

Restyling Factual TV

**Audiences and news,
documentary and
reality genres**

Annette Hill



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News and current affairs, documentary and reality TV are part of a turbulent time in broadcasting as the boundaries between fact and fiction are pushed to the limits. *Restyling Factual TV* addresses the wide range of programmes that fall within the category of 'factuality', from politics, to natural history, to reality entertainment. It looks at ways viewers navigate their way through a busy, noisy and constantly changing factual television environment.

Focusing on contemporary trends in the world of television, primarily in Britain and Sweden (both countries with a public service tradition), but with reference to other countries such as the US, Annette Hill investigates complex issues such as genre evaluation, the truth claims of factual television, knowledge and learning, and fair treatment in factual programming. Audience research highlights how people engage with and reflect on various representations of reality and, by looking at factuality in this way, we can see how audiences are centre stage in the transformation of factual television.

Annette Hill is Professor of Media and Research Director of the School of Media, Arts and Design, University of Westminster. Her previous publications include *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (2005), the *Television Studies Reader* (with Robert C. Allen, 2003), *TV Living: Television, Audiences and Everyday Life* (with David Gauntlett, 1999) and *Shocking Entertainment: Viewing Responses to Violent Movies* (1997). Her current research is on Spirit TV and media audiences.

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For Don, and all the lovely people in my life, thank you very much.

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Restyling factuality

'It seems that Reality TV, documentary, and news are all kind of mixed up.'

The Armstrongs (BBC 2006) is about Coventry's third largest double glazing business. It's the office Christmas party and the owners are wrapping presents which, amongst other everyday household items, include a frozen shepherd's pie. Mrs Armstrong is worried it might defrost and give someone food poisoning. 'Fuck em,' says her husband. An ominous bell tolls as the employees gather, the funereal sounds accompanied by distorted shots of the party in progress, the factory workers drinking flat beer from a water cooler. There are flashbacks to a previous party, a similarly bleak affair that is reinforced by the music from the film *A Nightmare before Christmas*. The Armstrongs are unbelievable. One time they go on a trip to France to sell do-it-yourself conservatories, but they don't speak French. They hire a motivational guru called Basil Meanie who alienates the staff. Mr Armstrong says baffling things like 'What was was, and now what is is. And is tomorrow a new day? Yes it is.' Surely this is made up. It's a clever mock documentary, like *The Office*, only about double glazing rather than paper suppliers. And yet it is real. After the first episode aired, the Armstrongs received over four thousand emails, many asking if the show was a spoof. They established their own website with official merchandise and a regular blog, they made radio and television appearances, and signed book deals. The Armstrongs became famous for being themselves on television. As Mrs Armstrong explained: 'This is the weirdest situation I have ever found myself in . . . and I thought the world of double glazing was exciting.'

This book is about the topsy turvy world of factual television. This is a world where things are not quite as they appear to be, where viewers constantly ask themselves 'is this real?' It is a space where familiar factual genres such as news, or documentary, take on properties common to other genres. It's a place where reality TV runs wild, crossing over into fiction and non-fiction territories, taking genre experimentation to the limit. In the world of factual television a newsreader can be the presenter in a reality gameshow set on a

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desert island. A celebrity chef can change government policy on children's school meals. A celebrity lookalike can win a celebrity reality gameshow. Producers can trick a group of people into thinking they are in space when really they are on a film set in Suffolk. Watching factual television can feel like a strange dream, where people agree to live in the Iron Age, go to a baby mindreader, undergo plastic surgery live on television. It can feel like being trapped between fact and fiction, where news footage of violent acts can be so difficult to comprehend that it seems unreal, and where fake footage of violent acts is passed off as real. Surrounded by factual programmes, viewers have to deal with the various ways programmes represent reality.

Restyling Factual TV is about understanding genres in relation to each other and in relation to popular audiences. It takes as a starting point the idea that factual television is being restyled, that various kinds of news, current affairs, documentary and popular factual genres are part of a turbulent time in broadcasting. Hybridity is now the distinctive feature of factuality. The boundaries between fact and fiction have been pushed to the limits in various popular factual formats that mix non-fiction and fiction genres. Popular factual genres are not self-contained, stable and knowable, they migrate, mutate and replicate. Significantly, they cross over into existing factual genres, with the cross-pollination of styles increasing the pace of change in news, current affairs or documentary.

Viewers do not experience factual genres in isolation but as part of a chaotic mix of factuality. The main research question is therefore one that asks what happens if we look at factual television from the position of the viewer? Using multimethod research with representative samples of British and Swedish audiences, a picture emerges of a viewer navigating their way through a busy, noisy and constantly changing factual television environment. As this viewer explains: 'the last couple of years or so, you know, reality TV is going towards a documentary kind of thing, and documentary is moving down to reality TV, and the news is just somewhere in between, so, none of them is actually factual.'

Viewing strategies show how audiences are dealing with the restyling of factuality. They classify factual genres so as to make them knowable and manageable, to make order out of chaos. Striking similarities between British and Swedish viewing practices highlight an overarching social and cultural order to factual genres, with public service genres at the top and popular genres at the bottom. Reality TV is off the factual scale and has been re-classified as reality entertainment. Another strategy for factuality is that of genre work. Genre work involves immersive and reflective modes of engagement with factual genres, allowing viewers to personally respond to programmes and themselves in conscious and unconscious ways, and often in contradictory ways. These viewing strategies highlight how audiences engage with and reflect on various representations of reality. Audiences are living in a cosmopolitan factual television environment, dealing with a mass of programmes

24 hours a day, finding various routes through the changes taking place in factuality.

Factuality

Factual television is a container for a variety of genres, sub-genres and hybrid genres. The term 'factual' is shorthand for non-fiction content. It is a useful term that instantly says this television programme is fact and not fiction. Factual is also a value laden term, and its association with truth, information and other conceptual values ensures it means different things to different people. The term 'factuality' refers to broader cultural production and reception processes. Factuality is understood as 'factual experiences, imagination, values, that provide settings within which media institutions operate, shaping the character of factual television processes and viewing practices' (adapted from Corner and Pels 2003: 3). Thus there are various interpretations of factual television commonly understood by audiences. Factual television is a container for non-fiction content; it signifies social and personal values for non-fiction genres; and it is part of non-fiction production and reception practices. For most people factual television is concerned with knowledge about the real world; as this viewer explains, 'factual means that the programme will contain facts and no fiction. Programmes that are true and about real issues.' This is an idealized view of factual television, and the tensions between ideals and practices make the production and reception of factuality challenging and dynamic, as programme makers and audiences negotiate between what factual content ought to be and what it is on a day-to-day basis.

An overarching view of factual content as true and about real issues assumes that this content contains representations of reality. Audiences perform 'a series of mental operations in order to assess the reality status' of factual programmes (Grodal 2002: 68). Most audiences evaluate factual programmes by using a criterion of truth. In this sense, factual content is perceived as authentic and true to life, and audiences focus on the referential integrity of factual content. The other overarching view of factual content is that it contains facts and provides knowledge about the world. Knowledge signifies specific information about a subject, event or situation, and it can also mean knowledge gained through experience. Audiences evaluate the knowledge status of factual programmes by assessing the level of information provided, and how objective or impartial the facts are in a given situation. Assessments about the factual status of non-fiction content are therefore connected to attitudes towards truth and knowledge. Although factual is shorthand for non-fiction content, it is rarely used to define any kind of non-fiction, such as light entertainment, but instead tends to be used by audiences to signify non-fiction programmes that make truth claims and are based on facts.

The kinds of non-fiction content that typically would be classified as factual are based on established genres within television production. Television genre refers to specific types of content that can be categorized as similar in style and communicative modes of address. Television genres are constructed through production and reception processes (Mittell 2004). Programme makers draw on production traditions, referring to previous practices to construct a factual programme similar to, or a variation on, another type of programme; and audiences draw on their knowledge of previous programmes to recognize it as a distinctive genre. News is the most well-established and recognizable factual genre. In terms of broadcasting, it has always been an important genre in early radio and television production, and although it has changed over the years in style and content it nevertheless is firmly rooted in long-standing journalistic practices and in public service broadcasting traditions (Schudson 1995; Seaton 2005). For audiences, news is the first, and still the most familiar, factual television genre, and in many ways all other factual genres are evaluated alongside viewers' understanding and experience of news. Documentary is another genre that has a strong historical tradition within television production. The establishment of this genre as a way of documenting the world and observing people's real lives and experiences is part of the development of public service broadcasting (Winston 1995). Audiences have come to recognize documentary as a genre, and to classify different kinds of documentary as sub-genres, such as natural history, with distinctive modes of address. A huge variety of other kinds of factual genres work alongside news and documentary, some of which can be classified as hybrid genres, where one established factual genre has been merged with another fiction or non-fiction genre. According to Neale (2001), all television genres become mixed up with others, and in this sense all factual content is based on multiple generic participation. However, the development of a range of popular factual genres in the 1980s and 1990s has ensured audiences have come to expect hybrid factual genres to be associated with what is most commonly described as reality TV, a term that, like misdirection in a magic trick, is not quite what it claims to be (Hill 2005). Popular factual genres therefore sit at the margins of factuality.

The primary aim of this book is to compare different kinds of factual genres based on the understanding that audiences experience factuality 'in the round'. Corner describes something similar in his discussion of the fictionality of the factual and the factuality of the fictional (2006: 96). The term factual television stands for factual and reality programming, an understanding of the term that is taken directly from audiences and their classification of factuality. Whilst popular factual is located in border territory between factual and other non-fiction and fiction genres, it is nevertheless part of the story of contemporary factual television and needs to be included in any discussion of factual categories (see Kilborn 2003; Nichols 1994, amongst others). Factual television also includes television programmes with

interactive elements, such as voting, and related websites or mobile content. The interactive and multiplatform elements of various factual television programmes are part of the story of the restyling of factuality. Whilst these various forms of factual content point to further diversification of factual genres, and future directions for segmented factual content to diverse audiences and users, these multiplatform elements are background to the primary experience of factual television. The focus on factual television programmes is derived from audience experiences and reflects the story of factuality at a specific moment in time.

Speaking in broad terms, there is a classification of factual content according to the specific genres of news, current affairs, documentary, and reality programmes, with further sub-genres applied within each of these categories. News is a category that encompasses regional, national and rolling news programmes. The major news programmes are often flagship productions, providing the main source of public information (Corner 1995). Current affairs and investigations is a broad category that encompasses both long form journalism, political debate, consumer-based stories, and investigative journalism (Turner 2006). Documentary is a category made up of different documentary modes (Nichols 2001). Selected documentary modes include specialist documentaries, observational documentaries and general documentaries, which can either be a strand or stand-alone documentaries on any number of topics. Reality TV, or popular factual, is a catch-all category for a variety of different one-off programmes, series and formats that follow real people and celebrities and their everyday or out of the ordinary experiences. Popular factual sub-categories include infotainment about crime or emergency services; docusoaps about institutions or groups of people; lifestyle, often about how to do gardening, or making over someone's home or personal appearance; life experiment programmes where people experiment with different social experiences; reality gameshows where a game element is introduced to a group of people in a controlled situation; reality talent shows where members of the public or celebrities audition for and perform music or other artistic endeavours; and the reality hoax, a mock situation that usually mocks those deceived by an elaborately staged set up (Hill 2005). There are other emergent categories within popular factual, such as reality business series like *The Apprentice*, and the wide range of hybrid genres shows how all encompassing this type of non-fiction content can be. The industry term 'reality event' sums up the scale and influence of hybrid genres such as *The X Factor*, that can run for up to twenty weeks, delivering a large audience share over a long period of time, and forcing competing genres to work hard to retain a place in the schedules. Popular factual is therefore a wide-ranging category that makes factual television top heavy with reality entertainment-led programming.

Factual and reality trends

In a report by the regulatory body the Office of Communications on British television in 2005, general factual (meaning all factual content that was not news or current affairs) was the largest growth genre. Across all five main channels there were more hours devoted to general factual content in peak-time than drama. For BBC2 and Channel 4, general factual was the dominant genre for peaktimes schedules (46 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively). The BBC's digital channels were dominated by news, making up half of all output. The most dominant genre in daytime television across the five main channels was also news, followed by general factual. For example, for BBC1 28 per cent of all daytime content was news, and 24 per cent general factual; for ITV1 general factual was the largest single category, taking up 35 per cent of daytime content. For multichannel television a quarter of all broadcast hours were devoted to news and general factual.

In the top twenty British shows of 2005 were reality talent shows *I'm a Celebrity . . .* (ITV), *The X Factor* (ITV) and *Strictly Come Dancing* (BBC), with over ten million viewers and an audience share of 40 per cent. The BBC's *Ten O'Clock News* was the only other factual programme in the top twenty shows of the year (Reevell 2006). Other factual and reality shows that did well in 2005 included the CGI documentary *Supervolcano* (BBC, eight million viewers), *Big Brother* (Channel 4, seven million) and *Hell's Kitchen* (ITV, six million). In the top ten multichannel programmes dominated by sports, the reality football series *The Match* came number six, with almost two million viewers. Amongst the highest earning independent production companies of 2005 were Talkback Thames (£145 million), the makers of *Pop Idol* and *X Factor*, Endemol UK (£120 million), the makers of *Big Brother* and *Fame Academy*, and RDF Media (£64 million), who produce *Wife Swap* and *Faking It*.

The industry magazine *Broadcast* (2006) compiled a report on the most creative programmes, channels and genres of 2006, including programmes that either won or were nominated in 27 international award ceremonies, ranging from the British Academy Programme Awards, the Golden Globe Awards, to the Rose d'Or and the International Emmy Awards. The results indicate the growth genre of factual not only generates high ratings but also attracts international acclaim. News and reality entertainment are award-winning genres for commercial channels, and public service channels dominate all other factual genres. The best news coverage was awarded to Channel 4 news for the coverage of the leaked document from the Attorney General questioning the legality of the Iraq war; Sky News won best news channel, and ITN best news production company, showing the range of quality news provision on public service and commercial channels. The BBC won the award for best current affairs for their investigation into the Saudi royal family and their relationship with the USA; the BBC also won best

current affairs channel, and best production company, highlighting the absence of commercial channels in this genre. For single documentary, *Children of Beslan* (BBC) won the top award, with a powerful account of the victims of the school massacre; Channel 4 won the channel award, and had three programmes in the top five documentaries; whilst the BBC won the production company award with their high end specialist documentaries. Most creative documentary series award went to *Jamie's School Dinners*, which took the critical issue of children's school meals and made it a government priority as a result of response to the series; the most creative channel was won by BBC2, and the production company Fresh One owned by Jamie Oliver, the star of the above documentary, won most creative company. For popular factual, *The Apprentice* got the top slot, with BBC2 winning the most creative channel, and Talkback Thames (producer of *The Apprentice* with Mark Burnett Productions) winning the production company award. The BBC also won hands down in the science and natural history categories, winning most creative channel, production company, and the natural history series *British Isles* receiving the number one programme award. With regard to reality entertainment, the commercial channels fared better, with ITV winning most creative channel and production company, and *The X Factor* taking the top slot.

British factual television is significant both in terms of broadcast hours, revenue and quality production, and these skills help with large export sales. In the independent production sector, export sales came to £79 million in 2005, with the majority of revenue from US sales: 'factual and factual entertainment genres generated the largest sales abroad, accounting for 45 per cent (£36 million) and 40 per cent (£32 million) of the total reported turnover respectively' (Ofcom 2006a: 66). The kinds of British factual programming that do well abroad, either acquired or co-produced, also include historical or science documentaries that contain a high concentration of dramatic structure and storytelling. According to the head of documentaries for ProSieben Television in Germany, 'the UK is certainly the most important exporter of high quality factual programming. It's also where many ground breaking programmes and new factual trends are created' (Bulkley 2006: 27). ProSieben is a commercial channel which shows many American drama imports, and also British documentaries, such as the BBC's *Walking with Monsters*, or *Supervolcano*. The channel is 'not looking for lifestyle or biography documentaries, nor for factual entertainment' but 'partially or fully dramatised programmes' (ibid.). The head of documentaries for France 2 is looking for 'big primetime documentaries on history and science that make a buzz and appeal to a wide audience with dramatic storylines' (ibid.). France 2 produced the *Odyssey of Life*, a nine-month documentary using CGI that charted the growth of a baby. France 3 co-produced the BBC's *Walking with . . .* series. The head of documentaries for France 2 explains, 'we are always interested in new ways of telling stories and the UK market is always at the

cutting edge of innovation . . . and combines strong dramatic structure with knowledge' (ibid.).

The Vice President of UK production and development for Discovery US comments: 'the key thing is finding innovative and surprising shows and the UK is where most of these types of shows come from. It's always been much more of a factual market' (Bulkley 2006: 28). Discovery co-produced *Going Tribal* with the BBC, and also *I Shouldn't be Alive* with Channel 4. Discovery 'don't want shows that are pure entertainment without any knowledge angle. . . . We want our shows to be immersive, adrenalised, and intelligent' (ibid.). The public service broadcaster SBS in Australia has acquired documentaries such as ITV's *The Second World War in Colour* or BBC's current affairs programme *The Power of Nightmares*. They co-produced the reality relationship format *Desperately Seeking Sheila* with Carlton, as well as producing *Mythbusters*, their own popular documentary series which has sold well abroad. According to the acquisitions and development buyer for SBS, the channel likes 'stuff that gets people talking' and looks to the UK for ideas.

Television news provision is also significant in terms of 'stuff that gets people talking'. An opinion poll conducted for BBC, Reuters and American thinktank The Media Centre reported that television news is the most important source of information about the world (Globescan 2006). Ten thousand people were surveyed in ten countries, including the UK, USA, Brazil, Egypt, Germany, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Russia and South Korea. Seventy-two per cent of the sample said they followed news closely every day. Seventy-seven per cent claimed to use several news sources, with television news the most trusted source (82 per cent), followed by national and regional newspapers (75 per cent). People placed great trust in national news providers, followed by internationally known news brands such as the BBC and CNN. More people trusted the media than the government, although there were variations across countries. For example, in the USA 67 per cent trusted the government compared to 59 per cent the media, in the UK 51 per cent trusted the government compared to 47 per cent the media, whereas in India 82 per cent trusted the media compared to 66 per cent the government, and in Nigeria 88 per cent trusted the media, and only 34 per cent the government. Trust was very important to respondents; over a quarter claimed to stop using a news source because they had lost trust in it. In terms of new media, a small proportion of respondents claimed the internet was the most important news source, for example 8 per cent in the UK, 11 per cent in Germany, 10 per cent in Brazil and 14 per cent in the USA. However, younger people were more likely to use net sources, with one in five aged 18–24 using online news. An Ofcom report (2006a) also indicates television is the main source of news in Britain in 2005. Seventy-two per cent claimed their source of world news was from television. People's reliance on television news has increased over the past ten years by 15 per cent, compared to

newspapers which have decreased by the same amount. The importance of news as a trusted source was emphasized by respondents, as 94 per cent claimed television news should be impartial. The share in television news on broadcast channels has reduced due to multichannel options, but the opportunities for trusted news sources such as the BBC to continue to provide quality news provision are there, especially given the low trust levels in online news sources.

A related trend is the international reach of reality TV formats made by production and format houses and sold to countries worldwide for local production. Reality entertainment formats have been described by Moran as examples of 'New Television' (2005). He claims that 'a unique intersection of new technologies of transmission and reception, new forms of financing, and new forms of content' has led to a global type of television programme, 'drawing upon but transforming older practices of transnational adaptation, the format is simultaneously international in its dispersal and local and concrete in its manifestation' (ibid.: 291, 305). Reality event formats such as *Idol* have been phenomenally successful worldwide. FremantleMedia (with 19TV) own the *Idols* brand and the details on their official website promote it as an international bestseller. They sold the format to over 30 territories, including amongst others the UK, the USA, Australia, France, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Russia, the Pan-Arabic regions, South Africa, India and Singapore. The original series shown in the UK in 2001 aired for 16 weeks, with the finale attracting 14 million viewers, and a 57 per cent share (72 per cent amongst 16 to 34 year olds). There were almost nine million votes cast in the finale, which saw the winner and runner up begin a nationwide tour and produce albums and top ten selling singles in the same year. The American version of *Idol* has been very successful, with the fourth series on Fox averaging 26 million viewers, a 23 per cent share, and 500,000,000 cumulative votes. In Singapore, *Idol* had a market share of 60 per cent in 2004. Network 10 showed *Idol* in Australia in 2004 and the series ranked as its highest since 2000. Ten million people voted for *Idol* in South Africa (third series in 2005), and the winner and runner up got to meet Nelson Mandela. The format has won awards in Australia, America and Britain, for example in 2002 it won the Rose d'Or (Golden Rose of Montreux) for best entertainment programme or series. There was even a *World Idol*, with series one winners from 11 different countries taking part during a Christmas special in 2003. FremantleMedia also own other successful reality formats such as *The Apprentice*, first shown in America on NBC, and sold to 16 countries to date, including the UK and Sweden. They have licensed the British documentary series *Jamie's School Dinners* to over ten countries to date. They also sell *X Factor*, a similar talent format to *Idols*, which has been shown in the UK, Australia, Belgium, Russia and Colombia.

Endemol own the rights to *Big Brother*, described by Peter Bazalgette as 'the most perfectly converged piece of entertainment ever conceived' (2005:

284). The format has been shown all over the world, since its original transmission in Holland in 1999. Series seven in Britain managed to attract between 5 and 7 million viewers and around a 30 per cent share, with a 40 per cent share of 16–34-year-old viewers. Its two spin off shows *Big Brother's Little Brother*, and *Big Brother's Big Mouth* also did well during the summer run in 2006. In 2005, CBS showed series six in America, RTL2 aired series six in Germany, Channel 10 showed series five in Australia, Globo TV series five in Brazil, TV Norge series four in Norway, and Televisa Canal series three in Mexico (Bazalgette 2005). Other countries airing a fifth or sixth series included Italy (Canale 5), Spain (Tele 5) and Sweden (Kanal 5). *Big Brother* has also been locally produced in South Africa, Pan Africa, Argentina, Ecuador, Columbia, Croatia, Poland, Serbia, Thailand and the Middle East, amongst others. According to Bazalgette, Chief Creative Officer of Endemol International, 'viewers have switched *Big Brother* on eighteen billion times. More than a billion votes have been cast via telephones and interactive TV. Six and a half billion page views have been recorded at *Big Brother* web sites' (2005: 284).

Mark Burnett, the reality TV super producer, is responsible for some of the most successful reality formats since 2000. An extreme sports producer, he took the adrenalin of competitive sports and transformed it into reality-based entertainment. According to Burnett, reality TV deals with 'contrived situations creating genuine emotions' (Littleton 2004). His production company made the American version of *Survivor*, which won an Emmy award for outstanding non-fiction programming in 2001, and won the People's Choice Award four years running (2001–2004). Mark Burnett Productions also make *The Apprentice*, a business reality competition format, *The Contender*, a boxing reality competition format, and *Rockstar: INXS*, a music reality competition format, all of which have proved very successful in their first run on American network television and also in export revenue. Burnett feels part of the success of these formats is connected to feelings of inclusion and exclusion: 'both *The Apprentice* and *Survivor* have something in common, which is dealing with the emotional pull that all humans feel from being excluded from something' (Littleton 2004). His formats include audiences not only through the emotional drama, but also by other forms of participation in the competition, such as voting, and online interactive elements. *Rock Star: INXS* has a live studio audience, voting options, and also an interactive website that allows users to vote, download video and music, and join in regular web logs. His company has a business relationship with Yahoo, which provides an online portal to series such as *The Contender*. The portal helps to drive users to online advertising, and also specially produced content for the official site, including boxing matches, and games where users can box with one another.

How news and current affairs, documentary and popular factual television intersect with each other is part of the story of the restyling of factuality. The provision of quality news content has been criticized for being heavily

commercialized, for crossing over into entertainment news, and adopting what are perceived as tabloid, or infotainment news values (Calabrese 2005). The success of ‘mega documentaries’ such as *Supervolcano* is linked to their dramatic storytelling, and computer-generated special effects, and these documentaries seem far removed from the documentary modes commonly identified with the genre. Reality formats contain contrived situations, and are examples of convergent entertainment, both of which take them to the limits of factual television. The cross-pollination of factual genres will be addressed in the next section.

The restyling of factuality

In *Media and the Restyling of Politics* Corner and Pels (2003) outline their argument for connecting political communication to a broader understanding of political culture. In referring to political processes and behaviours they address ‘elements of political culture that, amongst other things, interconnect the “official” world of professional politics with the world of everyday experience and with the modes of “the popular” variously to be found within work and leisure’ (ibid.: 3). Corner and Pels reject two dominant arguments within political communication concerning the causal relationship between media and politics. One argument is based on the assumption ‘that the media are necessary agents in the practice of modern popular democracy’; the other argument views the media as undermining democracy (ibid.: 3). They reject these two models, ‘refusing any suggestion of separate realms involved in some kind of play-off of convergence or super-imposition’ in favour of ‘a commitment to seeing the complex mutuality of contemporary political and media systems’ (ibid.: 5).

There is a rejection of traditional divisions between politics and culture, ‘breaking down some of the fences that separate politics from entertainment and political leadership from media celebrity’ (ibid.: 2). Boundaries between political and media institutions are blurred, and people ‘travel more freely across these institutional and classificatory boundaries’ (ibid.: 7). There is a ‘new aesthetics of the political self’ where performance, public relations and spin are paramount (ibid.: 6). Political style becomes a major part of people’s understanding of politicians, where voters identify with individuals rather than parties, where ‘audiences “read” political characters and “taste” their style, enabling them to judge their claims of authenticity and competence’ (ibid.: 7). The focus on spectacle, emotion and personality leads to a sense of a performative politics which ‘foregrounds the politician as actor, whose performance on the public stage is continuously judged in terms of authenticity, honesty and “character”’ (ibid.: 10). The presentation of the political self draws on the work of Erving Goffman (1959) and his idea of the presentation of the self in everyday life. Professional politicians manage various roles, ‘many of them performed in a cultural context where the relationship and

interplay between the “public” and “private” realms is indeterminate and changing’ (ibid.: 10). One response to performative politics is for people to be cynical of style, the political ‘spin’ many associate with contemporary political parties. Another response is for people to renew their interest in the authenticity of politicians that appear to have escaped the system, who can be trusted in a world of spin doctors. The emphasis placed on trust and truth draws attention to ‘the changing conditions of political trust’ and how this relates to media and reception practices (ibid.: 11).

All of the above points can also be found in the restyling of factuality. The two dominant arguments in factual television concern the role of factual content in furthering or undermining modern democratic practices. Traditional factual genres, in particular news and current affairs, have been the subject of academic research that is connected to the ‘public knowledge project’ (Corner 1998). This project is concerned with the power of public service factual genres to inform and potentially influence the viewer. Traditional factual genres can inform viewers about political, economic and social issues, and can help in their development as citizens who take part in democratic processes. The counter-argument is to see factual content as undermining democracy through an overemphasis on entertainment. Commercial factual genres are thought to be infotainment, providing poor quality, overly stylized, ratings-driven programmes that work against the knowledge project. The increased commercialization of factual content has also infected public service factual genres, subverting the goal of those genres to inform citizens, treating them instead as consumers of ‘tabloid’ TV. The play off between public service and popular factual genres, and the citizen and consumer, fails to address the complex mutuality between public service and commercial production and reception practices. This doesn’t mean to say that there are no tensions, contradictions or concerns about the interplay between information and entertainment genres in relation to factual television, but it is to say that there are other models for critically examining factuality.

In *Entertaining the Citizen*, van Zoonen (2005) rejects the distinctions between politics and entertainment in favour of hybridity, where traditional dichotomies become blurred and lose their stable meanings. She points out that popular culture, with all its flaws, ‘needs to be acknowledged as a relevant resource for political citizenship; a resource that produces comprehension and respect for popular political voices and that allows for more people to perform as citizens’ (ibid.: 151). The notion of cultural citizenship encapsulates the hybridity of politics and entertainment and allows for convergence across popular and political culture (see Hartley 1999; Hermes 2005). One example of cultural citizenship is evident in the way public service broadcasters have looked to balance their information and educational programming with more entertainment-led output. Ellis characterizes this as ‘popular public service’ (2000: 32). The term usefully sums up a move within public service broadcasting to appeal to popular audiences. This kind of

industry response to commercial imperatives shows how research into popular factual genres is connected to the transformation of the public knowledge project. When traditional dichotomies become blurred there is an opportunity for debate about the meaning of public service factual genres. Corner (2002a) has shown how the success of reality programming generated debate in documentary values. Couldry (2002) also highlights how reality programmes have become part of public debate about the cultural value of factual television. It is also possible to see how the public knowledge project has influenced debate about popular factual genres. Bolin (2007) points out that journalistic production practices have been incorporated into televised popular entertainment. For example, the style of local news production in on-scene footage of events as they happened became part of early reality programming based on crime and emergency services (Hill 2005). News journalists have been used to present *Big Brother* in America, or *Survivor* in Britain and Sweden.

There is much evidence in audience responses to factual television that supports the play off between public service and commercial factual genres. The distinctions made within the evaluation of factual television are common to audiences; they echo the dominant discourses of factual content as part of the knowledge project, but also undermined by commercial concerns, and the influence of hybrid genres on the intrinsic, public service values of news and current affairs, or documentary. The value judgements for public and popular factual genres can be mapped onto prevailing arguments concerning quality, knowledge and entertainment. However, there is just as much evidence to contradict these value judgements, as audiences reflect on the practices of watching various factual and reality programmes. Rather than collapse distinctions between public and popular, audiences draw on these common points of reference at the same time as reflecting on their meaning in everyday life. It is the complex mutuality of values and practices that makes factual television such a good site for analysis of changing attitudes and experiences of the public knowledge project and popular culture.

Another model for considering cultural and political participation is put forward by Peter Dahlgren (2005). Civic cultures are examples of the interaction and engagement on behalf of citizens that are preconditions for the public sphere. The public sphere refers to the work of Habermas (translated in 1989) and the idea that the media can offer 'unconstrained access to information, on a wide range of views' and encourage 'discussion amongst citizens as the foundation for political opinion formation' (Dahlgren 2005: 411–12). The public sphere is a normative concept, and Dahlgren proposes civic cultures as stepping stones towards democratic ideals. Civic cultures include five integrated circuits located around knowledge and competence, values, affinity and trust, practices and identities:

Such cultures are important in facilitating engagement in the broad domain of what we might term the politically relevant, in creating a

climate that is conducive to citizen participation in the shaping of society's political life, and in fostering fluid communicative borders between politics and non-politics.

(Dahlgren 2005: 413)

The characteristics of civic cultures are evident in issues concerning factuality. Dahlgren refers to debate on reality TV as an example of how contemporary television is moving away from 'the traditions that strive for "objective" rendering of the world toward approaches that underscore the personal, sensational, the subjective, the confessional, the intimate' (2005: 416). Although reality TV may represent the opposite of rationality, it also allows engagement with a more emotional public sphere. Various kinds of popular factual content can offer diverse groups of people both rational and affective experiences, opening up notions of a singular public sphere to multiple public spheres. Lunt and Stenner (2005) examine how talk shows such as *Jerry Springer* can provide examples of an emotional public sphere. Johansson's research on tabloid readers suggests objective and subjective approaches to news can provide opportunities for political and cultural citizenship (2006). Indeed, Seaton (2005) shows how the historical tradition of news, and in particular news about violence, has always drawn upon emotions and the body in order to communicate to the public. As Dahlgren points out, our experience of the world involves thinking with our head and our heart, and our experience of all different kinds of factual content will be no different.

The various forms of factual content available to the public open up possibilities for greater diversity and creativity within civic cultures. Thus, it is important to consider the existing knowledge and expectations of audiences for news and current affairs, documentary and popular factual genres. Their generic knowledge will highlight disengagement, or help to further engagement, in issues addressed within factual programming about the world we live in, and our connections to it. The personal, social and cultural values that are associated with factual genres are also significant in contributing to citizen participation, and a sense of public and private judgements about what is important in the provision of factual content. The trust people place in factual content is enormously significant to their evaluation of representations of reality. This is also related to what people feel they can learn from factual content, how news or documentary can enlighten them, or how popular factual can be used as a resource for knowledge and awareness of the self and identity formation. In short, the reception practices of factual television are evidence of civic cultures in the making.

The emphasis on performance that Corner and Pels highlight as so significant to the transformation of political communication is also apparent in factual television. So much of factual content is concerned with spectacle, style, emotion and personality. Goffman's notion of the presentation of the self in everyday life is particularly apt when considering the abundance of

what Dovey describes as 'first person media' (2000), where ordinary people perform themselves, provide confessions to camera, allow us to see into their private lives as seen on television. A reality series such as *Survivor* is more about the spectacle of staging a gameshow on a remote island than people's real experiences. The documentary series *Planet Earth* offers the ultimate spectacle of the natural world for television viewers at home. The terrifying footage of the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center during 9/11 have become symbolic of the spectacle of violence, repeated over and over on TV around the world.

The focus on emotions has become a trademark for many factual programmes, where the premise is to observe or put people in emotionally difficult situations. *Children's Hospital* is about the heartbreaking and also uplifting stories of how families cope with illness. *The Boy Whose Skin Fell Off* is a moving observation of one man's struggle with a disease that will ultimately kill him. Many reality formats particularly focus on negative emotions, where feelings of humiliation, anger, superiority, jealousy become part of our expectations for the genre. Palmer (2003) has pointed out how crime reality programming shames and humiliates criminals. The participants in *Big Brother* are deliberately picked so that different and larger than life personalities clash, where there is so little to do that arguments abound and negative emotions run riot. This is not an example of the managed heart (Hochschild 1983), where feelings are subject to mutually agreed rules of engagement, but rather an alternative reality where people run riot with their emotions. Watching series seven of *Big Brother* UK can feel like being part of a secure mental health unit, only no one is taking their medication.

Much emphasis is placed on personalities in factual programming. News presenters and journalists become national stars, appearing in other non-fiction programming. Calabrese shows how the cult of personality and personal image dominates American news, where consulting firms advise news anchors on 'talent performance tips', or 'hot tease tips' in order to maximize ratings (2005: 277). News presenter Michael Buerk was deliberately chosen by the BBC producers of the emergency services reconstruction series 999 because he lent the series an air of gravity, and helped to distinguish it from its commercial cousin *Rescue 911*, which was presented by William Shatner from *Star Trek* (Hill 2005). Sometimes people appearing in a documentary series can become media personalities, such as Pat Loud from *The American Family* in the 1970s, or Mr and Mrs Armstrong from *The Armstrongs*. Winners of reality gameshows can find fame, although it is often short lived. Talent show formats promise to find the next rockstar, model, band, actor, film maker out of hundreds of thousands of open auditions, looking for ordinary people they can transform into a star. People who choose to take part in popular factual formats know programme makers are looking for personalities in the making, and they become reality performers, with agents waiting in the wings. The 2006 series of *Celebrity Big Brother* UK contained an unusual twist – one of

the so-called celebrities was a fake. Chantelle was quickly revealed to be an ordinary girl from Essex and went on to win the show. However, before participating in *Celebrity Big Brother* she worked as a celebrity look-a-like, appeared in the *Sun* tabloid paper as a topless page three model, and had signed with notorious 'agent to the tabloid stars' Max Clifford. This is an example of the reality performer, someone who uses the production of personalities in reality programming as an opportunity for a media career.

Factual television is performative and reflexive. In this performative environment, audiences judge the claims of authenticity within various factual programmes. One response to the focus on style is to become cynical of the authenticity of factual content, questioning the truth claims made within programmes and the honesty of people participating in them. The cynicism of people towards politicians is partly to do with their performance in the media. News journalists who aggressively question politicians are popular with audiences because they are perceived to get behind the performance in order to inform the public about what is really going on. The use of dramatic structures and computer-generated effects in documentaries such as *Walking with Dinosaurs* means audiences question the veracity of the content and its historical and scientific facts. When there is a fakery scandal this has great impact on audiences, who become distrustful of documentary truth claims (Ellis 2005). Most audiences regard reality TV as entertainment and expect people to perform in front of the cameras. They find little that is truthful about these performances, or the settings within which reality is staged. The cynical factual viewer has a high degree of critical engagement with the authenticity of factual television. Perhaps because of this engagement audiences place great value on trust and truth in factual content. The more emphasis is placed on spectacle and style, the more audiences look for authenticity in people's behaviour, emotions and the settings for representations of reality. They draw on complex strategies for evaluating what is natural or artificial in factual television.

The restyling of factuality has become so extreme that programmes can become bloated and overly complicated. *Space Cadets* is a good example of an extreme trend in the reality genre. The idea behind the £4 million Endemol produced show is that a group of people are tricked into thinking they are at a Russian astronaut training base. Four of them are selected to go into space, but really they will be in a fake shuttle, made originally for a Hollywood film, with special sound effects and a custom-built screen portraying images of planet Earth. The premise is reliant on the winners not realizing the joke. Channel 4's factual entertainment commissioning editor said, 'we've taken a big risk with *Space Cadets*, and we don't know who will have the last laugh' (BBC News 2005). Some actors were also part of the hoax, including a comedy writer and friend of the producer. In case the joke was rumbled early on, Channel 4 lined up an alternate schedule during the two-week run in December 2005. *Space Cadets* ran every night, with an hour-long live show

presented by entertainer Johnny Vaughan, and round-the-clock live streaming on the digital channel E4, a spin-off show, and accompanying website and mobile downloads. The series started with 2.6 million viewers, the average ratings for that slot in the Channel 4 schedule, and was beaten by other programmes on other channels every night, with the lowest ratings dropping to 1.2 million. *Space Cadets* was universally panned. The *Guardian* critic wrote:

There are elements of *Changing Rooms* to this; *Big Brother* too, and a bit of *Candid Camera*. But it's also like *The Truman Show* for real, though it's hard to know what's real now that reality certainly isn't. If all goes to plan, a lucky few will actually board a shuttle replica and think they've blasted off into orbit. It is a funny idea, but it's also mean as hell. . . . I don't think many people will, in 35 years' time, be asking where you were when they didn't send nine gullible young people into space.

(Wollaston 2005)

Many critics pointed out that the show was based on one joke. The 'remote controller' for *Private Eye* (2005) explained:

The joke on day one – that they all think they're going up in a rocket – remains exactly the same gag on day ten. Reality television often claims to have learned from drama; but no fiction series would ever expect a single plot-line to sustain across ten episodes . . . the number one view out in the telly blogosphere is that the whole thing's a joke and all the contestants are played by actors; but that would make it even more of a waste of time. . . . Ground control to major network: there's definitely something wrong.

Even the Director of Programming for Channel 4 admitted afterwards that the show was a mistake – 'it was grim' (interview at the Edinburgh International Television Festival 2006).

One of the outcomes of the restyling of factual content is a move back to reality, away from the spectacle of reality entertainment. One of the most successful series on BBC2 in 2006 was *Who Do You Think You Are?* (5 million viewers), based on the premise that celebrities look into their family tree. Another popular series for BBC2 was *Springwatch*, which was number seven in the most creative popular factual series of 2006 (*Broadcast* 2006). This series is a wonderfully simple observation, with live footage and commentary on birds and animals and plant life emerging out of winter into springtime in Britain. The series picks up on the success of wildlife watching holiday packages where you can watch bears in the woods, wildlife cameras installed in official nature reserves so that you can see chicks in a nest without disturbing the birds, and wildlife webcams where you can see streaming video or

updated stills of wildlife around the world. For example, the webcam for a pair of bald eagles and their two eggs in Hornby Island, Canada, attracted ten million people every day. The McNeil river bears at wildcamgrizzlies made news headlines in August 2006 because so many millions of users were tuning in to watch bears be bears. As Wollaston (2006) explains:

Oh my God, it's wonderful, by far the best. In the top-left corner of my screen, the McNeil river thunders past. It's 3pm in London, early morning in Alaska, and the sun is just peeping over the horizon. There are about eight grizzlies, sitting on rocks in the river, or in the river itself, looking down. It looks cold in the water. A salmon jumps, a bear takes a swipe, misses, licks his lips. And I'm watching this live in London. How excellent is that? And it's so nice not to have any commentary, just the rush of the water, and the occasional screech of a gull. Forget *Big Brother* and *Love Island*. Turn on your computer instead and watch I'm An Alaskan Bear, Leave Me Alone.

The simplicity of *Springwatch* or wildcamgrizzlies is partly a response to overly complex, highly stylized reality entertainment formats. As the reality genre has become so bloated, viewers are looking for alternative representations of reality that are what they claim to be. In fact, the birds or bears in Britain or Alaska are also performing, but it is a different notion of performance that occurs in nature, where animals are engaged in the dynamic process of life itself. The sense of nature as performed gets at the heart of the way audiences respond to the restyling of factual content. There is factual content that is real and at the same time performed, that is to say it has referential integrity and also aesthetic value. And there is factual content that is artificial, and performed in such a way it loses its hold on reality. In the next section, the reception practices for factual television highlight how viewers evaluate different factual genres and the restyling of factuality.

Viewing practices

The approach used in this book is one which understands audiences as engaged in dynamic and creative practices. It is an approach taken up within contemporary studies in the environment and society (see, for example, Franklin 2002; Franklin *et al.* 2000; Macnaughton and Urry 2001). Nature and culture are involved in 'a co-performance of a number of different, interactive and evolving individuals, species and processes' (Szerszynski *et al.* 2003: 3). Nature is understood to mean both materiality (an organism, or landscape) and a process (evolution, life itself). Nature is also 'a world of meanings and significance' with various associations for individuals and societies, and an abstract concept we use to connote the 'real' (*ibid.*: 2). Performance is understood as several distinct yet related processes. It is an

activity, or practice. The act of performance can sometimes be associated with giving life to something through performance, that a person, object or experience wouldn't exist outside the performative act. Performance also means repetitive practices, something we do on a daily basis, and yet something that slightly varies each time we perform so 'variation and difference emerge in the spontaneous creative moments between iterations' (ibid.: 2–3). Performance in its theatrical context is concerned with creative acts, and with codes and conventions within the arts. In this sense, performance, including improvisation, is produced with an audience in mind, although this is not always the case. As mentioned in the previous section, Goffman's work (1959) on the performance of the self in everyday life adds a sociological dimension, where he suggests that our front and back stage 'selves' are part of how we communicate with people, sometimes performing a certain role (mother, daughter, friend, worker) necessary for day-to-day interaction, and sometimes revealing more intimate aspects of ourselves. Goffman says that we are all performing, and judging the performance of others, all the time, and we use props (people, objects, animals, nature and the media) to help us in the performance of the self, and our ongoing identity work.

Szerszynski *et al.* point out that there is nothing new in connecting nature with performance: 'the idea . . . was most dramatically asserted and sustained through biological perspectives that have built on Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory . . . that the nature we see (nature as *materiality*) is the ongoing product of a performance (by nature the *process*)' (2003: 3). Szerszynski *et al.* are not suggesting nature is only a matter of performance, but they are showing an historical understanding of nature as having multiple meanings and experiences. Nature interacts with other individuals and processes; it is a mutual performance where practices are co-produced in an ever-changing, evolving environment. In discussing mutual improvisation in the natural world, Szerszynski *et al.* point out that 'one loses a sense of nature as pre-figured and merely "played out"; instead the performance of nature appears as a process open to improvisation, creativity and emergence' (ibid.: 4). Importantly, this way of treating nature as performance 'necessitates a different way of thinking about knowledge – not as static or passive, but as active, distinctly relational, forming distinctive events and experiences by which it is possible to know more' (ibid.: 4).

This connection between nature and performance can help to further understanding of the dynamic processes of factuality. Factual content is something we see, both in the real world and as representations, and an ongoing process of production and reception practices. Factual broadcasting involves co-performances in the production and reception of factuality. The knowledge produced within factual broadcasting is active and relational, and as Nichols (2001) suggests, it encourages us to want to know more, to further our understanding of nature, science, history, politics, people, and hopefully

ourselves. Nature as a metaphor for the 'real' is a powerful concept for factual genres. We understand and make judgements all the time about actuality as true to life. News presents itself as a witness to events, natural or man-made. Undercover journalism promises to go beneath the surface to get at what is really going on. Natural history documentaries claim to document the real world. Observational documentary claims to be a fly on the wall. Aesthetic judgements are made all the time about footage, editing, presenting, and the performances of professional and non-professional actors. The binaries of nature/artifice, real/staged, genuine/fake, all help to construct cultural discourses of factual genres. Factuality as a process opens up value judgements, allowing abstract ideas to be experienced in a creative, evolving production and reception environment.

In media reception studies, Abercrombie and Longhurst identified 'the spectacle/performance paradigm' as a network of assumptions and research ideas that responded to 'the changing nature of the place of the media in the social life of the contemporary advanced Western world' (1998: 160). This paradigm is characterized by the notion of a diffused audience consuming different kinds of media. It is a paradigm where the media is constitutive of everyday life, and research methods pertaining to studies of everyday life are most appropriate for audience studies. It is also a paradigm where contemporary society is performative, spectacular, and focused on the self and individual identities (1998: 175). Aspects of this paradigm relate to the approach taken here regarding viewing practices, in particular the sense of the viewer as performing their role as an audience, as reflecting on social interaction with the media and everyday life. Silverstone's research on *Television and Everyday Life* (1994) is particularly helpful in this respect as he points out the central role of television in trust and identity formation. He highlights how news is the most important genre in maintaining trust, and how programme makers and audiences work on trust relations on a day-to-day basis. The research in this book is less associated with a particular paradigm, and more with exploratory work occurring in audience studies regarding dynamic practices. Such work is not located around any one particular method but is rather multimethod in its approach. Nor does it focus on the idea of performance as spectacle, but also as a practice that is as much to do with repetition as variation or creativity. The focus on the self and individual responses is one aspect of this research, but there is also an emphasis on the audience as a public, as having shared values and practices. Hermes, whose early work on women's magazines is cited as an example of the performance/spectacle paradigm, has also noted in recent research how popular culture is about bonding, about forming, maintaining and reflecting on alliances and affinities. This understanding of the shared values of factual television is the most dominant one to emerge in the audience research here. Thus, the approach used in this book uses viewing practices as a means to understand the restyling of factuality, to compare audience responses to different factual genres in order

to highlight the role of the audience in the transformation of factual television.

Other recent reception studies also adopt a similar position. For example, Livingstone's work on young people and new media (2002, 2005b) focuses on the changing practices of online users, and how through their experiences of new media in the home they are formulating their own understanding of public and private space from a young adult's perspective. She argues that through looking at new media processes, notions of public and private are 'unpacked into a series of distinct but intersecting questions of meaning, value, agency and responsibility' (2005b: 180). Hermes (2005) calls for a new understanding of popular culture 'in terms of practices (of inclusion and exclusion and of meaning-making) rather than in terms of identities, for example, to allow for as wide a variety of possible experiential knowledges and styles of reasoning' (ibid.: 151). Gauntlett's exploration of creativity and play in audience research opens up alternative meanings of the relationship between media and identity work (2007). Through looking at practices we can understand the various strategies audiences use to engage with and reflect on the changing nature of contemporary media.

Research methods

The initial idea for this project came from one of the key findings of previous research on reality TV, which was that viewers used a fact/fiction continuum to evaluate the various programmes that were part of a wide ranging mix of popular factual output (Hill 2005; see also Roscoe and Hight 2001). Therefore viewers did not see reality TV in isolation but as part of the production and reception of fact/fiction genres. The seed was planted for a larger audience study of different kinds of factual programmes. It was also the case that in the reality TV research viewers were aware of its evolution, so that at the time of the study when *Big Brother* first arrived in Britain (2000) they were evaluating the impact of this new format on the reality genre as a whole. The central question therefore became one concerned with audience responses to a wide range of factual genres.

The project first began in Britain in 2003, with funding from the former regulatory bodies the Broadcasting Standards Commission and Independent Television Commission; during the data collection period of 2004–5 the project opened up to become a comparative one between Britain and Sweden, thanks to the funding and support of Jonköping International Business School, and the Society, Opinion and Media Institute, Goteberg University. In 2005, a smaller collaboration was also possible with Helsinki University in Finland (see Appendix), and in 2006 further comparative research with the University of Lisbon in Portugal (ongoing at time of writing). Chapter 2 contains more detailed discussion of how the project was designed to address culturally specific factual television production

and reception practices, but at the same time be able to explore similar themes.

The main point of comparison in this book is audience responses to the differences and similarities of various factual and reality genres. The driving force of the research is to examine how audiences are critically engaged with the restyling of factuality, and that their experiences of different kinds of factual and reality genres means they are evaluating what is factual about contemporary factual television. The experiences of British and Swedish viewers are remarkably similar in their engagement with the restyling of factuality. Therefore, the comparisons between Britain and Sweden are secondary to the comparative analysis of different factual genres. The differences between countries are mainly concerned with specific differences in the scale of television production in the two countries. These are two countries with similar broadcasting structures, but with quite different size populations and media industries. The point of comparison in the book between Britain and Sweden is used strategically to highlight specific production contexts which allow for minor variations in audience responses to various factual genres.

Some brief facts and figures for Britain and Sweden show they are two northern European countries with different size populations, but similar social and cultural trends. Britain has a population of about 60 million (with 50 million living in England), and Sweden a population of about nine million. There is an even spread of men and women in the general populations. Both countries also have an aging population (OECD 2006). Life expectancy has increased in Britain and Sweden, and there is a decrease in time spent in paid work, with younger people spending more time in education and older people more time in semi- and full retirement (see Social Trends 2005; Swedish Statistics 2006). The proportion of the British population from a non-white ethnic minority is 8 per cent, although ethnic diversity is much higher in cities, and amongst younger people (41 per cent of those aged under 15) (Social Trends 2005). The number of people born outside of Sweden is 1.1 million, however the majority of immigrants are from Finland (Swedish Statistics 2006). Similar to Britain, there is a concentration of non-white ethnic minorities living in the main cities (*ibid.*). The number of foreign-born persons with tertiary education (as a percentage of all people with tertiary education) is similar in Britain and Sweden (around 10 per cent) (OECD 2006). The growth rate for the gross domestic product in Britain and Sweden for 2004 was 3.2 per cent and 3.7 per cent (*ibid.*). The numbers of long-term unemployed are very similar in both countries, with around 20 per cent of the total unemployed (*ibid.*). Britain has one of the highest rates of employment in the European Union, following Denmark and Sweden (Social Trends 2003). A visitor to Britain would find only two other European countries as expensive, Sweden and Denmark (*ibid.*).

Both countries adopted social policies during the post-war period contributing to a strong sense of a welfare state, where the state assumes primary responsibility for its citizens. The dominance of the Social Democratic Party in Swedish politics since the 1940s has ensured fairly consistent emphasis on universal welfare policies funded through taxes. Britain has seen both Labour and also Conservative party rule since the post-war period, significantly a long right-wing party period from 1979 to 1997, which worked to overturn welfare policies. The impact of the political situation in Britain and Sweden can be seen in some of the social differences in both countries. Income tax (and employee and employer contributions) is significantly higher in Sweden, at almost 50 per cent, than Britain, at 30 per cent (OECD 2006). Educational levels are higher in Sweden than Britain, for example the percentage of people with tertiary education aged 25–34 is 10 per cent higher in Sweden (40 per cent) (*ibid.*). In terms of public social expenditure, Sweden spends significantly more of its GDP than Britain, with 30 per cent compared to 22 per cent, respectively (*ibid.*). There was an 80 per cent turnout for the last Swedish general election in 2002, compared to 61 per cent in Britain in 2005. The 2006 Swedish general election also had a similar voting turnout, although the key difference was the election of the Conservative Alliance over the Social Democrats. Obesity levels are much higher in Britain, almost a quarter of the population, compared to Sweden (10 per cent) (*ibid.*). This may have something to do with the three main activities carried out by people in Britain – sleeping, working, and watching TV and videos/DVDs or listening to music (National Statistics 2005). The average household spending on recreation and culture as a percentage of the gross domestic product was 7.9 per cent in Britain and 5.73 per cent in Sweden in 2006 (Maley 2006).

In terms of broadcasting, both countries have dominant public service broadcasters, BBC and SVT. The British Broadcasting Corporation was founded in 1922 with a mandate to inform, educate and entertain, and started airing television alongside radio in 1932. Commercial television broke its monopoly in 1955 with the start of ITV. Now there are five main channels, including the public service commercial Channel 4 and commercial Channel Five. Sveriges Television was modelled after the BBC, and had a monopoly until 1987 when the satellite commercial channel TV3 was launched, followed by the public service commercial channel TV4 in 1992. Like Britain, there are now five main channels, including the commercial Kanal 5. Both the BBC and SVT also have digital channels, concentrating on news, children's programming and factual content, as well as radio, mobile and online services. Swedish broadcasting law restricts advertising, and so many commercial satellite channels are broadcast from other countries (for example, TV3 and Kanal 5 from Britain). The historical context to broadcasting in both countries is significant, as the late arrival of commercial television in Sweden has ensured different public attitudes towards the main channels and

their provision of factual content. For example, in 2006 Channel 4, Sky and ITV all won the top awards for the most creative production of news (*Broadcast* 2006). News is therefore a genre which has public service credentials and quality provision on all the main channels, regardless of their public service or commercial makeup. In Sweden, SVT dominates news provision, followed by TV4, but TV3 only provides around one hour of news per week, and Kanal 5 none at all (see Chapter 2 for more details). Therefore although there are similarities in broadcasting structures in both countries, there are also minor differences in the production and reception of factual content. A point of comparison for later discussion focuses on how the relatively small scale television production in Sweden means that the media industry struggles to support itself and has to restrict the amount of domestic content in favour of foreign imports and formats.

The main research questions focused on basic issues to do with genre and factuality, such as viewing preferences, genre evaluation, social and personal value judgements, trust, truth claims, knowledge and learning, ethics and fair treatment of participants in factual programming. In the British survey there were also questions on interactive and online elements related to factual content. The majority of the sample did not use interactive services or websites related to factual television programmes. For example, 73 per cent of respondents never used digital interactive features or websites linked to news, documentary and reality programmes. Younger adults were more likely to have used interactive and web features in factual programmes than older adults. For example, 20 per cent of young adults (16–24) used interactive and web features, compared to less than 10 per cent of older adults (55–64). As so few people in the survey accessed factual content outside of television this was dropped from the Swedish survey, although it was open to discussion in the qualitative research. It is a topic that will feature more prominently in forthcoming research (see Hill and Kondo 2006).

The project became a comparative study of a wide variety of different factual categories, but the breadth in factual genres was counterbalanced by a focus on television. The trends outlined briefly in this chapter show how television is the main source for factual and reality genres. Other multiplatform factual content has not been ignored, and further publications will be forthcoming on interactive media and factual content (Hill and Kondo 2006). However, the story of factual television is the focus for this book, as it has been the focus of audience responses in the quantitative and qualitative research.

There were four themes addressed in the design of the survey and focus groups:

- 1 How do adult viewers understand and evaluate the changing generic environment of British factual programming? How do viewers define factual or non-fictional programming? What value judgements are used

- for factual and reality programmes? To what extent do viewers categorize different factual programmes as informative, entertaining, or both?
- 2 How do adult viewers evaluate the truth claims of different types of factual programming? What are viewers' attitudes towards accuracy of information in factual programming? What are viewers' opinions of the truth claims of different factual programmes? What are viewers' attitudes towards performance in factual programmes?
 - 3 What do adult viewers consider they learn from different types of factual programming? Do viewers use factual programmes to help them form opinions about things?
 - 4 What attitudes do adult viewers have towards fair treatment of different social groups within news and current affairs, documentary and popular factual programmes? Is it important to viewers that particular social groups are treated fairly?

A number of methods were used in the project in both countries to explore these themes and research questions. The research methods included an analysis of media content of a range of factual and reality programmes over a six-month period, and a scheduling and ratings analysis of a range of programmes during the same timeframe. A series of interviews were also conducted with a range of media professionals working within the television industry in Britain and Sweden. This background analysis formed the basis for qualitative and quantitative audience research.

In Britain, a quantitative survey was conducted with a representative sample of 4,516 people. The sample included people aged 16–65+ living in Britain. In Sweden, a quantitative survey was conducted with a representative sample of 944 people aged 16–80 living in Sweden. The distribution amongst responses compared with the British and Swedish population as a whole. A series of semi-structured focus groups were conducted in Sweden and Britain. There were 24 groups, 12 in each country, with a total of 129 respondents aged 18–60. The recruitment method used was quota sampling and snowball sampling. The sample was based on the criteria of age (roughly split into two groups of 20–30 year olds, and 40–60 year olds), gender (even mix of male and female), socio-economic status (working and middle class, and educational levels from school to university). Occupations ranged from unemployed, students, administrators, teachers, sales assistants, technicians, office workers, carers, artists and retired people. There were people from Swedish, British, British Asian, black and European (German, Greek, Norwegian, Polish) ethnic groups, which was not by design but reflects the diversity of the population where recruitment took place. The focus group questions provided valuable insight into general attitudes of the survey. A series of open questions were asked regarding the four key questions of genre, actuality, learning and fairness. A game was used, whereby participants were asked to group a range of programme titles into categories and

to discuss their reasons for the clusters of titles (see Appendix for further details).

The use of the data in the book highlights the strengths and weaknesses of multimethod research and comparative research. A pattern established in Chapter 3 is to use the quantitative data to paint a general picture, and draw on broad trends, followed by the use of the qualitative data to support these trends and, just as importantly, to show contradictions, variation and complexity in responses. A serious lack of space means that each chapter only touches the surface of the data and is reliant on the main findings. The more detailed analysis and inclusion of minor findings will be published in other places, although wherever possible there is an attempt to flag up these issues. Inevitably, there is not space to do justice to the richness of the data sets, to analyse specific factual genres, to isolate particular social groups, or to provide accompanying textual analysis alongside the scheduling, ratings and reception analysis. The pattern for the analysis has been to generally highlight similarities, as these were the most striking results of the research. The most obvious differences for British and Swedish programmes and responses are addressed wherever possible, and feature in more focused comparative analysis in other publications (Hill *et al.* 2005, 2007).

Age was also the most significant factor in research on opinions of news in ten different countries, using a sample of 10,000 people (Globescan 2006). Gender and educational levels were comparatively similar across these countries, but age differences showed younger people with different news preferences. Similarly, analysis of the data in this study highlighted different viewing preferences according to age, with minor differences for other variables. A detailed analysis of age, gender and education is conducted in Chapter 3 in order to show this point, and also to highlight the similarity in the evaluation of factual genres across these variables. In other chapters, reference is made to gender and socio-economic status where possible, but mainly issues related to this are set aside in favour of the broad picture. Ethnicity was also something that had little impact on the evaluation of factual genres, although there were minor differences in viewing preferences. More focused analysis of specific groups of people for specific categories may very well highlight greater diversity in the results. There are, for example, different attitudes to the fair treatment of ethnic minorities in Britain and Sweden (see Chapter 7) and further analysis would be useful to learn why this is the case. In short, the main findings of the research have been used in the book as the basis for the argument about the restyling of factual television and the strategies viewers use to make sense of this.

Book outline

The book begins with an examination of the various genres that are part of factuality. Chapter 2, 'Mapping factual TV', concerns the large terrain of

non-fictional programming. The changing generic environment of factual television is constructed within culturally specific broadcasting environments and commonly understood genre categories. The chapter maps factual genres according to pre-existing categories, using prototypes and typical examples to help illuminate differences and similarities within factual content over a period of time. The analysis of various factual and reality genres within British and Swedish television schedules highlights how viewers experience these genres as part of a broad understanding of factuality. The next two chapters in the book examine viewing strategies for dealing with genres on the move.

Chapter 3, 'Public and popular', considers the importance of classificatory practices for factual television audiences. In particular, it shows the use of pre-existing value judgements regarding public service and popular factual genres as a framing device for genre evaluation. It outlines viewing preferences for different types of programmes. It explores audience definitions of factual television which are connected to normative ideals and viewing experiences. Audiences use classificatory practices to make factual genres knowable and manageable. Viewers who are watching a wide range of programmes, in particular reality TV, are also re-evaluating and re-classifying factual genres and therefore deeply involved with the restyling of factuality.

Chapter 4, 'Genre work', highlights another significant viewing strategy. Genre work is the work of being both immersed in watching a genre, and reflecting on the experience of a genre. Genre work allows viewers to draw on their knowledge of genres to personally respond to various programmes, highlighting the often contradictory and confusing responses that are part of dealing with the changing nature of factuality. There are distinct but related modes of engagement with news and current affairs, documentary and reality TV. Audiences are especially critical of reality TV and the strange dreamlike experience that is associated with watching this genre. Thus the restyling of factuality raises problems in that some genres have gone beyond the limits of factuality, occupying a troubling intermediate space between fact and fiction that is unsettling to audiences.

The rest of the book examines classification and genre work in more detail, connecting these strategies to the ongoing process of factuality. Three chapters address the core issues of truth claims, knowledge and fair treatment. Each chapter looks at these issues in relation to news and current affairs, documentary and reality TV, examining similarities and differences in viewing responses. Each chapter highlights how the restyling of factuality has had a disruptive influence on these core issues, challenging viewers to make sense of the changes taking place and to re-evaluate their own knowledge and experiences along the way. Each chapter shows how viewers constantly work to resolve the inherent contradictions between their ideal values for factuality, generic developments in television production, and their viewing experiences.

Chapter 5, 'Truth claims', addresses the importance of a criterion of truth when responding to factual genres. Audiences apply a 'truth/performance rating' to factuality. This is a simple tool for evaluating a range of genres. This classificatory practice shows that the binaries of nature/artifice are part of how audiences make sense of actuality. The social and cultural ordering of news at the top of a truth scale and reality TV at the top of a performance scale effectively relocates reality TV into entertainment. This genre evaluation foregrounds the referential integrity of factuality. Another, more reflexive mode of engagement foregrounds the aesthetic value of factuality. There are different modes of engagement for news and current affairs, documentary and reality TV, but what is similar is that viewers are aware of changes within these genres and the impact this has on the social and personal evaluation of truth claims in factuality.

Chapter 6, 'Knowledge and learning', examines the rich and complex knowledge profile of factual television, with news and current affairs, documentary and reality genres bringing different kinds of knowledge to viewers. In order to make sense of this knowledge profile, viewers make distinctions between knowledge about the world, knowledge about the media and self-knowledge. They also make a distinction between knowledge as facts and learning as experience. The understanding of knowledge as objective facts ensures news is at the top of the scale and reality TV at the bottom. However, audiences also reflect on traditional notions of public knowledge alongside more personal notions of learning. Learning as getting something from a programme, something for yourself, is most commonly associated by audiences with some types of documentary and popular factual. This 'environment of information' shows that the knowledge profile for television is contextual to viewers' understanding of factuality.

Chapter 7, 'Participation', is focused on audience attitudes towards fair treatment of people who participate in the media, specifically non-professionals, public figures and celebrities. There is a moral and social ordering to attitudes to fair treatment. There is also a context specific position that draws heavily on people's motivations, and professional practices, within different genres. Viewers make a distinction between ordinary people in news, or documentary, and reality performers who are thought to be 'media hot', motivated by fame. The perceived shameless behaviour of many reality performers is a reason viewers are interested in watching the genre. Viewers also feel ashamed at their interest in watching 'humiliation TV'. Audience attitudes towards the fair treatment of social groups in various genres highlights different ethical positions, from shallow to deep ethics.

The concluding Chapter 8, 'Containing factuality', synthesizes the key findings and presents an overview of the main argument in the book. The restyling of factuality is challenging for audiences. On the one hand, change is exciting and can provide new opportunities for representing different kinds of reality to popular audiences. On the other hand, the pace of change is

unsettling and can threaten the integrity of existing factual genres. The more extreme reality TV becomes, the more audiences become concerned about the intrinsic value of factuality as truthful and informative. One means of containing factuality is for viewers to re-locate reality TV into entertainment. The movement of reality TV to entertainment opens up opportunities for a re-evaluation of factuality. Reflecting on the research findings, a picture emerges of a viewer navigating their way through a busy, noisy and constantly changing factual television environment.

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