regardless of the subject matter being explored, with a crucial finding being that spectacle can form a legitimate role in the audience engagement process *without* negating an intellectual response.

Drawing on a media archaeological approach, the dissertation draws parallels to the way in which pre-cinema engaged an audience where the primary point of engagement came from the image itself, rather than a narrative. Within a documentary context, which is generally understood as a genre which is there to educate, or at the very least inform an audience, the primacy of spectacle calls for a re-evaluation of the form and function of contemporary television documentary itself. The question raised was whether twenty-first century documentary practices are manufacturing an *emotional* connection to engage the audience over attempting to persuade with reasoning and logic? The answer contained within this dissertation is that they are, but not necessarily at the expense of an intellectual engagement, and herein lies the original contribution to new knowledge and an opportunity for post-doctoral research to further this relevant and important area of public engagement.

What is exciting, and also problematic are the connections between early cinematic forms, especially the cinema of attractions (Gunning 1997), and the ways in which contemporary documentary invites the audience into their narrative. As these new forms of practice remediate (Bolter and Grusin 2000) older ways of seeing, this media archaeological approach has provided the defining link between all the sub-generic examples examined here within, in relation to how spectacle is used, and this dissertation provides the reader with a *new* critical framework with which to analyse further documentary examples.

The word problematic is used, as the BBC as an institution was built on the Reithian ideology of education, information and entertainment, with Reith himself favouring education as a means of engaging an audience. So how does an institution founded on these values retain this historical connection whilst maintaining its cultural currency? In all but one case-study, *The Secret Life of The Shop* (2005), spectacle was arguably a *primary* mode of audience engagement. Without a doubt, *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) utilised spectacle as a way to market the series and draw in an audience from across the viewing spectrum. From children, excited at seeing their favourite movie-monsters brought back to life, to adults interested in palaeontology, or just natural history in-general, spectacle worked to capture the audiences attention as the series undoubtedly *did* generate a range of magnificent visual representations.

And whilst these representations were framed within a factual discourse, they also worked as stand-alone entities which could be consumed not only for their visual illustrations of how extinct eco-systems operated, but as an ocular visual delight, working in the same was as the cinema of attractions (Gunning 1997), willing to break-free from the narrative to be enjoyed *for their own sake.* In much the same way the remediation of older technological flaws made the audience step-back and reconsider that what they were watching was a construction, it was in these iconic scenes which elucidated *this* response, that spectacle was often at its most prevalent.

In *Steve Leonard's Ultimate Killers* (2001) spectacle arguably forms *the* primary mode of audience engagement, and in this particular example it can be suggested that this *is* at the expense of a more educational narrative. However, the narrative premise of the series would support that this would inevitably be the primary point of engagement. Drawing on the historical tradition of representing animals as exotic and dangerous, the defining feature of this series was the way in which the central (human) protagonist interacted with creatures who were deemed the most effective killers. It stands to reason that audiences tuned-in to watch, rather than to intellectually engage, with situations of peril and danger and that spectacle was an obvious convention to utilise.

In *ONE life* (2003) visual spectacle works in differing ways across the series. In *Rat Attack* (2003) and *Scared to Leave Home* (2003) the desired affects are at differing ends of the scale; one episode to engage the audience into feeling horror and fear, framing rats as a social problem, the other to present what its like to suffer from a panic attack, encouraging the audience to have an empathetic bond with Julie, conveying the discomfort of what its like to suffer in this way.

A New Life For Delise (2003) presents the distress of Delise in the moments leading up to her life-changing surgery, and we are witness to her fear and anxiety, as a spectacle of emotional excess. Unlike *Scared to Leave Home* (2003), this comes near the end of the film and is fully in context with what is about to happen. This makes the situation *feel* more real as we are witness to a vulnerable child, who cannot be comforted by her mother as she is in another hospital ward having had her kidney removed in-order for Delise to receive it. This is not gratuitous spectacle, the audience are not kept on the surface of the image, gaining visual pleasure from the scenes of distress we are witness to; this is spectacle used to draw the audience into the reality of authentic human emotion, as a small child has to face-up to something which will improve the quality of her life, but is the most frightening thing they have ever experienced. The audience empathise with this universal concept, of being scared to do

something which we know is the right thing to do, but acknowledging that does not make the process any easier to bare.

In a different way *Rain in My Heart* (2006) uses cinematography to create a visceral response in the audience, who are captivated by the visual images of excess; spectacularly horrific images of jaundiced, distended abdomens, comatose bodies having tubes inserted into their throats, hooked-up to machines which are keeping the still bodies alive, close-ups of retching vomit into buckets, faces full of tears and snot as they lose control over both their physical and emotional selves, images of violent spectacles of expletives being shouted as a telephone receiver is banged-down and broken in a fit of rage. All of these are examples of the spectacle of excess. What is intriguing about these are that they are used as a distraction, a tool to facilitate disengagement from the often informative narrative which *does* engage with the political failure of the NHS and community services which fall short of supporting vulnerable people. And whilst the documentary cannot therefore be accused of skirting over the politics, the cinematography undermines this and subtly conforms to the neo-liberal agenda of placing personal failure as the cause of individuals' problems rather than addressing the collective social issues.

From the opening credits of *People Like Us* (1999) the series was presented within a discourse of spectacle; the voice-over claimed that Harpurhey was an area of economic depravation, the residents were uneducated and that anti-social behaviour was rife. This was reinforced through the mise-en-scène which showed youths riding Segways in residential areas, a landlord removing rubbish from his property, a mother and son shouting at each other, residents wandering the streets in pyjamas, the police arresting someone and putting them in a riot van and drunken nights out. This was peppered with more positive images, for example a wedding and childbirth, but the predominant imagery throughout was one of recklessness, irresponsibility, chaos and dysfunction.

This established the iconography which was to become associated with the Harpurhey community in general, firmly within the realms of the spectacular. Images of excess that, because they were divorced from any socio-political or cultural context, would remain as surface readings. The ocular pleasure gained from these spectacles incited a visceral response from the audience, with this ranging from (patronising) disbelief through to anger. Disbelief at the audacious plans some of the residents had to elevate themselves from their current situation, for example Dale who in episode two who was seen attempting to develop a radio presenting career alongside becoming a club promoter. Both ventures not gaining any real success, he was presented as a lovable-fool whom the audience could look upon as a

figure of fun. And Ryan, straight out of a four week prison sentence for breaking a restraining order, who dreamt of making it big in the rap-world. Unfortunately his MCing skills saw him lose at the rap-battle he hoped would catapult him into the big-time.

However, more predominant in the series were representations of anti-social attitudes and problematic behaviours which elicited a negative visceral response. Ranging from contributors who shouted and used profane language, through to residents who openly admitted to smoking cannabis and shoplifting, all of which helped to create a critical distance between the audience and the screen. Creating a negative visceral response enables the audience to feel justified in turning away from the plight of those less fortunate in society and deem them not-worthy of our time or help. In this context, using spectacle as a primary mode of engagement fed into a neoliberal political agenda, and undermined the authenticity of the series as a whole.

In summary, it is safe to say that the BBC still do have public service broadcasting embedded within its mainstream practices, but reflecting social and cultural changes, the priority of the how these are used has adjusted. No longer affording to give the people what it thinks they *should* have, whilst still considered a paternalistic institution, the BBC are now negotiating within a much more

competitive market. Audiences want to be entertained when they are engaging with representations of reality, and the BBC has to tread a fine line. As noted by Wheatley (2016) reality documentary series have the potential for spectacle to:

> “overwhelm[s] both viewer and medium, replacing what is potentially authentic or important with the distracting and the titillating, blurring the lines between fiction and reality, and, fundamentally, replacing discourse, dialogue and debate with the image.” (10)

What Wheatley suggests is undoubtedly correct, but this does not have to always be the case, and when the BBC get the balance right, it has produced some of the most innovative work within this genre of programming, which is ripe for further analysis. And not only in the field of documentary practice, as contemporary mock-documentary forms are arguably producing representations which undermine documentary in the degree to which they are authentically representing particular (disenfranchised) communities.

Moving forward *This Country* (2017-), the BBC3 mock-documentary series which utilises its framework in order to critique mainstream representation of the (non) working class youth, living in marginalised rural communities will be analysed. Whilst these representations are framed within a fiction discourse, they act as a counterpoint to the

neoliberal agenda inherent in contemporary forms of factual discourse, and arguably produce a more nuanced representation than that prevalent in documentary series such as *People Like Us* (2013). The relationship between factual and fiction discourses, as analysed in Chapter Six will form the basis of this research project.

One further area of analysis is that of the representation of the use of alcohol, on-screen, within contemporary television documentary practices. Taking the case-studies from Chapters Five, Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight a pertinent question which is raised is that of *how* alcohol use is engaged with, how these representations are framed, and what are the function these representations?

In *ONE Life* (2005) the emotional experience of alcohol and its impact on family life is explored from the perspective of those *experiencing* it. In *Rain in My Heart* (2006), whilst alcohol-dependent patients are allowed a space on-screen to display their lives, they are facilitated via an auteur documentarian who has mediated *their* experience for them. In *People Like Us* (2013) the use of alcohol is interesting; there are representations of teenagers and their parents getting drunk together, and unemployed residents using alcohol whilst living on social security benefits, both of these presenting negative connotations in relation to alcohol consumption as a social pastime. Starting with these three examples research would be

conducted into *where* serious engagement with alcohol use (and abuse) is within contemporary documentary practices, and how this is framed.

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Close Quarters (1943) d. Lee, J. UK

Coal Face (1935) d. Cavalcanti, A. UK

Drifters (1927) d. Grierson, J. UK

Electrocuting an Elephant (1903) d's. Porter, E and Smith, J. USA

Event Horizon (1997) d. Weir, W. USA/UK

Fighting Roosters; in Florida (1898) American Mutoscope Company, USA

Housing Problems (1935) d. Elton, A. and Anstey, E. UK

Hunting Big Game in Africa (1907) d. Selig, W. USA

Jaws (1995) d. Spielberg, S. USA

Jurassic Park (1993) d. Spielberg, S. USA

Land of The Mammoth (2000) d. Mairesse, E. USA

L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare de la Ciotat/The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station (1895) d. Lumière A. and Lumière L. France.

L'Arroseur Arrosée/Watering the Gardener (1895) d. Lumière L. France

La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon/Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon (1895) d. Lumière L. France

Le Repas de Bébé/Feeding the Baby (1895) d. Lumière L. France

Man with a Movie Camera (1929) d. Vertov, D. Soviet Union

Mary Shelly's Frankenstein (1994) d. Branagh, K. USA/Japan/UK

Moana (1926) d. Flaherty, R. USA

Nanook of The North (1922) d. Flaherty, R. France/USA

Night Mail (1936) d. Watt, H. and Wright, B. UK

Pianka and Her Lions (1899) USA

Raising the Mammoth (2000) d. Deniau, J-C. France/USA

Song Of Ceylon (1947) d. Wright, B. UK

The Act of Killing (2013) d. Oppenheimer, J. Denmark / Germany / Finland / UK / Netherlands / Norway / Poland / Sweden

The Lost World (1925) d. Hoyt, H. O. USA

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A Wedding in The Family [feature length] (2000) Channel Four

Addicted to Boob Jobs (2008) BBC3

Bashing Booze Birds (2007) BBC3

Big Brother [series] (2000-2010) Channel Four; (2011-) Channel Five

Britain's Most Embarrassing Parents [series] (2009) BBC3

Buried Treasure [series] (1954-59) BBC

Candid Camera [series] (1948-) Producer Allen Funt, USA

Cutting Edge [series] (1990-) Channel 4

- *The Home* (1996) Tx 02/09
- *The Dinner Party* (1997) Tx 24/03
- *A Wedding in The Family* (2000) Tx 20/03

Don't Tell the Bride [series] (2007-2015) BBC3

Eastenders [serial drama] (1985-) BBC1

Extinct [series] (2001) Channel Four

Forty Minutes [series] (1981-1994) BBC

- *A House of Hope* (1986) [season five: episode twenty eight] (1985) Tx 19/12

- *The Fishing Party* [season six: episode eight] (1986) Tx 27/02

Ground Force [series] (1997-2005) BBC2/BBC1

Horizon [series] (1964-) BBC2

Jordan: The Model Mum (2002) BBC Choice Tx 01/12

Jordan: The Truth About Me (2002) BBC Choice Tx 01/03

Jordan: You Don't Even Know Me (2003) BBC3 Tx 07/12

Life on Earth [series] (1979) BBC1

London After Dark [two parts] (1949) BBC

- *Inside Scotland Yard* [part one] Tx 07/03

- *Casualty Ward: Episode Two* [part two] Tx 21/03

MacIntrye Undercover [series one: five episodes] (1999) BBC1

- *Chelsea Headhunters* [episode one] Tx 10/11

- *Fashion Industry* [episode three] Tx 23/11

Made in Chelsea [series] (2011-) E4

Magistrates Court [three parts] (1948) BBC.

Malcolm and Barbara: A Love Story [feature length] (1999) Granada (ITV)

Malcolm and Barbara: Love's Farewell [feature length] (2007) ITV

Man Alive [series] (1965-1981) BBC2

One Born Every Minute [series] (2010-) Channel Four

One Life [series one: seven episodes] (2003) BBC1

- *Lager, Mum and Me* [episode one] Tx 24/09
- *Size Doesn't Matter* [episode two] Tx 01/10
- *A new Life For Delise* [episode three] Tx 08/10
- *Rat Attack* [episode four] Tx 15/10
- *Diary Of A Delinquent* [episode five] Tx 22/10
- *Beating The Bullies* [episode six] Tx 29/10
- *Scared To Leave Home* [episode seven] Tx 05/11

Panorama [series] (1953-) BBC1

People Like Us [series] (1999-2001) BBC2

- *The Managing Director* [season one: episode one] Tx 20/09/99
- *The Estate Agent* [season one: episode two] Tx 27/09/99
- *The Police Officer* [season one: episode three] Tx 04/10/99
- *The Solicitor* [season one: episode four] Tx 11/10/99

- *The Photographer* [season one: episode five] Tx 18/10/99

- *The Head Teacher* [season one: episode six] Tx 25/10/99

- *The Vicar* [season two: episode one] Tx 20/05/01

-*The Mother* [season two: episode two] Tx 27/05/01

- *The Journalist* [season two: episode three] Tx 03/06/01

- *The Actor* [season two: episode four] Tx 10/06/01

- *The Bank Manager* [season two: episode five] Tx 17/06/01

- *The Airline Pilot* [season two: episode sic] Tx 24/06/01

People Like Us [series one: six episodes] (2013)

- *Episode One* Tx 06/02

- *Episode Two* Tx 13/02

- *Episode Three* Tx 20/02

- *Episode Four* Tx 27/02

- *Episode Five* Tx 06/03

- *Episode Six* Tx 13/03

Pissed and Pregnant (2007) BBC3

Prehistoric Park [series] (2006) ITV

Rain in My Heart [feature length] (2006) BBC2 Tx 21/11

Robot Wars [series] (1998-2001) BBC2; (2001-2003) BBC Choice; (2003-2004) Channel 5; (2016-) BBC2

Serious [series: eight seasons] (2002-2011) CBBC

- *Season One: Serious Jungle* [Bruce Parry] (2002)
- *Season Two: Serious Desert* [Bruce parry] (2003)

Shameless [series] (2004-2013) Channel Four

Shaun Ryder: The Ecstasy and the Agony (2004) BBC3 Tx 14/07

Space [series] (2001) BBC1

Steve Leonard's Ultimate KIllers [series] (2001) BBC1

- *Speed* [episode one] Tx 10/06

- *Strength* [episode two] Tx 17/06

- *Chemical Killers* [episode three] Tx 24/06

- *Pack Hunters* [episode four] Tx 01/07

- *Deadly Defenders* [episode five] Tx 08/07

- *Man Eaters* [episode six] Tx 15/07

Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents [series] (2011-2015) BBC3

Survival [series] (1961-2001) Anglia Television (ITV)

Sylvania Waters [series: twelve episodes] (1993) ABC/BBC

- *Episode One* No Tx date

The Court of Justice [five parts] (1950-51) BBC.

The Family [series] (1974) BBC1

The Future is Wild [series] (2002) BBC1

The Making of 'Walking with Dinosaurs' (1999) BBC1 Tx 06/10

The Office [series] (2001-2003) BBC2

The Only Way is Essex [series] (2010-) ITV2

The Private Life of Plants [series] (1995) BBC1

The Secret Life of The Shop [four parts] (2005) BBC3

- *The Trouble with Ladies Wear* [part one] Tx 17/04

- *Tantrums and Tears in Mens Wear* [part two Tx 24/04

- *Jobs for the Boys* [part three] Tx 01/05

- *The Cook, the Lover and the Revolutionary* [part four] Tx 08/05

The Trails of Life [series] (1990) BBC1

Timeshift [series] (2002-) BBC4

- *Watching You:* [series two: episode three] Tx 22/05/2003

Time Team [series] (1994-2014) Channel Four

24 Hours in A & E [series] (2011-) Channel 4

Undercover Princes [series] (2009) BBC3

Vets in Practice [series] (1997-1999) BBC1

Vets in The Wild [series] (1999) BBC1

Vets School [series] (1996) BBC1

Video Diaries [series] (1991-1999) BBC2

Walking with Beasts [series: six episodes] (2001) BBC1

Walking With Dinosaurs [series: six episodes] (1999) BBC1

- *New Blood: Episode One* Tx 04/10
- *Time of The Titans: Episode Two* Tx 11/10
- *Cruel Sea: Episode Three* Tx 18/10

- *Giant of the Skies: Episode Four* Tx 25/10

- *Spirit of The Ice Forest: Episode Five* Tx 01/11

- *Death of a Dynasty: Episode Six* Tx 08/11

War on Crime [three parts] (1960) BBC.

Wildlife on One [series] (1997-2005) BBC1

- *Meerkats United* [series fifteen: episode one] (1987) Tx 26/01

World in Action [series] (1963-1998) Granada

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