

**PRODUCTION AND RECEPTION IN BRITISH
TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY: A GENRE-BASED
ANALYSIS OF MASS-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION**

DANIELLE BELINDA ARON

Submitted for the degree of PhD

London School of Economics and Political Science

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For Mum and Dad

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nature of communication in television documentary, based on an investigation of production, reception and their interrelationship. It assumes that social context is fundamental to an understanding of mass communication. Doise's (1986) levels of analysis (intrapersonal; interpersonal/situational; positional; cultural/ideological) provide the framework for conceptualizing social context. Audience reception research, which appreciates viewers' active role in reception and influence on production, inspires the qualitative approach. Whilst these premises challenge a traditional transmission approach to mass communication, the thesis argues against simultaneously rejecting the concept of information transmission. The thesis is located within a ritual approach to communication (Carey, 1989), exploring the potential for information transmission by extending this approach to situational and positional levels.

As a distinctive information genre, the television documentary is perfect for investigating transmission. In this endeavour, the thesis explores the assumptions of both broadcasters and audiences concerning the function, structure and content of documentary communication. The methodological structure comprises three qualitative studies - production context, reception context and a case study. The production study involves twenty one interviews with television documentary broadcasters and establishes two intersecting dimensions embracing their perspectives. The reception study includes eight focus group discussions, and finds documentary expectations differing by socio-economic status and gender. These studies provide the context for analysing the nature of communication in one documentary programme, "Parental Choice", comparing a producer interview with four audience focus group discussions.

The results highlight a lack of awareness amongst broadcasters of the varying genre-specific criteria used by documentary audiences in programme interpretation. Information transmission is possible if viewers accept a documentary's credibility. However, perceptions of credibility vary at the situational and positional levels, thus transmission is limited and ritually-based. The emerging nature of documentary communication contributes to academic debate on mass communication, audience research and the television documentary genre.

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CHAPTER 1

ASSESSING MASS COMMUNICATION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Outline

This thesis rests on the central premise that an appreciation of social context is fundamental to an understanding of communication. It explores this premise through an examination of the relation between the production and reception of television documentary. Furthermore, a recognition of social context necessitates the appreciation of different levels of analysis. This is the perspective from which the overview and critique of the mass communication literature in this chapter is approached, linking academic theory on mass communication with social psychological, cultural and sociological approaches to audience interpretation. The conclusions of the thesis offer what amounts to a redefinition of our understanding of the process of information transmission within what has been termed a ritual approach to mass communication. The focus on television as a medium and the documentary as a genre provides an appropriate means through which to investigate these issues.

As a genre concerned with information, the television documentary is associated with mass communication, and thereby embodies certain assumptions about its relation to its viewers. However, the legitimacy of these assumptions is unclear. Research within media and communications on the production and form of the documentary genre (e.g. Corner, 1986; Silverstone, 1985) is scarce, and very little research to date has examined the documentary audience. Consequently, questions such as who watches documentaries, why, what they gain from them, and how their responses relate to the expectations and assumptions of producers, remain unanswered. These questions are fundamental to the theoretical approach to mass communication adopted in this thesis. The research develops a recent convergence of perspectives on the audience and communication, viewed in relation to the broadcasting industry. The thesis explores producers' and viewers' perceptions of documentary to provide a more grounded insight into the nature of television documentary communication. This chapter explains the rationale behind the chosen theoretical approach.

1.2 Communication theory

1.2.1 Historical perspective

An overview of the historical development of mass communication research explains and contextualises the starting point of this research. The analysis of mass communication began with theories based around a simple, linear model of communication (e.g. Lasswell, 1971; Shannon & Weaver, 1949), which effectively assumed a passive audience and paid little attention to other influencing factors. Present-day research incorporates notions of an active audience (e.g. Livingstone, 1995) and polysemy of meaning in texts (e.g. Allen, 1985), thus recognising the role played by social, cultural and contextual variables in interpretation (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1990; Morley, 1980, 1992). Looking back over this history, Carey (1989) divides understandings of mass communication into two broad approaches - 'transmission' and 'ritual'. 'Transmission' refers to a linear transfer of information from communicator to receiver, whilst 'ritual', Carey's favoured view, is a more cultural approach focussing on the role of communication within a societal structure. The traditional transmission approach has been vehemently, although not universally, rejected over the last twenty years (most notably by the critical school of mass communication), primarily for the assumptions it incorporates about the nature of the audience, i.e passive as opposed to active, the 'message', which is conceived of in terms of information-value, and also the lack of appreciation of the context and structure in which communication is taking place. This thesis is similarly critical of the traditional transmission approach to communication.

Research in mass communications developed along two parallel tracks, namely the administrative and critical traditions. If the administrative school may be, somewhat simplistically, characterised as American, psychological and quantitative, the critical school is European, sociological and qualitative. Early transmission research is epitomised by the sender/receiver model of mass communication (e.g. DeFleur, 1970; Shannon & Weaver, 1949) which was incorporated into both the administrative and critical research traditions despite their differences. However, both encountered problems albeit of a different nature. Within the administrative tradition the assumption of a direct linear transfer of information between communicator and audience became incompatible with the increasing recognition

of other mediating and influencing factors. This marks the start of an appreciation of social context. Approaches embracing these factors range from the two-step flow (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) to diffusion models (e.g. Rogers, 1962), and uses and gratifications research (e.g. Blumler & Katz, 1974), in which the focus is on the receiver almost to the exclusion of the sender. Early critical research in mass communications (e.g. Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944) saw society as a hierarchical structure in which dictatorial/authoritarian senders impart messages to blindly accepting receivers. This could be read as suggesting that the functioning of society is based on the sender/receiver model of communication, implying that the nature of communication fosters unequal power relationships and essentially equating the notion of audience inferiority or subordination with audience passivity. However, the Marxist critique views societal structures and institutions, not the nature of communication, as responsible for unequal power relationships (e.g. Harrison, 1985) thus effectively rejecting the assumptions of the sender/receiver model. It is institutional control, not audience passivity, which leads to inequalities of economy and power. In other words, rather than assuming that viewers have no independent voice, they are actually not provided with a space in which to express their voice(s).

However, the critique of audience passivity does not necessarily coincide with a redress of balance between production and reception, or an adequate appreciation of the social context of communication. An example of this is the work on persuasion. Much mass communications research, particularly within the administrative school, has focussed on persuasion. The most famous studies are those of Hovland et al. (e.g. 1953) at Yale University on attitude change in experimental contexts. Others include McGuire's (1968) model of persuasion, which extends Hovland's model to look more closely at the processes involved (i.e. attention; comprehension; yielding; retention; action), and Bandura's (1986) theory of observational learning. In relation to the mass media, the study of persuasion and attitude change centres predominantly on effects. Consequently, the object of interest is the audience - has a message changed people's existing attitudes; under what conditions will such attitude change/persuasion take place; has that attitude change led to a change in behaviour. While these questions are interesting and relevant, their focus is on the 'results' of the communication rather than a more detailed contextual and intrinsic examination of message

production, message reception and their relation to each other. The concentration on attitude change and persuasive messages stems from psychology and has contributed to much media research. However, this approach is unsuitable for understanding the nature of mass communication, and thus for the present study, for three main reasons. Firstly, 'effects' concentrates on the audience rather than communication as a whole. Secondly, much of the research on persuasion and attitude change has been carried out under laboratory conditions with the aim of establishing general 'laws' governing persuasion. Whilst some of the results may serve as useful contributors to an understanding of persuasion e.g. the importance of source credibility, the experiments themselves are conducted in an artificial environment and are thus removed from the social context of the 'real' world. Finally, in the context of the present study, the notions of persuasion and effects still correspond with a transmission approach to mass communication. The focus remains on the message, rather than the nature of audience involvement and the structure and context in which communication takes place, hence the inadequacy of locating the thesis within the persuasion literature.

A rejection of audience passivity, and thus a recognition of some sort of audience involvement, prompted a variety of research on audience resistance and the negotiation of meaning (e.g. Fiske, 1987). The theoretical work endorsing these perspectives concentrates on how meanings differ, what may determine those differences, and the circumstances under which they will exist (e.g. Lewis, 1991). Subsequent research therefore investigates specific audiences, characterised by factors such as gender, socio-economic status and cultural background (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1990; Morley, 1980), and their relationship with specific genres, i.e. soap opera, news, talk show (e.g. Ang, 1985; Gamson, 1992; Livingstone & Lunt, 1994).

These later theoretical developments also reject the 'transmission' view of communication. Audience-centred theories appreciate the interaction between the audience and the text in the determination of meaning. Furthermore, the audience is seen in terms of its social, cultural and situational location, and, with the contribution of reader-response theorists, the programme in terms of the way it is constructed as a text (e.g. Eco, 1979). In terms of the transmission approach to mass communication, the involvement of the audience in

interpretation is an 'obstacle' and consequently represents a theoretical problem for studying the transmission of information. It is widely appreciated that social, situational and cultural contexts affect interpretation (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1990; Morley, 1980), but can the notion of information transmission can be rejected on the basis of this evidence?

It is useful at this point to explain what is meant by passive and active audiences. A passive audience is generally understood to essentially have no input in establishing the meaning of a message. Consequently, researchers and producers may feel confident about predicting the effects of the media from a knowledge of media content as the output from the source will be accepted by the receiver without alteration or question. An active audience, on the other hand, is understood to be involved, in some form, in the construction of meaning. I say 'in some form' because the concept of audience activity (and passivity) is subject to constant debate within audience reception research. Although the notion of a passive audience is traditionally associated with the transmission view, it is not necessarily the case that transmission requires a passive audience. In the same way, one cannot assume that the ritual approach, advocated by Carey as an alternative to the transmission approach, automatically involves an active audience.

The above paragraph illustrates how fundamental an understanding of audience activity is to deciding between, or redefining, transmission and ritual communication. Much depends on theoretical perspectives. This cuts right to the heart of contemporary debates within audience reception research specifically and the field of mass communication in general. Over the last fifteen years or so, audience research has provided a space for the convergence of the administrative and critical traditions (e.g. Corner, 1991) by finding consensus on two main issues. Firstly, that audience interpretation is diverse and affected by socio-cultural factors. Secondly, that meaning is constructed through an interaction between text and viewer rather than being determined by one or the other. What this does is present an argument for the rejection of audience passivity, but does not definitively explain audience activity - hence the debate which surrounds the clarity of the concept (e.g. Roscoe et al., 1995). Livingstone (in press) describes the current debates as surrounding the nature of the balance between text and audience, the relation between audience readings and

political/ideological processes, the methodology used in empirical audience studies, and the concept of 'audience' in general. Thus, the supposedly eradicated theoretical divisions appear to reemerge once the issues become more specific. This confusion only serves to muddy the direction and enterprise of the field (Livingstone, *in press*).

Contemporary audience theorists outline unresolved difficulties. In terms of the balance between text and viewer, is the role of the audience emphasised almost to the exclusion of the structuring role of the text, as suggested by Corner (1995), or does interactivity inevitably favour textual determinism and thus a return to a transmission model of communication (Lewis, 1991)? In terms of the relationship between interpretation and political/ideological processes, how can we determine when a reading is subversive (e.g. Gitlin, 1990; Seaman, 1992)? In terms of methodology, to what extent do researchers use the right methodology to answer their questions (e.g. Hoijer, 1990)? And finally, with reference to the concept of 'audience', how far is the audience an artificial construction which exists purely in relation to the media for the purposes of the media (e.g. Ang, 1991)?

According to Morley (1992), in order to answer such questions, research needs to move away from the traditional active/passive audience distinction and instead explore the conditions, circumstances and influential factors involved in audience interpretation. It is possible, for instance, that research has concentrated on open, plural genres, which encourage diverse readings. The study of other relatively unexplored genres (e.g. documentary) will provide more insight into hegemonic positioning and perspectives (Livingstone, *in press*). Furthermore, there are calls to integrate micro audience interpretation with the macro structures of society, thus recognising both the social/cultural positioning of individuals and their media interaction (e.g. Schröder, 1994) as well as the effect of audience interpretation on society as a whole. These concerns relate to different ways of understanding the concept of audience activity. The concept which links them all, and is central to this thesis, is the role of social context.

The above discussion highlights the emerging appreciation of different aspects of audience activity, and the difficulties in integrating it into both micro (psychological) and macro

(sociological) approaches to communication. This thesis argues that the best way of representing and exploring these issues is by analysing communication contexts on multiple levels. This approach not only incorporates the variety of concerns and questions raised above, but also, consequently, embraces the variety of elements which constitute social context. The levels of analysis approach is explained in more detail later in this chapter.

1.2.2 Defining communication

There have been many attempts to define communication:

"In the most general sense, we have communication wherever one system, a source, influences another, the destination, by manipulation of alternative symbols, which can be transmitted over the channel connecting them."
(Osgood et al., 1957)

"Communication may be defined as 'social interaction through messages'"
(Gerbner, 1967)

"The transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to another (or others) primarily through symbols"
(Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969)

"a relationship built around the exchange of information" (Schramm, 1983, p.15)

"a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (Carey, 1989, p.23)

These quotes exemplify the variety of approaches to the study of communication. My own approach to the study of mass communication, and thus the starting point for a critique of the field, is fuelled by the debates within audience research. In order to understand mass communication, it is necessary to appreciate the social context in which that communication takes place. Furthermore, an appreciation of social context highlights the multitude of levels at which social context operates.

My theoretical framework is based on three points. Firstly, that mass communication

research comprises several different approaches to communication, each of which tend to be based at one level of analysis rather than appreciating a variety of levels. Secondly, that the problems of the transmission approach to mass communication are indicative of this failure to appreciate multiple levels of analysis, and thus the approach fails to offer a comprehensive appreciation of social context. Finally, that the ritual approach, although ardently incorporating social context, still does not adequately explain communication on different analytical levels.

I have already discussed the problems with a transmission approach to communication. The ritual view of communication offers what appears initially to be an adequate alternative:

“A ritual view of communication is directed not towards the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information, but the representation of shared beliefs.” (Carey, 1989, p.18)

With its roots in the Chicago School (e.g. Dewey, Mead, Goffman), the ritual view appreciates the importance of the cultural context in communication. Communication refers to people's involvement with cultural forms e.g. plays, television, and the role of these forms in the structuring of one's life. Communication is possible through the existence of culturally shared meanings, which in turn reflect the underlying order. Consequently, the ritual view focuses more on the social and cultural nature of communication. The emphases on audience involvement and social structure and thus the integration of text and viewer within a social and cultural context, echo the developments in audience research described above. It is these elements of the ritual approach which make it a useful starting point for an investigation of communication. However, although the approach explains the *purpose* and *role* of communication as a concept, it is rather vague in explaining how it relates to the many activities which constitute forms of communication. In other words it does not explain the nature of communication on other, more micro, levels of analysis. The ritual approach emphasises cultural consensus and *shared* meanings in communication, yet research into the active nature of the audience highlights the possibility of *differences* in interpretation based on different social factors. Whilst shared meanings and consensus can be identified at a

broad, general, *cultural* level, they are not necessarily so clear at more specific levels. However, there is no suggestion of a conflict in Carey's definition. Consequently, the ritual approach bears more resemblance to a theory of culture than to an explanation of the communication process.

If our perceptions of reality are determined by social factors then different societal 'groups' will have a different notion of what is culturally shared as a result of their own 'versions' of reality. The more interests and characteristics people have in common, the more they can use a collection of shared implicit meanings. This results in a particular discourse which cannot be understood outside that situation - effectively a specific rather than a general communication code. If ideas about what is culturally shared and discourses are determined by one's own social location, it becomes impossible to generalise about how messages will be understood. Consequently, mismatches between the intentions of the communicator and the interpretation of the receiver are inevitable without adequate knowledge of these different groups, perspectives and realities, which brings the discussion back to the importance of exploring audience interpretation in context. Thus, the area of study represents the complex interface between individual and social, micro and macro, producer and receiver.

In order to accommodate these dichotomies, this thesis adopts Doise's (1986) levels of analysis approach as an appropriate framework within which to study communication processes. Doise used 'levels of analysis' in social psychological research as a means of capturing different aspects of reality. The identification of levels of analysis was a way of bringing an element of order to the diversity of approaches that existed. The same technique can be applied to communication research to explain what has gone before, i.e. the variety of approaches that exist, and how to progress in the future, i.e. by recognising multiple levels and the influencing factors at each. Doise outlined four different levels - intra-personal, inter-personal and situational, positional, and ideological.

The intra-personal level concerns the processes used by individuals to organise

"their perception, their evaluation of their social milieu and their behaviour

within this environment." (Doise, 1986, p.11)

The inter-personal/situational level examines

"the dynamics of the relations established at a given moment by given individuals in a given situation." (Doise, 1986, p.12)

The positional level focuses on the

"differences in social position which exist prior to the interaction between different categories of subject" (Doise, 1986, p.13)

The final level - the ideological - deals with

"values and norms more or less shared by members of the same culture."
(Doise, 1986, p.16)

The levels of analysis approach not only provides a clear and ordered way of approaching research, but also explains much of the conflict between different theoretical perspectives. Doise's (1986) explanation of the articulation of different levels of analysis is done so with reference to social psychological phenomena e.g. inter-group relations. His approach is based on the conflict between psychological, social psychological and sociological approaches to such phenomena, and the prevalence of analysis at only one of these levels:

"...in domains which each correspond in a preferred manner to a different level of analysis, applying analyses at the three other levels can enrich our understanding of complex problems and at the same time resolve certain apparent contradictions." (Doise, 1986, p.114)

However, whilst Doise clearly outlines the contribution different levels of analysis offer to the understanding of a phenomenon, he does not elaborate the interaction *between* these levels. If, as he states, the separation of levels is an artificial division of reality, then the features of each level must play a part on other levels. Nevertheless, despite the limits of Doise's application, the levels of analysis approach is a useful tool for understanding mass communication. Disagreements about the definition of communication can be somewhat

reduced by appreciating that definitions will vary in accordance with the *level* at which a researcher is operating. It is consequently possible for a variety of definitions to exist, as long as the domain of explanation is also defined i.e. intrapersonal, interpersonal/situational, positional, ideological.

An awareness of different levels of analysis represents both a more social and a more psychological approach to communication. It demonstrates an appreciation that cultural beliefs, membership of certain social groupings, viewing context and individual expectations all influence what is watched and the way in which it is interpreted. The levels of analysis framework highlights and emphasises the varied role and form of social context - a concept central to the approach of this thesis.

I have used the phrase 'social context' several times already in this chapter as it captures the essence of the theoretical framework used. By this term I mean to refer to the situation and conditions in which a perception, a person, an interaction and/or a process is set, and the effect that the situation subsequently has on that perception, person, interaction and/or process. Consequently the notion of context can be used to articulate the levels of analysis outlined above. Thus, the 'communication context' is the situation and conditions encapsulating a communication. The intra-personal level of this communication context will concern the socio-cognitive processes used by producers and receivers to organise messages. The inter-personal/situational level will relate to the dynamics of the relationship between producers and receivers in that particular situation. The positional level will involve the social position of producers and receivers outside of that particular situation. Lastly, the ideological level will access the values, beliefs and norms shared by both producers and receivers. This study deals with mass communication, therefore the relation between producers and receivers is mediated rather than direct. Consequently, it is more appropriate to discuss the second level as 'situational' rather than inter-personal, thus relating to the situation in which both producers and receivers are located during particular communications, rather than the dynamics between them.

In terms of audience activity, levels of analysis provide a useful framework for linking

context with variations in viewers' interpretation of messages. Cognitive processes include processing capability and capacity, information organisation, (e.g. Gunter, 1987), and motivational elements such as emotion, taste and desire. Situation relates to the viewing context i.e. what is being watched, why and with whom. Social position refers to structural factors such as socio-economic status, religion, race, gender and influences e.g. parents, school, peers, all of which contribute to one's knowledge, identity and perceptions. Finally, the ideological/cultural is the culture in which the communication takes place, and thus the overarching values and norms shared by those living within it. It must be emphasised that these levels are not independently complete. Doise (1986) notes that,

"analysis at each level is legitimate in its own right; one could look on each level as a filter which captures one aspect of reality while others escape. All science inevitably involves abstraction and can never capture the whole of reality. On the other hand, to restrict oneself to a single theory is always an impoverishment and it is often necessary to use complementary analyses at different levels in order to account for changes in a process described by a particular theory." (p.16)

Thus, a reconceptualization of the audience as active does not have to concentrate solely on the individual or regard the individual viewer as isolated from the rest of society. It also does not necessarily signify an abandonment of the structuring role of television on the audience's interpretation. After all, television still provides a framework within which only a certain number of interpretations can be made. My suggestion is that the levels of analysis approach offers a useful heuristic for addressing the problems levelled at contemporary audience reception research (e.g. by Ang, 1991; Corner, 1995; Hoijer, 1990; Lewis, 1991).

It is against this background that the thesis explores the nature of communication in television documentary. This study assumes some degree of audience activity, and investigates the nature of transmission and ritual communication within that context.

1.2.3 The problem

An appreciation of audience activity, in all its forms, goes hand in hand with a rejection of the traditional notion of a direct, linear transfer of information from producer to receiver.

This presents problems of both a theoretical and practical nature. From a theoretical perspective, the resulting concentration on the text/viewer relationship effectively removes the role of the author. Consequently, it is not only the author which is removed but also much of the communication context. From a practical perspective, heterogeneous audience interpretation suggests that it is not possible for a communicator to successfully communicate his/her 'message' to a mass audience.

Carey does acknowledge the potential for message transmission within the ritual approach to communication, as long as it is "within an essentially ritualistic view of communication and social order" (Carey, 1989, p.22). However, he does not elaborate on how this takes place. Whilst both the original sender-receiver model and hypodermic needle notion of effects have been discounted for legitimate reasons (e.g. Katz, 1980), one may not wish to discount at the same time the very process they were seeking to explain. Within a levels of analysis framework, if message transmission occurs "within" a ritual approach, it must occur on different levels of analysis. In mass communication message transmission concerns the relation between production and reception which I would suggest, although the relationship is mediated, is located at situational and positional levels of analysis. An appreciation of factors at situational and positional levels of analysis may accommodate the criticisms levelled at the early transmission approaches, by recognising the involvement of different elements of social context. However, an appreciation of social context alone does not necessarily explain the processes on those other levels. Each level represents a different context in which different elements and processes are prioritised. I do not wish to suggest that the levels are distinct. Indeed, as Doise (1986) emphasises in his essay on levels of analysis, although the notion of levels is useful for analytical purposes, such a separation is artificial as in reality everything is intertwined. The point is that different levels of analysis cannot be ignored. An investigation at particular levels will prioritise those levels, but must also appreciate the contribution of other levels. Thus, Carey's cultural approach is not useless to the investigation of transmission on situational and positional levels. An understanding of what goes on at the situational and positional levels would not be possible

without an appreciation of cultural factors¹. However, as the ritual approach is located at the cultural level it cannot explain the communication processes on situational and positional levels. To investigate the potential for information transmission, there is a need for a better, more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between production and reception on those levels, which appreciates the benefits and constraints of the ritual approach without collapsing levels together.

1.3 The nature of communication

1.3.1 Relating production and reception

It has been demonstrated just how difficult the concept of communication is to define because explanations of its processes, role and purpose are intertwined with particular theoretical perspectives. In this study, the purpose of the communicative interaction is taken to refer to communicating information to an audience. If this information is regarded as important for everyone to know then the concern will be with ensuring that it is understood. If it is misunderstood it is, in effect, a different piece of information. Thus the communicator will attempt to structure both the situation and the message to ensure that the intended communication is successful. Ang (1994) talks in terms of communication success and failure, arguing that failure should be the expected outcome. But, the implication is that under the right circumstances communication *can* be successful i.e. the interpretation of the receiver matches the intended meaning of the communicator. However, without an appreciation of the reception process, one can never be aware of the extent of comprehension and misunderstanding. In addition, the number of intervening social factors, relating to perspectives and context, make the black and white distinction of communication either succeeding or failing seem rather crude. Perhaps 'success' and 'failure' are not the best terms in which to analyse communication.

Communication is a two-way process and therefore requires an appreciation of the roles of

¹'Cultural factors' describe those aspects of both the structure and the content of society which are commonly known, held or appreciated e.g. widespread beliefs, representations, rituals, identity.

both producer and receiver in the transmission and *understanding* of a message. In interpersonal communication, although misinterpretation is possible and frequent (e.g. Goffman, 1971), the parties involved are typically *both* visible and audible to each other, with each being able to respond instantly to the other. In mass communication, the relationship between producer and receiver is a mediated one and consequently indirect. Therefore the cues exchanged on an interpersonal level are absent, and both parties rely on their relationship with the medium or the text rather than the other party. This could explain the concentration in previous communication research on either the relationship between the producer and the text, the text itself, or the relationship between the text and the audience. However, the consideration here is with the communication *process* from producer to audience rather than just parts of that process. Morley (1992) notes that,

"Any understandings of mass communications will be inadequate if we consider the elements of that process (production, programme, audience) in isolation from each other" (1992, p.78).

Taking this one stage further, Abercrombie states,

"Most of the larger questions concerning the social role of television can, in fact, only be tackled by considering the *interrelationship* of text, producer and audience." (1996, p.205)

This research explores television as a form of mediated communication. Hall (1980) remarks that events can only be *signified* through an aural-visual discourse, and hence are,

"subject to all the complex formal 'rules' by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a 'story' before it can become a *communicative event*." (1980:129)

It is the meanings associated with the discursive form which enable communication to take place - "through the operation of codes within the syntagmatic chain of a discourse" (Hall, 1980:128). Therefore, the suggestion is that 'reality' has to be adapted to the communicative medium in a specific way if it is to be communicated effectively. Thus the encoder's aim is a match between the codes operating at both encoding and decoding stages of the

communication process. However, neither process can be taken out of its social context, as emphasised by Hall (1980), and it is this procedure of appreciating context which complicates and undermines the idealised concept of a linear model of communication.

The importance of feedback is a vital feature of communication. If there is no knowledge of how a message is received and interpreted, it is difficult to ascertain whether it has been understood as intended. Academic media research has tended to concentrate on the relationship between either text and audience or producer and text. Broadcasting institutions concentrate on economic survival. As a result, in both cases, communication is removed from its holistic context leaving what Schlesinger (1978) described as a "missing link". This link is the relationship between producers and consumers - essentially knowledge of the audience. Whilst programme-makers feel that only production experience allows one to understand what an audience finds interesting and important, Schlesinger argues that, in practice, programme-makers make programmes for themselves. There is little attempt to assess audience opinion and comprehension, and, furthermore, it is suggested that to do so would impose intolerable restrictions on programme-makers. What is left therefore is a "relationship between production and audience based on audience satisfaction rather than the communication of meaning" (Elliot, 1972:151-2).

However, it is still unclear what information is required to establish knowledge about the audience, how it would be used and whether it *would* impose intolerable restrictions on producers. It is at this point that research concentrating on the relationship between the text and the audience becomes relevant. Certain audience research theorists e.g. Ang, Morley, Radway, would reject the goal of using audience research to effectively improve the communicative goals of producers, believing that it would reinforce the status quo rather than challenge authority. However, this view could be underestimating the activity of the audience. To understand a message is not necessarily to agree with it. The point is that producers need more knowledge not about how to control people, but about the bases of their interpretations. Studies have indicated the importance of certain 'intervening' variables which affect the way texts are received and interpreted. Morley's (1980) seminal analysis of *Nationwide* highlighted the fact that socio-economic background affects the interpretation

of meaning. Liebes & Katz (1990) and Rubin (1984), indicated the importance of the nature of viewer involvement with the text, relating this to issues of knowledge, education, reasons for watching, and expectations. Morley (1986), through an investigation of the domestic context of viewing, exposed the existence of other factors which serve to 'distract' the viewer from concentrated television watching, such as talking to other people and simultaneously performing another activity e.g. ironing. Therefore, knowledge about the audience refers to socio-economic variables, cultural and political perspectives, cognitive skills, motivations, expectations, and situational context. In short, such features of reception encompass different aspects of the notion of 'social context'.

In audience studies², all these factors are seen to affect interpretation, making it impossible for a text to have a singular fixed meaning. This is very much an 'audience' perspective. A semiotics-based analysis (e.g. Eco, 1979) would explain these variations as an inevitable result of the polysemy and plurality of texts. In other words, the differences in interpretation are prescribed by the structure of the text, rather than being purely dependent on the perspective of the receiver. However, from a communication perspective, it is interesting to consider which of the interpretations match the intentions of the communicator, and on what aspects (i.e concerning both text and reader) the various interpretations differ.

To return to the idea of cultural consensus and varying social realities, it is possible that a communicator believes a message to be fully comprehensible to all, but that his/her conception of what constitutes 'fully' and 'all' is determined by his/her positioning within the societal and contextual structure (Doise's third level). Ang (1991) discusses the problem of broadcasting institutions homogenising the audience in a particular manner. It is highly probable that the only viewers perceiving the 'correct' reading of the text will be those who possess the characteristics and aspects mistakenly assumed by broadcasters to be attributable to the audience as a whole. Consequently, if a message is to be understood in the way it was intended, knowledge, or rather assumptions, about how it will be received must be incorporated into the way it is presented, which is the reasoning behind Eco's (1979) "model

²Audience studies are also genre studies especially of soap opera and of news, hitherto neglecting other genres e.g. documentary, film, comedy.

reader". Therefore, if the communicator does not take the notion of a diverse audience into consideration and assumes that all interpretations match his/her own, then possibly the only people perceiving the 'correct' or intended reading will be those falling into the same situational and contextual categories as the communicator. Ritchie (1991) notes,

"Communicating creates relationships between what is perceived or known by one person and what is perceived or known by another; it also relies on pre-existing relationships. The receiver and originator of a message must work from some common understanding of what sorts of patterns are used to communicate and how these patterns are related to other events." (p.11)

The importance of the way information is presented is something recognised and valued within the marketing world. Advertisers, information campaigners and public relations experts implement a process described as *segmentation* (e.g. Salmon, 1989) which involves 'packaging' a product in a particular way to suit a target audience. Whilst the principle behind the process demonstrates a recognition of the need to 'know your audience', the audience categories are crude and stereotyped. These same categorisations are used by the broadcasting industry (BARB) to ascertain who is watching. However, whilst advertisers, information campaigners and public relations personnel use this information as the *basis* for campaigns, broadcasters have a more retrospective approach. Broadcasters are more interested in how many people watch as opposed to what they may gain from watching (Ang, 1991). However, if a purpose and role is to be ascribed to television, particularly the information-oriented genres, then attention should be paid to programme content and its relation to both production and reception.

To summarise the argument thus far, I have suggested that television is a phenomenon which can be analysed at cultural, positional, situational and individual levels. This particular study focuses on television as a medium of communication as well as the broader, societal expectations of television through its communication potential. Communication is social in nature, and individuals are grounded in a social context. All levels of analysis are relevant to the understanding of communication, but the study is specifically located at situational and positional levels for two main reasons. Firstly, the thesis is interested in the applicability of Carey's ritual approach to levels other than the cultural. Secondly, these two levels are more

easily accessible to the researcher. However, it is not enough to simply emphasise the social context accessed by these levels i.e. mediating factors in both production and reception. The process as a whole must also be located in a communication context. This additional sphere of influence is important as it covers producers' and viewers' perceptions about both the effects of communication on society and how it takes place. An appreciation of context in itself indicates the inadequacies of the original linear model of communication³, but, as suggested earlier, the rejection of a theory does not necessarily indicate the invalidity of the concept of transmission itself. By neglecting the wider context of communication, the focus of our attention is shifted away from the communication as a whole, concentrating, instead, on the parties involved and their interaction with the message. These interactions are important, but examining them in isolation detracts from the issue of communicating that message.

Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model represents an attempt to overcome this separation. By appreciating the contexts in which the encoding (production) and decoding (reception) processes take place, the model incorporates the situational and positional levels of analysis. Inspired by Marx's notion of the circuits of production, the model places the relationship between encoding and decoding within a cyclic rather than linear system of meaning (re)production, appreciating the dynamic nature of communication and the social and cultural context within which it takes place. However, in keeping with the anti-transmission climate, this cyclic paradigm has been criticised for collapsing back into a transmission model, with television representing a vehicle for reproducing the dominant messages within society rather than producing its own (Lewis, 1983). I would argue, though, that the criticism is more a feature of the two-dimensional representation of the process in the form of a model than of its conceptual nature. As later explained by Hall (1994), the model was not intended as a literal explanation, merely a structural template. Indeed the model is used within this thesis as a structural template. It provides a starting point and a guide to the investigation of the transmission of communication within a ritually structured society. The final chapter elaborates the contribution this thesis makes to the development

³i.e. that mediating factors relating to production, reception and communication contexts create problems for the direct transfer of information.

of Hall's original encoding/decoding model.

1.3.2 The medium and the genre

The above discussion outlines the theoretical background of this particular research project. This next section explains why television, and specifically the television documentary genre, are appropriate vehicles through which to investigate the theoretical problem posed.

There are two concepts to discuss here - medium, in this case, television, and genre, in this case, documentary. During this century, the television has emerged as the most widespread and widely used medium of mass communication, with huge potential for informing a large number of people. The ability simultaneously to combine the visual image and the spoken word into a form readily and instantaneously received by a vast percentage of the population truly exemplifies the term *mass communication*. The importance of television can be broadly split into four areas:- individual value, societal value, cultural value and practical value. Its value on an individual level is to the people watching or *using* the medium, which maps, to a certain extent, on to Doise's intrapersonal level. Societal value concerns assumptions about the *effect* such a medium has on its recipients, both interpersonally and collectively, and its consequent function or purpose within society - hence covering both the interpersonal/situational and positional levels. Its cultural value will be its contribution to and significance in cultural beliefs and values - the ideological level. Finally, television's practical value is to those with something to communicate, i.e. providing an effective platform for broadcasters seeking as large an audience as possible for their programmes.

Mulgan (1994) describes the purpose of television as,

"...for entertainment, for enlightenment, for the creation of citizens or whole persons, for making profits, for sustaining the cultural capital of dominant classes, for uncovering the true natures of society and everyday life, or for preserving the morality and cohesion of the community..." (p.112)

Thus, the television is an appropriate medium for three main reasons. It facilitates mass communication. It accesses multiple levels of analysis. Assumptions about its function will depend on who is using it, in what way and for what purpose, which is potentially problematic for the relation between encoding and decoding.

The documentary is a specific media genre. A genre is a particular type of text distinguished by its predominant characteristics (Dubrow, 1982). However, the definition of genre goes beyond aesthetic appearance to assumptions about how a text should be used, thus affecting how it is both read and understood (Hirsch, 1967). In other words, these genre conventions act as - "a communication from the writer to his readers" (Dubrow, 1982, p.31). However, at the same time, the reader brings certain expectations to the text, which have been acquired from previous experiences with the genre and are used to evaluate it. Consequently,

"Genre conventions can be looked upon as rules for the communicative interaction associated with composition, propagation, and reception which is rooted in the socio-cultural context" (Würzbach, 1983, p.65)

These quotes illustrate the relevance and importance of both producers' and readers' assumptions about a genre, its conventions, and its purpose to mass communication. These expectations and assumptions about a genre form part of the social context in which communication takes place.

The documentary is a genre associated with information communication⁴. Although varied in content, it is predominantly concerned with imparting information into the public domain (e.g. Blumler, 1970; Rosenthal, 1988). Such information is deemed to be in the public interest and hence is almost a form of "national education" (Grierson in Hardy, ed., 1979). Corner (1986) describes the genre as an attempt,

"to 'document' real events and circumstances through mechanically recorded images" (1986: vii)

Whilst documentary exists on radio as well as television, it is the television documentary which, for many people, is seen as an important source of information on social, political and scientific affairs (e.g. Roscoe & Hight, 1997). Documentaries contribute significantly to the 'factual' output of a broadcasting organisation, making up a large part of the 'serious' programming quota. There is a constant concern amongst broadcasting regulators and

⁴There is a more in-depth discussion of the definition of documentary in Chapter 2.

controllers over the number of hours of factual programming and the quality of that programming. The documentary is a genre which is seen to raise the 'quality' of a channel. Quality is a key concept in broadcasting, and factual programmes were one of five compulsory programme categories identified by the ITC (along with news, regional, religious and children's programmes) as fundamental to their notion of a quality threshold⁵. This implies that factual programming, including documentaries, is commonly regarded as responsible broadcasting, treated with trust and respect. Paradoxically, this attribution of trust and respect also makes television documentary programmes a controversial issue in the relation between politics and broadcasting. They are cited in debates over television quality (e.g. Corner et al, 1993), the existence of political bias (e.g. Bolton, 1986), and as pawns in the conflict between public service and market models of broadcasting (e.g. Goodwin, 1992). Given the apparent high regard for documentary, institutions are concerned about what is broadcast, how, and with what effect.

1.3.3 Communicating information through the television documentary

If the establishment objects to the screening of a documentary, it implies a presumption that viewers will accept and internalise the views of the programme, presenting a threat to the status quo and the normative structure of society. This apprehension suggests a belief in a linear model of communication and, effectively, a passive audience. The genre is therefore representative of certain assumptions surrounding the function, structure and content of communication in certain contexts. The irony is, however, that the documentary is a relatively understudied genre, hence knowledge about how it *is* regarded and interpreted is scant. With such assumptions, responsibilities and decisions resting on its status, it is of vital importance that its 'effects' are investigated. The previous section outlined some of the assumptions associated with the television documentary genre. This section addresses these in more detail, exploring the underlying concepts and implications.

⁵In February 1991, the ITC published a set of formal guidelines, the *Invitation to Apply for Regional Channel 3 Licences*, including programming standards, in order to comply with the 1990 Broadcasting Act. It required bidders to 'appeal to a wide variety of tastes and interests' and to devote a 'sufficient amount of time' to 'high quality' programmes.

Anxieties about content and effects demonstrate the contribution of the documentary to an analysis of communication at a *societal* level (Doise's situational and positional levels of analysis). They relate to the function of the documentary in a more abstract manner, hence detracting attention from the content and intentions of specific programmes. However, assumptions at the 'macro' societal level must bear some relation to assumptions at a 'micro' individual level. This effectively demands a strong element of information and/or education in individual programmes. It is at this point that difficulties begin to set in. Such a reduction positions the programme-maker as an informer and educator. The programme-maker may see him/herself in this role, bringing important information to the attention of the public. However, their perception of vital knowledge, and indeed 'the truth', may not be shared by others. These clashes explain why certain programmes are debated, criticised and even banned (e.g. *Edge of the Union*). Consequently, to a certain extent, the programmes which are 'allowed' to be broadcast have to conform to criteria set by particular 'gatekeepers' (e.g. Lang, 1989). Those gatekeepers can be seen directly as the broadcasting management, but perhaps indirectly as society's institutional power-based elites including the government and the legal system.

There is a contradiction between different conceptions of what is valuable knowledge. A propaganda model of the media (e.g. Herman & Chomsky, 1988) would explain the promotion of certain knowledge as the imposition of a certain structure by those in power in order to favour those in power. An alternative explanation relates to perceptions and conceptions of objectivity (e.g. Lichtenberg, 1991). Abramson (1990), in an essay discussing the ethics of the press, sees objectivity as

"a commitment to telling the truth" (p.251)

However, the way the 'truth' is told reflects how it is being defined. News and current affairs broadcasting appears to equate the notions of objectivity and truth, and strives to achieve this ideal through certain journalistic practices (Tuchman, 1972). However, whilst certain techniques (e.g. presenting conflicting possibilities; presenting supporting evidence) may create an impression of impartiality and neutrality, they do not necessarily provide sufficient

'protection' from both the subjectivity of journalists and societal biases represented by and interpreted through the material. The regular confusion of the concepts of impartiality, neutrality and objectivity has been carefully examined (Lichtenberg, 1996). Thus, despite the efforts of broadcasters, mass-mediated information is likely to be 'biased' in some manner. The question is whether 'biased' information still constitutes education. It is necessary to examine the notion of unbiased information, or 'fact', more closely to understand its importance to the documentary genre⁶.

Much rests on accepting the notion of the unbiased nature of fact. Paget (1990) regards the association of facts with truth as one of the most treasured myths of the twentieth century. He goes on to argue that:

"The documentary has always had such an apparently obvious 'purpose' that audiences have been persuaded to take its objectivity 'for granted'....The phenomenon of 'objective information' is itself a hegemonic myth, designed to anchor populations in a unified view of the world." (p.19)

Whether or not a 'fact' is regarded as biased depends largely on its origin. It cannot simply be based on the impartiality and neutrality of a broadcaster. One example is the use of scientific research as evidence for certain governmental policy decisions. The widespread representation of science is one of authority, objectivity, and empirical truth. Research is accepted as valid, without knowledge of the huge amount of disagreement and debate within the scientific community itself (e.g. Hilgartner, 1990). Merton (1968) claims that the communication of scientific information actually *conceals* the process of investigation, so exaggerating the rational aspects of the work. In short, in common with the criticisms of journalistic practice, objectivity is perhaps inappropriately used to authenticate certain material and hence permit its access to the world of unquestioned and conclusive information. Similarly, in programme making, certain conventions, e.g. the use of expert witnesses; the presentation of opposing viewpoints, are used to create the illusion of objectivity, whilst masking the inevitable selection processes that are involved in the making of a programme.

⁶This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, section 2.4.3.

Alongside the problem of the origin of facts is the manner in which they are interpreted - thus returning to the concept of the active audience. Following the work of researchers such as Morley (1980), Liebes and Katz (1990) and Rubin (1984), a viewer's social context (i.e. his/her background, surroundings, identity, cognitive ability, perceptions) interacts with the text and subsequently undermines notions of both a linear transfer of information and the rigid attribution of a singular meaning to a text. A multiplicity of meanings also suggests the existence of multiple perspectives negotiated through social 'positioning'. The existence of different perspectives on or interpretations of information contradicts claims to its objectivity. If meaning depends on a negotiated interaction between the reader and the text, then believing the information presented will depend on the balance between an audience's conception of what constitutes objective and true information, i.e. how it is established and what it relates to, and how their own social positioning, i.e. context, background and perspectives, affects interpretation. Therefore, regarding the information as 'true' will depend on how far the viewer's interpretation of it conforms with his/her conception of objectivity.

Graber's (1984) study of news processing highlighted how message factors and contextual factors affect the selection and rejection of news items for processing. Although objectivity is not openly 'tested', she established, for instance, that items which appear staged, i.e. giving an "air of watching a 'show' rather than reality" (p.104), have less of an impact on the audience than those seen as unmediated reality, and thus 'the truth'. Much also depends on the audience's prior knowledge of the issues (e.g. Philo, 1993). Therefore, the assessment and acceptance of 'facts' is highly dependent upon social processes (e.g. Shibusaw, 1955). To apply this reasoning to the documentary, whilst a programme may employ certain techniques as a supposed guarantee of objective content, it will not necessarily protect it from the more fundamental societal biases which determine what is and is not deemed 'true' (e.g. Paget, 1990). Paget (1990) outlines two traditions of documentary - the liberal/conservative and the radical/revolutionary. The former tends to view facts and information as objective, bias-free, and equivalent to truth while the latter recognises that facts and information are never value-free and that the audience understands the notion of mediation. The fundamental question therefore is whether an audience holds the former or the latter perspective on documentary as this will significantly affect the way programme content is interpreted.

Perceptions and conceptions of objectivity illustrate one way in which the documentary is a suitable case for examining the problem of information communication. They also relate to discrepancies in theoretical approaches to the communication process, namely, given the probability of multiple interpretations, the lack of information about the audience (e.g. Elliott, 1972; Schlesinger, 1978). One of the reasons behind choosing television as the medium of communication is to broadcast one's message or information to as wide an audience as possible (Keane, 1991). If the objective of a programme maker is to make as many people as possible aware of what he/she has to say, then obviously that programme maker will want the audience to *understand* what it is he/she has to say in the way it was *intended* to be understood. However, the question remains as to whether the assumptions of broadcasters (and those concerned about programmes effects, e.g. the government and the legal system) about the nature of communication are accurate. The revelations of audience research cast doubt over the successful achievement of their objectives without a more in-depth knowledge of the audience. The issue of knowledge of the audience raises additional questions, as posed by Graber (1984). Is the process of tailoring information to the audience's knowledge and desires an aid or a hindrance to communication? Should broadcasters be taking their lead from the audience rather than embracing the traditional paternalistic public service notion of providing the audience with what the broadcasting establishment feels they need to know?

1.4 The importance of documentary communication

It has been argued that the television documentary genre can act as a useful springboard to explore the theoretical issues under review. As well as the academic study of communication, this thesis has implications for the practical relation between broadcasting and society. Researching documentary is one way of exploring the function of television in society, hence accessing wider debates on public service broadcasting and the relationship between television and democracy. From an academic perspective, it deals with the issue of communication in television documentary - an appropriate and relatively unresearched television genre. The theoretical problems of mass communication and its relation to

documentary have already been discussed. The next section expands on the function of television in society, examining documentary communication in relation to issues of democracy and public service broadcasting.

1.4.1 Documentary, democracy and public service broadcasting

In Britain, the *value* of television to individuals, society and culture has traditionally been linked with the concept of public service broadcasting (Blumler, 1993). Although public service broadcasting is explicitly and overtly linked with the BBC, its ethos effectively underwrites the whole of the British broadcasting system (see Chapter 2). Thus, the interest here is the link between the television documentary and *principles* of public service broadcasting, rather than particular broadcasting channels. This discussion explores the meaning of the concept, why it is deemed 'good' for individuals, society, and culture, and why the documentary is considered a contributory factor.

Avery (1993) defines the principles behind public service broadcasting as,

"universality of service, diversity of programming, provision for minorities and the disadvantaged, sustaining an informed electorate, and cultural and educational enrichment." (p.xiii)

As mentioned above, Blumler (1993) describes how, despite the fact that the BBC is explicitly a public service broadcaster, the British broadcasting system *as a whole* is based on a commitment to public service. Following the philosophy of John Reith⁷, the emphasis is on television which "should positively enhance the quality of life" (p.2). The audience is seen as a "set of publics" with "overlapping tastes and interests" (p.3), and the material should not only entertain, but also occasionally,

"stretch their minds and horizons, awaken them to less familiar values and tastes in culture and art and science, and challenge their uncritically accepted assumptions about life, morality, and society." (p.3)

⁷Director General of the BBC from 1926-1938.

In practical broadcasting policy terms, this has been translated into five central requisites: a comprehensive remit; programme range and balance; universal provision; editorial independence; and public accountability (Blumler, 1993). These requirements correspond with Scannell's (1989) view of what public service broadcasting should represent, and why it is worth preserving. He believes such a television system gives citizens greater access to public life and aids the conversion of political discourse into common, everyday discourse, thus demystifying the political process and providing a public forum for debate. Thus, Scannell is linking public service with democratic principles. In his essay, "Public service broadcasting and modern life", he concludes:

"In my view equal access for all to a wide and varied range of common informational, entertainment and cultural services, carried on channels that can be received throughout the country, should be thought of as an important citizenship right in mass democratic societies. It is a crucial means - perhaps the only one present - whereby common knowledge and pleasures in a shared public life are maintained as a social good for the whole population." (p.164)

However, television, and indeed mass media, is not viewed in such a democratic way by all. At the other extreme, Habermas (e.g. 1989), for instance, claims the mass media has *limited* people's access to the public arena. His argument is based on the role of rationality. He believes that a rational will is formed through insights and arguments between people, culminating in generalizable interests which transcend the particular interests of those competing groups and individuals. He believes that contemporary society has undergone various shifts of power. It is possible that these changes have occurred partly through rational debate and consensus, although the participants reaching that consensus are widely seen as an elite rather than as a representative section of the public. However, with the increasing modernization and development towards the end of this century, Habermas sees a deepening *irrationality* as opposed to rationality, and attributes it in part to the manipulation of public opinion by the mass media. The media are a player in the 'system's' management of politics, and the population has developed into "the object rather than the subject of politics"⁸. Thus, rather than expanding the public sphere, the mass media have

⁸in Pusey, M. (1993). p.90.

only served to diminish it. In the same vein, the critical school (e.g. Hall et al., 1980), drawing on the work of theorists such as Gramsci, sees television not as a democratic 'liberator' for the public, but as a "repressive ideological apparatus" which serves,

"to produce a social and political consensus that confirms the dominance of existing economic and political institutions and processes, and of existing structures of class, gender and ethnic relations in capitalist societies."
(Scannell, 1989, on Hall)

Whether television is or is not a democratic aid in reality is a bigger question than can be addressed here. However, the guidelines set down by the British broadcasting institutions correspond to the public service ideal. Whilst the public service requisites apply to the broadcasting system as a whole, two in particular can be directly related to the documentary genre - universal provision and editorial independence.

In the early 1950's, the television documentary was seen as innovative as it dealt with *real* social problems from the perspective of the audience (Bell, 1986). Paul Rotha, the then head of documentaries at the BBC, envisaged a 'social responsibility' function for the documentary as television could potentially reach a mass audience. This, of course, assumes an acceptance of their credibility. Indeed, Bell (1986) notes,

"The success of a documentary programme - how far the audience was likely to accept it as 'being true' - depended more on the skill with which a programme used contrivances to conceal its necessary contrived nature than on the development of techniques enabling the camera to relay more and better pictures from more varied locations." (p.76)

Consequently, credibility is regarded as a function of the construction and presentation of information rather than of audience interpretation. Nonetheless, the point is that in reaching members of the public simultaneously, the documentary is uniting people and helping to create "the informed democracy which could provide a more just and humane society" (Bell, 1986, p.79). It, therefore, fulfils Blumler's requisite of universal provision, and Scannell's public service ideal of uniting and involving the country's citizens. However, documentaries are watched by the minority, and, given the lack of knowledge about the documentary

audience, research is needed to ascertain just how informative they really are.

The public service requisite of editorial independence ties in with Paget's (1990) liberal/conservative tradition of documentary, i.e. conveying objective, value-free and thus true information. A documentary therefore must not be perceived by its audience as advocating any one particular position at the expense of others. This echoes the democratic principle of allowing all perspectives to be equally heard, rather than opinions being controlled or suppressed by the ruling or dominant power. Thus the documentarist is merely an independent mediator for the expression of these perspectives. However, as argued forcefully by Barnouw (1993), the concept of the 'objective documentary' is absurd. All documentarists make choices and decisions concerning topic, people, vistas, angles, lenses, juxtapositions, sounds and words, each of which signify a point of view. Claiming that these choices are objective merely signifies a belief in their validity. That is not to say that the documentary is 'undemocratic':

"A documentary cannot be 'the truth'. It is evidence, testimony. Diverse testimony is the heart of democratic processes." (Barnouw, 1993, p.345)

Therefore, in the same way that Hallin (1993) calls for a reversion to a more subjective, critical and analytical approach to the news, the documentary genre should be recognised and appreciated not for what it is trying to be, but for what it actually is and the democratic contribution it can consequently make. It is possible that this preoccupation with objectivity is not equally attributable to all programmes falling under the 'documentary' banner. Its relevance may vary depending on how controversial the subject matter is.

Broadcasters have to rely on certain assumptions about the audience for the documentary to fulfil both their public service remit and the documentary's democratic potential. They assume that their programmes attract a fairly substantial and varied audience, that their conception of objectivity matches that of the audience, and that subsequently the material portrayed is perceived as credible. Thus, rather than manipulative, partisan propaganda, they assume that their programme is informative, educational and entertaining. Effectively, broadcasters are assuming that a programme will be interpreted as intended. Questioning

these assumptions is tantamount to questioning public service broadcasting itself. However, it is not the theory or aims of public service broadcasting that would be undermined, but the 'tools' that are presently assumed to provide it. With so much dependent on these assumptions i.e. information; education; entertainment; public service; democracy; and communication, it is vital that they are tested.

1.5 Research objectives and implications

The principal objective of this research is to investigate the production and reception of documentary programmes, both independently and in relation to each other. It will advance our understanding of not only *what* is happening, but, perhaps more significantly, *why* it happens and under what circumstances. From an academic perspective, the research will extend genre-based audience research to an under-researched genre - the documentary. Alongside the reception issues of social and cultural context are issues relating specifically to the genre, namely viewers' conceptions and perceptions of objectivity, truth and credibility - all variables which can potentially affect audience interpretation. On the production side, the research will provide an insight into lay theories of communication and persuasion and, more importantly, the nature of mass communication in a *practical* broadcasting context. It is the comparison between production and reception which will indicate how far the documentary achieves what it hopes, or is believed, to achieve. Furthermore, in the context of the thesis's theoretical framework, whether information transmission is possible on situational and positional levels within a ritual approach to mass communication.

The results of the study potentially have wider implications for the field of audience research, beyond the documentary genre itself. As has already been noted, genre-based audience research is prolific, yet concentrated around a small number of genres i.e. news, soap opera and scattered other studies. The documentary has been neglected, hence the necessity of studies such as the present one. However, if the research does indeed reveal that audiences are heavily influenced by factors closely related to the genre itself e.g. perceptions of

objectivity, truth and credibility, then one wonders how valid it is to undertake this type of research as a means of establishing or refining a more general theory of audience interpretation. In other words, is the relationship between programme genre and audience interpretation too close or is audience interpretation too dependent on and interlinked with the object of interpretation to enable universal 'facts' about the process of interpretation to emerge? The idea of establishing general features of audience interpretation, i.e. across genres, either removes or ignores the generic and situational context of that interpretation. In this particular case, to do so would contradict the theoretical framework of this research as it implies using data obtained on situational and positional levels of analysis to explain events on the cultural/ideological level, thus collapsing levels. However, that is not to say that this study cannot be of any use to audience research. Indeed where it can be illuminating is precisely for the levels on which it *is* located i.e. situational and positional. Consequently, rather than the results being taken as representative of general audience interpretation, thus collapsing levels of analysis, they can be seen as a means of testing certain assumptions about how and why interpretation takes place on *particular* levels of analysis. The major assumption based on previous audience research is that interpretations will vary in accordance with the situational and positional context of audiences. The question is whether this variance is significant, and if so, whether situational and/or positional links can be made between the producer and that audience sector sharing an interpretation assumed by the producer to be shared by the whole audience. If this is the case, one can then investigate which aspects of the communication may be influential. The results of this study will have potential implications for a number of theoretical dichotomies alluded to earlier in the chapter. Firstly, there is the continuing debate over the relative influence of text and audience in interpretation. In keeping with the theoretical position proposed, this debate concerns the balance between the two in the context of a particular genre. It would be naive to assume a definitive decision one way or the other. However, if variations in interpretation exist, one can then investigate the contribution of 'genre factors' to those differences i.e. perceptions of the genre; structure of the programme; content of the programme etc. If variations in interpretation are negligible then it could be suggested either that the text is dominant in determining interpretation, or that the content and structure of the message itself does not exploit any comprehension and/or knowledge differences amongst the audience.

In accordance with the analytical levels on which the study is based, such an outcome could suggest the existence of a widespread representation of the genre which becomes the dominant factor affecting programme interpretation. It thus follows that programmes will commonly be seen either to conform or not to conform to this requirement. Approaching the documentary in terms of a medium of communication rather than merely as a means of investigating audience interpretation, both acknowledges and, hypothetically, reinstates the author of the text. The notion of the author is not a popular one in contemporary audience research probably due to connotations both of a linear model of communication and of the manipulation of passive audiences. It is not so peculiar to combine multiple interpretations with the acknowledgement of an author. A comparable association is pronounced by reader-response theorists such as Eco and Iser. However, Eco (1979) still specifies that the author of an open text allows for multiple interpretations within the text, and Iser (1978) claims that the interpretations bear no relation to the author. Therefore, different reader-response theories still emphasise either the text or the viewer in the construction of meaning. With an acknowledgement of the influences and factors on either side, this study aims to understand the balance between the text and its reception in the television documentary.

In terms of Carey's opposition between transmission and ritual models of communication, this study proposes a theoretical perspective which could incorporate transmission within a ritual view of society. However, it does necessitate slightly different definitions of both the terms 'transmission' and 'ritual'. Transmission can be described as a process in which a 'sender' disseminates his/her 'message' into the public domain which is then interpreted in some way by 'receivers'. Thus it refers to a process rather than specifying the exact content of the 'message' at each stage of that process. It is the ritual nature of communication within society which determines interpretation. Factors highlighted as influential in the interpretation of texts can be commonly shared in the form of a representation e.g. genre conventions. They can also be positionally determined e.g. the interaction of social background, opinion and issue salience, where social background refers to the different identity groups in society differentiated on the basis of gender, class, socio-economic status, religion etc. That identity and representations are shared corresponds to the ritual view of communication. However, although the ritual approach works on a cultural level and does

not appear to acknowledge the differences between groups on positional and situational levels, it incorporates the social and cultural context and those aspects which may be shared on any level of analysis.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter highlights the need to reconcile theoretical approaches to mass communication, research on the active audience and the concept of information transmission. The television documentary not only exemplifies this problem, but serves as a useful case study raising interesting issues of its own. Emphasis is placed on the role of social context in communication. With this in mind, a levels of analysis framework is proposed as the best way of approaching and understanding the various factors contributing to the nature of communication in television documentary.

CHAPTER 2

DISCUSSING DOCUMENTARY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Outline

Chapter 1 places the thesis in its general theoretical context by examining and combining approaches to communication and audience research. It explains the reasons for choosing the television documentary as an appropriate genre through which to investigate this theoretical issue. This chapter looks more specifically at the research literature on the documentary itself, and assesses it in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis. The first section explores the origins and development of television documentary, thus placing it in a historical context. The discussion is brought up to date with an examination of the structure and organisation of the British television documentary industry today. This is followed by an analysis of the various theoretical issues surrounding documentary including its definition, relation to reality, objectivity and credibility. The last section critically assesses the empirical studies of audiences already conducted in this area, evaluating their findings in relation to the proposed theoretical perspective. The chapter concludes with a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the research literature to date, outlining the gaps which the thesis will fill, and the theoretical advancements it will subsequently make.

2.2 The origins and development of television documentary

The documentary film was originally the preserve of the cinema, existing long before the arrival of television. Many of the pioneers of the documentary film-making style worked in the first half of this century, making films predominantly for the cinema. Different perceptions of the definition and role of documentary existed from as early as the 1930s. Waldron (1949) identifies three approaches: documentary film as art - the 'aesthetes'; documentary as social reality - the 'documentarists'; and documentary as educator. The tensions between these aspirations, and the attempts to resolve them arguably characterise the development of the genre (e.g. Corner, 1995). Three individuals were particularly

influential, and each accorded documentary a different role. Robert Flaherty is considered the forefather of ethnographic film (Barnouw, 1993). His work is exemplified by the seminal "Nanook of the North" which documents the lives of a group of Inuit Eskimos. Films of this sort were concerned solely with the recording and observation of people removed from our everyday existence. Dziga Vertov, a Polish/Russian filmmaker working during the first world war, is generally regarded as the pioneer of films in which the documentarist acts as a reporter (Barnouw, 1993). John Grierson initiated the social, democratic function of documentary by turning the camera onto our own rather than a remote society. He believed in,

“..the power of information as social cement” (Paget, 1990, p.13)

and used documentary as the medium to communicate this information, transcending social, regional and economic differences to create harmony (e.g. Rosen, 1993). Furthermore,

“Within the perspective of Grierson's brand of social democratic politics, documentary films were to be given the function of providing the public with something akin to a regularly updated 'civic education' programme. Through this, citizens would be better equipped to participate in a rapidly changing, industrialized democracy thought to be displaying increased enthusiasm for efficiency and greater equality.” (Corner, 1986, p. ix)

However, the sociological motivation behind Grierson's film-making has recently been questioned (Winston, 1995). Winston argues that the size of audiences watching Grierson's films was never large enough to realise these social and democratic aims and that Grierson's real priority was actually film-making.

The development of the documentary coincides significantly with the progression of technology, which includes the advancement of the equipment used in the making of documentary films and, of course, the growth of television. The fundamental job of the equipment used in film-making is to record. Corner (1986) notes that the act of recording reproduces a likeness, thus creating an independent existence for that which is recorded. Winston (1995) explains how this process of recording creates the illusion of documentary

as almost unimpeachable:

“Watching 'actuality' on the screen is like watching the needles dance on the physiograph: the apparatus becomes transparent; the documentary becomes scientific inscription - evidence.” (p.137)

Thus, the documentary camera apparently ensures direct access to the truth as the mediation is technical as opposed to human¹. In order to preserve this claim to objectivity, the camera had to remain invisible, hence the development of smaller equipment. The introduction of lighter equipment in the 1950s made intimate observation possible and initiated a unique style of documentary in which filmmakers are merely observers. Vaughan (1976) argues that the development of 16mm lightweight cameras gave a new authenticity to private experience, allowing the documentary to operate on a level other than the sociological.

Television began to replace cinema as the main medium of mass communication. As an advocate of mass education and communication, Grierson was instrumental in the transition of documentary from cinema to television (Macdonald, 1978). A cynical view attributes the move to documentary's failure to find a niche in the cinema where it was attracting relatively small audiences (Winston, 1995). However, if Grierson's aim was mass education then the logical step would be to move to a medium with a broader reach. The expansion of documentary to television was further hastened by the advent of new equipment.

“Documentary was obliged to re-define itself in relation to a new social ambience - new management structures and new assumptions about audiences - at the same time as it was defining itself in relation to new technical possibilities, and for the same reasons.” (Vaughan, 1976, p.2)

Paul Rota, a former documentarist who was appointed head of documentaries at the BBC in 1953, shared Grierson's belief in the social responsibility of documentary. The ability of television to realise this function is echoed by Bakewell and Garnham (1970):

“It is in the field of informational TV that the questions of function and public

¹This assumption will be examined later in the chapter.

service responsibility become most acute. There is a traditional and largely unquestioned assumption that journalism is a necessary estate of the realm in a properly functioning democracy. The more complex our society becomes, the greater the need for clear channels of communication by which information can be transmitted; information without which society would simply cease to function at all. Television is clearly growing in importance as one of those channels.” (p.295-6)

Thus the documentary dealt with 'social' as opposed to 'political' issues, tackling problems from the point of view of the audience. However, although the issues may be from the audience's point of view, the assumptions about communication are not. The quote clearly indicates the idea of a linear transfer of information and its corresponding effects.

Nevertheless, television documentary began to be seen as innovative compared to other media e.g. theatre (Bell, 1986), as it dealt with real social problems. Then, in 1955, commercial television emerged, provoking, in retrospect, both negative and positive responses. On the negative side, Bell (1986) argues that television documentary was never again able to regain the energy and faith of the early years. Vaughan (1976) cites the way documentary producers subsequently responded to the needs of television as the beginnings of the demise of documentary. He describes the late 1960s and 1970s as a period of lethargy in which there was a decline in the pace of creativity and an obsession with the pursuit of atmosphere. On the positive side, however, the technology did continue to develop. The 1970s saw the emergence of videotape and video recorders enabling individuals to make their own films:

“Some observers saw the documentary as entering an era of broad participation and wider, freer use. Others suggested that techniques of surveillance and control would multiply as rapidly as media technology.” (Barnouw, 1993, p.288)

Barnouw (1993) argues that the documentary has consistently grown in stature since the 1970s, and charts the emergence of several subgenres such as: 'the overview', which looks back over a long period of time e.g. David Attenborough's *Life on Earth*; 'the compilation of archive footage', which aids a reinterpretation of the past; and 'the biography' e.g. Granada TV's 7-up series.

The 1990s mark the increasing influence of the forces of commercialisation i.e. mergers, dependence on advertising etc., on both the commercial and public sectors. Barnouw (1993) describes the impact of this on documentary making in the United States:

“Such pressures tended to make networks, especially commercial networks, inhospitable to documentaries not considered 'mainstream'" (p.340)

In Britain, the outcome of the 1990 Broadcasting Act was the auction of regional franchises, with licences awarded to companies offering the highest bid and a remit fitting the requirements of the Independent Television Commission. The appointment of John Birt as director-general of the BBC in 1992 heralded the start of major changes within the organisation. A series of cost-cutting measures were introduced, defended by those in BBC management as efficiency drives, but criticised by many as cuts in minority audience areas, e.g. documentary, based on a desire to remain commercially competitive.

The documentary has always featured a combination of the intentions of the people making it and the influences of the context in which it is shown. Television documentary today carries the legacy of the documentarists of the past, the intentions of contemporary filmmakers, and the pressures and influences of the context within which it now exists. The next section examines one aspect of this context - the structure and organisation of today's television documentary industry.

2.3 The British television documentary industry

The British documentary is regarded as prestigious, with producers seeing themselves as heirs to two traditions - public service broadcasting and documentary film-making (Tunstall, 1993). Documentaries appear on television either in the form of strands, short series or one-off programmes. A strand is a series of programmes under one title which occupies a particular slot in the schedules. Each strand is controlled by a commissioning editor who, with the approval of the channel controller, decides which programmes will fill the slots and then oversees the production of those programmes. The British terrestrial television industry

is essentially split into five sections - the BBC, ITV, Channel Four, Channel Five and the independent production companies. The five terrestrial channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel Four, Channel Five) together provide about twenty hours of documentary a week (Tunstall, 1993²). Each of the five sections has a different constitution and mode of operation, and the structure and organisation of the documentary industry is characterised by its position within these distinct sections.

The BBC is a public service organisation housing two channels - BBC1 and BBC2. The organisation's brand of public service broadcasting is based on the principles of information, education and entertainment, as laid down by the original director-general, John Reith. Funding is obtained through a licence fee which is set by the government and payable by the viewers. In order to secure the required amount of money for quality programme-making, the BBC has to prove to the government that it is fulfilling its commitment to the tenets of public service and adequately serving the whole public. Up until a few years ago, all aspects of production were carried out in-house. However, with the introduction of 'producer choice', producers are now able to use the staff and equipment of their choice from inside or outside the BBC rather than automatically being assigned a BBC crew, provided the cost is within their individually allotted budget. The television production side of the BBC is divided into a number of departments each responsible for programming in a different area. Documentaries are produced in the 'Documentary and Features' department, although it is possible that some of the products of other departments also qualify as documentaries³. It is, however, a useful guide to the BBC's 'institutional' definition of documentary. Some of the main BBC documentary strands are *Everyman*, *Fine Cut*, *Horizon*, *Inside Story*, *Modern Times* and *Under the Sun*, the majority of which are on BBC2. Other strands not made in the documentary department, but which arguably are also seen as documentary include *Panorama* (BBC1) and *First Sight* (BBC2). Other documentary programmes and series exist but are not so eternal e.g. *Children's Hospital*. Producers working within the BBC

²Although this observation was made in 1993, it still appears to be applicable.

³For example *Panorama*, the current affairs strand produced in the 'News and Current Affairs' department.

continually work on programme ideas, presenting them to the most appropriate commissioning editor until one is accepted. However, not all programmes are made by BBC staff. Since the Birtian reorganisation, 25% of programmes have to be commissioned from outside the BBC. Each strand has its own particular remit to fulfil, together with a responsibility to satisfy the requirements of public service broadcasting. The details and implications of this for producers and commissioning editors are discussed in Chapter 4.

The ITV network is made up of a number of companies holding regional licences, all of which are coordinated by a central London-based body. The output is partly national - controlled by Network Centre, and partly regional - controlled by the regional licence-holder. The regional companies commission from independent production companies. The national programme editors commission from independent companies including the regional licence-holders. ITV obtains its funding through advertising. Consequently the channel has to attract particular audience sizes and composition if it is to retain the interest of advertisers. ITV's output is monitored by the Independent Television Commission (ITC), an independent watchdog which ensures that the licence-winning companies maintain their production promises. *Network First* is the only national documentary strand on ITV⁴, although there is also a slot for one-off documentary series e.g. "Hollywood Women".

Channel Four is essentially a commissioning house. The television production side is divided up into different departments, like the BBC, each of which are responsible for the programmes in that area. Like ITV, Channel Four is an independent channel which supports itself through advertising revenue. However, Channel Four is not split up according to region⁵, and has a specific remit to cater for minority tastes and interests. There are three distinct documentary strands, *Cutting Edge*, *Dispatches* and *True Stories*, along with several other one-off series, programmes and seasons. The various commissioning editors choose their programmes from a number of proposals or 'treatments' sent in by independent production companies.

⁴*World in Action* qualifies as 'News and Current Affairs'.

⁵Except for Wales which has its own fourth channel.

Channel Five began broadcasting in April 1997 and is available to nearly 80% of the population. It is the only terrestrial television station which is also available on satellite and its remit is to compete for the mass audiences of BBC1 and ITV. Channel Five operates as a commissioning house in much the same way as Channel Four. There are no specific documentary strands currently broadcast on Channel Five, although they do show one-off documentary programmes e.g. *The Real Monty*.

The BBC, ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five all commission in varying degrees from outside their own company. The recipients of this business are independent production companies whose central objective is to produce and sell programmes. A producer formulates an idea for a programme, researches the issues, draws up a treatment explaining how the programme would run and how much it would cost, and then sends it to the commissioning editor/programme thought most likely to accept it. However, the number of independent companies specialising in documentary is huge⁶ making the competition to obtain commissions very strong. Companies need work to survive financially, which means that often they have to diversify into other non-interest areas in order to bring in revenue. The problems and dilemmas of independent producers are pursued in more depth in Chapter 4.

The British broadcasting map also includes satellite and cable television channels and radio. The non-terrestrial television channels tend to be content-specific, i.e. sport, film, news etc., with one channel devoted exclusively to documentary - "The Discovery Channel". However, although the thesis uses television documentary as its field of investigation, my direct focus is terrestrial television documentary. The underlying focus of the thesis is mass communication, and television is selected as the appropriate medium because of its wide reach and use. Satellite and cable channels do not yet have the same sort of mass penetration as terrestrial television channels⁷ and therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, do not qualify

⁶The 1996 PACT handbook lists almost 300 companies specializing in Current Affairs/ Documentary.

⁷In 1996, 17% of British homes had satellite and 10% had cable - although there was a 22.4% take up of cable in cabled areas (Source: TBI).

as appropriate vehicles of mass communication. There are also documentaries on the radio. However, once again, the radio does not have the same widespread uptake as television⁸.

There are certain questions looming over the effect of changes in the industry on documentary. The most pertinent is the conflict between public service and commercial success, which is embodied by the issue of funding. Compared to soap opera, sitcoms, game shows and a lot of drama, documentaries are expensive to make, hence the recent trend amongst producers towards international co-production. This ensures extra funds and adds glamour and prestige (Tunstall, 1993) but it also means that the programme has to appeal to an international audience. O'Sullivan (1994) remarks that not only is there pressure to make films with an international appeal in order to get co-funding, but that the resulting programme cannot be too controversial or else no strand will accept it. On the domestic front, all five channels have to achieve sizable audiences across the schedules in order to secure revenue, whether from advertisers or the government setting the licence fee (e.g. Busfield, 1994).

However, it has been suggested that certain features strongly related to documentary are neglected in the battle for large audiences. Documentary purists feel that there is a concentration on presentation which detracts from a programme's content (Carter, 1989). Fry (1994) notes the depression amongst documentary makers because of the lack of space for hardhitting documentaries in this new ratings-led world. This same pressure affects the amount of innovation and exploration around format (Dobbs, 1992):

"It's no good blaming the public for the decline, rather it is the inability of current affairs programming itself to provide a format that works for the audience." (Dobbs, 1992, p.14)

Producers are accused of having lost their sense of responsibility (Nichols, 1983; Wyver, 1986) and less effort invested in documentary reduces the impact it has (Winston, 1988).

⁸In 1996 radio was listened to for an average of 16 hours a week (predominantly news/music programmes in the morning) compared to an average of 25 hours of television (predominantly in the evening, of which documentaries are the second most popular genre) (Source: Social Trends).

Broadcasters stick to certain formulas, there is a lack of new talent and the single documentary is gradually being removed from the schedules (Wyver, 1986). These concerns are not all specific to the 1980s and 1990s. In 1970 Bakewell and Garnham highlighted a similar threat to documentaries:

“..the needs of scheduling demand predictable and easily digestible products.”
(p.179)

However these negative sentiments are not shared by all. Much of the criticism has been directed at the cutting of factual programmes, particularly on ITV, in order to increase audiences. However, Busfield (1994) notes that there was 20% more factual programmes on ITV in the first six months of 1994 than in the same period in 1993. Phillips (1994) argues that certain factual programmes get consistently good audiences by appealing to the same things as other genres. *World in Action* has always done well by steering clear of political argument and sticking to topics such as crime and emergencies, fly-on-the-wall and travel. Yet, it is this very policy that appals other documentary makers. Munro (1994) regards this approach as voyeuristic and down-market, at the expense of programme quality and the style and technique of story-telling. He believes that the intelligence and interest of audiences is consistently underestimated. They want to watch serious documentaries, which at present are ghettoised in late night slots on BBC2 and Channel Four.

Thus the pressure to obtain large audiences for financial reasons involves assumptions about what interests a mass audience. However, the above criticisms imply that the measures employed to make television documentary appealing to a wider audience are incompatible with programme quality. Much hinges on the way quality is defined. The view that a quality documentary is serious, and provides people with what they should know rather than just being pure entertainment has been termed elitist (e.g. Corner et al., 1993). That is not to say that all criticisms of the current state of documentary are elitist. Indeed Corner et al. (1993) list several aspects on which quality can depend e.g. adhering to a literary aesthetic, fulfilling a public informational role, displaying technical skill and achieving popularity. Documentary quality can therefore relate to the way a programme is made, what it is about, and how many people are watching. The issue of programme quality indicates a fundamental

conflict over the purpose underlying documentary-making. What type of excellence are producers aspiring to? Are broadcasters more interested in lining their own pockets or satisfying the viewing public?

It is ironic that the need to attract a large audience has been linked to a decline in documentary quality when John Grierson's original reason for moving documentary from the cinema to television was to reach a mass audience and subsequently unite and empower the public. The question is not only whether today's documentary fulfils that role, but whether broadcasters and audiences believe it should be fulfilling that role.

2.4 Theoretical issues

The documentary is and has always been imbued with a variety of interdependent properties and functions. As initiated by the films of the 1930s, every documentary makes a claim to a general truth (e.g. Nichols, 1991; Paget, 1990), and it is hoped that the techniques used to construct the film will validate that claim (e.g. Vaughan, 1976). However, for a programme to be read as the truth, it has to draw upon characteristics associated with 'the truth'. This section examines the methods used by documentary to convey the truth, the assumptions on which those practices are based, and the validity of those assumptions. The issues are then examined in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis.

2.4.1 Documentary definition

Theoretical analyses usually begin with a definition of the object under investigation. The 1989 Oxford English Dictionary defines documentary as:

"Factual, realistic, applied esp. to a film or literary work, etc., based on real events or circumstances, and intended primarily for instruction or record purposes."

Grierson is widely cited as describing it as 'the creative treatment of actuality', although this precise quote is hard to find in any of his work (Higson, 1995).

However, the documentary literature indicates little consensus on the precise nature of the genre. The problem is the lack of a single focus on which to base an explanation (e.g. Steven, 1993). Definitions vary because they are centred around different questions: what is a documentary? how is the documentary constructed? what is it trying to do? and what methods does it use to do this? A BBC publication entitled "Principles and Practice in Documentary Programmes" (Cawston et al., 1972) contained the following extract:

"A precise definition of the term 'documentary' is impossible. Different practitioners use the word differently. There is a professional understanding between them about its meaning, but that meaning may vary according to context. In addition, documentary techniques are subject to continuous evolution. Therefore it has always been found convenient not to define the word, and it is perhaps because of its very flexibility that no substitute has ever been found. In the early days of the factual cinema, when the term was taken from the French 'documentaire', John Grierson described documentary as 'the creative interpretation of actuality'. That definition, although once adequate for the cinema, is quite inadequate for television with its vastly increased output and changing styles....At one extreme, documentaries border on current affairs programmes; at the other, on drama".

It is probably naive to attempt a single specific and all encompassing definition for the documentary (e.g. Nichols, 1991). However, there must be certain features typical of all items falling under the heading 'documentary' which not only justify their inclusion in such a category, but also demand the very existence of the genre in the first place:

"Each film establishes internal norms or structures of its own but these frequently share common traits with the textual system or organizing pattern of other documentaries." (Nichols, 1991, p.18)

Conventions can be regarded as a form of shorthand necessitated by the short length of time available to broadcast. They are a sign system which establishes a convergence point for filmmaker and viewer (Vaughan, 1976). They refer to the criteria or characteristics which classify a programme as documentary in terms of both content and structure. In the following analysis, I have ordered the conventions outlined in the literature into three categories - conventions of content and type, stylistic construction features, and overall narrative strategies. Content and type are broad characteristics pertaining to subject matter

and programme form. Features of stylistic construction are the techniques adopted within a programme to satisfy its truth claim. Narrative strategies refer to the ways in which the narrative is organised to further fulfil a programme's purpose. The categories therefore move from a descriptive account of documentary content to an in-depth analysis of its narrative structure.

2.4.1.1 Content and type

In terms of content and type, documentary explores a factual subject in depth (e.g. Croton, 1989; Steven, 1993), takes a long time to make and can present opinion as well as undisputed facts (Ashton, 1985; Croton, 1989). It is described as a creative act (e.g. Croton, 1989; Grierson, 1932-34; Tunstall, 1993) which can vary in both structure and content:

“..diversity in subject-matter, strong factual stories and innovative styles.”
(Carter, 1989, p.20)

Different forms of documentary include informational reports and explanations, verite/fly-on-the-wall, personality documentaries, investigative documentaries, entertainment documentaries, historical documentaries, portraits/profiles and dramatised documentaries (Wyatt, 1983). These descriptions are broad, suggesting that only purely fictitious material is excluded from a documentary categorisation. With such a broad definition, it would not be unreasonable to include programme types such as current affairs and docudramas within the documentary genre. However, such an inclusion is often the topic of fierce debate (e.g. Corner, 1995), suggesting that the boundaries of the documentary genre are not so clear cut. The conventions of the documentary genre go beyond subject matter and programme type.

2.4.1.2 Stylistic construction

The conventions of documentary which lie beyond programme type and content relate to features of its construction. This section illustrates the intrinsic relation between the conventions of documentary structure and the genre's purpose. The truth claims in documentary are centred around argument and evidence (Kuehl, 1988). Factual programming, unlike fiction, relies on evidence to give its argument credibility, although this is still no guarantee of an argument's validity. A documentary works because of institutional

discourse, textual structures and viewer expectations (Nichols, 1991). Given that different documentaries are characterised by the different ways they are put together (Silverstone, 1985), it is easy to understand the difficulty expressed in finding a common denominator for all subgenres of documentary (Steven, 1993). However, there are certain attributes which viewers expect that not only eliminate ambiguity for the viewer (Vaughan, 1976), but also distinguish the text from other genres (Nichols, 1991). Silverstone (1985) describes it as:

“..the realisation of a set of expectations, some call it professionalism, which provide a guarantee that what is being seen is legitimate.” (p.177)

As already noted, the aim is to convince the viewer that what they are watching is the truth. The techniques used are both aesthetic and structural. Minh-ha (1993) cites the use of unstable handheld cameras, grainy images and direct interviews in the effort to create a sense of urgency, immediacy and authenticity.

The eternity of an event, and thus its validity, is conveyed by using the present tense. A sense of authority is bestowed with a voice-over (e.g. Silverstone, 1985; Vaughan, 1976), and the use of words such as 'in fact' and 'really' (Silverstone, 1985). Conclusions are confirmed by restructuring the discourse of interviews, reducing them:

“..towards the symbolic through submission to a syntax not of their own generation.” (Vaughan, 1976, p.17)

Rosen (1993) argues that this process of restructuring makes an event comprehensible. The documentary is history arranged in a certain sequence or format.

These various stylistic techniques contribute to a documentary's formal structure of which a number of types have been identified. A typology established by Burton (1990) establishes four main modes in documentary film - expository, observational, interactive and reflexive. The expository form is the most common (e.g. Hart, 1988; Nichols, 1991; Steven, 1993; Sheibler, 1993). This involves:

“..the development of an argument by citing examples, the rejection of counter-arguments, the citing of outside authorities, the presenting of personal ‘authentic’ testimony, the use of standard logic (if a, then not b). All the basic conventions of this rhetoric are well known to audiences, and most documentaries...still use the rhetoric of exposition.” (Steven, 1993, p.15)

The typology offered by Bordwell & Thompson (1990) is broader, outlining two types of documentaries - rhetorical and categorical. The rhetorical matches the expository form described above, presenting an argument and laying out evidence to support it. The categorical is simply an approach to a film's organisation, dividing a subject into parts - “a catalogue of categories” (Winston, 1995, p. 114). Winston (1995) criticises both of these broad typologies - the rhetorical for imposing chronological structure and the categorical for overlooking dramatic structure. Nichols (1991) looks beyond formal structure, at the varieties of representation within a documentary. Representation can refer to a likeness, a model, a depiction, the political representation of a group or class, or simply the presentation of a convincing case.

2.4.1.3 Narrative strategies

Narrative strategy further illustrates the way structure can be mapped on to purpose. A network of narratives can be used to create different angles and perspectives. Documentary structure is frequently likened to that of a story (e.g. Hart, 1988; Nichols, 1981), having a beginning, middle and end:

“This does not mean that producers or viewers are consciously aware of a mythical dimension, simply that there is a limited number of ways in which stories can be told.” (Hart, 1988, p.89-90)

The 'story' analogy consequently refers not only to a programme's format but to its narrative strategy. Narrative strategies are embedded in the formal structure of documentary, moving the truth claim to a deeper, more complex level of analysis. Renov (1993) argues that the documentary uses some of the same techniques as fiction. However, both Nichols (1991) and Winston (1995) are quick to point out that structural differences do exist between factual and fictional programmes. Documentary is not simply the application of fictional techniques to non-fiction:

“Certain documentaries closely resemble the fiction film in that they deploy its basic signifying structures at many textual levels; others mark out their distance by adopting these structures episodically or by restricting them to certain textual functions.” (Guynn, 1990, p.154)

Furthermore, the logic of documentary lies in its strength and congruence of argument, whereas fiction depends on temporal and spatial continuity (Nichols, 1991). As mentioned above, Winston (1995) criticises the use of chronological structure in documentary. If the genre is different from fiction, then its techniques should be different too.

The combination of story and argument (e.g. Silverstone, 1985) raises a fundamental tension in the documentary genre. The story elements represent the attempt to engage and entertain, whilst the argument embodies the efforts to persuade. Stories occur in imaginary universes, depend on plot and must be plausible. Arguments occupy imaginary space, address contemporary issues, are based on rhetoric and must be persuasive (Nichols, 1991).

Documentary typologies do not have to be based on either stylistic construction or narrative strategies. Corner (1996) essentially combines elements of both in his proposed modalities of documentary discourse, outlining:

“..some of the principal ways in which communication is organised in documentary.” (p.27)

He identifies four image modes (reactive observationalism; proactive observationalism; illustrative; associative) and three speech modes (overheard exchange; testimony; expositional). Reactive observationalism is a technical term for ‘fly-on-the-wall’ - an indirect mode requiring much interpretation on the part of the viewer who acts as an observer or witness to events. Proactive observationalism is also fundamentally indirect, but involves more control over movement and space. In the illustrative mode, visual images are used to support the narrative argument whilst the associative mode uses images to create second-order meanings i.e. connotation rather than denotation. Overheard exchange refers to observed speech, testimony refers to interview speech, and, finally, the expositional, or ‘voice of God’ mode is:

“The ‘classic’ mode of documentary speech, including full and partial commentary, occasional out-of-frame bridging, presenter direct address etc.”
(p.30)

Thus, the bases for presenting a typology of documentary depend on fundamental decisions about what documentary is - a form; a text; or a communication.

2.4.2 The 'position' of documentary

The questions posed at the beginning of this section concerning the definition of documentary relate to the purpose of documentary i.e. what it is supposed to do, as well as the way that it is constructed. The conventions discussed above relate closely to the construction of documentary. However, there are also conventions concerning the effect documentary will have and the reasons why it is assumed to have such an effect, thus relating to the wider social context of documentary. These are conventions of theory rather than practice. Theoretical accounts of documentary purpose (e.g. Minh-ha, 1993; Rabinowitz, 1994; Tunstall, 1993) also reflect some of the tensions illustrated above:

“..in documentary practice the tensions between the competing claims of social mission and poetic quality, between a mechanical sense of realism and the role of creativity in representing actuality, and between the appeal to the head as opposed to the heart, should be understood as characteristic of documentary purposes and practice rather than peripheral or aberrant.”
(Chaney & Pickering, 1986, p.34)

Disagreements over the purpose of the genre are understandable given the contradictory position it inhabits. Rabinowitz (1994) states that the documentary is both aesthetic and archival, part-truth and part-fiction, simultaneously object and subject, and circulating between the public and the private. There is also, as mentioned above, the amalgamation of story and argument (Nichols, 1991; Silverstone, 1985). 'Story' represents specific presentational elements, whilst 'argument' reflects the wider social purpose. A guide to documentary making (Croton, 1989) advises producers to hold the attention of the audience, entertain and move them without departing from a responsibility to the subject. Thus the contradiction between presentation and purpose is evident in practical approaches too. Public service broadcasting houses the same disparity by aiming to educate, inform and entertain.

Tunstall (1993) notes that:

“Documentary aimed to inform and to educate but it attempted to do so with absorbing filmed images.” (p.33)

He argues that this fit between documentary and public service broadcasting explains why the genre constitutes one of public service broadcasting's chief elements. The implication is, however, that these concepts are incompatible. But the combination of education, information and entertainment does not have to be seen as a paradox. It is possible to educate and inform *through* entertainment (e.g. Bakewell & Garnham, 1970).

Renov (1993) outlines four functions for documentary: to record, reveal or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; and to express. Rabinowitz (1994) lists several different roles for documentary: to induce feeling, thought and action; to point out social problems and either solve them or change the situation; to gather support for a particular solution to a crisis; to represent itself to itself; and to give an identity to the person or position being represented. Trinh Minh-ha (1993) echoes this:

“It puts the social function of film *on the market*. It takes real people and real problems from the real world and *deals with them*. It *sets a value* on intimate observation and *assesses its worth* according to how well it succeeds in capturing reality on the run...Powerful living stories, infinite authentic situations. There are no retakes. The stage is thus no more no less than life itself.” (p.94)

These typologies of subtype and of purpose raise the interesting issue of the relation between them. If a documentary is constructed in order to fulfil a particular function, then the number of types of documentary structure should depend on the number of functions that documentary performs. Any criticisms of specific documentary structures (e.g. Winston, 1995) could be the result of a misunderstanding of the purpose or function of that particular documentary. Criticisms could also reflect a conviction that there is only one adequate structure or function for documentary. It is therefore very difficult to arrive at a definitive link between specific structures and purposes without a more detailed explanation on the part of documentary makers of what their purpose is and how the particular structure used fulfils

that purpose. The only endeavour commanding a general consensus is the documentary's claim to the truth.

The definition of documentary relates to perceptions of the conventions of the genre. Conventions relate to content and format, programme construction, narrative strategies and ultimately the purpose and function of documentary. Although there are variations and contradictions in each area, all efforts revolve around a claim to the truth. For this claim to be realised, the argument and/or story presented must be believed. The previous section illustrated the variety of techniques used to achieve this. However, it is based on certain assumptions about the nature of credibility and also objectivity - two concepts frequently associated with the truth. Credibility can be explained as the extent to which something is believable. Objectivity can be described as the extent to which something is free from bias. The next section examines these concepts, and the validity of the documentary's claims to reflect them.

“Its plausibility, its authority, is the special quality of the documentary - its attraction to those who use it, regardless of motive - the source of its power to enlighten or deceive.” (Barnouw, 1993, p.349)

2.4.3 Credibility and objectivity

It is vital for a programme to appear credible to the viewer if it is to be seen as the truth. Truth is often associated with the concept of objectivity and indeed Abramson (1990) defines objectivity as a commitment to telling the truth. Objectivity relates to the equivalence between a representation and reality. The documentary aims to convey reality and truth, thus draws on the concept of objectivity to achieve this. However, in so doing, it taps into some of the issues which fuel a wider debate over both the concept of objectivity and the existence of an external reality. The question is not just whether something is objective or not, but also whether it *should* be objective or whether objectivity in itself is possible (Lichtenberg, 1996). The idea that objectivity is infeasible constitutes one of the cornerstones of postmodernism, resting on the assumption that there is no such thing as a reality independent of our own minds and language.

A fundamental issue is a programme's relation to reality. To believe in the notion of objectivity, is to accept the possibility of an external reality which can be distorted or manipulated by subjective biases. Tuchman (1972) describes certain techniques employed by the media in order to 'protect' (or give the impression of protecting) media broadcasts from bias e.g. using quotes, presenting two sides. Thus, to be credible a documentary must appear free from such biases so that the viewer perceives what is seen on the screen as representative of 'reality' beyond the screen (e.g. Chaney & Pickering, 1986; Corner, 1986; Vaughan, 1976).

"It seems likely that the majority of public controversies over television documentary programmes have hinged precisely on the supposed representativeness of what has been depicted." (Corner, 1986, p.xi)

A successful documentary is thus one in which mediation is visible or it appears that either no mediation has taken place, implying that there is no space between the referent and representation. Both of these conditions signify that the images on the screen are portraying reality. It is worth noting that Vaughan (1976) views documentary as an ideal rather than an entity, thus corresponding with Kant's writings on objectivity. Both regard the attainment of unity with the world as impossible yet still something to aspire to. However, credibility of a documentary is supposedly guaranteed by the codes used within the programme (Nichols, 1981; Sheibler, 1993). If by adhering to certain conventions (i.e. internal coherence, naturalisation, not challenging cultural expectations, mixing truth, comment, argument and story) these claims to truth and reality are accepted, then it is vital to examine why (Silverstone, 1985).

One 'guarantee' of the truth is judged to be the presentation of facts (e.g. Paget, 1990). It is argued that facts and information have begun to replace religion as a source of certainty.

"Modern man worships 'facts' - that is, he accepts 'facts' as the ultimate reality...He believes that facts in themselves provide evidence and proof, and he willingly subordinates values to them..." (Ellul, 1971, p.xv)

Vaughan (1976) uses the terms 'pro-filmic' and 'putative' events. The pro-filmic event is the event as filmed by the camera, and the putative event is what would have happened had the

camera not been present. The documentary maker is aiming for the closest relationship possible between pro-filmic and putative events, in order to create the impression that filming had little effect and thus viewers are seeing what really happened. Less intrusive equipment and the direct cinema tradition are examples of techniques used to achieve this (e.g. Minh-ha, 1993; Vaughan, 1976; Winston, 1995). The assumption is therefore that 'truth' is unbiased, and any form of mediation or effect indicates the introduction of bias and subjectivity thus decreasing the material's credibility.

This link between truth, objectivity and lack of bias can be explained by the representation of science within our culture (e.g. Purkhardt, 1993). The development of particular scientific techniques i.e. observation and experimentation, empiricism and statistics and probabilities, have formed the basis of judgement about the external world (e.g. Corner, 1986; Winston, 1995). These techniques are assumed to bypass human interference and thus provide direct access to the truth. The documentary adopts some of these techniques in an attempt to gain credibility and similarly convince viewers that they are observing 'the truth'. For example, Grierson incorporated the case study into the genre, thus introducing the statistical idea of a sample representative of the whole (Winston, 1995). Thus documentary embodies an assumption that viewers will make certain associations between the way material is presented and the credibility of that material:

"Even when reportage or documentary moves more clearly towards advocacy, effectiveness often depends on satisfying this expectation of impartiality...the viewer's expectation is that the empathetic identification with characters so common in fiction will remain tenuous but that intellectual and emotional engagement with a topic, issue, or problem will gain in prominence, and be mediated by the conventions and rhetoric of objectivity." (Nichols, 1991, p.30)

Paget (1990) claims that the documentary has always had such an obvious purpose that audiences have learnt to take its objectivity for granted. However, the earlier part of this chapter illustrated just how diverse documentary purpose can be. Doubt can also be cast over the validity of the documentary's claims to truth and objectivity. Kluge (1988) makes a clever analogy with camera angles to convey the different perspectives from which

objectivity can be questioned. He suggests that documentary is shot with three cameras - the camera in a technical sense, the film-maker's mind and the generic patterns of the documentary film based on audience expectations. The technical film-making process obviously entails temporal and spatial limits because a camera cannot record everything, a film/programme is a two-dimensional representation of the three-dimensional world, and in addition there are stipulations on broadcast time. Under these circumstances the process of selection is inevitable, thus introducing the second 'camera' - the film-maker's mind:

"Documentarists make endless choices: of topic, people, vistas, angles, lenses, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of a point of view, whether conscious or not, acknowledged or not." (Barnouw, 1993, p.344)

Nichols (1991) argues that a number of arguments can be constructed from any fact or piece of evidence. Consequently, what is presented is *a* truth rather than *the* truth (Minh-ha, 1993; Nichols, 1991; Wyatt, 1983). The idea of choosing one approach when others are possible contradicts the notion of objectivity. However, Lichtenberg (1996) argues that although people can disagree over the causes and agents of facts or invest them with different meanings, the objectivity of facts themselves is still possible. Nevertheless, any claims to objectivity merely illustrate an assertion that particular choices have a special validity (Barnouw, 1993). There must therefore be a motive behind each of these decisions, and the suggestion of motive introduces a political, ideological element to the debate. Claiming objectivity has been interpreted as an expression of an authoritarian perspective, e.g.

"..'objective' reporting reproduced a vision of social reality which refused to examine the basic structures of power and privilege. It was not just incomplete, as critics of the thirties had contended, it was distorted. It represented collusion with institutions whose legitimacy was in dispute." (Schudson, 1978, p.160)

Two clear perspectives exist within the documentary literature concerning the intentions of the film-maker. The first is free from political/ideological influence, explaining the impossibility of objectivity given the nature of the film-maker's endeavour:

“True documentarists have a passion for what they *find* in images and sounds - which always seems to them more meaningful than anything they can invent. They may serve as catalysts, not as inventors. Unlike the fiction artist, they are dedicated to not inventing. It is in selecting and arranging their findings that they express themselves; these choices are, in effect, their main comments. And whether they adopt the stance of observer, or chronicler, or painter, or whatever, they cannot escape their subjectivity. They present their version of the world.” (Barnouw, 1993, p.348)

The second, rather more cynically, believes that film-makers consciously mislead viewers by claiming realism and playing on the assumption of objectivity in order to achieve their own ideological ends (e.g. Winston, 1995; Nichols, 1981). This also illustrates the third 'camera' - the generic patterns of the documentary film, based on audience expectations. However, the idea that a documentary could be a threat through some covert alliance with an authoritarian, institutional order, automatically assumes that the audience accepts a programme's credibility.

Very few references refer to the role of the audience in this process other than to assume that if a film conforms to generic conventions it will be accepted as credible. This ignores any potential variations in interpretation on the part of the audience. However, Paget (1990) appreciates the roles of both producer and audience, claiming that distortion is always inevitable, and objective information consequently impossible, because information has an intended audience and a reception context. Both Barnouw (1993) and Wyatt (1983) recognise the variations in viewer perspectives:

“Often the word ‘propaganda’ is invoked...The irony is the term is invoked precisely when the film has failed as propaganda. When the choices please us, we do not invoke it.” (Barnouw, 1993, p.344-345)

“..what seems perfectly fair to one person may seem unfair to another.”
(Wyatt, 1983, p.7)

Thus the objective status of documentary can be questioned by viewers, and it is suggested that people would find the genre more engaging and beneficial if it was openly subjective instead (Paget, 1990; Winston, 1995). Winston (1995) believes that dropping the concepts

of actuality, non-intervention and objectivity and moving the basis of documentary from representation to reception will actually liberate the documentary.

“It is only Grierson's heritage that stands between us and a documentary form that could be, on occasion, satiric, irreverent and comic.” (Winston, 1995, p.255)

Interestingly, Rabinowitz (1994) talks about the use of advocacy not objectivity as a means of relating truth to ideology:

“Documentaries construct not only a vision of truth and identity but an appropriate way of seeing that vision.” (p.12)

If there is no such thing as external reality then the documentary would be forced to find a new source of credibility (e.g. Rosen, 1993; Winston, 1995). It is tempting to suggest, as Winston (1995) does, that credibility should be defined by audience reception. However, this effectively removes the role of the author and, as argued by Corner (1996), diminishes the documentary's role within the public sphere. This debate highlights the difficulty of striking a balance between producer intentions and audience interpretation, and illustrates the complex relationship between public knowledge and private opinion.

The majority of the theoretical literature on documentary discusses the history of the genre, its definition, construction, techniques and function. The central query posed by this thesis however is the validity of the assumptions regarding the genre's communicative potential. Chapter 1 emphasised the importance of knowledge of the audience and the social context of communication in the broadcasting of programmes. The following section considers the extent to which this concept is discussed and/or embraced within the documentary literature.

2.4.4 Communication in television documentary

Chapter 1 indicated the importance of the active nature of the audience in communication, the importance of understanding the social context of communication and the subsequent rejection of linear models of communication. There is consequently a problem in the integration of two apparently contradictory concepts - the transmission of information and

diversity in interpretation. The important questions therefore are how far interpretations vary, why they differ, and what is the resulting nature of communication.

Very few of the works cited in the body of this chapter make any reference to the importance of the audience in communication. The majority concentrate on the conventions of the genre and the way it is constructed to achieve its aims:

“..much of the close textual analysis of the 1970s and 1980s seemed oblivious to the audience, when in fact the concept of ‘text’ should imply both film and viewer as dialectical points within a communication process. We must know more about real, flesh-and-blood audiences in all their variations.” (Steven, 1993, p.22)

With no consideration of the audience, the assumption is that the audience as a mass will be homogeneous in its response to documentary content and structure. This suggests a belief in a passive audience, a disregard for the notion that differences between people and situation affect interpretation, or a conviction that the persuasiveness of the text overrides any audience factors. A 'convention' implies something fixed and shared, thus it is easy to see why such an assumption is made. However, the writings of academics and practitioners on documentary indicate the existence of a variety of conventions, based on their own assumptions about the genre. The problem, therefore, is not the fixed nature of conventions, but that, as a result, those believing in particular conventions may be unaware of the existence of any others. This relates to the issues raised in Chapter 1 concerning the link between perceptions of reality and social factors. The discrepancies between what people believe is widely shared, indicate the existence of different 'versions' of reality. In accordance with the argument in Chapter 1, these discrepancies are mistakenly assumed by theorists to be on the cultural/ideological level of analysis, when they in fact belong to both situational and positional levels. These beliefs are, therefore, the result of differential social positioning and experiences.

A handful of theorists comment on the active nature of the audience in documentary communication (e.g. Hart, 1988; Rabinowitz, 1994; Steven, 1993; Vaughan, 1976), although they vary in approach. Vaughan (1976) recognises the paradox between the activity of

viewers and the ideology of television i.e the social responsibility function, which places viewers back into a passive role. In keeping with Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, Vaughan suggests that films can only achieve their intended significance if the assumptions of the film-maker about how to represent images on the screen match the way viewers make a connection between images on the screen and the event as filmed. Hart (1988) is also aware of the link between production and reception as well as the potential mismatch between the text as transmitted and the meaning received. The mismatch, however, is explained by what viewers bring to the viewing context rather than through the relationship between producer and viewer. Consequently, control over interpretation is placed very much in the hands of the audience. Although Hart is aware of the influence of contextual and socio-economic variables, no suggestions are made to 'close the gap' between production and reception. Nichols (1991) broaches the subject of communication, asserting that the methods used by documentary to communicate are both unexamined and underdeveloped. He also advocates the power of the audience in interpretation:

“..the distinguishing mark of documentary may be less intrinsic to the text than a function of the assumptions and expectations brought to the process of viewing the text.” (p.24)

This is further echoed by Eitzen (1995) in a discussion of documentary film:

“..it is not the representational or formal aspects of a movie that determine whether viewers ‘frame’ it as a documentary but rather a combination of what viewers want and expect from a text and what they suppose or infer about it on the basis of situational cues and textual features...In short, documentary must be seen, in the last analysis, not as a kind of text but as a kind of ‘reading’.” (p.92)

Thus, documentary text and conventions still play a substantial role, guiding the response of the audience and providing a starting point for information processing.

The work of Steven (1993) provides the strongest support for both the theory and practice of this thesis. He notes the importance of the audience:

“Bringing audience into the picture casts light on concepts of meaning and reception and serves to remind us not to make sweeping generalizations about documentary.” (p.21)

He also recognises the lack of audience studies on documentary and the crucial unanswered questions relating to audiences and communication i.e. how do documentary films address their audiences? what do they assume? what conventions are employed to convince viewers of a particular viewpoint? how do audiences respond? While these questions have been addressed to a certain extent within the literature, it is all from the perspective of the producer or the text. If an adequate theory of documentary communication is to be found, the audience has to be taken into consideration too.

“Producers need to know what works and what does not, and audiences need to be more open and better educated in the ways of the media. In both cases we can only start from where audiences are at. Unfortunately, even a basic theory of the documentary audience does not exist, and much ground remains to be broken.” (Steven, 1993, p.78)

Steven's perspective conforms to the more recent developments in audience research which move away from assigning total power to either audience or text, recognising the interaction between the two. He acknowledges the way text positions viewers as well as the influences on interpretation provided by the reception context:

“The frames of reference can be political, ethical, or aesthetic and can originate in the social world or within other media. In the case of documentary they include genre expectations, the inherited and docified history of particular landscapes or workplaces, actual events prior to their capture on screen, and public knowledge of the off-screen lives of characters or narrators who appear on screen. The meaning thus does not reside in the film or in the individual interpretations of the viewers, but in the activity of viewing.” (p.82)

Hughes (1996) acknowledges the lack of consideration of the audience in discussions about television documentary. Furthermore, he appreciates the contradiction between the heterogeneous audience in reception research and the homogeneous audience in institutional broadcasting and the consequent challenge to:

“..general claims about the social experience of watching documentary, and hence of the social project of the documentary.” (p.50)

However, very few theorists discuss the relevance of the audience to documentary, and still fewer talk about it with reference to the problems of communication. Even when this dilemma is highlighted (Hart, 1988; Nichols, 1991; Vaughan, 1976) an explanation rather than a solution is proposed. What is lacking, from both an audience research and a communication perspective, is an in-depth analysis of the documentary audience combined with analyses of production in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the nature of communication in documentary and how it might be improved. A small number of empirical studies on the documentary audience have been undertaken. The concern is, however, the extent to which they address the above issues.

2.5 Empirical audience studies

Despite the large number of studies on genres such as news and soap opera, there are surprisingly few pieces of empirical research on the television documentary audience. However, as different genres have different aims and conventions, the expectations and assumptions of viewers approaching different genres will vary. The need for separate studies of the television documentary audience is neatly summarised by Corner et al. (1990):

“..the interplay between ‘story’ and ‘fact’, imagination and knowledge, textuality and reference, is likely to be different from that of, say, popular series drama. This difference, and its implications for positions and practices of ‘reading’, does not seem to us to be sufficiently recognised in a number of recent audience studies..” (p.48)

As Chapter 1 highlighted, the present debate in audience research concerns the complex relationship between text and audience, thus accepting that reception is not determined by either text or audience alone. Texts, like audiences, are not homogeneous. However, in the same way that similarities across audiences can be linked by social contextual factors, texts can be linked by genre. Consequently, a single, generalised theory of audience reception is

inadequate, and separate genre analysis is essential. This section examines the findings of those documentary audience studies which do exist, and their contribution to the question of documentary communication.

Silverstone's (1985) study follows the making of a science programme from conception to broadcast and constitutes one of the most detailed case studies on television documentary. The broad argument in the programme is described as:

“..the naiveté and impotence of science in the face of political, social and economic forces...Scientists are deeply implicated and the forces are those of world powers.” (p.169)

The specific topic is the nature of Western aid to the Third World. The programme argues that Western scientific research would be more useful if directed at problems such as land use and helping the poor to help themselves, rather than in the form of military assistance. The focus of the study is the film-making process as a whole rather than the audience specifically. Consequently, although the reactions of both expert and lay audiences are investigated, it is predominantly a measure of viewer appreciation rather than a study of the audience itself. Nevertheless, certain interesting observations of the lay audience are made. The viewers' appreciation of the programme was defined in terms of both content and form. Their views on content were clearly dependent on gender and political positioning. Women refused to accept that their intelligence was equal to the men's or adequate for a proper understanding of the arguments presented and they tended to identify with the children in the programme. Men, on the other hand, wanted more science and technology, and were more dismissive of the programme's 'emotional' content. Perceptions of bias reflected differences of prior political position as well as gender. Women tended either to perceive the film as balanced or, if bias was detected, recognised and accepted it, whilst the men recognised and disputed it. Response was also affected by viewers' relationship with programme form. Two broad relationships were identified. One in which the viewer sees the programme as reality, relating directly to the content. The other in which the viewer sees the programme as a construction and distortion, relating instead to its form. This reflects Liebes & Katz's (1990) referential and critical modes of viewing where referential viewers perceive the programme

as real and critical viewers see it as a construction and/or are aware of their role as processors of the text. An awareness of attempts to construct images or 'distort' obviously affects viewers' perceptions of credibility. By way of conclusion, Silverstone identified three dimensions - viewer identity; personal identity; and cultural identity - on which to base further investigations of a programme's significance. Viewer identity relates to how a programme fits into a viewer's perceptions and understandings of all programmes. Personal identity examines the significance a programme has in a viewer's life. Cultural identity explores how programmes:

“..express or contradict, reinforce, or transform the basic dimensions of a given culture.” (p.198)

This research represents an appreciation of the variations in interpretation that exist between viewers and the dimensions on which those variations depend. By examining the intentions of the production team earlier in the book, one can establish the areas of convergence and divergence between production and reception. However, as the focus was the practical film-making rather than the communication process this comparison is not made explicit. The audience response section is not nearly detailed enough, but the important point is the recognition of film-making as a process and the existence of variation in audience response.

Corner and Richardson (1986) set out to investigate the effect of documentary form. They selected two contrasting documentary styles - fly-on-the-wall and narrated - and investigated the language and images used in each to discover what was happening, whether the images related to what they were representing and what the programme was trying to say. The differences they observed were all specific to viewers' relation to documentary and television, rather than particular to individual identities as in Silverstone's study. They outline three types of reading - mediation, transparency and displaced. A mediation reading indicates an awareness of programme form, thus a viewer is alert to the intentions and motivations of the programme-makers. A transparency reading is evident when a viewer directly perceives the images depicted on the screen as reality. Finally, a displaced reading is produced when a viewer predicts the likely interpretation of others. In addition it is asserted that the assumptions of viewers regarding the conventions and properties of documentaries affect

their evaluations and attributions of a programme's motives. The first two readings echo the two relationships identified by Silverstone and thus also the referential and critical modes of viewing identified by Liebes and Katz. Once again, there is an appreciation of the influence of the beliefs and assumptions of viewers towards television and documentary on the way that it is watched. This recognises not only the variations across viewers but also the active nature of viewing and the interaction between viewer and text. However, the potentially significant influence of socio-demographic variables is not examined due to the small scale of the research. Although the focus is on documentary form, no direct comparison is made between the rhetorical strategies of the different programmes and their link to reception. Therefore the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms for both producer and viewer are unclear. From a communication perspective, the intentions of producers are only recognised from the position of the audience, thus it is impossible to judge the 'success' of the communication. Similarly, there is no discussion of the implications of the three different types of reading. However, the researchers do acknowledge the small scale of the research and the subsequent inability to conduct all the necessary investigations. The study provides an insight rather than conclusions.

In a later and more extensive study, Corner et al. (1990) explore how both television and viewers make sense of the nuclear energy issue. They examine the form and content of four programmes, focussing on their communicative design, i.e. how the rhetoric is organised to address the audience, thematic development, i.e. how the issue is treated, and visualisation, i.e. the contribution of visual images to the programme. The production process is also investigated so as to connect these issues with the producer's intentions and the production context. Indeed, the authors state:

“..just as programme analysis without a connection with viewer activity is severely limited in explanatory range, so is a reception study that is not connected back to a detailed engagement with the signifiatory forms of particular programmes and generic conventions.” (p.2-3)

The audience was sampled according to certain aspects of social identity judged relevant to this particular issue and across which interpretation could vary. The first phase involved

people from different interest groups, e.g. political, environmental, who watched three different programmes. The second phase contained three groups - members of a Women's Institute, arts students and science students - who watched one particular programme. Whilst it is interesting to analyse and compare these three groups' responses in relation to their different social identities, it is unclear why these particular groups were chosen. The researchers outlined five frameworks used by viewers to understand and thus evaluate programme content - civic, political, personal, evidential and environmental. Groups were paired according to certain oppositions e.g. Labour and Conservative, and each group's 'agenda' was evident in their selection and ordering of the above frames. This study acknowledges the different types of rhetorical and expositional methods used by producers to address viewers as well as the ethnographic factors affecting viewer reception. Consequently, there is an awareness of what viewers bring to the text and what the text brings to viewers. This goes some way towards an understanding of communication in television documentary. However, whilst it examines what programme-makers are trying to do, how they attempt to realise it and how viewers responses vary, it does not connect all three within the context of a communication. The relationship between production and reception is not directly addressed and the implications and solutions not really explored.

Although these studies reveal something about the variations between viewers in interpreting documentary programmes, they only look at specific programmes and make assumptions about what audiences believe documentary to be. No study as yet has investigated the audience's perceptions of the documentary genre, and then applied that to the way programmes are interpreted i.e. in conjunction with modes of viewing and ethnographic variables. It is the relationship between viewers' expectations of what a documentary should be and what they actually perceive, together with the difference between what they perceive and what the producer thinks they will perceive, which has huge implications for both the nature of communication in television documentary and the fulfilment of the genre's social role. The studies to date represent an important appreciation of the audience's heterogeneity in interpretation. However, the analysis is of audience reaction to particular programmes rather than the documentary genre. Silverstone looks at the film-making process, and the two Corner studies look at the audience in relation to documentary form. However none of them

use this information as a means of evaluating the communicative nature of the genre itself.

2.6 Conclusion

The literature on television documentary focuses on the history, structure and purpose of the genre. The historical angle traces the development of documentary from cinema to television. The structural perspective examines conventions associated with content, format and style. Discussions of purpose explore the various functions that documentary is believed to fulfil in society. The discussions about the structure and purpose of the documentary involve certain assumptions about the way it is interpreted by the audience. These assumptions are implicit rather than explicit which suggests that most theorists do not even entertain the possibility or potential repercussions of a heterogeneous audience. However, Chapter 1 not only illustrated the variations that exist across audiences, but argued that it is essential to understand the audience if communication is to be effective. The structure of documentary is very much linked to assumptions about how to fulfill its purpose. This relies on information about how documentary will be understood and the consequent effect it will have. However, all of this is speculation without an accurate knowledge of the audience. A detailed appreciation of these assumptions on the part of both production and reception is necessary for a more complete understanding of the nature of communication in television documentary. The small number of audience studies that do exist are helpful but not sufficient for this task.

This thesis addresses the above problems through an analysis of both production and reception in television documentary. The first study examines the production context of documentary in general through interviews with producers and commissioning editors. The second study investigates the reception context through group discussions with audiences from different sections of society. These two studies together will provide an insight into the assumptions surrounding the nature of documentary which inevitably influence production and reception respectively. The third study explores communication in a particular documentary, comparing the producer's assumptions, expectations and efforts with the

audience's interpretation. The results of the third study together with the knowledge gained in the first two will shed considerably more light on the nature of communication in television documentary than that which exists currently in the literature.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCHING DOCUMENTARY: THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1 Outline

This chapter serves as a link between the theory and practice of the thesis. It outlines both the methods of inquiry and their appropriateness in relation to the objects of investigation and the theoretical approach of the research. Methodology has its own epistemological basis, and therefore the strength of a piece of research depends to a large extent on the techniques chosen and the explanation and substantiation provided by the researcher for that choice. The chapter begins with a discussion of the research focus as prescribed by the theoretical position of the thesis. It explains the suitability of a qualitative approach and proceeds to map both theoretical and qualitative positions to the research design of the thesis. The chapter then addresses the often controversial issues of sampling, reliability and validity in qualitative research, and it concludes with a description and discussion of the specific methods used.

3.2 From theory to practice

Two related debates are relevant to a discussion of the transition from theory to practice. One concerns the disparate schools of thought within mass communication research. The other is a methodological debate relating to quantitative and qualitative approaches. The former illustrates different foci for research whilst the latter represents different approaches to undertaking an investigation of these foci.

The central concern of the thesis is the nature of communication in television documentary. As was demonstrated in Chapter 1, the study of mass communication represents an amalgam of contributions from different schools of thought and different academic disciplines. Perspectives are characterised by different priorities and outlooks, which inevitably culminate in different research foci. For example, a propaganda model (e.g. Herman & Chomsky,

1988) would concentrate on the institutional production of mass media, whilst the uses and gratifications tradition (e.g. Blumler & Katz, 1974) would focus on the desires of individual audience members. The range of different approaches and perspectives within mass communication research have been broadly divided into two traditions - administrative and critical. The administrative tradition is aligned with American psychological empiricism, whilst the critical is rooted in European sociology. The distinction between administrative and critical research has been criticised for its simplicity (Slack & Allor, 1983), although it does emphasise the contradictory contributions of psychology and sociology to communications research. There has been a tendency to link quantitative research with the administrative tradition and qualitative with the critical. However, this probably has more to do with the dominance of specific approaches to research at different times.

A historical analysis of the use of qualitative methodologies in mass communications over the last century (Jankowski & Wester, 1991) identifies three periods separated by the type and intensity of qualitative research practice. From 1890-1930 research was virtually all qualitative. The period from 1930-1960 marked the rise of positivism and thus the dominance of quantitative methodologies. It is only in the last twenty years that the quantitative tradition has begun to be challenged once again. This challenge has been realised by the renewed sociological contribution to the study of mass communication in the form of cultural studies. The last decade has witnessed a convergence of psychological, sociological and anthropological approaches to communications research (Schrøder, 1987). As a result, choice of methodology is not so clear cut (e.g. Lindlof, 1995). Whereas, in the past, methods of inquiry were rather more fixed to a discipline, the recent convergence requires a more detailed consideration of research aims. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with all methodologies. However, these judgements are predominantly based on the type of information sought and the theoretical notions of what constitutes good research. It is consequently vital for researchers to state clearly what they are doing, what perspective they adopt, what they are looking for and why the chosen methodology is the most appropriate. The following section sets out to do this.

The theoretical framework of this thesis highlights the inadequacy of linear models of

communication. They ignore the social context in which communication takes place and subsequently the various influences and experiences at work in the processes of production and reception. Previous work on the production process (e.g. Cantor, 1971; Tunstall, 1993) appreciate the context in which producers are working and the subsequent effect this has on what is broadcast. Separate theories of reception (e.g. Corner & Richardson, 1986; Liebes & Katz, 1995) recognise the role of both social context and heterogeneity of audience in the interpretation of programmes. However, in concentrating on these different processes, the concept of a communication process tends to get lost. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model is one attempt to avoid this, by recognising the different factors involved at each stage, yet still linking them together as one whole process. The model acknowledges the notion of feedback from the audience back into the production process, thus departing from the misconception of a uni-directional flow of information. The model is still criticised for maintaining a 'transmission' approach, but I feel such criticism is only valid if the model is taken as a *literal* explanation of the process of mass communication i.e. as two-dimensional, spatial and sequential. If, on the other hand, it is regarded as *symbolic* of the nature of mass communication, rather than a precise representation, it serves as a valuable framework on which to base further analysis. Thus, the theoretical and, consequently, the methodological design of this thesis follows Hall's basic approach, examining production and reception both separately and in relation to each other.

It is important to examine production and reception processes separately as each operates in a different context. However, at the same time, one depends very much on the other. Producers need an image of who they are broadcasting to in order to decide on content and construction. Receivers have an image of the type of programme (genre) they are watching and what they expect from it, which contributes to the interpretation and evaluation of particular programmes within that genre. Encoding also refers to the way in which the text embodies the assumptions of the producer, and decoding describes how the audience responds to this text. Consequently, in order to understand the nature of communication in a specific genre, it is essential to discover not only the practices involved at production and reception but also the impression that producers and receivers have of each other. This information will then contribute to an explanation of communication at the level of a specific

programme.

Chapter 1 also stressed the importance of distinguishing between different levels of analysis as each provide a different perspective on mass communication and thus different information concerning the process as a whole. The theoretical framework proposed here to explore television documentary allows insight into three of Doise's (1986) four levels of analysis. An investigation of the practices involved in production and reception together with the influences on those practices inform the interpersonal/situational level of analysis. Comparing those in different jobs and in different companies on the production side, and audiences with different demographic backgrounds contributes to the positional level of analysis. An overview of general perceptions concerning both the production and reception of documentary corresponds with the cultural/ideological level, providing a more general impression of the status and capabilities of the genre in society. Thus the theoretical framework clearly outlines what is to be looked at and why. The considerations from a methodological point of view concern which approach and which techniques are the most suitable for exploring these issues, and why.

I have already noted the resurgence in qualitative research over the last decade. There has been much more research on reception than on production, and the predominant approach has been a qualitative one. Whereas quantitative research is based on an objectivist science, establishing causal explanations and statistical probabilities (Lindlof, 1995), qualitative research seeks an empathic understanding through interpretive analysis (Christians & Carey, 1989).

"Qualitative research methods are distinguished from quantitative methods in that they do not rest their evidence on the logic of mathematics, the principle of numbers, or the methods of statistical analysis." (Anderson & Meyer, 1988, p.247)

Whilst quantitative research regards the experiences and expressions of human subjects as subjective, and thereby inaccurate, qualitative research treats these articulations as central to its inquiry. Both approaches are searching for answers to the same broad question i.e. what

is the relationship between mass media and society? However, quantitative research uses numerical techniques to establish objective conditions of cause and effect, whereas the qualitative approach bases its understanding of the media/society relationship on the meanings constructed by both communicators and audiences.

In order to examine the nature of communication in television documentary, this thesis proposes to explore the production and reception contexts both separately and in relation to each other. It is asserted that the actual nature of that communication can only be established through an appreciation of the perceptions held by producers and audiences of their own practices, of the genre in general and of each other. Consequently, it is the way in which the various participants understand and make sense of the aims, content and construction of documentary, which underlines an appreciation of the nature of communication involved.

As stated by Lindlof (1995),

"If communication is primarily a matter of signifying meanings and purposes, then qualitative inquiry is interested in how signifying occurs and what it means for those who engage in it." (p.22)

Furthermore, regarding a specific programme, it is important to explore the way in which a producer constructs the text based on his/her ideas on the link between signification and meaning. Of equal relevance is an investigation of the extent to which the text prescribes the meanings held by audiences or positions viewers in relation to the text. These questions require knowledge about the content of perceptions. This knowledge is difficult to obtain with quantitative techniques.

Thus, the most appropriate approach for this particular inquiry is a qualitative one. However, although the information obtained through a qualitative inquiry is the most suitable, it does not automatically negate the practice or incorporation of quantitative methods. The opposition that has been created between qualitative and quantitative approaches implies an inherent epistemological incompatibility between the two. However, I would argue that it is the theory surrounding the use of a method and the subsequent assumptions and expectations attached to that method which dictate its appropriateness. The information

yielded through separate methods is different rather than being either right or wrong. Consequently it is possible to effectively combine quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. Curran, 1976) providing the aims and limitations of each are made explicit. In this case, the nature of producer and audience responses can be complemented with the number of people from different categories with similar responses. Thus the 'qualitative' information describes the nature of responses, and the 'quantitative' information maps out the position of category members.

The thesis is essentially constructing a 'theory' of communication in television documentary. Therefore, the general strategy approximates that of grounded theory (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), in which the object is discovering and building theory from data. However, the grounded theory approach advocates the generation of theory based on the data collected, developing a conceptual structure through continual coding and recoding (e.g. Lonkila, 1995). The approach in this thesis involves the collection of data within a particular theoretical framework in order to investigate a specific research question. Therefore, the general coding schedule is guided, although not dictated, by the requirements of the research focus. The next section maps the theoretical framework and qualitative approach on to an appropriate research design.

3.3 Research design

The framework of the thesis advocates examining the processes of production and reception separately and in relation to each other. The separate analyses of production and reception enable an appreciation of the contexts in which each process takes place. By context, I am referring to the practices of production and reception and the various influences on them, whether institutional, cultural, social or psychological. An appreciation of *these* factors contributes to an understanding of the context surrounding an individual programme. Thus the nature of communication in a specific documentary programme is largely dependent on the nature of production and reception of documentary in general. This further demonstrates and necessitates analysis on different levels in order to fully understand the nature of the

communication. Consequently, the empirical part of the thesis is divided into three studies: an examination of the production context of television documentary; an examination of the reception context of television documentary; and a case study of communication in television documentary. The above discussion explains why, for the proposed inquiry, it is appropriate to place more emphasis on qualitative than quantitative data. Thus, the methods chosen need to access the actions and meanings associated with television documentary.

3.3.1 Production context

Investigating the production context of television documentary requires a method which fulfils both the theoretical and qualitative priorities outlined above. I decided to use semi-structured interviews with a variety of producers and commissioning editors to perform this task. The qualitative interview is a versatile tool that can fulfil several functions depending on the purpose of the inquiry. In this case, it provides information that cannot be directly observed by other means (Patton, 1990), and is an opportunity to understand the perspective of a social actor in a particular social situation.

"Often a researcher will interview persons only if their experience is central to the research problem in some way. They may be recruited for their expert insight, because they represent a certain status or category, or because of critical events in which they have participated." (Lindlof, 1995, p.167)

In this particular study, the experience of the interviewees is central to the research problem. They have expert insight, and they represent different categories of producer (differentiated on the basis of job, company, position and gender). The type of interview used in this study follows a 'respondent interview' format, which entails a series of directive questions and open-ended answers. The in-depth, semi-structured interview was considered the most appropriate methodology to investigate and determine individuals' perceptions and opinions. Its semi-structured nature maintains a particular framework yet, at the same time, provides a certain amount of flexibility to pursue emerging issues and themes. Consequently, the interviewer is able to pursue a particular agenda, yet, at the same time, probe the interesting, unexpected and complex issues in more depth. Consequently, whilst respondents are unconstrained in their replies, the choice and design of questions and the sample of

respondents are strongly guided by the conceptual framework of the study¹.

The theoretical basis of the thesis emphasises social context and levels of analysis. Both of these priorities are evident in the interview study. Preservation and appreciation of social context is obtained in three ways: by interviewing those actually involved in the production of documentary; by using a method of inquiry which both allows respondents to freely articulate their own experiences and provides an insight into their perspective on a situation; and by carrying out the interviews at the respondents' place of work². The technique also enables analysis on different levels. The interpersonal/situational level is represented in two ways. Firstly, the information provided by the respondents is indicative of their own social experience in a particular situation. Secondly, the interview itself is an interpersonal relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Thus the results can be regarded as the consequence of another particular interpersonal situation - the interview. The respondents vary in job, company, gender and experience. Therefore, comparing the resulting data according to these variables supplies information on a positional level of analysis. Finally, common perceptions, experiences and perspectives across the data can be read as indicative of the 'culture' of television documentary production, thus accessing the cultural/ideological level.

There is a difference between interviews with 'ordinary' people and with those who can be regarded as 'experts'. In this context an 'expert' is somebody who is chosen on the basis of the professional role they occupy. The 'experts' are being questioned about the world in which they have specialised knowledge and so perform the dual purpose of informing the interviewer about that world and at the same time expressing some form of opinion on it. 'Ordinary' people, on the other hand, have no specific involvement with the subject in question. The difference therefore is a lack of focus and direct knowledge regarding the subject matter, and the objects of interest for the interviewer which are the perceptions and beliefs surrounding it.

¹A detailed description of respondents and method is presented in section 3.5.1.

²Except for one respondent who came to LSE as he was working in the area.

Every methodology has its critics and the interview is no exception. Often subjects will regard themselves as representatives of an organisation (e.g. commissioning editors), and thus try to speak on behalf of that constituency rather than asserting their personal opinions. Thus it is vital to maintain an awareness of the position of respondents within the context under investigation. In addition, there are potential biases stemming from the interview situation itself which diminish the face value of the data (e.g. Farr, 1982). For example, interviewees may be worried about how they are presenting themselves and the impression they are making, which Rosenberg (1969) termed 'evaluation apprehension'. At the same time, interviewees could be making an effort to perform in the way they feel they should, rather than how they otherwise would, just to 'please' the researcher i.e. demand characteristics (Orne, 1962). These biases can be reduced by assuring participants of their anonymity, thus encouraging them to speak freely. However, at the same time, this study is interested in the institutional structure of television documentary as well as personal opinion, therefore a regurgitation of the 'party line' is by no means useless.

The interview is still an effective means of yielding information from people working within a particular context - the production of television documentary. The information can then be explored for emerging patterns and themes, thus formulating a picture of what is going on in a particular social context.

3.3.2 Reception context

A series of focus group discussions with a variety of different audiences were carried out to investigate the reception context of television documentary. As is explained below, this technique satisfies both the theoretical and the qualitative criteria of the thesis. The focus group discussion is a technique which faded from use during the 'quantitative years', but has recently reemerged in various guises within both market research and audience research (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1995; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). As with interviews, the focus group fulfils various purposes. It can be used as an exploratory tool, a pre-test measure for questionnaire items, an additional technique contributing to a triangulation of methods, and as the sole source of data gathering for exploring any social context. The feature distinguishing focus groups from other interviewing techniques is its group format.

"In a group setting actors are able to obtain feedback on their views of reality; they can respond to other or differing views; and the researcher can vicariously experience a reality in the same manner as the respondent through interaction and unstructured interviewing." (Frey & Fontana, in Morgan, 1993, p.25)

Thus, the experiences of group members encourages participants to articulate their own perspectives (e.g. Calder, 1977; Lindlof, 1995; Morgan, 1988), producing a debate which resembles "the dynamics of everyday social discourse" (Lindlof, 1995, p.174). It has been asserted that the focus group is a better way of obtaining data than the one-to-one interview as the amount of influence the interviewer can have on the interview is thereby reduced (e.g. Schlesinger et al., 1992). In this study the focus group is being used in its 'stand-alone' format, as a tool to explore similarities and differences in audiences' perceptions of television documentary. The decision to run several groups for this purpose reflects the view that rather than being an undifferentiated mass, the television audience is highly heterogenous. The aim is obviously to access as many of these different perspectives as possible. There are differences in opinion as to the best way of achieving this. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) believe the most effective group is one which accommodates complex relationships and diverse views. However, the more recent trend is to group together those people sharing similar backgrounds and views (e.g. Morley, 1980). This stems from the assumption of a link between social background, experiences and interpretation of television programmes, which not only fits in with much current media research (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996) but also, significantly, the theoretical thrust of this thesis. If there are more similarities than differences between members of the same social group, then it makes sense to separate groups on this basis and then observe the *between* as well as *within* group similarities and differences (e.g. Schlesinger et al., 1992). From a practical perspective, grouping 'similar' people prevents the dominance of one sector over another e.g. men over women, AB's over C2D's, older people over younger people.

In accordance with the theoretical priorities of the thesis, the focus group methodology preserves the social context. The technique itself is social in nature, eliciting opinions and perceptions through social interaction. Grouping people together who, coming from the similar backgrounds, are more likely to socialise together outside the focus group situation,

reduces the awkwardness, artificiality and formality of the situation and, at the same time, represents an effort to retain the social context from which the participants are drawn (e.g. Philo, 1993). There are, however, several dimensions which constitute 'social background'. It would certainly not be feasible to carry out groups along every possible social dimension, thus certain features have to be selected as the dominant dividing factors. Other audience studies have separated their groups along the dimensions thought to be relevant to the question being explored. For example, the study by Schlesinger et al. (1992) of television, violence and women, involved women who had and others who had not experienced violence. The focus groups in Lewis's (1991) study on the ideological effects of television were structured to explore the effects of race, gender and class. The object of interest in the present study is the various perceptions and expectations that exist surrounding television documentary, therefore the focus groups need to be constructed in such a way so as to anticipate where these variations may lie³. Justification for this approach is neatly summed up by Gamson:

"As participants bring their everyday knowledge to bear on these issues, we are able to observe the commonsense conceptions and taken-for-granted assumptions they share - to use Schutz's (1967) term, their *intersubjectivity*. This process rests, Schutz argues, on the assumption that others see the world in the same way and, hence, is defined socially, not individually. The key variables in the degree of intersubjectivity are personal contact and similarity of socialization. It is more problematic across societal cleavages such as race, class, and gender than within them. Hence, the closer focus groups come to natural peer groups, the more easily will this world of everyday knowledge emerge." (Gamson, 1992, p.192)

Carrying out focus groups, particularly those structured in this manner, also facilitates an exploration of the different analytic levels. The interpersonal/situational level is represented in each individual group discussion. The positional level is reflected in the comparisons between groups as they are separated on the basis of certain features pertaining to the participants' social background. Finally, any overall patterns of both similarities and differences which transcend those group distinctions inform the cultural/ideological level.

³The dimensions chosen, the rationale behind them and the practice of the focus groups are explained in section 3.5.2.

It has been argued that the focus group discussion encourages a false consensus amongst its participants (e.g. Hoijer, 1990) and thus renders the results of the technique worthless. However, this very much depends on the group moderator, who can provoke dissent and thus break up a false consensus. Secondly, and fundamentally, I would concur with Lunt and Livingstone (1996) that much depends on the reasons for choosing a particular method, and that any discrepancy between the results of individual and group interviews are the consequence of different contexts rather than the inherent accuracy or inaccuracy of either one or the other. Indeed the idea that data may be 'affected' by the group context echoes the positivist belief in the need for objectivity to gain access to the truth. This philosophy contradicts the theoretical and methodological spirit of the thesis.

3.3.3 Case study

The third empirical section of the thesis focuses specifically on communication in a particular documentary programme. The previous two studies take a general approach to the processes of production and reception respectively in documentary. The third section provides an insight into the factors involved in the production and reception of an individual programme. Whilst the case study is undoubtably the focal point of the thesis, any analysis of the results would be inadequate without the knowledge gained from separate investigations into production and reception. This is based on two premises. Firstly, that production is considerably influenced by the context in which that production takes place (e.g. Tunstall, 1993). Secondly, that reception is significantly determined by the perceptions and expectations that viewers bring to the reception context (e.g. Livingstone, 1995). The case study is an opportunity to examine the documentary 'in action'. It represents the interaction between production and programme, as well as between programme and viewers. More importantly, it also allows a comparison between the 'theoretical' positions presented by producers and receivers in the previous studies, and the 'practical' realization (or not) of those positions.

The case study can be defined as a study of:

"Any individual persons, organizations, communities or societies" (Stoecker,

1991, p.88).

Its popularity as a research method peaked in the 1930s then went into a decline in the 1950s, parallelling the general decline in use of qualitative methodologies across the social sciences. The case study can be used for different purposes - to explain a particular case; to explain a particular case using more general concepts; to explore a particular problem in more depth to grasp its complexity and suggest generalizable principles; to pilot test hypotheses; and as a careful selection of a case in order to test theory (Eckstein, 1975). This case study relates most closely to the final purpose - to test theory. The two main criticisms of the method are its lack of ability to generalize from a single case and the difficulty it has in maintaining objectivity. However, these criticisms are very much linked to a positivist approach to research. In direct contradiction to the positivist emphasis on representativeness, Mitchell (1983) argues that a case study should be chosen for its "explanatory power rather than for its typicality" (p.203-4). Rather than being an exploratory study to discover emerging phenomena which may or may not apply generally, this case study investigates the feasibility of applying a particular theoretical approach to the study of a specified phenomenon - communication. Therefore, the question is not about how far the results can be generalized, but, if the theoretical approach is endorsed, whether they are only specific to this particular case.

The study uses a similar approach to that of the general studies. A particular programme was chosen⁴, those involved in its production were interviewed, and it was then viewed and discussed by a varied audience. In keeping with the theoretical approach of the thesis, the case study methodology incorporates the axioms of social context and levels of analysis. As has been emphasised throughout the thesis, an analysis of communication has to take account of the social context in which it takes place. Broadly speaking this involves an appreciation of the processes of production and reception. However, a levels of analysis approach exposes the range of influencing factors contributing to the 'social context'. The interpersonal/situational level examines people's experiences in a particular situation i.e. the experiences of the producer during production and those of the viewer during reception, both

⁴The reasons for the choice are explained in section 3.5.3.

internal and external to the programme. The positional level refers to the influence of producers' and viewers' social identity to the processes of production and reception. The cultural/ideological level relates to common beliefs and perceptions concerning documentary which contribute and/or explain the perceptions and expectations of producers and viewers in relation to specific documentary programmes.

These three techniques provide different perspectives which together contribute to an understanding of the concept of communication as a whole. By this token, the research design represents a triangulation of methods and levels of analysis (e.g. Denzin, 1978). The use of triangulation reiterates the theoretical framework of the thesis, emphasising the importance of information obtained from different levels to an understanding of communication. It also contributes to the validity of the conclusions drawn⁵.

3.4 Reliability, validity and sampling

The positivist approach to research asserts that both design and data must be reliable and valid if the results are to be of use (e.g. Krippendorff, 1980). Validity concerns whether the research measures what it purports to measure. Reliability refers to the prospect of the same results being obtained by other researchers. Both of these requirements supposedly act as protectors of the truth. They are assumed to guard against subjective manipulation, preserve objectivity and thus ensure access to universal truths. Qualitative research has long been criticised for contravening these rules, allowing subjective inquiry and thus producing worthless, unrepresentative and ungeneralizable results. However, this is inevitable as the epistemological bases for positivist empiricism and for qualitative research are contradictory. Qualitative research emphasises the social context and individual realities of subjects, whilst positivism removes subjects from their social context and searches for a single, not a diverse or contested, reality. This does not mean that reliability and validity are redundant concepts

⁵This will be discussed in the next section.

in qualitative research, just that their implications are different. In the empirical work of this thesis, reliability and validity refer to the rigour and appropriateness of the research process rather than to notions of fixed truth and reality. Reliability refers to the extent to which another researcher will be able to follow the same procedure and thus understand how the outcome has been reached. Validity concerns the appropriateness of the methods chosen for an investigation of the questions posed by the research. Thus, rather than assessing the results in terms of their generalizability outside of the research context, both concepts rely on a clear explanation of the link between theory and practice, and between practice and the interpretation of results i.e. an audit trail.

However, the question still remains as to the value of the results generated by qualitative research. Are they relevant only within the confines of the research itself? It is important to reiterate first of all the aim of the research. The thesis is not aiming to unearth universal facts but to gain an insight into a particular social situation. It investigates the nature of communication in television documentary based on the perceptions and views of participants involved in the processes of production and reception. Theory and method are intertwined as both advocate an appreciation of social context and individual realities in order to obtain a measure of understanding. The point is that social context and individual realities are inextricably linked to the nature of communication in television documentary. There is no claim to mass generalization as that would involve removing the social context and consequently, ironically, rendering the results useless. However, it would be similarly extreme to claim that the results have no relevance outside of this specific research context. Indeed, any linkage between social contextual factors and perceptions would suggest the possibility of generalizing the results to *related* situations. Thus, one of the strongest claims to reliability and validity in this thesis is the proximity of the methodology to the theoretical framework on which the thesis is based. Within this approach, no claim is being made to a total and complete understanding of all perspectives on television documentary communication. However, the research does strive to uncover the most significant divergences and similarities of viewpoints based on what are argued to be the most significant differentiating features of the people involved. It is this rationale which forms the basis of the sampling procedure. The participants in each study are not intended as a

representative sample of the world of television documentary, but rather as a diverse collection based on what are assumed to be differentiating features within both production and reception. The focus is on the processes involved in television documentary communication rather than on the distributions of behaviours. Thus the emphasis is on sampling for diversity rather than to satisfy a statistical claim to representativeness.

It is, however, desirable to maintain as much rigour in the research process as possible. By rigour I am referring to standardizing the questions addressed to producers and viewers and, as outlined above, clearly delineating the procedure followed. Two separate interview schedules were used for producers and commissioning editors, ensuring that they were all asked roughly the same questions (e.g. Lindlof, 1995). In the same vein, a focus group discussion schedule provided the issues to be covered in every case. Standardizing the procedure in this way enables the results from each individual event i.e. interview or focus group, to be combined and analysed. Consequently, although the research context is in itself a particular social situation (e.g. Farr, 1982), the researcher is better able to explain any similarities and discrepancies in terms of the participants rather than the research process.

Thus the research *practice* is reliable and valid. The interpretation of the results obtained can only be that - an interpretation. There is no guarantee that another researcher would interpret the results in the same way. What is vital, therefore, in order to ensure the reliability of the research, is to make clear the steps taken and the decisions made to reach the interpretation that is offered. Qualitative research is often criticised for ignoring issues of reliability and validity, and not establishing methods to evaluate the plausibility of results (e.g. Bryman, 1988). The reliability and validity of this thesis is preserved through an open account of the relation between theory and method, the research process and the interpretation of results.

3.5 Methods

3.5.1 Producer interviews

Method

A basic aim was to access as wide a range of views as possible. Variations across people and position in the industry may characterize diverse experiences and thereby a potential divergence of views and opinions. Therefore four variables were identified across which differences could exist. Two variables follow institutional divisions. The first examines differences across job i.e. producers and commissioning editors. The second looks both across channels i.e. BBC1, BBC2, ITV and Channel Four⁶, and between 'types' of channel i.e. public service broadcasting and the commercial/independent sector⁷. The third variable explores people at different stages in their careers, and the fourth considers gender.

Chapter 2 describes the issues of theoretical relevance to television documentary i.e. definition, content, format, objectivity and truth, as well as the small amount of research carried out on documentary production and reception. This study addresses these same issues but with the more focussed aim of understanding the environment in which production takes place and the perceptions producers have concerning documentary communication.

Speaking to those people in charge of commissioning programmes for different series not only establishes the criteria used for selection, but also the underlying assumptions held about the audience watching, the image and aims of the series, and the channel itself. An understanding of the position selectors are in sheds light on the situation or obstacles production companies face. The goal is to ascertain perspectives on the documentary as a genre. What is its role in the schedules? Is it important? What purpose does it serve? Does it achieve its aims? Will it survive in the current and future broadcasting climate? Do different formats and styles exist and are different ones envisaged for the future?

⁶Channel 5 was not then in existence.

⁷The study only considers terrestrial channels.

The perspective of documentary producers, both independent and within the BBC, is a potential contrast. The aim is to establish their perceptions of the purpose, role and status of the documentary, both in an ideal world and in the present and future broadcasting climate. How do these views manifest themselves in the making of specific documentaries? In other words, what determines the format and style used? and on what basis and under what assumptions are such decisions taken? Who are the programmes made for? and to what extent is the audience considered in programme production? How far do the requirements of the broadcasting channels affect the way programmes are made? and are such requirements a constraint on the goals and desires of the programme makers? Do these producers feel they are making compromises? and if so, what sort of compromise and with what results? The BBC has its own institutional structure; how does that affect those producers working within it? and what are their opinions of it? A final issue to pursue is producers' perceptions of the balance between aesthetics and societal purpose i.e. how important is it for a film to be a 'work of art' or fulfil a social function, and are these creative or political elements stifled in any way by the commercial environment?

These questions were translated into two separate but overlapping interview schedules, one designed for commissioning editors (see **Appendix A**), the other for producers (see **Appendix B**). Forty letters were sent out requesting an interview, and, between June and October 1995, twenty one interviews were carried out (response rate = 52.5%). **Table 1** summarises the spread of respondents.

Table 1 Description of interviews

VARIABLE		Commissioning Editor	Producer
Number of respondents		7	14
COMPANY	Independent	n/a	10
	BBC1	1	3
	BBC2	2	
	ITV	2	1
	Channel 4	2	n/a
GENDER	Male	6	10
	Female	1	4
AGE	Young	n/a ⁸	3
	Old	n/a ⁹	11

The aim was not to obtain a representative sample of commissioning editors and producers, but to sample individuals across a range of factual series (current affairs, science, society) and channels, thus tapping different 'sections' of the industry. As there is no independent or objective indicator defining the point at which one becomes established, the length of time spent working in the industry was used as a benchmark as one has to be fairly good to survive. The sample covered two rough categories: 'young' producers who had been in the business for fewer than ten years, and 'old' producers who had been in the business for over ten years. All the interviews, with one exception¹⁰, were carried out at the respondents place of work. The length of the interviews ranged from twenty five minutes to an hour and a half, with most lasting around 45 minutes. After first obtaining permission, all of the interviews (except for one¹¹) were audio taped and then transcribed verbatim. Every respondent was subsequently sent a letter of thanks and a copy of the transcript. One respondent wished to

⁸A commissioning editor is appointed as such by virtue of their experience, thus commissioning editors are at the same stage of their career. This makes the variable 'age', which I used to distinguish between producers' career positions, irrelevant.

⁹See note 8.

¹⁰One BBC respondent came to LSE as he was working in the area.

¹¹This interview could not be taped due to excessive noise in the vicinity. The main points were noted and written up afterwards.

remain anonymous and two others requested to see their quotes.

Analysis

This study strives to comprehend the practices and debates within the world of British television documentary production. The interviews are intended as an insight into that world, hence it is the themes that emerge across respondents as a whole that are of primary interest. The aim of the data analysis is to extract such themes and highlight variations in perspective, opinion and perception. Efforts are also made, as far as possible, to maintain the context from which such extracts are drawn. It is then possible to identify whether any variations can be linked to the variables selected at the beginning of the study i.e. job, channel, experience, gender.

The extraction of themes requires a close examination and reorganisation of the data. In order to structure this process a coding frame was devised. This was a relatively straightforward procedure as the interview questions had been specifically formulated to cover a variety of areas. The initial coding frame was drawn up using a top-down approach, i.e. approaching the data with a set of questions rather than letting the categories emerge from the data. However, although the coding frame was highly structured beforehand, it also incorporated a bottom-up approach, remaining open to the inclusion of any relevant themes and/or categories that had not previously been taken into consideration. The strategy thus allowed a continuous refinement of the coding frame. As expected, the data informed and expanded the number of categories *within* themes, however it also led to the removal of one theme identified as important before the data analysis began and the inclusion of one extra theme. The original coding frame had thirteen broad themes:

- Background details
- Definitions of documentary
- Purpose of documentary
- Issues relating to the audience
- Constraints
- Compromises
- Documentary making in the past and survival in the future
- Format
- Documentary types
- Reasons for making documentary

- Perceptions of control
- Commissioning criteria
- Amount of documentary on television.

'Compromises' was dropped from the original coding frame as the theme was already catered for within the 'constraints' category. An additional theme was constructed to assimilate all references to the features of different programmes or strands. This provides an indication as to the range of perceptions and perspectives which exist amongst the practitioners concerning the content and aims of *specific* programmes. The final coding frame encompassed thirteen general themes (see **Appendix C**).

The NUDIST¹² computer qualitative data analysis package was judged the most suitable method to apply given the large amount of qualitative data and the highly structured nature of the analysis. The programme allows you to create an index system within which the data can be structured and organised. The advantages of such a programme for this particular study are firstly its ability to handle large amounts of data; secondly the correspondence between the theoretical approach of the analysis (i.e. division into themes) and the programme's analytical design requirements; and thirdly the capacity to cross-reference between themes. The aim of the data analysis is to establish some sort of theory of television documentary production, and the structure and practice of the NUDIST package is ideally suited to this endeavour:

"Working with a hierarchically structured tree of codes (or nodes) *forces* you to think about the relationship among your codes and strongly encourages you to do it in hierarchical terms." (Weitzman & Miles, 1995, p.252)

The interviews were coded and transferred to NUDIST. The code used to differentiate between respondents is explained in **Appendix D**.

3.5.2 Focus groups

Method

As described in section **3.3.2** the principal aim of the focus groups is to explore different

¹²NUDIST is an acronym for Non-numerical, Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing.

views and perceptions which exist surrounding television documentary. Not only does this provide some indication of the 'image' of the genre but it contributes significantly to the way a programme belonging to that genre will be differentially interpreted. The questions raised in the focus groups derive from three areas: the theoretical framework of the thesis; the existing literature on documentary; and the analysis of the producer interviews. The theoretical framework highlights the importance of what the viewer brings to the viewing context and the relevance of these expectations and views to an interpretation of what is subsequently watched. Assumptions are made in the literature (see Chapter 2) and by the producers (see Chapter 4) as to what those expectations and views are. However, as has already been noted, no significant attempt has been made to assess the accuracy of these assumptions. The focus group schedule (see **Appendix E**) covers a variety of issues such as the definition of a documentary, the difference between documentary and current affairs, how often they watch documentaries and why, whether they force themselves to watch or really want to, what makes a documentary interesting, what attracts them to a particular documentary, whether they ever get annoyed watching them and if so why, whether it is important to have documentaries/current affairs on television and why, the role/purpose of documentary, whether they fulfil this, whether there is such a thing as a bad documentary, documentaries and objectivity, whether they want them on television, and whether they should be about what the public wants to watch or what broadcasters feel it should watch. Thus the groups are asked about their expectations of the genre, their viewing habits, their perceptions of what is shown, and the general importance of documentary. These questions tie in not only with the issues of importance to producers but also the overall theoretical thrust of the thesis i.e. the nature of communication in documentary and its subsequent purpose in society.

As outlined in section 3.3.2 the focus groups were divided along the dimensions of socio-economic status, age and gender. These were judged to be the dimensions most likely to produce diverging views and perceptions of television documentary. Socio-economic status is often linked to level of education, and it is possible that those who are better educated will have different opinions and expectations of documentary than those with less education. At the same time, it is possible that documentaries underestimate, as well as overestimate, the

competency of their viewers, which will also contribute to the audience's perceptions of the genre. Consequently, dividing the groups according to socio-economic status is a useful way of exploring their range of views as well as these potential myths. Age could also be significant as an older age group will have lived through the beginnings of television together with its strong emphasis on public service broadcasting, whilst a younger group may be more aware of or positive about commercialisation and the pressure of market forces. Dividing groups according to gender i.e. having all-male and all-female groups, complies with the argument by Schlesinger et al. (1992) that the presence of men can inhibit and distort women's responses and interpretations. Consequently, eight focus groups were conducted, each with 5 people:

Table 2 Focus Group Descriptions

	A B C1	C2 D ¹³
20 - 35 YEARS	Group 1 - Male Group 2 - Female	Group 3 - Male Group 4 - Female
45 - 60 YEARS	Group 5 - Male Group 6 - Female	Group 7 - Male Group 8 - Female

The focus groups were held in London and Manchester. Groups 1 and 2 were held at the London School of Economics. Group 4 was held at the participants' place of work in Manchester. Groups 5 and 6 were held at a family home in Manchester. Groups 3, 7 and 8 were held at a family home in London. I arranged five of the groups and the remaining three were assembled by a professional recruiter. Before the discussion began, each group participant was given a short written task to complete which involved sorting a list of twenty programmes into the categories 'news/current affairs', 'documentary', 'other' and 'don't know' and explaining in writing the criteria used to place things in each of these categories. They were asked whether the documentary genre could be split up into different types, and if so what they were. The task was intended as a cue to thinking and talking about the subject in hand. Every focus group was held around a table so that everyone was at the same level and could see each other. On average the task took fifteen minutes to complete and the

¹³The E category was excluded on the grounds that it is misleading. It includes the retired and the unemployed and thus contains people who, if employed, would be divided amongst the other socio-economic groups.

discussions lasted an hour. I acted as facilitator in each discussion, allowing the conversation to flow yet also making sure it covered the areas I wished to be discussed. All of the discussions were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Analysis

As with the producer interviews, the focus groups were constructed to explore the different views that may exist amongst the audience of television documentary. Consequently the analysis was designed not only to describe those views and the areas to which they relate, but also to establish whether differences in perspective can be correlated with the variables along which the groups were divided.

The analysis was carried out following the same reasoning behind the analysis of the producer interviews. A coding frame was drawn up based on the interview schedule used in the focus group discussions. However, the coding frame remained flexible in order to incorporate further information emerging through the discussions. The original coding frame covered ten broad themes:

- audience background
- documentary definition
- viewing habits
- reasons for watching
- reasons for turning off/not watching
- interest maintainers
- societal role of documentary
- objectivity and bias
- commercialisation
- whose agenda

However, in the course of coding, two additional themes emerged, one referring to the personal effect of documentary, the other to its credibility. Thus, the final coding frame contained twelve broad themes (see **Appendix F**). The discussions were coded and entered into the NUDIST qualitative data analysis programme. Once again, this programme is suitable because of its ability to organise, manage and cross reference large quantities of data.

3.5.3 Case study

Method

The aim of this final study is to ascertain the nature of communication in one particular documentary programme. The knowledge acquired in both previous studies is used as a guide to both the design of the study and the analysis of its results. There are several broad questions to which this final study aims to offer some sort of insight. How far do the ideas of the producer correspond with those of the viewers? How far do the results of the general studies contribute to an understanding of a specific example? An associated question is how far the views of respondents towards an abstract concept relate to their perceptions of a more concrete example. How does this contribute to theory on the balance between producer, text and audience in television documentary programmes? And what can be said about the nature of communication in television documentary as a result?

The production study highlights two dimensions along which producers and commissioning editors can be located (See Chapter 4). One concerns their conception of the type of service documentary should provide, ranging from a paternalistic, public service broadcasting approach - essentially providing the audience with what they *should* watch - to conforming with the demands of the audience. The other focuses on different forms of gratification sought by the producer, from the qualitative fulfilment of the audience to the quantitative financial gain of the producer. Positioning along these dimensions is partially determined by job, company and career position. Consequently, one aim is to establish where the producer of the programme used in the case study is located on these dimensions, and whether the variables of job, company and career position have any bearing on this. The dimensions represent beliefs about the role of documentary in society, the relationship between documentary and its audience, and the subsequent function of the broadcaster. Furthermore, those involved in production seem to focus more on the structural and technical aspects than the content of documentary. If the general context provides much of the context for the specific, then one would expect there to be a prescriptive link between position on the dimensions and the objectives and construction of the case study documentary programme. This is one of the issues to be explored by the study.

The reception study (see Chapter 5) identified certain widespread characteristics associated with documentary, yet certain other factors on which audience members differed. Differences concern the way viewers engage with documentary - whether in a critical or referential fashion. There is a distinction between fundamentally accepting and fundamentally questioning documentary, and two ways of assessing a programme's credibility are evident - one in which a viewer uses his/her own personal experience, the other using their factual knowledge of the world. These distinctions are strongly associated with different socio-economic classes, which is why, as is described below, class is one of the differentiating variables of the focus groups in this final study. The question is how far the viewers' interpretation of the programme in this final study draws on the findings of the general reception study.

The answers to both production- and reception-related questions can only be found following the exploration of the central focus of this last study, namely the nature of communication in a specific television documentary programme, established through a comparison between production and reception. The study looks at the similarities and differences between the way the producer and viewers describe the programme. If there are any differences what are they? who are they between? and how can they be explained? Similarly, to what extent, in what manner and amongst who, is there convergence and divergence between the producer and the viewers on the programme's (or producer's) aims? how does it attempts to fulfil them? and does it do so successfully?

The first stage was to choose a suitable documentary programme to use as a case study. The programme "Parental Choice" was selected, which documents the process of moving from primary to secondary education and the problems involved. A transcript of the programme can be found in **Appendix H**. This particular programme was chosen for several reasons. First of all, it was broadcast as part of Channel Four's *Cutting Edge* series - one of the main documentary strands on terrestrial television. It thereby conforms to an institutional definition of documentary. Secondly, it had been broadcast fairly recently (March 1997), thus both content and format were not outdated. The subject matter of the programme involved two issues which were significant in the perceptions of respondents in the reception

study (see Chapter 5). One is a socio-economic class angle, the variable on which notable differences were based. The other is the likelihood of viewers having had personal experience of the issue discussed. The final decisive factor in the choice of programme was the availability and willingness of the programme-maker to take part in the study.

The study was in two parts. The first part involved an interview with Riete Oord, the programme-maker, on 15th July 1997, at her home in Stoke Newington. The interview concentrated on where the programme-maker lay in relation to the dimensions identified in Chapter 4; the circumstances in which the programme was commissioned; the aims of programme, and programme-maker, in terms of both structure, content and effect; the existence of constraints or compromises in the making of the programme; how the programme's structure was determined i.e. the choice of characters, stories etc., and how this is linked to the producer's aims; the role of viewers in making it i.e. whether they taken into consideration and, if so, how and why. The interview lasted forty five minutes and was tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The second part consisted of four focus group discussions with different viewers, held in August 1997 (See **Table 3**). In accordance with the main differentiating factors in the reception study, the groups were divided according to socio-economic status and gender. The participants were not further divided into younger and older groups as the variable 'age' had produced no clear differences of perspective in the general reception study. However, because of the possible importance of personal experience on interpretation, each group included a number of parents who had been through the process on which the documentary was based. The other participants were single. All group members were aged 20+ in accordance with the bottom age band in the general focus group study.

Table 3 Case study focus group participants

	ABC1	C2D
MALE	5 participants (3 single men; 2 parents)	5 participants (2 single men; 3 parents)
FEMALE	4 participants (3 single women; 1 parent)	5 participants (2 single women; 3 parents)

Three of the groups were held in a private home, and the fourth took place at the London

School of Economics. I recruited the ABC1 groups, and a professional recruiter assembled the C2D groups. Each group followed the same format. The programme was shown, which lasted for 50 minutes, and was followed by a one hour group discussion. The groups discussed issues on and around the programme's description; how far it conformed to a documentary concept; what the producer was trying to say and how; whether it was fair and/or objective; whether it was convincing; how interesting it was; its effects; and what should and should not have been included in the programme. The topic guide can be found in **Appendix I**. Factors which cannot or are not accounted for in advance are the respondents' knowledge of the subject matter and the regional context of both the programme and the focus group participants. All the discussions were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Analysis

The analysis of the case study sets out to answer three main questions. What is the relationship between the producer of "Parental Choice" and the results of the production study? How do the patterns of perspectives within and across the audience focus groups of this programme correspond with those of the reception study? What is the nature of communication between producer and viewers in this television documentary programme? Consequently, the coding schedule had to include themes from the previous studies which would be related to the production and reception of the documentary, as well as themes which relate more directly to this particular programme. The interview and focus groups were coded using the same schedule. The advantage of this is that it enables direct comparisons to be made. The disadvantage is that certain themes would only be relevant to either interview or focus groups. The coding frame (see **Appendix J**) included thirteen broad themes:

- Background details
- Definition of documentary
- Role/purpose of documentary
- References to the audience
- Issues surrounding programme-making [production]
- Description of the programme
- Aims/objectives
- Programme structure/construction
- Credibility

- Objectivity/Bias
- Personal effect [reception]
- Additional content/character-related comment
- Viewing details

The interview and four focus groups were coded in accordance with the themes and subthemes in the coding schedule. These areas were generated in response to the results of the production and reception studies, the aims of this particular case study and any further information arising from the data. The additional information within the data contributed to the development of subthemes within the specified themes, rather than uncovering previously unforeseen themes. This study is a lot more focussed than the previous two. The production and reception studies were fairly exploratory in nature, whereas this case study is an application of both the results of those two studies and the theoretical framework of the thesis.

Once again the NUDIST qualitative data analysis package was used to organise the coded data. Once the data had been coded, each subtheme was examined to ascertain which group had said what, and whether there was any debate, both within and across groups. The groups were also summarized individually, in the light of the coding, in order to maintain an awareness of the context in which themes, consensus and debate emerge.

3.6 Conclusion

The qualitative approach adopted in this research corresponds with the theoretical emphasis on preserving social context and maintaining an awareness of different levels of analysis. The producer interviews and audience focus group discussions investigate the general context of production and reception respectively. The case study of a television documentary programme examines a specific instance of communication, the analysis of which benefits from the insights gained in the previous two studies. Thus, the three studies together acknowledge, complement and explore the theoretical framework of the thesis.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTEXT OF TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY PRODUCTION

4.1 Outline

This chapter explores the production context of television documentary through a series of interviews. The interviews are analysed from the perspective of both the broadcasting industry and the communication context, thus placing them within the theoretical framework of the thesis as a whole. The chapter outlines the theoretical concerns and corresponding issues which structure the interview study. The results are presented both specifically within the domain of this study i.e. the production context, and more generally in relation to the wider theoretical position of the research project as a whole.

4.2 Framework of the study

Chapter 1 emphasised the importance of the relation between production and reception. Morley (1992) notes that:

"Any understandings of mass communications will be inadequate if we consider the elements of that process (production, programme, audience) in isolation from each other" (p.78)

Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model illustrates this relationship, linking the processes of production and reception, yet still appreciating their own quite specific social contexts. This thesis similarly seeks an understanding of television documentary communication by examining the relationship between production, text and audience. The present chapter explores the nature of the production context, or encoding moment, and its approach to both text and audience.

Chapter 1 argued that definitions and perceptions of communication vary according to the level at which the analysis takes place. As the focus here is on the relationship between

production and reception in television documentary, analysis concentrates on the situational and positional levels (Doise, 1986), although an awareness of other levels i.e. intrapersonal and ideological, is maintained. This is important because whilst the articulation of levels of analysis is necessary for an understanding of the different factors involved, the separation itself is an analytic rather than an empirical one.

Hall's model (1980) highlights the role of social context within communication, and Doise's levels of analysis (1986) outline different contextual spheres - intrapersonal, interpersonal/situational, positional, ideological. In this study of television documentary production, the intrapersonal level refers to the socio-cognitive processes used by producers to organise messages¹, the situational level concerns factors relating to the practical/institutional broadcasting context, the positional level concerns the social positioning of producers and commissioning editors both within and without the institutional broadcasting context, and the ideological level refers to the values, beliefs and norms which frame their actions. With these in mind, the study considers two broad areas from the viewpoint of producers and commissioning editors - the structure and functioning of the television documentary industry; and their relevance to the texts and audiences of documentary - so as to understand the structuring of communication across producer, text and audience.

Appreciating and understanding how the documentary industry operates provides information about the environment in which producers are working. 'Environment' encompasses various issues, all of which are explored in the interviews. Firstly, the way the documentary section of the industry is organised i.e. what sort of institutional context people are working within. Secondly, the practices, rules and boundaries surrounding the commissioning and the making of programmes which are determined by that institutional setting. Thirdly, the way such practices, rules and boundaries are regarded by those working within the institution. In terms of the documentary as a genre, the pertinent considerations are how documentary is being defined and by whom, which debates exist surrounding the nature of documentary as a genre,

¹Although relevant, this study will not be investigating specific socio-cognitive processes.

and where those within the industry locate themselves in relation to these genre debates. Finally, the theoretical concerns of the research refer in general to the concept of communication and, more specifically, to perceptions of the purpose of television documentary by both producers and audiences.

As television is a mass medium, producers have an indirect relationship with their audience which makes it difficult to ascertain viewers' responses to programmes. Chapter 1 advocates the importance of feedback to communication (e.g. Schlesinger, 1978; Hall, 1980), however, given the lack of direct contact with the audience and the paucity of audience research (e.g. Ang, 1991), producers have to bridge the gap between production and reception themselves. Consequently, it is important to discover what they believe they are doing, how they are doing this, and what information they depend upon in doing so. Thus, the relevant issues are how producers construe the aims and role of documentary within society, perceptions and/or knowledge of the audience i.e. who they are, what they understand, what they enjoy, and the importance of the audience to the producer.

This chapter reports a series of interviews carried out with both commissioning editors and documentary producers in order to establish a general picture of television documentary production². In the present broadcasting climate, a programme has to be accepted by a channel or strand before a documentary can reach the television screen. Consequently, a producer must take into consideration not only his/her own criteria concerning the importance of documentary but also the institutional requirements of production. Indeed if a programme does not make it to the screen, any aspirations the producer may have for mass information, education or entertainment are quashed. Thus, a crucial part of the picture is the institutional constraints, the genre, strand and channel conventions, and the relationship between independent production companies and the various commissioning editors.

In sum, the aim of this chapter is to reveal the nature of the relationship between producers and the broadcasting institutions, the environment in which they operate, the perceptions held

²The sampling, execution and coding of these interviews are described in Chapter 3, section 3.5.1.

about the purpose of the genre itself, the assumptions on which such perceptions are based, and thoughts about its survival in the future.

4.3 Results

The interview analysis strives to strike a balance between the extremes of mass homogeneity and individual heterogeneity of perceptions. Following the theoretical emphasis on social context, this goal is based on two assumptions. Firstly, that our perceptions are highly dependent on different levels of social context, as explained in Chapter 1. Secondly, that, by virtue of its social nature, this context is shared by others, thus forming common discursive spheres. In the context of the television documentary, this analysis aims to establish the nature of these discursive spheres - their content, what distinguishes one sphere from another, and what social factors unite a sphere. Thus, I will analyse the interviews in relation to four central questions. Firstly, what are the common debates running through the interviews, i.e. the overarching debates to which all other themes relate? Secondly, what are the issues of consensus and debate within these other specific themes - where specific themes are the various areas discussed in the interviews? Thirdly, how far are these similarities and differences in perceptions associated with the variables of job, company, career position and gender? Finally, how do the findings within specific themes relate to the common debates across the data? The presentation of results begins with an outline and illustration of the common debates. This is followed by summaries of the specific themes and their relation to the variables of job, company, career position and gender. However, it is important to note that due to the small number of people interviewed, only emphatic differences between variables and themes are pointed out. The final discussion considers the implications of the findings in relation to the common debates in the data and the theoretical framework of the thesis.

4.3.1 Common Debates

Two fundamental debates emerge from the data which appear to underpin the discussion of television documentary. The identification of these debates is based on issues which reoccur

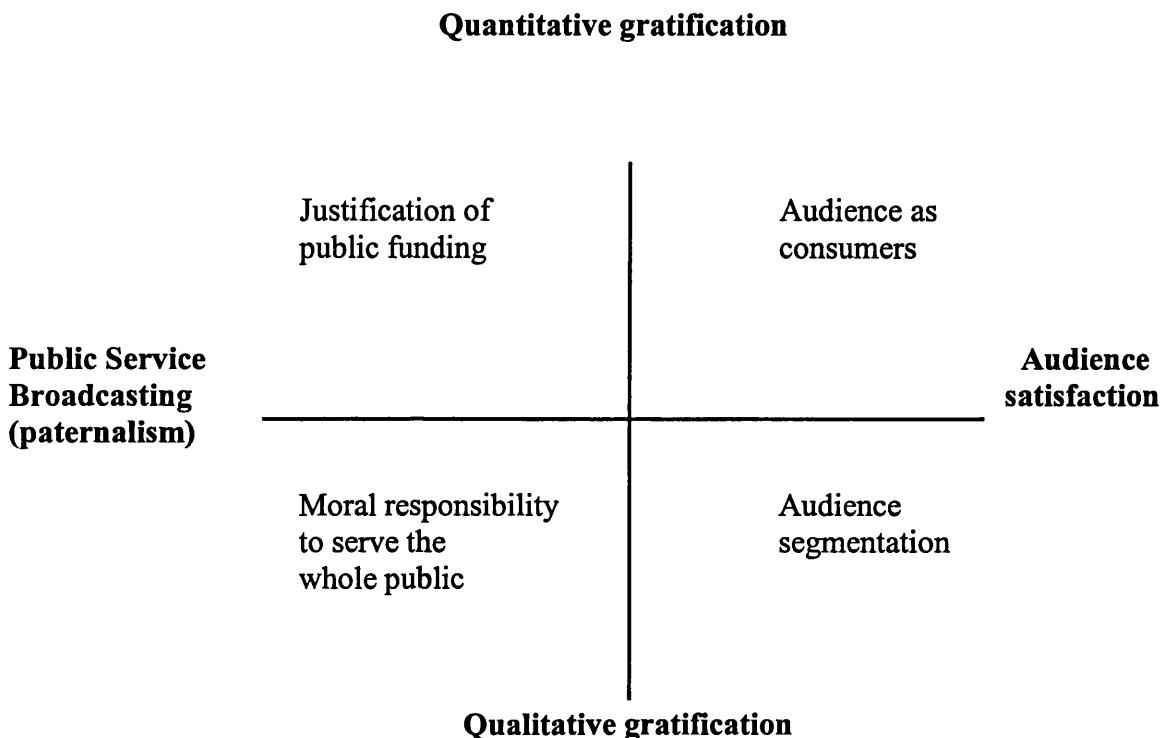
across responses within each theme. I have termed these debates 'conceptions of public service' and 'forms of gratification'.

By 'conceptions of public service' I am referring to different perspectives on the type of service that television offers the audience, or, in more abstract terms, the role of television in society. At one extreme (public service broadcasting) is the Reithian, some would say elitist, viewpoint which accords television a paternalistic role. In other words, those controlling television determine what is broadcast according to their perceptions of what is important and interesting. This is set in the context of television as vital to the ability of citizens to participate in the democratic process. Television is thus regarded as providing a public service. The alternative perspective (audience satisfaction) assigns television a reactive as opposed to proactive role. Its function is to serve people according to what *they* themselves want, rather than what broadcasters want for them. Consequently, television is responding to the desires and needs of the audience and, in so doing, provides a service to the public.

'Forms of gratification' describe different types of satisfaction. This debate is also polarised. At one extreme (quantitative gratification) the priority is the broadcasters' commercial gain, hence the desire to attract mass audiences indicating programme popularity and guaranteeing future funding. At the other extreme (qualitative gratification) the priority is the intrinsic satisfaction of the audience. The aim is not mass audience at whatever cost, but the satisfaction of a broad and diverse audience through an appreciation of what is wanted, enjoyed and understood. Thus, it is the concerns and interests of audiences which lie at the forefront of broadcasters' minds.

These two debates can be represented as intersecting dimensions (See Figure 1), creating four broad perspectives.

Figure 1 Broad perspectives on television documentary production



The top left hand box - justification of public funding - represents the attempt to overcome the clash between the concerns of the citizenry and those of the market. Thus it broadly supports the provision of a certain range of programmes which are beneficial to the public, together with a recognition of the need to demonstrate success in this endeavour - through large audiences - in order to secure future funding. For example,

"from the point of view of *Modern Times* as a series, it should be...of such quality, or is should be able to be delivering the kind of programmes that enable the BBC to say that on its..BBC2..that on its second channel it has a..it is putting out the best kind of single documentaries, or it has a series, it has a strand, it has a programmes that is delivering high quality single documentaries that are..are getting critical attention and critical acclaim and..and attracting a decent audience..so that in that way it's performing a small..it's an element in the wide range of things that the BBC is highlighting all the time to the outside world as to what it's delivering for the licence fee."

(BCE2, 139-155³)

The top right hand box - audience as consumers - advocates the production of items which will interest the largest possible audience and consequently attract as much money as possible. For example,

"we found that you get a lot more out in pure financial terms of things like gardening, or whatever, than you can out of current affairs. I get absolutely dedicated to current affairs and you're a journalist through and through, which I was until I became an independent, then yes you stick with current affairs, but you'll never ever run a business" (PIOM3, 33-40)

The bottom left hand box - moral responsibility to serve the whole public - alludes to the fundamental duty to serve and be of benefit to everyone, together with a recognition that the audience has to be taken into consideration if this is to be achieved. Thus, a large audience is only possible if a programme is understood, relevant, and engaging. For example,

"there is not an understanding within the higher echelons of television, in other words management, programme controllers..of the appreciation that the audience has and the desire that the audience has for serious programmes...Popular programming people do watch, populist programming, they're appealing to the...companies are trying to produce programmes that they believe appeal to the lowest common denominator, but as always with both...whether it be our politicians, our media chiefs, whatever, they constantly underestimate the desires and intelligence of the audience." (PITV1, 38-43, 61-68)

Finally, the bottom right hand box - audience segmentation - refers to the recognition of different interest categories within the audience and the consequent attempt to satisfy those different sections. For example,

"I think probably the channel is happy with a small audience provided it's...it's a target..we're providing a service for them. I mean, we do Hindi movies, you know, I think that makes the..an audience very happy." (C4CE2, 570-575)

So the two fundamental oppositions spanning the data are the different conceptions of the

³Every quote is followed by a reference to the respondent and where (text units) it can be found in the interview. An explanation of the codes used can be found in **Appendix D**.

type of service television provides and the prioritised form of gratification. These two debates emerged through an exploration of several specific themes dealing with issues within documentary production. The following section examines the content and arguments within these themes.

4.3.2 Coded themes

Each specific theme is reported by way of a summary table displaying the frequency and nature of responses in each category within the theme. I identified certain subcategories within each theme, by grouping responses which referred to the same issue. The first column lists the subcategories within the theme. The second column lists the number of interviews containing references to each subcategory. The third column notes the number of descriptive, supportive or positive references, where a 'reference' is a general term encompassing all comments made by a respondent⁴. The fourth column similarly denotes the number of negative or critical comments⁵. There follows an explanation and, where appropriate, illustration of two significant concerns: the main issues and debates; and the relation between perspectives and the variables of job, company, position and gender. The concluding discussion then seeks to establish the relation between specific themes, variables and the common debates outlined above. Eleven of the twelve specific themes reflected questions asked in the interviews, therefore using a top-down approach. The final theme - 'Programme/strand features' - was generated from the data, thus bottom-up.

⁴This is based on the observation that respondents tend to occupy a particular position and are thus fairly consistent in the tone of their comments.

⁵In a small number of themes certain respondents made both positive and negative comments. Consequently, the sum of positive and negative references does not always equal the number of documents referenced.

Theme 1: Documentary Definition

Table 4 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 17

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of positive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references ⁶
Format/Style/Genre	16	15	1
Subject matter	7	6	1
Continuum	4	4	0
Art form	2	2	0

The definition of documentary has traditionally been an area of disagreement (e.g. Vaughan, 1976; Bondebjerg, 1994). The descriptions given by the respondents in this study were neither unanimous nor conclusive. One respondent commented,

"if you can come up in your PhD with a precise definition of the different sort of levels of documentary you'll do the industry a favour!" (ICE2, 647-650)

The above table indicates the subcategories used to define documentary: by format, style or genre; according to subject matter; as a continuum of genre (from current affairs to documentary) and of style/format (from journalistic to observational); and as an art-form. A reference to one of these four subcategories does not preclude references to the other three. In fact, although the definitions fell into these areas, the debates within the theme straddle all four.

The most routine way of defining the documentary was in terms of format or style:

"a documentary is one where somehow the film-making skills..er..and the framing of it, in the context of the schedule, isolates it more as a film than simply as something off the back of the news. It's more time..it suggests more time and thought has gone into it, it's more..it's a mixture of aesthetics and, you know, some technical recognition that the actors..that the people in

⁶This column encompasses comments which criticise the way in which a specific category is used to define documentary.

it aren't actors." (PIOM2, 274-282)

Definitions rarely pinned down the precise technical characteristics of documentary as a genre, although one producer describes the classical documentary as:

"16mm film, 50 minutes long, edited on film, talking heads, illustrative material, captions under people as they talk, you know...you know the stuff - the language of documentary" (PIOM1, 610-614)

Other more esoteric definitions include a description of the documentary as story-telling, debates over whether the documentary is the voice of the producer or the subject, and whether analysis should be implicit or explicit. It was common for documentary to be defined in relation to current affairs:

"Current affairs has to be based on authoritative journalism..er..reliable journalism..it's reliable, authoritative, fair, reasonable, you know, it's got lots of journalistic obligations. Documentaries..the best documentaries are always based on good journalism, but, they are fully entitled to be partial provided they're not secretly so" (BCE1, 665-672)

However, this separation of the two genres is not universally accepted:

"these are the sort of deep philosophical debates that people like to have, but when you're actually making the programmes, it's quite clear what sort of programme you're making. I mean, you may want a current affairs programme to look like art, and it might occasionally. And you might want, you know, a fly-on-the-wall observational documentary to be hard-hitting, and it will occasionally." (PIYF1, 205-213)

One other recurring issue is elitism versus populism. The following quote defends the so-called 'populist' documentaries:

"I get a bit upset when those that make the one and a half hour long [programmes] look at the people that made "Hollywood Wives" and say, well, you know...because to me it's just as valid. It shows people a trite piece of life just as much as the serious documentary about marriage break-up does" (PIOM3, 929-935)

This view that the more appealing, popular and 'lightweight' programmes are also documentaries, just different types, was prevalent in the data. However, it also implies the existence of an alternative view rejecting their inclusion in the documentary genre. Although not articulated within this theme, this alternative view is indirectly expressed within other themes (e.g. Documentary Purpose).

Defining documentary according to *subject matter* referred predominantly to its factual basis and to the wide range of potential topics:

"Documentary does strike me as something...a film that is factually based."
(PIOM2, 270-271)

"I believe documentary in the broadest sense can be a rock video, or it can be a news report on the fire on Southend pier" (PIOM1, 583-586)

The idea of a continuum is used both in terms of genre - from current affairs to documentary - and documentary style - from journalistic to observational. However, both are based on the varying degrees of structure and freedom, with the current affairs/journalistic end representing tight structure and rigidity and the documentary/observational end symbolising individuality and flexibility:

"at one end, very cut and dried news and current affairs, the other end really very, yeah, very creatively done, done the way you want to do it" (PBOM2, 486-489)

A final, infrequent, way of referring to the documentary was as an art form. It is interesting that so few respondents define the documentary in this way given the amount of literature on documentary aesthetics (e.g. Waugh, 1984). There are two possible reasons. Firstly, the majority of documentary broadcasters have a journalistic rather than artistic background. Secondly, 'art form' in this context refers to a stylised film in which the emphasis is on aesthetics rather than knowledge. This is considered to be appealing to a very small audience, and therefore will not be highly prioritised by documentary commissioning editors:

"They know that a beautiful opening sequence on a story with no meaningful narrative won't make the difference..audiences won't stay with it. They know that a fairly poorly crafted but powerful story will probably keep an audience to a greater extent." (PIOM4, 1278-1284)

The question of what is and what is not documentary corresponds closely to the common themes running through the interviews. The elitism/populism debate parallels the 'conceptions of service' theme. At one extreme lies the classic, specialist or educational, informative documentary, both of which are centred around the desires of the producer. The other extreme houses programmes made from the viewers' perspective, which make no secret of the desire for large audiences - a feature that leads those at the other end almost to exclude such programmes from the documentary category.

Although four subcategories are identified, the respondents often referred to one or more of the four areas. However, references to the same areas do not necessarily signify overlap or concurrence between distinct concepts of documentary. For example, two producers place the documentary along a continuum and define it in terms of its format and style. One argues that while the type of documentary may change, it is always within the context of reality. Meanwhile the other argues that only as it moves from the journalistic to the observational is the documentary perceived as more realistic. While the first producer believes in a

"definite distinction between news and current affairs and documentary"
(PBOM2, 436-437)

the second producer believes that the division between current affairs and documentary is created solely for the sake of discussion. However, there is no clear pattern of combinations or content across the subcategory references (see **Table 5**).

Table 5 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Subject matter	3/7	3/14	1/6	3/3	0/2	2/10	6/16	0/5	0/3	11/11
Continuum	0/7	4/14	1/6	0/3	0/2	3/10	3/16	1/5	1/3	3/11
Format	5/7	11/14	5/6	3/3	0/2	8/10	13/16	3/5	1/3	10/11
Art form	0/7	2/14	0/6	0/3	0/2	2/10	1/16	1/5	1/3	1/11

There are a few notable patterns between perceptions and the variables of job, company and career position. Only producers defined documentary as a continuum. The category 'subject matter' is used by all the ITV respondents compared to one out of six BBC respondents, three out of ten independent respondents, and no Channel Four respondents, and by six of the sixteen men compared to none of the women. Older producers were more inclined to define documentary by its 'format/style/genre' (10 out of 11) whereas the younger producers were evenly spread across the subcategories. However, on the whole it is the within-group *differences* that stand out as these two extracts from BBC respondents exemplify:

"my feeling increasingly is that, it's a working definition, that documentaries are television programmes in which the producer/director's voice, and view of what they see, is reflected" (PBOM3, 414-418)

"I suppose documentaries generally have to have the authentic voice of the people" (BCE1, 746-748)

The only clear division is in the tone of response used by commissioning editors and producers. While the editors were factual, reserved and fair in their comments, producers were more able to be candid and opinionated e.g:

"I suppose documentaries generally have to have the authentic voice of the people, whereas current affairs programmes, if they're documentary, if they're in that sort of end of things, they have to have the same thing, but, you know, you can...well I don't know. It's really very difficult to draw clear lines." (BCE1, 746-753)

"what's being put on, masquerading as documentaries, are nothing more than rather badly made current affairs magazine pieces that are stretched to half an

hour or an hour (53-56) A current affairs programme is absolutely journalist-led, doesn't really matter about the pictures, it's all..I'm sick and tired of seeing...I mean, how many times do you see it, go home and watch the television tonight, you'll find the idea of an interview is done with somebody against a grey screen with a splash of red light or a splash of blue light."
(PITVM1, 420-427)

Theme 2: Documentary Purpose

Table 6 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 21

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of positive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references
Information/public debate/raise awareness	17	16	1
Entertainment/ appeal	12	12	0
Democracy/justice/ representation	10	9	1
Public service	11	10	1
Education	6	4	2
Communication	6	4	2
Improves TV quality	6	6	0
Prompts action/ has an effect	5	3	2
Deeper understanding	4	4	0
Archive/document/ history	3	3	0
Getting to an emotional truth	1	1	0

The above eleven categories were identified as explanations for the purpose of documentary. The table shows that the areas of slight disagreement can all be related to the concept of public service broadcasting: information; democracy; public service; education; communication; and prompting action. Again, responses commonly referred to more than one category. The most frequently named purpose was the use of documentary as a means of informing people, which also incorporated the idea of adding to or stimulating a public

debate and raising awareness.

"basically they are informative - tell people things they didn't know, sometimes to persuade people of things, but most important to tell people things they didn't know" (PIOF1, 103-106)

Out of 17 references to such a category, only one saw television as an inappropriate medium for such a task.

"I'm sure we'll come to this but, for my money, it's not a very good medium for communicating information because, you know, one of the key things about television, is you can only watch it once." (BCE1, 4-8)

That the documentary is or should be entertaining is not disputed. It is debate over the reasons why it is that divides the respondents, as well as symbolising the common debates spanning the interviews:

"but, the bottom line is you are entertaining as well..I mean you are really in the entertainment business, so you've got to." (PIYF2, 159-162)

"I also think it should be entertaining too. I don't think there's anything incompatible about a thing being important, interesting and entertaining." (PIOM3, 133-136)

"it has an entertainment function..um..its sort of misapplication, which we are guilty of I'm sure as well as others, is that it becomes a kind of entertainment genre purely entertainment because it's quite..it's cheaper than drama, and can often be as dramatic." (C4CE2, 667-672)

The debate over documentary as education pits television as both leader and follower. Television as leader incorporates the public service notion of what television *should* be doing, and also the idea that documentary as education is politically important:

"try and engage a domestic audience in..that there's a world out there and it's one that they should be interested in, not only because they should be interested per se, but actually because we share one planet or one world and increasingly they aren't going to be isolated problems" (ICE2, 441-447)

Conversely, television as follower suggests that television is merely complying with people's desire to learn:

"Some people like getting to know worlds and people that they wouldn't otherwise know" (C4CE1, 234-236)

There are two perspectives arguing against the idea of television as educator. One raises the practical issue of not being able to learn at one's own pace. The second argues that people are averse to being preached to, adding that:

"the notion of sort of enticing people to your point of view is not one that I'm particularly comfortable with" (PIYM1, 196-198)

This is a direct criticism of television as leader and regards such documentary not as education but propaganda.

The relationship between documentary and public service broadcasting is debated in terms of both the way things are and the way things should be:

"BBC is a public service broadcaster, it's got an obligation...it feels rightly, I think, that is got obligations to offer high quality current affairs to a wide audience, the license payers" (BCE1, 553-558)

The discussion again reflects the common debates i.e. the kind of service television should provide and the forms of gratification. Thus, a small audience is either evidence that a particular taste or interest is being served, or that documentary is not as central to the role of television in society as public service broadcasting demands:

"I don't think anymore that the BBC has this..this cultural role that it used to have, but think the people who still work there think it has" (PIOM3, 285-288)

Nine of the ten references to documentary as contributing to democracy, justice and

representing people supported its ability to do so. The one dissenter however, claimed that:

"there is a crisis in television about television as part of the public sphere, if you like, and that documentary is a part...is an important part of that - sort of public sphere function of television". (PIYM1, 348-351)

All references to documentary as a means of improving television output equate the genre with quality broadcasting. The prevailing and unchallenged idea in this category is that documentary restores credibility and prestige to the channels:

"I feel basically that I'm just putting a little bit on the other side of the balance, that's what I feel, that's how I justify it. In the name of truth, in the name of some degree of honesty, some degree of insight, I'm putting something on the other side of the scale." (PIOM4, 1147-1152)

This subcategory is interesting as it indirectly confirms the existence of 'elitist' views associated with the status of documentary. This viewpoint was identified but not subscribed to in the discussion on the definition of documentary.

There are conflicting views over how much effect documentaries can actually have. One opinion is that they can prompt action, change practices and provoke investigations, whilst the opposing position is that audiences are too small for there to be a major effect.

A number of references were made to the communicative role of documentary, with the arguments clearly corresponding to the common debate - 'forms of gratification'. Support for its ability to communicate was based on the medium's reach:

"moving pictures are the..is the way to communicate with the broad mass of people today" (PIOM1, 129-131)

- thus tending towards the 'quantitative gratification' end. Opposition to such a role centred around the fact that a documentary moves along at its own pace and cannot be replayed - indicating 'qualitative gratification'. The remaining three emerging categories explaining the purpose of documentary were not contested. Firstly, documentary as an archival contribution to history - arguably the original role of the documentary. Secondly, documentary as

qualitatively increasing people's understanding of different issues. Finally, one BBC producer referred to documentary as a technique for getting to an emotional truth about a subject.

In the empirical analysis of the correspondence between perceptions and background variables, it was the smaller subcategories which proved the most interesting. **Table 7** outlines the results:

Table 7 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Info/public debate/ awareness	5/7	10/14	4/6	2/3	2/2	7/10	11/16	4/5	3/3	7/11
Entertainment/ appeal	4/7	8/14	4/6	0/3	2/2	6/10	8/16	4/5	2/3	6/11
Democracy/ justice/ representation	2/7	8/14	0/6	2/3	1/2	7/10	7/16	3/5	2/3	6/11
Public service	4/7	7/14	5/6	1/3	1/2	4/10	10/16	1/5	1/3	6/11
Education	4/7	2/14	1/6	1/3	2/2	2/10	5/16	1/5	1/3	1/11
Communication	2/7	4/14	4/6	0/3	0/2	2/10	5/16	1/5	1/3	3/11
Improves TV quality	3/7	3/14	2/6	1/3	2/2	1/10	5/16	1/5	0/3	3/11
Prompts action/ has an effect	1/7	4/14	3/6	0/3	0/2	2/10	5/16	0/5	0/3	4/11
Deeper understanding	4/7	0/14	1/6	1/3	1/2	0/10	4/16	0/5	0/3	0/11
Archive/ document/ history	0/7	3/14	1/6	0/3	0/2	2/10	3/16	0/5	0/3	3/11
Getting to an emotional truth	0/7	1/14	1/6	0/3	0/2	0/10	1/16	0/5	0/3	1/11

Commissioning editors were more inclined to talk of the benefits documentary provides for both television and viewers, thus featuring strongly in the 'education', 'improves television',

and 'deeper understanding' subcategories. Producers, on the other hand, were more concerned with the political role of the documentary in society, hence their concentration in the subcategories 'democracy/justice/representation' and 'effect'. Respondents from the different companies are randomly distributed around the subcategories although there is a concentration of BBC respondents in the 'public service broadcasting' subcategory. Two surprising observations are the absence of BBC respondents in the 'democracy/justice/representation' subcategory and the absence of ITV respondents in the 'entertainment' subcategory. There are similarly no clear divisions in perspective on the basis of career position or gender.

Theme 3: The audience

Table 8 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 21

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of positive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references
Awareness/consideration of/knowledge of	20	18	2
Description	16	15	1
Programme perception/feedback	16	11	5
Appeal/ratings	13	7	6
Communication/comprehension	13	11	2
Importance	9	4	5

In accordance with the theoretical framework of the research, I have argued that the audience plays a fundamental role in communication. It is consequently of considerable importance to ascertain the significance which broadcasters attribute to the audience. The varying beliefs about the audience are grouped into six different areas, as shown in **Table 8**. All but one of the respondents acknowledged an awareness, consideration and/or knowledge of the audience. This respondent was a commissioning editor, although the other six did offer information about the role of the audience in the making of programmes. The responses

revolve around where this information about the audience comes from, how accurate it is and whether or not and how it is used. Some argue that it is instinctive:

"it's just a gut instinct with me I think. If I come across a subject which interests and excites me, I think it's probably going to be interesting to the audience." (PIOM3, 173-176)

Others use people they know as representative of either different audience types or just members of what is perceived as a general audience:

"if it works for me and my..the type of people I watch programmes with, then I think it will work for quite a wide audience." (PIYF2, 208-210)

There are also those who rely on the information provided by formal audience research. A heavy reliance on such research indicates a belief in its accuracy and value, although it is worth noting that a degree of suspicion regarding such information was also detected:

"knowing your audience is the key, and audience research is vital..is a vital part of that process." (BCE1, 399-401)

"I've actually got a deep mistrust of the kind of focus groups or whatever they call them on audience research. I reckon that I should be able to judge.." (BCE3, 416-419)

It was further suggested that those controlling television represent the liberal and elitist section of society and are consequently removed from the lives, experiences and opinions of the majority of the audience:

"There is not enough understanding - this is the real bone of contention with a lot of serious filmmakers - there is not an understanding within the higher echelons of television, in other words management, programme controllers..of the appreciation that the audience has and the desire that the audience has for serious programmes" (PITVM1, 35-43)

As long as this gap remains, a true understanding and appreciation of the audience is impossible.

The use of audience information depends on the way broadcasters construe the relationship between themselves and their audience i.e. are they responding to the audience, or do they believe the audience responds to what is broadcast. A belief in the former involves using audience information as a criterion in idea, producer and/or programme selection, whilst the latter views the audience as dependent on the particular slot and channel. There are also responses that reject any consideration of the audience, preferring to follow only what is of interest to themselves. Interestingly, this can result from either a total lack of audience appreciation, a belief that audience consideration is the job of the commissioning editor, or, conversely, an acute awareness of the diversity of people and interpretations amongst the audience and consequently resorting to one's own interest through a realisation of *not* being able to appeal to all.

Much of the audience description offered by respondents links demographic characteristics with different programmes and genres - probably taken from formal audience research:

"you will get a more ABC1, upmarket audience if you do the kind of stories that are covered by the broadsheet papers. If you do the kind of stories that you see in The Sun and The Mirror you're more likely to increase the proportion of the audience that's coming from the C2's DE's or whatever."
(BCE2, 194-200)

However, other respondents criticise the vagueness and uselessness of such profiles preferring either their own instinct or advocating more detailed ethnographic studies.

Despite the multitude of comments indicating an awareness and knowledge of the audience, the significant factor is just *how* important the audience is considered to be in the selection and making of programmes. Some consider it to be vital, thus placing particular emphasis on it:

"I would have thought you ignored an audience at your peril" (C4CE2, 549-550)

Others see it as,

"just another element in the process." (BCE2, 242-243)

and there are those who believe

"It doesn't have an effect on the way that you make a programme because, curiously, you don't have a lot of control over that." (PIOF1, 500-502)

Thus it is the system rather than the person that determines the role of the audience.

The subcategory 'audience appeal and ratings' is directly relevant to the common debate 'forms of gratification' with views ranging from open concern about the size of audiences to immediate rejection of the suggestion that audience size alone is an important factor. Those who declare an interest in ratings explain it in terms of a desire to communicate to a wide number of people. Only through wide audience appeal is this goal achievable:

"I think those things really really matter, and I..I mean if you really want to be a communicator, there's no bigger pleasure in the world than communicating with as many people as possible." (PIOF2, 381-385)

Those who get higher ratings explain it in terms of the increased accessibility and relevance of programmes to the audience:

"we've had the highest ratings in the channel here, and I don't know quite why that is, it's taken us by surprise. I suspect it's, you know, some kind of...it's partly that sometimes you do latch on to that sort of commonality that people can relate to." (C4CE2, 305-310)

An alternative, more sceptical interpretation is that there is a concentration solely on those subjects and formats which are certain to attract large audiences. One respondent, however, regards this policy as a means of *decreasing* the number of people watching:

"we are now, and have been for the past two or three years, seeing the...the negative evidence of the results of the..move to produce what they call populist television, and I think there's a distinction between populist television and popular television. They call it popular television..um..I don't

think it is, and the ratings prove that it isn't because the ratings are going down. The ratings are going down because the standard is going down...Popular programming people do watch, populist programming, they're appealing to the...companies are trying to produce programmes that they believe appeal to the lowest common denominator, but as always...they constantly underestimate the desires and intelligence of the audience." (PITVM1, 43-53; 61-68)

This extract illustrates the cynicism that exists surrounding the reasons for and methods of increasing audience size. It stems from the knowledge that broadcasting companies have to prove audience interest in their offerings in order to guarantee revenue - whether from government or commercial sources. One argument expressed is that the desire for large audiences is overtaking moral concerns about the content of programming. This could explain why some respondents are reluctant to acknowledge the significance of ratings.

Moving from audience ratings to broadcasters' views on how the audience perceives different programmes, one common view was that much depends on the expectations and/or stereotypes held about a programme:

"I've got a notion of what I think a documentary is, but in a way that's irrelevant because the perception of documentary..one thing that our audience research showed us was that people couldn't distinguish between different factual programmes. They thought if it was a good *Panorama*, they thought it was *World in Action*, and if it was a bad *World in Action* they thought it was a *Panorama*" (BCE1, 632-641)

One respondent suggested that beliefs held by the viewer can affect the way something is interpreted, even beyond what is actually shown. It was pointed out that viewers can easily recognise technical mediocrity, although it was widely believed that a well-made and convincing film will be seen as the truth. Audience feedback (i.e. formal research, letters, phone-calls etc.) is considered by some as rewarding and important given the lack of direct contact with the audience. However, this is used to gauge the reception of a programme already broadcast rather than to aid future programme making. Others berated the validity of audience research as feedback - it was either unnecessary or too superficial.

The final subcategory identified relates to the way communication and understanding is achieved. A common link is the association of comprehension and communication with entertainment and interest:

"I don't think there's anything incompatible about a thing being important, interesting and entertaining. And I have absolute contempt for something that's going out of fashion, thank God, for that kind of phase the BBC seemed to go through about three or four years ago...when they had the idea that they were going to ram important information, a kind of Peter Jay type journalism, down the audience's throat, and that they couldn't understand it and they were bored silly by it..um..that didn't matter. I mean, this is a mass medium and so you know, play by the rules (PIOM3, 134-147)

This also correlates positively with criticisms of the more traditional paternalistic approach to broadcasting. The methods used relate both to the content and structure of programmes. In terms of content, there is a repeated belief in the need for a strong storyline or narrative. Another suggestion is the use of identifiable authors and characters that one can relate to. As regards structure, there is conflict between simplifying information so that everybody understands it, and maintaining a balance so as to appeal to both 'experts' and 'lay people'. In order to check the complexity of a programme, respondents rely on the views of either colleagues, peers, token members of the public, or their own intuition, all of which are taken as representative of the population at large.

Table 9 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Awareness/ consideration of/ knowledge of	6/7	14/14	6/6	2/3	2/2	10/10	15/16	5/5	3/3	11/11
Description	7/7	9/14	4/6	3/3	2/2	6/10	13/16	3/5	1/3	8/11
Programme perception/ feedback	3/7	8/14	3/6	2/3	0/2	6/10	9/16	2/5	3/3	5/11
Appeal/ ratings	6/7	8/14	2/6	1/3	1/2	3/10	10/16	4/5	2/3	6/11
Communication comprehension	0/7	11/14	1/6	1/3	0/2	9/10	7/16	4/5	2/3	9/11
Importance	6/7	3/14	2/6	0/3	1/2	1/10	7/16	2/5	0/3	3/11

There are two subcategories producing associations between perspective and background variables. The importance of the audience in the making of programmes, was stressed by commissioning editors rather than producers. However, only producers emphasise communication and comprehension. This is also the only subcategory in which there is a noticeable difference between men and women (44% of all men, 80% of all women). The only visible pattern between career position and perspectives on the audience relates to programme perception and feedback, in which its importance is emphasised by younger rather than older producers.

Theme 4: Constraints

NB: The positive/supportive column refers to those comments which either did not see the subcategory as a constraint or saw it as a beneficial limitation. Accordingly, the negative/critical column refers to comments which agree with the restrictive nature of the subcategory.

Table 10 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 20

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of positive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references
Channel	17	4	15
Financial	15	3	12
Strand	12	6	8
Commercial	12	4	8
Format	10	5	4
Of medium/ genre	9	3	6
Legal	8	0	8
Moral	4	1	3
Political	3	3	0

This theme highlights the aspects which restrict or present obstacles to documentary production. The ten subcategories (see **Table 10**) can be looked at from two perspectives. They are either elements associated with the profession that act as a hindrance or challenge to the craft, or, conversely, characteristics intrinsic to the profession which determine its unique identity and institutional context.

There is little dispute over the fact that the different channels have different identities, remits and rules. The overriding problem for producers, as a result, is thinking or matching ideas to the requirements of the channels, e.g.

"So the process, you have an idea, gosh I think that's good, or an idea comes to you, gosh that could be interesting, then you have to think well which programme or network would actually take it, who's it appropriate for?"
(PIOM3, 263-268)

One cynical respondent believes it is just as much to do with the contacts you have within the channel as the fit between your programme and their remit. Both positive and negative views are expressed about different channels:

"there are lots of constraints working inside the BBC. Um..I could say it the other way round, the constraints of working in the BBC are nothing compared to the constraints of working outside the BBC." (PBOM2, 273-278)

The BBC is praised for its sophistication, social responsibility, making programmes that other channels would not and for being easier to work in than other channels because of the 'producer choice' scheme⁷. Yet it is also criticised for presenting solely a middle-class, liberal perspective and for making severe staff, technical and financial cutbacks. ITV is known to be watched by more people, thus programmes have to speak to all people. Channel Four is described as easier to deal with and get access to, entrusting more power to producers, yet also criticised for its intrusion into the film-making process.

Constraints associated with strand relate to both the commissioning process and the ensuing film-making. The views expressed by producers over the usefulness of the commissioning process appear to depend significantly on the relationship they have with the different commissioning editors and the amount of freedom desired when making a film. The process can be described favourably:

"I don't think it's fair to say 'constrict' because it's a matter of negotiation."
(PIOF1, 183-184)

"the commissioning process in a way eliminates the need for risk, for filmmakers to survive" (PIOM4, 1491-1493)

However, it can also be seen as a restriction of one's own film-making freedom:

"they all have a particular style and angle, and most people have to try and fit into one of those....And those people are, either by inclination and desire or because they've got no alternative, having to deal with the whole process of getting films commissioned, in a way rather like car salesmen." (PITVM1, 333-335; 344-348)

There is discussion over whether or not there is pressure to use a certain format for

⁷A scheme in which producers have to manage their own finances and resources for a programme rather than it being automatically supplied in-house.

documentary. This format involves the telling of a good, clear story with strong characters and often a hero, in order to hold an audience:

"that rubric excludes an enormous number of ways of making television and an enormous number of insights on an enormous number of issues, enormous number of things that could or should be talked about" (PIYM1, 232-234)

The format is accused of being so overemphasised that the story itself is obscured. It is also suggested that the commercial pressure to attract and maintain an audience forces the use of a story format:

"the problem is that there ain't the room to fail anymore, so fewer people experiment" (PBOM3, 741-743)

On the other hand, it can be argued that the stories themselves can be told in a variety of ways, good storytelling is the essence of good programme making, there is no time for complexity and detail, people love stories and if viewers like such a format then it must work.

The financial constraints identified relate to the running of companies and the making of programmes. A company needs a considerable amount of money to make a documentary, thus insufficient finances obstruct production. This can be solved by obtaining co-production money, although the wishes of the co-producer then have to be acknowledged. Consequently, in order to survive, compromises of subject may have to be made in order to secure funding and make programmes. However, this situation is not necessarily objectionable:

"I think that one of the few good things that's come out of the end of programme factories and the beginning of small independents is a more realistic use of money." (PIOF2, 759-763)

The BBC is commended for balancing an increase in cheap acquisitions with channelling money into active programme making. However, they are also criticised:

"there's no way that the funding available to the BBC is sufficient for it to

make its programmes so outstandingly good that they're irresistible." (BCE3, 524-527)

A set budget is beneficial for some as one always wants more money, but detrimental to others as the lack of money guarantees compromises from the start. One additional point raised is that as very little profit is made, there is very little money available to train staff, thus presenting a problem for the future.

Certain subjects invite controversy, even the threat of being sued for libel. Consequently, all the material presented has to be strongly supported. This becomes a problem when something is known but cannot be proven. The libel laws can be seen as restrictive or just another obstacle to overcome.

Another predominant constraint identified is commercialisation. It is argued that the pressure to make money results in a demand for large audiences and a consequent resistance to straying from popular formulae and subjects. This strategy is interpreted as both positive and negative. The positive view sees no reason for feeling ashamed as one is simply producing programmes that people want to see:

"often I was constrained by the fact that it was the BBC and they're very careful, or..because somebody all the time is paying for the product because in another way it's just like making vacuum cleaners, you're making a product to fill a space." (PIOF2, 476-482)

"that squeeze has been quite good in that we are more concerned with pleasing, entertaining, attracting, informing an audience rather than just each other." (PBOM2, 635-638)

However, a negative view equates certain subjects and large audiences with tabloid television and a consequent decline in quality. The audience as consumer rather than citizen. Some of the respondents were unaware of these pressures:

"I've never ever had a conversation with a commissioning editor about an audience, except after the programme has gone out...the pressure just isn't there. They know your past work, they know what you're capable of, the

story you're suggesting to them. They calculate will this get an audience? will this not get an audience? will this fit into my strand?" (PIOM4, 1288-1298)

Views on moral and ethical guidelines, laid down predominantly by BBC and ITC guidelines, range from being seen as excessive and boring, to necessary reminders of the responsibility one has to both subjects and viewers.

The constraints associated with the nature of the medium or the documentary as genre can once again be interpreted as either negative and positive. Negative perspectives highlight an elitist concentration of the industry in the South; the impossibility of attaining perfection or the whole truth due to problems of access, time, money and energy; the expense involved if things go wrong; the total commitment required; and the difficulty of using narrative to convey scientific information because the story cannot commonly be paused and replayed. Positive perspectives assert that a lot can be achieved within a short period of screen time; the more experienced and established you become, the fewer obstacles stand in your way; and that the compromises themselves epitomize the nature of the medium and stimulate rather than impede creativity and innovation.

One other constraint identified was that posed by political pressure. Political constraints were considered either non-existent or irrelevant:

"we're certainly not in any way constrained by the government or government agencies or any other organisations to what we do or don't do." (C4CE1, 288-291)

"[I've] never knowingly told anything less than what I understand to be the reality, the truth of the situation. I would never change something because it was politically unacceptable" (PITVM1, 765-769)

Table 11 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Channel	3/7	13/14	3/6	3/3	1/2	9/10	12/16	4/5	2/3	11/11
Financial	4/7	8/14	2/6	2/3	2/2	6/10	9/16	3/5	2/3	6/11
Strand	1/7	7/14	1/6	2/3	0/2	5/10	7/16	1/5	1/3	7/11
Commercial	2/7	6/14	1/6	2/3	1/2	4/10	6/16	2/5	1/3	5/11
Format	0/7	4/14	1/6	0/3	0/2	3/10	2/16	2/5	2/3	2/11
Of medium/genre	2/7	4/14	2/6	0/3	0/2	4/10	4/16	2/5	1/3	3/11
Legal	2/7	6/14	0/6	2/3	1/2	5/10	5/16	3/5	3/3	3/11
Moral	0/7	3/14	2/6	0/3	0/2	1/10	3/16	0/5	0/3	3/11
Political	0/7	0/14	0/6	0/3	0/2	0/10	0/16	0/5	0/3	0/11

Certain patterns emerged between perspectives and background variables. Overall, it was the producers rather than the commissioning editors who highlighted broadcasting constraints. In contrast to producers, commissioning editors did not tend to see the channel as a constraining factor, probably because they are very much a part of it. Similarly, it was producers rather than commissioning editors who perceived strand and format as constraints. However, what the table does not show is that of those feeling *no* pressure to conform to strands, the large majority were 'older' producers, which signifies confidence in both their reputation and ability. There were two obvious differences between companies. Firstly, those who saw financial limitations in a positive light were all associated with ITV, with the emphasis on efficiency, thus favouring programme production and management over programme content. Secondly, the proportion of BBC respondents perceiving commercial and legal constraints was much less than other companies.

Theme 5: The survival of documentary-making

Table 12 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 19

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of positive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references
Future	19	13	12
Past/compared to past	14	7	8

This theme deals with speculations about the status of documentary in the future and comparisons between the present situation and the past.

Views on the future of documentary are divided among believing there is a considerable threat to the existence of documentary, that there is no threat at all, or that changes to certain aspects of documentary production will be made. The potential threat is posed by a number of factors: the arrival of additional terrestrial channels, thus further fragmenting audiences and reducing budgets; the growing costs of making documentary coupled with the decreasing amounts of available money; audience perceptions of documentary as bleak and depressing, or conversely even as approximating light entertainment, thus conventional and unappealing; and an increasing number of programmes requiring a short attention span, signalling a movement away from the long form documentary. However, the demise of documentary is always predicted and never realised:

"They've been going on about the death of the documentary ever since I started" (PIOM3, 427-428)

Most believe that documentary will survive because there is a market for good, well-made documentaries enhanced by the notion that viewers prefer a rich variety of programming. In addition, documentary is cheaper than drama and there is a strong tradition of documentary in Britain:

"I think that UK audiences have for historical reasons been brought up on a diet of programmes including documentary, and I think it would be unwise for a broadcaster to dismiss that out of hand. So I think there's a little cause

for optimism." (ICE2, 742-747)

The debate is not seen in such black and white terms by all. The documentary may survive, but with certain changes to the production process. A pressure to make more means those made will be less well researched and considered; an increasing reliance on co-production money requires pandering to foreign audiences; and audience fragmentation suggests the introduction of niche marketing for documentary.

The changes in documentary-making over the years represent a shift along the 'conceptions of service' dimension away from public service broadcasting and towards audience satisfaction:

"in former times television was dominated by the passions of documentary makers who felt passionate about x, and now we're dominated by what the audience, what we know the audience does enjoy." (PBOM3, 312-316)

"in the last twenty years..it is absolutely mind-blowing when you stand back from it to see the degree to which the ideological ground has shifted from television being thought of years ago as basically something you could talk about in terms of its influence on society or social good or what it was doing socially, to something now which is conceived of absolutely exclusively in terms of the market" (PIYM1, 207-212)

However, it is pointed out that, nowadays, it is easier to get started in television, more documentaries are made, and technical standards are higher:

"I think a degree of professionalism has been injected that certainly wasn't there when I were a lad" (PBOM2, 926-928)

Table 13 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Future	5/7	7/14	2/6	2/3	2/2	5/10	8/16	5/5	2/3	5/11
Past/ compared to past	2/7	5/14	2/6	0/3	1/2	4/10	6/16	1/5	0/3	5/11

The only correlations that are evident concern predictions about the future. Once again they centre around the difference between commissioning editors and producers, and between BBC respondents and those from other companies. Roughly three quarters of the commissioning editors compared to half of the producers made a point of saying something positive about the future of documentary production. Meanwhile, two thirds of BBC respondents (2 producers and 1 commissioning editor) were predominantly negative about the future compared to a third of the ITV, half of the independent and none of the Channel Four respondents. This could reflect the general dissatisfaction amongst BBC employees over the organisational changes made by John Birt which arguably constitute a movement away from public service broadcasting.

Theme 6: Programme format

Table 14 Summary of responses

N.B. A reference which simply describes how a subcategory (e.g. subject, strand, technology) determines programme format is included in the 'positive/supportive references' column.

Total number of interviews referenced = 18

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of positive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references
Link to aims	12	12	0
By fashion	10	6	4
By subject	9	9	0
By producer	8	7	2
By strand	4	4	0
By technology	3	3	0
By what works /successful	2	2	0

This theme deals with the different influences on a programme's structure. The above factors were identified as important in determining the way a programme is constructed. They were typically not mutually exclusive in anyone's views.

The aims of the programme maker are an obvious influence on format. This strongly relates to perceptions about the function and effect of different techniques:

"the films I make with John [co-producer] are very much presenter-led...they do have a beginning and a middle and an end, and they..um..visually work, they tell the story in pictures as well, and that's very important, otherwise all you're doing is making radio programmes with some wallpaper pictures, you know." (PITVM1, 392-393; 397-402)

"it's about arguments and structures, and in a way, they're like jokes, you know, and it's interesting - people who are good at telling jokes are often good at making television programmes." (BCE1, 274-278)

There is also the view that formats come in and out of fashion, although the reasons for the changes vary:

"now you can't really make a documentary unless you've got a story and characters....that's part of that same ideological move, which is fundamentally about ratings, and defining audiences as consumers." (PIYM1, 229-230, 241-242)

"there is certainly more graphics and they're shorter, and more magaziney kind of feel, given the attention span is shrinking. I don't think that's true" (PIOM2, 346-349)

However, it is also mentioned that programmes still need a firm foundation in content and, rather than enhancing a programme, an overemphasis on format can actually obscure the story.

With such a strong emphasis on storytelling, the overwhelming view is that subject matter considerably determines the way that story is told:

"there are some subjects that are just too complicated to be left to vérité...If you just went into an estate and just filmed what happened, people would come away saying, well screw them let's just leave them behind in their poverty and suffering and whatever it is. The minute you get closer to them and understand more about their situation, helped by me as a presenter, with the voice-overs, then the feelings start to change. Also you'd never see any

way out of that situation unless I told them." (PIOM2, 82-94)

Debate exists concerning the extent to which a producer is able to develop a personal style. Some believe they have their own recognizable style:

"I think what distinguishes our work here is that we are always experimenting with form, experimenting with narrative, experimenting with style" (PIOM4, 49-53)

whilst others feel restricted by the requirements of both commissioning editors and strand:

"sometimes maybe we're not as inventive or experimental as we might be, it depends, that's down to personal preference to some extent, but it is...the mantra that you go around at the moment is 'I want to be told a story'." (PBOM3, 917-921)

Variations in format are also dependent on the strand a programme is made for, which in turn hinges on the wider aims of the channel on which the strand is broadcast, as perceived by the strand's commissioning editor and the channel's controller⁸:

"I'm given a lot more freedom on something like Under the Sun, which is the series I've made most of the films for, which is this anthropological strand on BBC2, and there I feel I'm treated much more like a filmmaker, you know, sort of it's my vision....Whereas for something like Cutting Edge, that's much more of a dictated strand and you know there are certain things - you've got to start with some grabby bit of action, you can't bring it in in some sort of subtle filmic way - the subject - you've got to grab them right then and there." (PIYF2, 220-226, 233-239)

Technological advances in camera design and editing equipment are also highlighted as affecting format, although it is simultaneously noted that technology eases rather than replaces human skills. Another infrequently cited influence on the development of programme format is formats which have proved successful in the past.

Table 15 illustrates that, once again, the only clear difference across the background

⁸This is developed more fully in a later theme.

variables was between commissioning editors and producers. Commissioning editors were more likely to see format changing due to technology, therefore circumstances external to the actual production process rather than aspects over which they have direct control i.e. the producer chosen, the style of the strand etc. Producers, on the other hand, referred to factors relating more closely to particular programme making i.e. their own different styles, what they are trying to achieve through a programme, the subject matter and the requirements of a strand.

Table 15 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Link to aims	2/7	10/14	4/6	1/3	0/2	7/10	8/16	4/5	3/3	7/11
By fashion	2/7	4/14	3/6	0/3	0/2	3/10	5/16	1/5	1/3	3/11
By subject	2/7	7/14	3/6	1/3	0/2	5/10	8/16	1/5	1/3	6/11
By producer	0/7	7/14	2/6	1/3	0/2	4/10	5/16	2/5	1/3	6/11
By strand	0/7	4/14	1/6	1/3	0/2	2/10	2/16	2/5	1/3	3/11
By technology	3/7	0/14	2/6	0/3	1/2	0/10	2/16	1/5	0/3	0/11
By what works /successful	1/7	1/14	1/6	0/3	0/2	1/10	0/16	1/5	1/3	0/11

Theme 7: Documentary Type

Table 16 Summary of responses

N.B. This theme contains descriptions of different types of documentary rather than value judgements, hence they are not categorised as positive and negative references.

Total number of interviews referenced = 16

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced
Current Affairs	12
Various/ Miscellaneous/ Undefined	6
Observational	5
Art/autour	4
Historical /Biographies	2
Science	1

Respondents were asked either to describe the type of documentaries they made or the series they commissioned for. Six main categories of documentary type emerged (see **Table 16**).

Some of the adjectives used to describe current affairs programmes included investigative, hard hitting, journalistic, angst, heavily edited and analytical. The programmes can be partial as long as it is clear to the viewer. However, there is an element of confusion or dispute over whether current affairs is a type of documentary i.e. referring to subject matter, or a separate genre altogether, which is apparent when it is compared *to* documentary. However, this contradiction can be traced to the institutional differences established between current affairs and documentary departments, e.g.

"current affairs responds..has to respond rapidly, it requires a different kind of mentality, different kind of character...the personalities of current affairs people is very very different from that of documentary people, and, the more you go to a pure documentary, the more you go to a pure current affairs - *Newsnight* versus Molly Dineen, for example - the more you find these people are very different creatures." (PIOM4, 871-881)

There is no argument, however, over the documentary status of the observational film. Observational documentaries are described as pure, fly-on-the-wall, and without commentary. The aim is to film things as they happen with the audience understanding a situation through a story and people. It is argued that this type of documentary is more likely to be seen as real than current affairs as it appears relatively unedited. In actual fact it is just as heavily edited.

Auteur or art documentaries are described as slow, stylised, creative, difficult to watch, elitist, self-conscious and pointless. Two other specific categories were historical/biographical documentaries and science documentaries. Those producers making documentaries in other areas (e.g. gardening, business) and those who did not specify a particular type directly were placed in the various/miscellaneous/undefined category.

Table 17 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Current Affairs	3/7	9/14	2/6	2/3	1/2	6/10	8/16	4/5	1/3	8/11
Various/ Miscellaneous / Undefined	0/7	6/14	3/6	0/3	0/2	3/10	5/16	1/5	0/3	6/11
Observational	1/7	4/14	0/6	1/3	0/2	4/10	3/16	2/5	2/3	2/11
Art/auteur	0/7	4/14	2/6	0/3	0/2	2/10	4/16	0/5	0/3	4/11
Historical /Biographies	0/7	2/14	0/6	0/3	0/2	2/10	2/16	0/5	0/3	2/11
Science	0/7	1/14	0/6	0/3	0/2	1/10	1/16	0/5	0/3	1/11

The only real divergences in perspective occurred in the 'current affairs' subcategory. All the commissioning editors described current affairs as the combination of topical subject matter and documentary format, thus defining documentary in terms of a particular type of programme construction. Producers were split between current affairs as a different genre from documentary, a certain type of documentary, or just the subject matter of a documentary. It is interesting to note that all the BBC producers fell into the miscellaneous category, therefore not specifying an affiliation to one particular type or style but instead

making a variety of different types of documentary. This can be explained by their need to remain flexible within the BBC institutional structure.

Theme 8: Reasons for making documentary

Table 18 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 16

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of positive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references
TV power/effect/ wide reach	10	9	1
Belief in subject/ importance	9	9	0
Love/enjoyment/ talent	8	7	1
Money/business	6	5	1
Interest area	5	5	0
Accident	4	4	0
Other	2	2	0

This theme captured the different reasons for starting and continuing to make documentaries. The motivations identified are straightforward and incorporate benefits to both self and society. A large number of respondents advocate the power of television to reach a wide audience and have an effect:

"I've always been aware of the great power you have as a programme maker - I'm married to an MP, I often think I've got more power than he has to influence people" (PIOF2, 140-143)

Sometimes it is a belief in and a commitment to the importance of a certain subject that propels one to make a documentary about it:

"the only films that are really worth making are the films that the filmmakers themselves are absolutely committed to, and indeed are obsessed by, that they have something to say." (PITVM1, 358-361)

However, not all producers feel this sense of purpose or responsibility, making documentaries on particular subjects purely because it interests them, or even just for the enjoyment derived and having the ability to do so:

"there's huge creative scope within it, and certainly that's something that I've always enjoyed, that you can make a sort of investigative, nitty gritty film about an aircraft or something, as I've done, where you're sort of talking about sprockets and jet engines and it's all very very journalistic, and equally you can go off and make a film about a bunch of pub performers in Jarrow"
(PBOM2, 466-474)

Documentary making is a business like any other, thus production can be driven by a desire to make money, earn a living and survive as a company:

"I think that's really what drove me, to run a small business. I mean I didn't have any, you know, 'we should change the world with these documentaries'."
(PIOM3, 195-198)

One producer, however, deplores this approach:

"If you're just doing it to fill a slot to pay the rent, go and do something else, don't use our valuable chance of time on television where you are being given the greatest gift you could possibly be given, which is an hour, an hour and a half of screen time where you can speak to the audience, and you can get an idea across." (PITVM1, 361-368)

The revelation that some respondents began making documentaries simply by accident indicates that these heartfelt motivations can be developed:

"I didn't start out wanting to be in television. I just accidentally ended up here, so, in that sense, there was no conscious decision, there was no ten year strategy, I didn't run the student newspaper, any of these things, I did entirely different things beforehand. So in that sense it was just accident." (PIYF1, 23-29)

There are no particularly clear-cut differences across background variables (see **Table 19**). However older producers, and particular those who make programmes for ITV (except for

the one ITV producer⁹) are more likely to mention the financial/commercial elements of their job.

Table 19 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
TV power/ effect/ wide reach	0/7	10/14	2/6	1/3	0/2	7/10	8/16	2/5	1/3	9/11
Belief in subject/ importance	2/7	7/14	2/6	3/3	0/2	4/10	7/16	2/5	1/3	6/11
Love/ enjoyment/ talent	0/7	8/14	2/6	1/3	0/2	5/10	6/16	2/5	1/3	7/11
Money/ business	1/7	5/14	0/6	1/3	0/2	4/10	4/16	2/5	0/3	6/11
Interest area	0/7	5/14	1/6	0/3	0/2	4/10	4/16	1/5	1/3	4/11
Accident	0/7	4/14	1/6	0/3	0/2	3/10	1/16	3/5	1/3	3/11
Other	0/7	2/14	0/6	0/3	0/2	2/10	2/16	0/5	1/3	1/11

Theme 9: Perceptions of control

Table 20 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 5

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced
Yes	4
No	3

There were very few references to the degree of job control respondents perceived themselves as having, and of these, two respondents identified feelings of *both* control and lack of control. The comments relating to perceptions of control all refer to the mutually respectful

⁹This particular producer is only affiliated to ITV. Before the 1990 Broadcasting Act he was a relatively permanent freelance producer working for the documentary department at Central television. After 1990, license winners Carlton merged with Central and network documentaries began to be commissioned centrally. Although this producer is still working for Carlton, he does not represent the views of post 1990 ITV.

relationship between either producer and commissioning editor or commissioning editor and channel controller:

"the relationship that you build up with a commissioning editor is, well, they trust you to make the programme" (PIYM1, 416-417)

"there is a real dialogue that goes on between me and my..me and the managing director of current affairs, me and the controller of BBC1, you know, as it were, people are always throwing their ideas in. But in the end, there is an acceptance in the BBC...that you're the editor of the programme and it is actually up to you." (BCE1, 591-599)

Perceptions of lack of control relate to some of the constraints reported earlier - fashionable formats, commercialisation and the commissioning process, e.g.:

"what you rapidly realise, and if you opt for, and I think this is throughout the industry, if you opt for a sort of..to make documentaries and be busy, they you need to have a degree of flexibility. There are documentary makers who are very lucky and whose particular passions coincide at a particular time with the interests or the fashion" (PBOM3, 51-59)

Table 21 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Yes	2/7	2/14	1/6	1/3	0/2	2/10	4/16	0/5	1/3	1/11
No	1/7	2/14	1/6	1/3	0/2	1/10	3/16	0/5	1/3	1/11

There is no apparent relation between the opinions expressed and variations in job, company, position or gender.

Theme 10: Commissioning criteria

Table 22 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 16

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of positive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references
Aims of series	11	11	0
Aims of channel	11	7	4
Subjects wanted	9	6	3
Choice of producer	7	4	3
Demands of scheduling/ratings	6	3	3
Personal aims	2	2	0

It became apparent within the 'constraints' theme that a programme has to fit in with a commissioning editor's requirements if it is to be commissioned. Consequently, it is the producer's job to anticipate the nature of such requirements. This is not always easy:

"We made two *This Weeks*, they were both turned down by *Dispatches*. Same programmes, exactly the same programmes. *This Week* was bigger, it had a much, much, much larger audience than *Dispatches*, yet the smaller programme turns them down. So, you know, you tell me the rules. I don't know the criteria." (PIOM3, 597-604)

Table 22 outlines the criteria used by commissioning editors themselves in order to select programmes.

The different series have certain aims to fulfil as described by their commissioning editors. *World in Action* requires stories which are interesting, relevant and makeable. There has to be a good mix of subjects and programmes across the series, remembering that it is broadcast before the nine o'clock watershed. *Dispatches* also emphasises the need for a mix of subjects, and the editor argues that she can tell how successful a project is going to be from the way the idea is pitched in the first place. *Panorama* is looking to cover the important developments in domestic politics and around the world, reporting on issues important to both audience and broadcasters. Programmes have to be attractive and worth watching,

corresponding to the specifications of public service broadcasting. *Network First* strives for more accessible or populist programmes in order to increase ratings and protect the slot. The balance is tilted towards lighter issues, but still maintaining space for the more serious topics. *Modern Times* seeks out interesting features of contemporary Britain. The aim is to attract a good audience using engaging characters and a mix of subjects ranging from the light and amusing to the serious and moving. Constant communication between the commissioning editor and the producers is advocated. *Horizon* aims to lead the world in the making of science programmes. It wants solid stories, across a cross section of subjects, explaining why something happens or how it works, and using interesting styles and approaches. Again, communication is continuously maintained between editor and producer. Finally, *Cutting Edge*'s editor wants to tap into what is happening in the nineties. He claims to have no political agenda and seeks programmes that are heavily idea-led ranging from the important to the nonsensical.

The commissioning editor acts as the link between producers and the different parts of the channel and consequently is somewhat representative of the aims of a channel. Pertinent questions, however, are what those aims are, how they are translated into commissioning criteria by editors, and how those aims are subsequently perceived by producers. The central issue emerging here is whether the objectives expressed by individual channels are *believed* by producers.

An ITV commissioning editor believes that the channel openly commissions programmes which attract both high and low ratings. However, one producer feels that ITV is very honest about its economic aims:

"at ITV they say, it's a game show, it's fun, it'll get a big audience, let's do it, you know, there is no inherent hypocrisy." (PIOM3, 248-250)

Another feels that certain 'serious' programmes are commissioned merely to ease the channel's conscience:

"They can turn round to their critics and say, 'but we made "Death of a

"Nation", we made "Vietnam: the last battle", you know, and it helps them get out of the hole when the critics, rightly, attack them for the, you know, the very narrow and bland programming that they sort of produce - and that's not just Carlton, the whole of ITV." (PITVM1, 253-260)

Two BBC commissioning editors believe their series fulfil certain public service roles within the channel:

"the BBC's got a very strongly stated aim that it...that science is one of its kind of cornerstones of, if you like, the public service remit, which is to provide people with the kind of understanding of life and society that's necessary for them to get on in the twentieth century." (BCE3, 129-135)

However, one BBC producer suspects that the BBC secretly commissions with ratings in mind, and another believes that a successful formula is always chosen over an interesting idea.

Two views emerge about Channel Four. One suggests that Channel Four is still motivated by what's important, with a view to shaking up the political system rather than increasing ratings:

"[the series on homelessness] had the highest audiences in the history of Channel Four in those two weeks, it took Channel Four by complete surprise. Why did they do it? they didn't do it for audiences, they did it because it needs to be done, it was really important to be done, and they're still motivated by this" (PIOM4, 1565-1571)

The other opinion is more cynical:

"it's the middle-class making a documentary about the working-class therefore they cannot say anything about the working-class that might upset their middle-class friends at the dinner party. And that's the controlling ethos certainly within the documentary department in Channel Four." (PIOM3, 476-482)

As regards the subjects chosen, there is once again a gap between the aims of editors and the perceptions of producers. The commissioning editors on the whole advocate choosing a

range of subjects in order to achieve a good mix of light, heavy, high audience and low audience programmes. However, there is the feeling that editors are only interested in achieving large audiences and have shifted the emphasis on to those subjects which appeal to the audience. One BBC producer goes further:

"The problem now is there are fewer and fewer commissioning editors who are prepared to have confidence enough in their own jobs to say 'I don't care, I'm going to do this because I think it's important, or I think it's interesting', because the argument against that which is, who are you to tell us what's important? Surely the audience determines what's important, you know, the sort of...so when you get a *Network First* about Indonesia, John Pilger did his film about..er..East Timor, that's really rare, and he can only make that because he's John Pilger. If I had come up with that idea I could not have made it, no one would have commissioned it." (PBOM3, 530-545)

The editors do not deny the pursuit of audience appeal, but explain it in terms of the benefits to the audience i.e. making programmes more relevant and accessible, rather than to themselves and the channel. One editor maintains that the commissioning is heavily idea-led, but clearly based on his own interests and concerns.

Another important criterion in deciding what to commission is the ability of the producer. Obviously an editor wants to be sure a programme is well made, and certain producers are seen as better than others. Consequently editors tend to have a group of producers they commission regularly and are subsequently accused of favouritism by those not included in the group.

One category deals specifically with the role of scheduling and ratings in the commissioning process. Once again, there is a difference between the intentions of commissioning editors and producers' perceptions of those intentions. The editors want a large audience, and choose their subjects accordingly, as proof of the value of programmes to that audience. Producers, however, are split between accepting and rejecting this altruistic approach to ratings:

"And the truth is I don't think the commissioning editors simply sit there and say, 'well, we can't get an audience, let's get some publicity'...quite a few of them are less concerned with audiences and pure audiences than you might

expect." (PIOM4, 722-730)

"The truth of the matter is, the first question when you come to them with your passion, is what did they think? is this going to get a five million audience or is this going to get a one million audience?" (PBOM3, 437-441)

A couple of the commissioning aims identified were more personal. One BBC editor wanted specifically to increase the number of young people and women watching science. Another independent producer believed that commissioning editors are particularly concerned with showing that they are able to commission and broadcast high quality work.

Table 23 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Aims of series	7/7	4/14	3/6	2/3	2/2	3/10	10/16	1/5	0/3	4/11
Aims of channel	4/7	7/14	4/6	2/3	1/2	4/10	10/16	1/5	0/3	7/11
Subjects wanted	6/7	3/14	3/6	2/3	2/2	2/10	7/16	2/5	0/3	3/11
Choice of producer	3/7	4/14	4/6	0/10	1/2	2/10	7/16	0/5	0/3	4/11
Demands of scheduling/ ratings	3/7	3/14	2/6	1/3	1/2	2/10	5/16	1/5	0/3	3/11
Personal aims	1/7	2/14	1/6	0/3	0/2	1/10	3/16	0/5	0/3	2/11

The above table is slightly misleading as it indicates the number of respondents in each category who referred to a particular subtheme. It does not show whether the respondents were positive or negative about that subtheme. If the numbers are considered in conjunction with the nature of the responses, there is a visible difference between commissioning editors and producers. This is clear with respect particularly to the aims of a channel (all the editors cited saw this as positive compared to 4/14 producers), the reasons for choosing certain subjects (6/7 of editors expressed support for this criterion whilst 3/14 of producers criticised it) and the demands posed by scheduling and ratings (all of the editors cited endorsed this criterion whilst 3/14 producers criticised it).

Theme 11: Amount of documentary on television

Table 24 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 7

Theme	No. of interviews referenced
Amount	7

A number of respondents emphasised the increase in the number of factual programmes on television:

"The question is, is the documentary dead or nearly dead, and all this sort of thing. Actually, no it isn't, it's healthier than ever. It's actually in over production, it's in danger of going bonkers." (C4CE2, 791-795)

However questions are raised by one producer in particular (PITVM1) as to the amount of information they provide, how original it is, where they are scheduled and whether the expansion can be maintained.

Table 25 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod.	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Amount +ve	2/7	2/14	1/6	0/3	1/2	2/10	4/16	0/5	0/3	2/11
Amount -ve	1/7	2/14	1/6	1/3	0/2	1/10	2/16	1/5	0/3	2/11

There is no obvious correlation between views on the amount of documentary on television and one's job, company, position or gender.

Theme 12: Programme/strand features

Table 26 Summary of responses

Total number of interviews referenced = 16

Subcategory	No. of interviews referenced	No. of descriptive/supportive references	No. of negative/critical references
Image/remit	11	11	2
Style/format	11	8	3
Content	7	5	2

The twelfth theme examines the specific format, content and remit of different documentary strands comparing the aims and intentions of the series with the way in which they are differentially perceived.

Table 27 summarises the 'institutional' features of certain series as described by their commissioning editors. This theme was generated from interviewees' responses across questions rather than from one question in particular, thus certain cells are empty.

Table 27 'Institutional' descriptions of series

TITLE	CHANNEL	LENGTH	STYLE/ FORMAT	CONTENT	IMAGE/ REMIT
World in Action	ITV	30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - voice-over - no reporters - mainstream - almost personality-led - aims to be visual with original shots - stick to conventions for legal reasons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -moved away from the main news agenda as the news was covering the same material - interesting and relevant stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not as establishment as Panorama and therefore less likely to be criticised - Granada is seen as difficult to deal with - our journalists will go to extremes to conceal sources
Panorama	BBC1	40-50 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - varied: reporters in and out of vision; some programmes more authored than others - no particular documentary technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - obligation to deal with domestic and international developments that are important to both us and the audience - issue is not whether a topic is watchable but how to make it watchable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trying to change the dull image - BBC's flagship current affairs programme, thus has a reputation to maintain - want people to trust it and see it as authoritative and relevant
Modern Times	BBC2	40-50 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - wide use of handheld 16mm cameras for observational documentary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interesting aspects of contemporary Britain - engaging characters doing or done something interesting - events unfolding thus present tense - range from light and amusing to more serious and moving subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - show interesting aspects of changing contemporary Britain - reflecting society back to itself - enable BBC2 to say it is delivering high quality single documentaries attracting critical acclaim and decent audiences
Network First	ITV	60 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 34 a year - one-off subjects - 10.40 pm Tuesday 	NO REFERENCES MADE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increasing strand identity - still backs low audience films

Horizon	BBC2	40-50 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strong story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - content changes each year due to the wide spread of science in society - has to be a reason to watch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BBC2's flagship science series - programmes which lead the world in how science programmes are made - interesting styles and approaches to push boundaries - bringing awareness and understanding of science to a general public
Cutting Edge	Ch4	60 minutes	NO REFERENCES MADE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not a political agenda, just showing the way the world is - not trying to be didactic or proselytise - about commonalities that people can relate to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - range from the popular to the iconoclastic
True Stories	Ch4	70-90 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - long feature documentaries - some shot on Hi-8 - bit of a muddle - largely co-produced 	NO REFERENCES MADE	NO REFERENCES MADE
Dispatches	Ch4	60 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mainly observational documentary - relies on obtaining access to people or institutions for observation - use of narrative film-making - build up journalistic points to make a case - story approach preferred to dry, analytical approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more closely related to a public policy than a news agenda 	NO REFERENCES MADE

The references made by those other than the relevant commissioning editors on the above series are as follows. One general description of *World in Action* places it in the current affairs genre:

"I'm not a classical documentary maker, mind you nor is *World in Action* - current affairs rather than documentary." (PIOF1, 17-19)

Panorama is perceived as always having a reporter and making wide use of micro-narratives. More generally,

"..it was radical but had shades of *Panorama* about it..you know..shades of sobriety in it" (PIYM1, 63-64)

"But on the other hand, you see *Panorama* which wasn't really a documentary programme, which used to be a current affairs programme, moving towards documentary because that's the way to maximise its audience." (PIOF1, 240-245)

Thus the commissioning editor's belief that *Panorama* is seen as dull, and his efforts to change that, are recognised. However, these comments were made by different people, thus the editor's attempt to change perceptions has not been totally successful. The former producer sees no change, and the latter gives reasons other than those explained by the editor.

Perceptions of *Modern Times* concentrate on its tabloid image:

"*Modern Times*, for example, which is the new series replacing *Forty Minutes*, has established its style very very quickly very early on, tabloid documentaries" (PIOM4, 1308-1311)

"I think you possibly are seeing a push towards..and I think on the BBC in the first series of *Modern Times* though I think it's going to change in the second series..um..a push towards tabloid subjects - not necessarily tabloid treatments, but tabloid subjects" (PIOF1, 269-275)

"*Modern Times* has done very well, it's just documentaries about life" (BCE3, 663-665)

These extracts appear to capture the intentions of the commissioning editor. However, the degree of similarity between the editor's intentions and other perceptions will depend on whether the definitions and assumptions ascribed to 'tabloid documentary' are positive or negative.

The references to *Network First* support and contradict the intentions of the commissioning editor. The first recognises the slow creation of strand identity:

"*Network First* is probably the one that [the audience]..you don't, I don't think it's been banded long enough - it depends a lot on how long they've been on television." (PIOM3, 1025-1028)

The second cynically criticises the strand's remit:

"*Network First* was a sort of..gay mums have babies by sperm donors or whatever..you know, it was a bit sort of tabloid, and a bit of that, quite a lot of that, it's quite a schizophrenic strand, but they realised that where it brings them plaudits is if they send John Pilger to East Timor and so on, and they're realising increasingly that, though they have every now and then to play a sort of, you know, documentary behind the scenes with Paul Daniels, or you know, the Duchess of whatever goes..do you know what I mean, up a mountain with disabled people, [...] that it's kind of hearts and minds stuff that matters" (C4CE2, 749-764)

Perceptions of *Cutting Edge* contradict the commissioning editor's aims. The following extract illustrates the editor's objectives:

"quite often it didn't attempt to be didactic or to proselytise particularly, it just sort of said, this is the way the world is, and you make up your mind." (on a particular episode of *Cutting Edge*, 272-275)

However, perceptions of the series were quite different:

"in documentaries there is an argument that, you know, *Inside Storys*, *Cutting Edges* and all that kind of stuff are not journalistic because what they're doing is... editorialising people's lives and stories and so on and so forth, but they're not applying analysis, but in a way they're editing. So, they are, in a very

subtle form, analysing because they choose not to show one thing and they choose to show another, then effectively they are casting some judgement or someone else's on a situation" (PIYF1, 180-191)

"*Cutting Edge* has a style, and it..to encompass its style, is take the middle-class and take the piss out of them" (PIOM3, 450-452)

"*Cutting Edge* is actually about seduction and betrayal..you seduce the people to appear and then you betray them." (PIOM3, 711-714)

The only reference to *Dispatches* corresponds fairly well to the journalistic depiction provided by the commissioning editor:

"to argue that a *Public Eye*, a *Panorama* or a *Dispatches* is not journalism, you know, it's art, is just absurd, however I think that they're not all journalistically sound" (PIYF1, 194-199)

Table 28 Subtheme x Respondent category

	C.Ed	Prod	BBC	ITV	CH4	IND	Male	Female	Y	O
Image/remit	6/7	6/14	4/6	2/3	1/2	5/10	10/16	2/5	1/3	5/11
Style/format	6/7	7/14	2/6	2/3	2/2	7/10	10/16	3/5	2/3	5/11
Content	6/7	2/14	3/6	2/3	1/2	2/10	7/16	1/5	0/3	2/11

No additional references were made to either *Horizon* or *True Stories*. The above table is again slightly misleading as, despite the apparently equal number of references between commissioning editors and producers, the majority of positive comments came from commissioning editors, whilst producers tend to be neutral or negative. Consequently, the only significant variable apparently influencing opinions is that of job.

4.3.3 Interview Interpretation

1) Within themes

It was assumed at the beginning of the study that differences across job, company, career position and gender would affect perspectives on different issues. Certain differences were observed on the basis of these variables.

Commissioning editors were more reserved in their views on the definition of documentary, seeing it as a particular type of programme construction. They were more inclined to talk about the benefits of documentary to both television and the audience, stressed the importance of the audience in programme making, did not see the channel as a constraint, regarded changes in format as external to the actual production process, and were generally positive about the future of documentary. Producers were more opinionated and varied in their views on the definition of documentary, more concerned with the political role of documentary in society, and perceived format as a constraint yet also as an expression of personal style and aims. Representatives from the BBC did not talk about documentary in terms of its democratic role, did not affiliate to any particular style or type, and were predominantly negative about its future. Only those affiliated to ITV recognised the financial and commercial aspects of the job, and talked openly about the pressure or desire to be popular. The only notable difference regarding career position was that older producers did not perceive strand as a constraint. The only clear divergence based on gender was audience communication and comprehension, with more women than men referring to its importance.

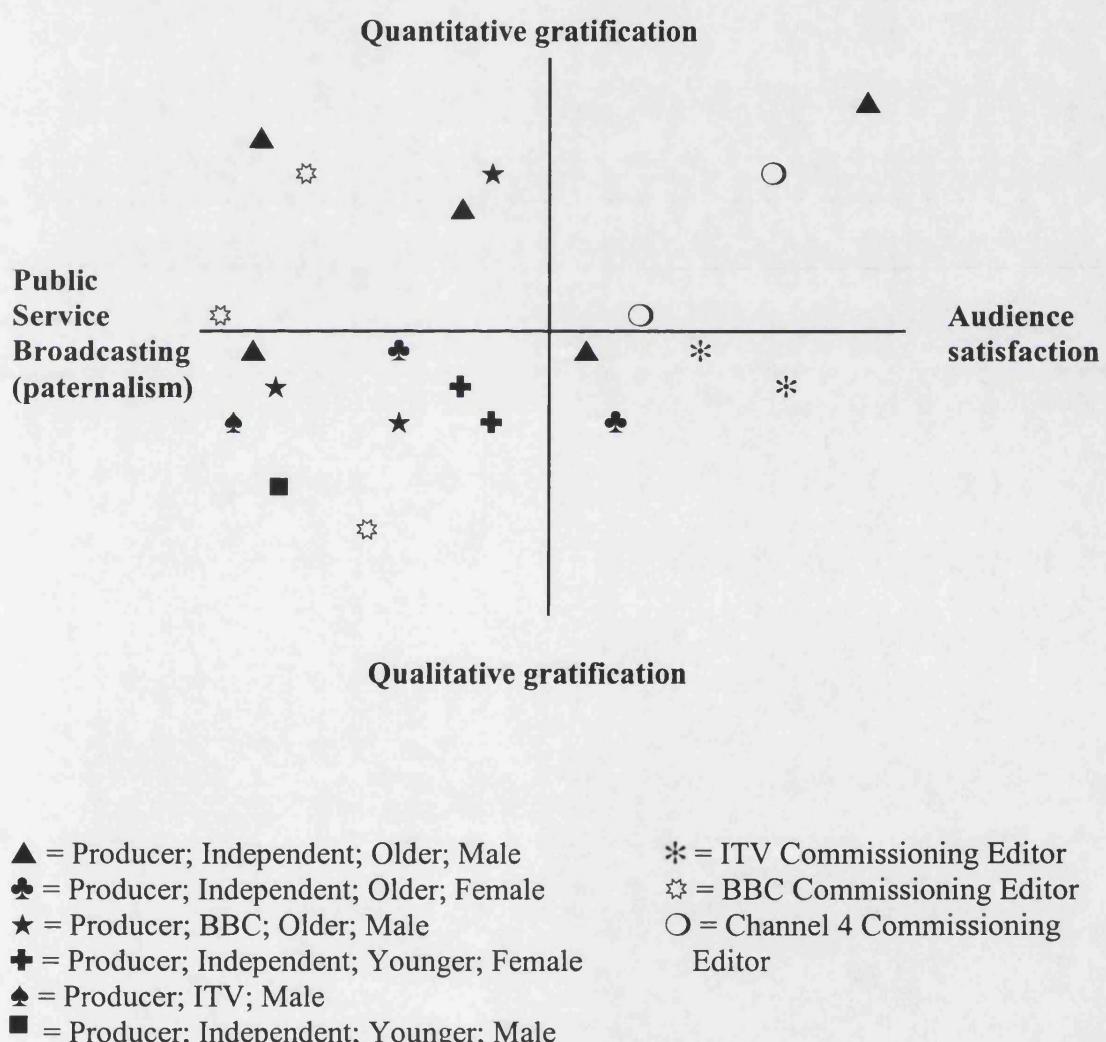
Thus perspectives on questions such as the definition, purpose and content of documentary as well as the role of commissioning editors, producers and the audience do depend to some extent on contextual variables. However, the differences observed were by no means emphatic or consistent across any variable. This can be explained both theoretically and methodologically. From a theoretical perspective, it may be that the role played by institutional and situational context is marginal in broadcasters' perceptions of their work. However, from a methodological perspective, this marginality could be because perceptions are formed through a variety of interacting factors, of which institutional and situational context are just two. Furthermore, the sample of respondents is small and centred more around job and company than position and gender, so it is possible that a larger proportion of 'old' producers, 'young' producers and women would produce more differences. This is not pursued in this thesis as the aim of the study was to gain an insight into *what* broadcasters' perceptions are and whether differences can be linked to contextual variables - and the results suggest that they can - rather than a detailed study of the effect of job, company, career position and gender on perception.

2) Across themes

The positions highlighted by the two common debates outlined at the beginning of the chapter - 'conceptions of service' and 'forms of gratification' - can be found in the majority of the coded themes. 'Conceptions of service' spans the gap between serving the public based on broadcasters' decisions as to what the public should watch, and providing a service for the public according to what the public itself wants. 'Forms of gratification' examines what success means to the broadcaster, from the quantitative reward of financial gain to the qualitative gratification of the audience.

These central debates can be explained more specifically. With regard to service, does a documentary place its emphasis on being informative, serious and educational, thus conforming to the demands of public service broadcasting, or does it concentrate on being appealing and entertaining, thus providing people with what they enjoy watching? Of course, these two extremes are not necessarily incompatible. One can enjoy and desire something which is informative and educational, and an educational, informative, 'heavyweight' programme can equally be entertaining and appealing. This is where the second theme becomes relevant. Much depends on a broadcaster's motivation for programme success, whether the goal is to make money or to understand and thus be of use to an audience. If the aim is to line broadcasters' pockets, then it is the aesthetically appealing elements of a programme which are important - i.e. attractive subject matter and exciting format. However, if the aim is to enrich the audience, then it is the more cognitive aspects which predominate i.e. comprehensible content/construction and relevant subject matter, echoing Gruber's (1984) approach to the processing of news. **Figure 2** positions each respondent along these two themes:

Figure 2 - Positioning of respondents on the common themes



The positioning is approximately determined according to the relationship between answers generated in individual interviews and the common themes in the sample as a whole, thus acknowledging the context from which responses were drawn rather than just segments of text in isolation. The interviews were broadly re-coded in accordance with the polarised perspectives of the two dimensions, i.e. paternalism; audience satisfaction; quantitative gratification; qualitative gratification. A respondent's position on the chart represents a rough aggregate of that coding.

Although it is impressionistic, the recoding presents a picture of the effect of contextual variables which differs from the thematic analysis. The wide distribution of producers and commissioning editors is an indication of the complexity of the differences observed in the previous correlations. However, certain groupings are clear in this diagram, which suggests that job alone does not determine outlook. All the representatives from the BBC, both producers and commissioning editors tend towards the more traditional notion of public service, although there is no consensus on the motivations behind this. All the representatives from ITV lean slightly towards audience awareness, but the commissioning editors are markedly more concerned about audience satisfaction whilst the one producer remains committed to the traditional notion of public service. Although still more interested in audience satisfaction, the Channel Four commissioning editors are slightly closer to the traditional notion of public service than their counterparts at ITV, yet more commercially minded. It is interesting that the young producers are concentrated in the box which advocates programme relevance and audience comprehension, yet the older producers are scattered all over the place. This suggests that the idealistic intentions that producers start out with are not necessarily sustained, or that new people have to be more idealistic or focussed than used to be the case. Finally, all the female members of the sample are contained in the bottom half of the diagram leaning predominantly to the left. This illustrates the prioritisation of the audience over personal gain and a slight tendency towards the more traditional notion of public service. The male members of the sample are distributed in all four quarters of the diagram.

If the understanding and interpretation of audiences was a top priority across the industry,

we would expect to find all respondents clustered in the bottom third of the chart. However, these results find the respondents generally distributed in the top two thirds of the diagram.

4.4 Discussion

The concluding part of the chapter considers the results of the study in relation to the nature and structure of the television documentary industry and the thesis's theoretical concentration on the nature of communication.

4.4.1 Structure of the industry

The results demonstrate the complex amalgam of political, institutional, creative, ideological and commercial forces which structure the television documentary industry. It is an industry which simultaneously represents a number of mutually dependent relationships - a medium and its audience, the state and its citizens, an employer and its employees, a colony and its artists, a product and its consumers. These relationships can be applied to the documentary industry specifically or to broadcasting in general. They can be particular to the internal structure of the documentary industry or a consequence of its positioning within the societal framework.

The characterisation of documentary as a relationship between a medium and its audience is both descriptive and simplistic. It is true that the basic role of television documentary is to provide something for people to watch. However, this is a somewhat superficial analysis which ignores the social contexts in which provision and viewing take place. This study's investigation of what is provided and why reveals the tension and the complexity of the relationships involved.

If the documentary is accorded the democratic and informative role advocated by Reithian public service broadcasting, e.g.

"[Television] should educate, bring the nation together as a moral community,

promote the highest standards of taste, and, by the provision of information and argument, help to create a rational democracy." (Abercrombie, 1996, p.75)

it suggests a homogeneous institution with some form of structuring and authoritative power over society. This positions it both as part of and apart from the rest of society, with a function almost comparable to that of the State. These traditional public service ideals appear across the interviews, indicating their prevalence and salience across both debates within the industry and respondents.

The data provide evidence of certain employer/employee relations common to organisations. The differences observed between producers and commissioning editors reflect the hierarchical structure of power within the industry, although there is also a strong element of mutual dependency. Commissioning editors represent the 'institution' - the employers - with producers as employees, thus producers depend on editors for work and editors rely on producers for success. The nature of this mutually dependent relationship is contingent on the balance of power. Power is in the hands of the editor when the focus of their attention is on finding a product to fit a slot - hence the oft-mentioned comment from producers that dependency stifles creativity. However, power is in the hands of producers, usually the well-established, 'reputable' ones, when it is their own product which is in demand. This issue is closely related to the depiction of documentary makers as artists in a colony. Documentary can be seen as space and time for producers to develop their artistic and creative talents within a supportive environment. However, the freedom, once liberally distributed, is now curtailed by financial and commercial constraints, unless of course investment in a producer is judged as a risk worth taking. Consequently the space exists for some but not for others.

Possibly the most influential factor in both documentary production and perception is that of commercialisation. Television documentary is part of an industry which first and foremost needs to survive economically. From this perspective, the focus is on supply and demand, profit and loss - hence the analogy of product and consumers. The problem is that this philosophy is viewed as the antithesis of public service broadcasting. Whilst the motive of

the former is money, the motive of the latter is the enhancement and advancement of society. The common themes running through the study embrace this conflict and efforts to resolve it. The criticism of a commercial approach is that to seek profit, programme quality is abandoned in favour of the easiest route to the largest audience. A 'quality' documentary is assumed to include information and education as well as entertainment, whilst the commercial approach only provides entertainment. However, entertainment, information and education are not mutually exclusive, and large audiences do not necessarily signify a programme's lack of substance. If the BBC is to fulfil its public service role it also needs to maintain sizeable audiences. It is possible that the BBC was only able to secure large audiences at a time when there was little alternative choice. If public service broadcasting insists on paternalism or elitism as hallmarks of documentary quality, and documentaries on commercial channels obtain larger audiences, one has to question whether it is 'documentary' or 'public service' that needs to be reevaluated. An acceptance of television documentary's position in the consumer market is an acknowledgement of reality. This reality is beginning to be recognised within public service institutions, as indicated in the data. The problem is in reconciling what appear to be two opposing ideologies.

The praise and criticisms of both public service-oriented and commercially-oriented approaches to documentary are based on certain assumptions about the way they will be interpreted, the effect they will have and their consequent benefit to both the industry and society. These assumptions relate to documentary's communicative potential. The final section discusses the viability of communication in the light of the production context and the theoretical framework of the thesis.

4.4.2 Communicative potential

This thesis is primarily concerned with the nature of communication in television documentary. This particular study focuses on the production context, or, to use Hall's (1980) terminology, the encoding moment. The two relevant areas to look at in relation to the question of communication are the *practical* production context and *perceptions* of how to communicate within that context. The former relates closely to Doise's (1986) situational level of analysis, and the latter introduces the positional and cultural levels.

There are various practical problems associated with documentary communication. Firstly, the difficulties of getting a programme commissioned in order to be in a position to communicate. Then there are all the issues surrounding the programme that is eventually made. In conforming to a commissioner's wishes, a producer may potentially be compromising what he/she wanted to communicate. Lack of time and resources can affect the final product. Pressures to attract a large audience may force certain programme features to be prioritised, e.g. strong characters, possibly distorting the programme's thesis. The nature of the medium i.e. primarily visual, may exclude the production of a number of more complex and less visual topics. However, all these points relate to the making of a programme up until the point of broadcast. The fact that a programme *is* broadcast implies that a solution has been found to overcome these obstacles, producing a programme which will still communicate what was intended. Thus, the problems and constraints highlighted above relate to the transformation and adaptation of an initial idea rather than the communication process during and after transmission.

Indeed, one would assume, as the majority of respondents did, that the mass distribution of television guarantees mass communication, which echoes Carey's transmission view. However, this does not take into consideration either the content or the reception of that 'communication' and thereby signifies a gap between the perceptions of producers and the reality of communication. Chapter 1 emphasised the importance of understanding the audience (e.g. Ang, 1991), both in terms of who they are and what they understand, if effective communication is to be achieved. The irony is that this theory essentially contradicts the foundations of public service broadcasting, suggesting that it is the audience rather than the broadcasters who are setting the agenda. If the foundation of public service broadcasting is the need to provide what the public needs to know, then it must be coupled with the assumption that if the audience were left to its own devices it would only want entertainment i.e. certain types of subject matter. This ignores the possibility that audience satisfaction may also relate to programme structure. Consideration of the best format for both audience understanding and appeal, does not necessarily signify an abandonment of ethics. In other words, putting the audience first does not necessarily exclude the treatment of certain subjects or formats. In fact, the interviews reported here refer to the variety of

different ways in which subjects can be treated. Thus the prioritisation of the audience can relate to programme structure as well as to content. This debate reflects opinion across the 'conceptions of service' theme.

There is actually a degree of convergence between theory and practice on the best format for communication. A large number of producers and commissioning editors advocated the use of story, which echoes Hall (1980):

"the event must become a 'story' before it can become a *communicative event*"
(p.129)

However, it is interesting to note that many of the public service advocates see the emphasis on a story format as a constraint, indicative of tabloid television and, consequently, the scourge of commercialisation. This is not totally unfounded, as it was admitted that a story with absorbing characters is essential to secure the interest of an audience, and the more members of the audience that are interested, the larger the amount of money attracted. It is possible though that the popularity of these 'tabloid' programmes is not the result of sensationalism but the use of a format that is both accessible and entertaining. This argument mirrors views across the 'forms of gratification' theme.

It is thus unfair to claim that producers have no appreciation of the audience. What I would dispute is the depth of that appreciation. The knowledge that the respondents in this sample had of the audience was based on either the retrospective viewing habits of a population sample according to age, gender, and socio-economic status, or the prospective reactions of close friends, relations and colleagues. Both are assumed to be representative of the population as a whole. However, the first is a quantitative measure at the positional level of analysis, and the second is a qualitative measure at the interpersonal/situational level. Although these two sources together provide a better picture, the respondents rarely have sufficient of either. In addition, they often do not know or do not want to know the most effective way of using it. There is, however, a further problem. Theoretical perspectives (e.g. Morley, 1992) emphasise the need for a linguistic, social and cultural match between production and reception. People come from a variety of social backgrounds, thus, following

the above logic, the notion of mass communication is unfeasible. However, there is no allusion to or recognition of this whatsoever in this sample of broadcasters. Their goal, conversely, is to attract large audiences, either as evidence of serving the public or to attract money. The audience, therefore, is a contingent piece in a much larger jigsaw rather than a contributor to a process of which it is the prime beneficiary.

The broadcasters of television documentary are exhibiting an transmission approach to mass communication. The two dimensions on which their perspectives vary, i.e. 'conceptions of service' and 'forms of gratification', are centrally concerned with the *effect* of documentary. The debate across the 'conceptions of service' dimension concerns the sort of service documentary should provide and whether the broadcasters or the audience should determine what is broadcast. The underlying assumption is that documentary has an effect, and the debate across the dimension is over who has the ability to *control* that effect. Does the audience know what it wants or is it up to broadcasters to provide what people need to know? Central anxieties are either that viewers opt for entertainment as opposed to information or education and thus cut out the democratic function of television, or that broadcasters underestimate viewers' demand for 'quality' programming. If the first dimension considers effect in terms of the relationship between the medium and its audience, then the second - 'forms of gratification' - considers it in terms of the relationship between the broadcaster and his/her audience. This debate concerns the *type* of effect aimed for i.e. quantitative (large audience) or qualitative (widespread comprehension and fulfilment), which subsequently influences the way a programme is made.

Both these debates focus on the role of the message, whether in terms of who controls that role, or how broadcasters differently use it. Notions of effect, control, and movement of a message indicate the assumption of a direct transfer of producer intentions to viewers which, in turn, illustrates a transmission view of mass communication. Although these broadcasters consider the audience, it takes the simplistic form of a homogeneous category whose activity in relation to documentary is categorical, i.e. watch/don't watch; like/don't like; understand/don't understand. There is no appreciation of the way people relate to documentary, the way interpretation involves and reflects social identity, or how the process

of communication enables participation and community spirit through the representation of shared beliefs. In other words, the adoption of a transmission approach ignores the social and cultural context of mass communication - elements offered within a ritual approach.

4.5 Conclusion

This study illustrates the context in which documentary production takes place. Two themes were identified across debates relating to the type of service documentary should provide and the preferred form of gratification. Differences depend on whether the priority is audience or producer, public service or commercial gain. Communication is not necessarily contingent on any prioritisation, however it is difficult to assess the validity of any assumptions regarding communication without a complete understanding of the process. The next study examines the reception context of documentary through the perspectives of different 'audiences'. This will enable further progress towards an appreciation of the nature and context of documentary communication.

CHAPTER 5

THE CONTEXT OF TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY RECEPTION

5.1 Outline

This chapter investigates the reception context of television documentary programmes. It reports on a series of focus groups constructed to explore existing audience perspectives on television documentary. The aims of the study are to establish what those perspectives are, discover which issues generate consensus and which debate, and explore the possibility of links between perspective and social background. The chapter begins by placing the study in the theoretical context of the thesis as a whole. The subsequent analysis is divided into three sections. The first outlines the themes running through the groups, highlighting the areas of consensus and debate. The second describes the characteristics and dynamics of each group as both individual units and in relation to the overall thematic trends. The final analysis examines the link between perspective on documentary and social background of respondents and explores the indications of any patterns. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the results in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis as a whole.

5.2 Framework of the study

This thesis seeks to understand the nature of documentary communication based on an investigation of production and reception. In accordance with the theoretical encoding/decoding model offered by Hall (1980), and the findings of empirical audience reception research (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1990; Livingstone, 1995; Morley, 1980), the thesis acknowledges the importance of the audience in the communication process. This importance, in relation to television documentary, is explicated in two broad ways - the perceptions of documentary producers of and towards the documentary audience, and the perceptions of that audience towards documentary. My assumption is that there needs to be a match between audience perceptions of and about documentary and producers' perceptions of that audience and its perceptions if communication in documentary is to be understood by

the audience in the way the producer intends. The previous chapter highlighted the different positions assumed by those involved in the making of television documentary based on both perceptions of the relationship between broadcasting and the public and on the objectives of individual broadcasters. Thus, the production study sheds light on the context in which documentary production is taking place, and the varying position accorded to the audience. However, the theoretical position advocated in this thesis states that communication is a process linking production and reception. Whilst the previous study explored the production context, or encoding moment, and its perspective on both text and audience, this study explores the reception context, or decoding moment. The term 'moment' is used by Hall to represent the determinate rather than autonomous nature of the encoding and decoding contexts. A moment represents the "transposition into and out of the 'message form' (or mode of symbolic exchange)" (Hall, 1980, p.129). This study thereby pursues empirically the theoretical requirements advocated by the thesis for any investigation of the nature of communication. In accordance with the highlighted object of analysis, the study centres on the audience's expectations, assumptions and perceptions of television documentary.

The thesis emphasises the role of social context in the communication process. It employs Doise's (1986) levels of analysis as a means of articulating different contextual spheres and thus the various influences or contributory factors in the communication process. The four levels outlined by Doise are the intrapersonal level, the interpersonal/situational level, the positional level and the ideological level. However, for the purposes of the thesis, it is the interpersonal/situational, positional and ideological levels which are more directly relevant. The notion of social context is central to the organisation of this particular study. The focus group interview itself is located at an interpersonal/situational level of analysis. The emphasis in the focus group is on the interaction between people in a social, group setting, and thus it accesses areas of consensus and debate which may not have become evident through individual interviews. It is possible that such areas are only consensual or contentious as a result of the group dynamics rather than strong opinions on the issue itself. However, even if this is the case, it recognises the social nature of interaction (process) and the way it relates to the subject under discussion (content). Doise's positional level of analysis is encapsulated in the divisions between the focus groups. The groups are

constructed according to three distinct social contextual variables - gender, age and socio-economic status. These variables were selected as they represent the standard ways in which the audience is differentiated in audience research. They focus on the:

"differences in social position which exist prior to the interaction between different categories of subject" (Doise, 1986, p.13)

As audience interpretations of television documentary are largely unknown, it is useful to begin with criteria associated with differences in interpretation in other genres. The majority of reception studies stress the importance of class (e.g. Morley's, 1980, study of *Nationwide*) and gender (e.g. Livingstone's, 1994, study of audience discussion programmes) on interpretation. Other reception studies have used criteria such as occupation (e.g. Lewis, 1991), race/ethnicity (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1990), membership of political and social interest groups (e.g. Corner et al., 1986), religion (e.g. Gamson, 1992) and experience of the issue in question (e.g. Schlesinger, 1992). The criteria are selected following the researcher's belief in their relevance to audience interpretation of a particular programme's content. Following this line of reasoning, I have included age as a criterion because interpretations may reflect different experiences associated with the development of television i.e. an older age group will have lived through the beginnings of television with its strong emphasis on public service broadcasting, whilst a younger group may be more aware of or positive about commercialisation and the pressure of market forces. Given the link between social divisions and audience interpretation, these variables of gender, age and socio-economic status could differentiate between audience perceptions of documentary as well as between the audience itself. The ideological level of analysis refers to the values, beliefs and norms which frame the respondents' perceptions, expectations and opinions.

Obtaining a variety of perspectives on television documentary from members of different social groups within the general public provides an insight into the way in which viewers are decoding or interpreting documentary programmes. This process relates fundamentally to the expectation a viewer has about what a documentary is, what it should be about and how it is structured. Any programme will then be evaluated to some extent along these criteria. The aim is to establish descriptions of those criteria, the extent to which such descriptions

concur and differ, and whether patterns of similarity and difference bear any relation to positional aspects of audiences' social context. This information represents the feedback outlined in previous chapters as fundamental to the communication process (e.g. Hall, 1980; Schlesinger, 1978). Chapter 1 referred to the importance of 'knowledge about the audience' to this communication process. Audience perceptions and expectations of a particular genre play a large part in the subsequent interpretation of individual programmes belonging to that genre (e.g. Livingstone & Lunt, 1993). Therefore, it is essential to know what those perceptions and expectations are, how widely they vary, and on which aspects. The study described in this chapter seeks to fill empirically a hitherto theoretically-defined gap.

The chapter reports a series of focus group discussions which were carried out with different sections of the public. The criteria of age, gender and socio-economic status were identified *a priori* as potentially significant for perceptions of television documentary. Therefore, the groups were organised according to these social criteria, and were homogeneous, providing a basis for comparison. The issues for discussion concern the audience's perceptions about the definition of documentary, documentary's role and purpose, how documentary should be made in order to fulfil these objectives, and whether, where and to what extent this is achieved. The methodology was described in Chapter 3, sections 3.3.2 and 3.5.2.

5.3 Results

As described at the beginning of the chapter, the results of this study are presented as three separate analyses. The first outlines the themes running through the data, highlighting the areas of consensus and debate. The second concentrates on each individual group, its characteristics, dynamics and discussion in relation to the overarching themes. The third explores the possibility of links between social background and viewer perspective. The final discussion considers the implications of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis.

5.3.1 Overarching themes

Eleven themes were identified in the data based on the focus group schedule and the focus group discussions. Thus the themes represent issues pursued both *within* the group discussions as well as those emerging *through* group discussion. The themes are the audience's viewing habits; the definition of documentary; the effect of documentary on viewers; viewers' reasons for watching documentary; viewers' reasons for turning off or not watching; the factors which maintain viewers' interest; the societal role of documentary; documentary credibility; objectivity and bias; commercialisation; and whose agenda is being pursued. Each theme is presented initially through a summary table which displays the subcategories within the theme, the number of references to each of those subcategories over all the groups, the number of issues not contested, and the number of issues fuelling disagreement¹. The subcategories are the broad areas referred to within a particular theme. A reference describes a section of text referring to a particular subcategory, which can cover one person's response or span more than one respondent. An issue refers to a specific concern within a subcategory. It can either be something agreed on (undisputed) or contested (disputed) within and/or across groups. The ensuing explanation describes and illustrates the issues. It is important to mention all the issues raised as, although some may only have been referred to by one or two people, such issues will exist to a greater or lesser extent throughout the general population. Quotes are used to highlight those issues which are widely accepted or are contested².

Theme 1: Viewing Habits

This theme investigates the regularity of documentary viewing amongst the eight groups. It presents an impression of what the participants perceptions and opinions of documentary are based on. Participants were directly asked whether they watched documentary and how frequently.

¹It is important to note two observations. Firstly, that disagreement may only have existed in *certain* groups. Secondly, that disagreement can be defined as contradictions *across* groups.

²An explanation of the code assigned to each quote is provided in **Appendix G**.

Table 29 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 8

Subcategory	No. of references
Watch occasionally	16
Do watch	11
Don't watch	7
Watch selectively	3
Would watch	3

This table represents the viewing habits of each participant in the eight focus groups (n = 40). The table clearly shows that the majority of people (30 out of 40) claim to watch documentary regularly, occasionally or selectively, whilst only 10 do not watch at all, whether voluntarily or not. The socio-demographic analysis, described in section 5.3.3, explores the links between these viewing habits and social background.

Theme 2: How is documentary defined?

Given the ambiguity of documentary definitions, both in the literature (e.g. Bondebjerg, 1994) and in the producer interview study (see Chapter Four), the groups were directly asked to define documentary. Their responses can be compared and contrasted with the other definitions (see Chapter Six), and also outline viewer expectations. The comparison with news/current affairs was raised by the moderator rather than generated by the participants.

Table 30 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 8

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Characteristics	145	15	11
Same as news/ current affairs	9	3	1
Different to news/ current affairs	54	12	2
Types/Applications	38	11	6

There were more references and issues relating to the characteristics of television

documentary than to any other issue across the data. It is not surprising that the largest subcategory within the theme was 'Characteristics' as this was explicitly explored in the discussions. However, many other topics were also explicitly explored and did not elicit responses to this extent. This corresponds with the lack of any clear and simple definition of documentary within the research literature. Two observations are noteworthy. Firstly, although certain issues produced disagreements within certain groups, other issues emerge across the groups which are unchallenged within groups yet contradict each other. Secondly, issues which produce disagreement and debate in one group are often undisputed in other groups. The most common references describe documentary as a collation of information and opinion; as in-depth and well researched; as a genre which educates and imparts information; as factual or real; and as discussing one topic.

Of these five issues, the idea that documentary educates and imparts information is accepted and mentioned in all eight groups:

"It's giving you information about something." (YFC2D, 5-6)

"Yeah, it's informative and you learn from that and everything" (OMC2D, 1082-1083)

There is also no debate within the five groups (younger ABC1 women; younger C2D men and women; older ABC1 and C2D men) describing the documentary as covering one topic, or the six groups (younger ABC1 and C2D men; all four older groups) characterizing it as in-depth and well researched. All groups except for younger ABC1 males referred to documentary as factual or real, although there is a difference of opinion over this issue amongst the older ABC1 women:

"A particular view they're putting across. It's usually a slanted view as well." (OFABC1, 210-211)

"But a documentary isn't their opinion is it, it should be fact." (OFABC1, 861-862)

In this situation, the disagreement exists following one group member's belief in the objectivity of information. It is possible that there is no conflict in other groups due to an acceptance that whilst documentary is factual and real, it is impossible for it to be totally objective. Five groups discussed documentary as being a combination of information and opinion or analysis, three displaying consensus (younger ABC1 women, older ABC1 men and women) and two debate (younger ABC1 and C2D men). The following quotes illustrate the two conflicting views voiced. Both quotes come from groups in which there was debate:

"it's something with a spin, something where they've had an opportunity to collate loads of information, think about how they want to present it."
(YMABC1, 8-11)

"a documentary's just a general insight, it's not a for or an against it's just a look at.." (YMC2D, 52-54)

Another contentious issue was whether or not documentary picks up on recent issues. This is debated within one group (younger ABC1 males) yet each side of the debate is consensual in other groups. Similarly, older ABC1 men debated whether or not a documentary comes to conclusion, although the suggestion that it does was uncontested within the older ABC1 female group. Conversely, the older ABC1 male group believed unequivocally that documentary tries to persuade - an issue which the older middle-class women debated. Whilst younger ABC1 women debated whether or not documentary uncovers issues not covered in the general news, the issue remained unchallenged amongst younger C2D men and older C2D women. Documentary is described as entertaining by younger ABC1 female group, yet the issue is contentious for older ABC1 men:

"Can't it be just informative without entertaining." (OMABC1, 660-661)

As for non-contentious characteristics, one raised across the groups was documentary's presentation of more than one view - which contradicts the criticism raised elsewhere that they are biased and one-sided. Other characteristics mentioned in various groups were that documentary is filmed, tells a story, covers issues not usually discussed, deals with a range of topics, is creative, has live interviews with people, is broadcast late, involves commentary,

documents something, and is an intelligent, quality programme.

Certain similarities were described between the documentary and news/current affairs. They are both edited (younger ABC1 men; older ABC1 women), they both have prepared reports telling the story (younger ABC1 men), they both deal with new issues (younger ABC1 men) and they both concern current events (younger ABC1 women; older ABC1 men and women). These observations are only evident in certain groups, and again some comments contradict earlier issues raised. The only similarity debated within a group (older ABC1 men) was that both genres concern current events. More factors were raised differentiating the documentary from news/current affairs. The documentary follows a producer's agenda whilst news pursues a public agenda (younger ABC1 men; older C2D women). News/current affairs has a constantly changing content (younger C2D women) and does not tell a story (younger ABC1 men). It is not always edited (older ABC1 men and women), is formulaic (younger ABC1 men), more urgent (all groups except older ABC1 men), and informs rather than educates (younger ABC1 men and women). News/current affairs is always political (younger C2D men; older ABC1 men; older C2D women), takes less time to make (younger men; older ABC1; older C2D women), does not go into as much depth (younger men) and does not draw conclusions (older ABC1 women). The only debate was amongst the older C2D women who could not agree on which of the two genres constituted opinion and which was impartial. Both sides of this debate remained unchallenged within other groups i.e. either documentary was seen as opinion and news/current affairs as neutral information (younger ABC1 men; older ABC1 men and women), or documentary as neutral and news/current affairs as pursuing a particular agenda (C2D men).

The final subcategory within the definition theme concerns types of documentary. The majority of references within this category refer to different programmes, debating whether or not they are examples of the documentary genre. Controversial programmes discussed include *Panorama*, Breakfast TV, *Wildlife on One*, *Match of the 70's*, the "Hollywood Women" series and *The Cook Report*. The debates illustrate the contradictory characteristics attributed to documentary programmes. For example, the young ABC1 male group argued about whether Breakfast TV can be described as documentary as it is both contemporary and

includes news and opinion - two factors outlined by the group as characteristic of documentary. However, I would suggest two reasons behind the group's resistance to unreservedly accept it within the documentary genre. One is that the programme may lack some central feature attributable to documentary. The notion of typical features will be addressed in the discussion. The second is the tendency of this particular group to push the boundaries of logic as far as possible purely to undermine other group members' assertions. Programmes raised as examples of documentary, thus fitting more closely to that prototype, were *Inside Story*, *Defence of the Realm*, *7-Up*, *Equinox*, *Cutting Edge*, *Horizon*, *Whicker's World*, and *Hillsborough*.

Theme 3: What do people get out of documentaries?

Before discussing the findings within this theme, it is important to note that this theme was generated from the data rather than specifically pursued within the group discussions. Consequently, the references coded were those spontaneously raised by some participants. Thus, they cannot be regarded as the only possible views existing as the remaining participants were not provided with a direct space to air their opinions on this theme. However, it is also worth noting that none of the issues raised were contested. The theme represents a uses and gratifications angle which was not pursued directly in group discussions, although the same sentiments are captured within other themes.

Table 31 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 6

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Annoy	19	6	0
Learn	7	1	0
Opinion formation	2	2	0
Enjoyment	2	1	0
Depends	1	1	0

The aspects of documentary identified as annoying relate to two central areas - the programme's construction and the relationship between the programme and the viewer. In terms of construction, participants referred to content (younger ABC1 women; younger C2D

men; older ABC1 women), aesthetic structure (younger ABC1 women) and lack of balance (older C2D women):

"Yeah, especially with wildlife documentaries. When you see everything that's going on, all the animals that are being killed basically just for money at the end of the day." (YMC2D, 440-443)

"I'd probably get annoyed if it's a one-sided view, you know, I know something that you haven't presented in this and that's not a fair picture." (YFABC1, 595-599)

Regarding the relationship between programme and viewer, annoying features were programmes which discuss issues you already have knowledge about (younger ABC1; younger C2D women; older ABC1 women), those that preach (younger ABC1 men; younger C2D women) and those which attempt to bluff viewers or do not provide all the right information (older C2D women):

"People that think they know everything probably, who stand there and preach to everybody about such and such a thing." (YFC2D, 337-339)

"Or if something's happened to you and it's never happened to them, and they're preaching about it and they don't know how it feels, they don't understand it, then it gets you annoyed when it's happened to you." (YFC2D, 348-354)

This particular subcategory is interesting in that it illustrates the gap existing between producer and viewer. This thesis will go some way in establishing whether this gap is particular to a certain category of viewer, whether it is particular to specific issues, and indeed whether it is possible to satisfactorily close the gap for all viewers.

Two different issues explain how documentary aids opinion formation. One describes its ability to cover all angles and thus enable the formation of opinion (younger ABC1 men):

"if you sit down and watch a documentary you know at the end of it that you're going to have pretty much covered all the angles and you will be able to formulate an opinion on that." (YMABC1, 451-455)

The other comments on the power of the visual (older ABC1 women):

"Bearing in mind that what you see is something like is it sixty eight percent of your..."

"Yes, enormous isn't it"

"Yes, enormous..of your understanding is based on the visual, so they.."

"That would have gone right in wouldn't it, straight in." (OFABC1, 1146-1155)

One further reference suggested that a documentary's effect depends on the subject matter (younger C2D men). Documentary is also referred to as providing a space for learning (younger ABC1 men and women; older women) and entertainment (younger ABC1 women; younger C2D men).

Theme 4: Why do people watch?

Each group was directly asked why they watch documentary, thus the theme is a straightforward description of responses. It overlaps partly with the previous theme in that some responses refer to the gratification provided by documentary.

Table 32 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 8

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Interest	43	1	0
Obligation	32	3	1
Education/Information/Truth	16	1	0
Unintentional	13	1	0
Entertainment	11	6	0
Strand/ Presentation	6	3	0
Own field	4	3	0
Social interaction	4	1	0
Depends	4	3	0
Advertising	2	1	0

The overwhelming and uncontested reason for watching documentary is interest in the subject matter. Other clear, but less frequently cited issues are to gain access to education, information and/or the truth (all except older men), as a basis for social interaction (younger C2D women) i.e. a talking point, as a result of seeing a particular programme advertised (younger ABC1 women), and just by accident (all except older men).

Various reasons were given which can be placed under the general banner of 'entertainment'. It is interesting that all eleven references to documentary as entertainment came from the younger groups, only one of which was made by a woman. One abstract, genre-based reason describes television as an entertainment medium of which documentary is a part:

"I just see TV as entertainment, I really...I can't even really see it as education, maybe it's knowledge or seeing a different part of the world, or seeing a different view. I think...I just can't really see, think of watching a documentary to be educated" (YFABC1, 1318-1324)

More specific references suggest that an entertaining feature of documentary is its violent content:

"...a lot of people just watch it for the violence aspect of certain documentaries." (YMABC1, 1567-1569)

However, rather than indicating a sick mind, this probably corresponds with the expressed enjoyment of sensationalism:

"I like to watch documentaries sometimes for the shock content.." (YMC2D, 292-294)

The younger male groups also find humour an attractive characteristic of documentary:

"Some of it I think of as entertainment value. I mean a lot of it people will watch them just to see the houses they lived in, what they were wearing, how many nose jobs and whatever they'd had and...you know, a lot of it was just sheer fun. I mean, that's the reason I watched it because I thought it was hilarious, a lot of it." (YMC2D, 815-822)

And one participant (younger ABC1 male) enjoys documentary's learning potential:

"some people are entertained by the learning process. At times in my life, I'm entertained by a learning process." (YMABC1, 1615-1617)

People are attracted to programmes which focus on their own field of work because it is relevant to them, it is something they feel strongly about, and their personal knowledge enables them to criticise. It appears that the ability to criticise is a form of control, a protection against vulnerability and deception. This desire is more evident among the ABC1 viewers, and is discussed later on. A documentary strand and/or a programme's presentation are suggested as reason for watching. This can be based on the way a programme is put together, the type of slant it has, and the reputation it has acquired. Reasons for watching are qualified by placing them in the wider context of viewing. Reasons for watching documentary are not confined to programme content, as the subcategory 'Depends' indicates. Watching can also depend on the viewer's situation - is there anything else on? is there anything else I need to or want to do? am I in the right sort of mood?.

It is only watching out of obligation - believing a programme covers something one ought to know about, that is debated. The feeling of obligation ties in with a uses and gratifications argument that watching documentary programmes fulfils a particular function for the viewer, based on an expectation of what the genre provides. This can be taken one step further. It reinforces the association of information-based programming with importance and boredom, whilst entertainment equals enjoyment and frivolity, thus concurring with an elitist notion of quality broadcasting. Once again both sides of the debate are represented in different groups. Only older ABC1 groups display opinions both for and against this issue. Twelve out of the thirty two references to obligation described a feeling of forcing oneself to watch, whilst another twelve professed watching only through genuine desire. One reference revealed an obligation to start watching a programme, five references admitted to sometimes feeling obliged, whilst two believed it depended on a programme's subject matter.

Theme 5: Why do people either not watch or turn off?

Like the previous theme, this theme describes responses to the direct question of why

participants do not watch or turn off a documentary programme.

Table 33 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 8

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Presentation/ Subject/Slant	55	7	0
Time slot/ Scheduling	10	0	1
Old hat	8	1	0
Emotional effect	4	2	0
Effort	4	1	0
Sensationalism	3	1	0
No prior knowledge	1	1	0

The above table clearly illustrates that reasons for not watching documentary or indeed turning it off relate most prominently to the general structure and content of a programme, collectively referred to here as 'Presentation/Subject/Slant'. The majority of references within this subcategory cited the subject matter as a reason for not watching e.g:

"A documentary on a subject that I'm not interested in turns me off."
(OMABC1, 217-218)

Other fairly frequent comments within the category relate to a viewer's prior expectations - the slant of the documentary not corresponding with their own (younger ABC1 men; younger C2D women; older C2D men), a structure they consider boring (younger ABC1 men and women; younger C2D women; older men), the content not covering all the facts (younger ABC1 men; older C2D men), a feeling that the programme makers are unsure about the issue (younger C2D women), and just generally finding a programme not as was expected (younger men) or difficult to follow (younger ABC1 women).

The only contested reason was the time slot or scheduling of a programme. Viewers want to watch documentary, but the time they are on is often inconvenient (younger ABC1 men;

younger C2D women; older C2D). The problem can obviously be avoided by using a video recorder (older C2D women), thus, scheduling may simply be an excuse for not watching. If so, it corresponds with the logic of obligation. If documentary is considered important, then watching it is something one *should* do as a valued contribution to self-development. Consequently, if a viewer does not want to watch, he/she needs to find an external excuse i.e. out of his/her control, so as not to portray an unfavourable, although more realistic, impression of themselves.

Other reasons for not watching concern viewers' relationship with specific subject matter. Sensationalist content (younger ABC1), old material (younger C2D men; older ABC1), too much effort involved in watching (older C2D women) and, interestingly, even a viewer's lack of prior knowledge (younger ABC1 women), which contradicts the notion of wanting to learn from documentary. It was also suggested that the presumed emotional effect of a programme, such as feeling upset or helpless, is sufficient to prevent viewing:

"I sometimes find that if it's upsetting I won't want to know...So it's uncovering something, like opening a can of worms, but..so you walk away realising what's happening, but is there anything going to happen to improve this situation, that's probably why I don't really want to watch a lot of documentaries." (YFABC1, 610-611; 620-627)

Theme 6: Why do people keep watching?

This theme also describes responses to an issue directly addressed in the focus group discussions. The question was what factors are important in maintaining a viewer's interest in a programme. The issue is not only interesting in its own right, but is also a major concern for television producers.

Table 34 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 6

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Sensationalism	17	1	0
Angle/Approach	12	3	0
Opening titles/ sequence/ presentation	10	2	0
Narrator/ Characters	8	3	0
Personal interest/ Subject	7	1	0
Doing something else simultaneously	1	1	0
Depends	1	1	0

Sensationalism, although mentioned in the previous theme as a reason for not watching documentary, was widely cited as a factor in maintaining viewers' interest in a programme (younger ABC1 men and women; younger C2D men; older ABC1 men):

"There's nothing wrong with sensationalising..if they didn't sensationalise no one would watch them." (OMABC1, 1037-1040)

As regards a programme's perspective or approach, certain references promote the need for documentaries to have a clear angle and line of reasoning (younger ABC1), pose searching questions (younger ABC1 women) or present a new angle/insight on an issue (younger C2D; older ABC1 men) if viewers' interest is to be maintained. The opening sequence appears important, whether it be of a specific strand (younger ABC1 men) or a particular programme (all ABC1 groups):

"I always stop when I hear..the "Panorama" theme tune, I love that. I always stop and listen to the first sort of five minutes and then think right well, I can go and watch that.." (YMABC1, 717-721)

and also the way the programme is subsequently constructed:

"it's the pace of documentary, they have to pace it very well, because if it

slows down and they're remaining on one issue too long, and you want them to get on to the next issue, and your mind wanders and then when you get back you're completely, well, where are we now. So I think it's got to be paced very well." (YFABC1, 497-506)

Interest can be dependent on having a personal interest in the subject (all younger groups), and the narrator and/or characters used. The tactics advocated for the latter were the inclusion of a familiar face (younger C2D men), a character (younger C2D men; older ABC1 women), and filming a situation rather than a series of interviews (younger ABC1 women). One woman (older C2D) suggested interest in watching a documentary programme is maintained by doing something else simultaneously. However, a younger ABC1 man believed there were millions of variables involved in the endeavour.

Theme 7: What is the societal role of documentary?

Again this issue was directly addressed in the focus group discussions. Participants were asked if they thought documentary served any particular purpose or fulfilled a specific role in society.

Table 35 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 8

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Inform/educate	30	1	0
Public awareness	12	1	0
Opinion formation	9	1	1
Presenting different angle to your own	5	1	0
Motivate action/ has an effect	5	1	0
Commercial survival	3	1	0
Slot fillers	3	0	1
In-depth knowledge	2	1	0
Provides tv choice	2	1	0
Indifferent	2	1	0
Entertain	1	1	0
Conveying message	1	1	0
Accessible to all	1	1	0
Raise tv quality	1	1	0

The three main societal functions of documentary quoted were to inform/educate (all groups except younger C2D men), to raise public awareness (all except C2D women), and to form opinion (younger ABC1; older ABC1 women). Informing/educating was by far the most prevalent:

"It's imparting information, that's what documentaries are about, imparting information, they're learning experiences rather than light entertainment."
(YMABC1, 171-174)

Opinion formation covered two issues. One straightforwardly advocates documentary as providing an opportunity for viewers to form their own opinion (younger ABC1; older ABC1 women):

"...it helps people understand certain issues better, or formulate an opinion about them." (YFABC1, 953-956)

The other challenges this (older ABC1 women), suggesting that documentary manipulates opinion through the way material is presented. Although cynical, this implication still supports the notion of opinion formation:

"But it is forming your opinion the way they present it, because they can present you with a dead person first and what happened last or they can help you with what happened first then the dead person last...Which makes you have a different opinion on it." (OFABC1, 241-245; 249-250)

The only other contentious issue, debated by the older ABC1 men, was that documentaries are merely slot fillers, filling a gap in the schedules in order to satisfy a broadcasting mandate. The challenge to this rather cynical view is that documentaries actually represent worthwhile, important and popular programming.

Other societal roles of documentary mentioned were: to present a different angle; to motivate action or have an effect; to be commercially successful; to provide an in-depth knowledge; to provide more choice on television; to entertain; to convey a message; to be accessible to all; and to raise the quality of television. None of these suggestions were contested.

Theme 8: What makes a documentary credible?

This theme emerged from the data rather than being directly addressed within the focus group discussions. Consequently, group participants may have had other views or comments which remained unexpressed. The issue is important in that it outlines the factors necessary for a documentary to be accepted as truth.

Table 36 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 8

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Factors guaranteeing credibility	60	16	2
Factors challenging credibility	43	14	1
Depends	11	6	0

Several factors were raised as guarantors of a documentary's credibility. The reputation of the genre or even a particular strand (all groups except younger C2D women and older ABC1 women) emerged as central, yet was also, interestingly, one of the issues prompting disagreement (older ABC1 men):

"I always envisage documentaries to be, you know, giving all the facts they know..I expect documentaries to be truthful, like sort of fly-on-the-wall stuff, cameras on the wall can't lie, that's how I expect documentaries to be." (YMC2D, 673-678)

"I think the worrying thing is if you're watching a documentary you're being..you're assuming, or you should be assuming, that you're watching something which has been prepared in a balanced way and is giving you the facts, and is not being fed to you so that you will be persuaded one way or the other." (OMABC1, 763-769)

The other contentious issue, related to the one above and debated in the same group, concerns presentation. Whilst good presentation lends credibility to a programme, much depends on *how* the information is presented:

"I think the manner of the presentation has a lot to do with it as well. Now some of them are very seductive...if it's not put over angrily, if it's put over quietly and calmly and rationally and put over, you know, there's a logical answer to this thing. There's no big hype and there's no big obvious special interest in this thing, you know, you have no reason to question it do you. I think the presentation can be very seductive and very persuasive." (OMABC1, 740-753)

The majority of factors mentioned guaranteeing credibility relate to a programme's

construction. It should have a logical sequence (younger ABC1; older ABC1 women), be balanced, showing both sides (older ABC1), use music and drama appropriately (younger ABC1 men), include shocking or upsetting footage (younger ABC1 women), use interviews (younger ABC1 women), reveal hidden information (ABC1 women; older C2D men), be well researched (younger ABC1 women; younger C2D men; older C2D), clearly show why it has been made (younger ABC1 women), use visual, actual footage (younger C2D men), and have a familiar or competent presenter (C2D men). The remaining factors are external to the programme itself. They relate either to the viewer or the context of broadcasting, and were only raised in the older groups: the relative ignorance of the viewer (older ABC1 men); an automatic attribution of credibility through passive viewing (older ABC1 women); a nostalgic association of credibility with the way documentary used to be (older C2D men); and an assumption of credibility based on the fact that we live in a democratic country (older ABC1 women). Incidentally, credibility is guaranteed in wildlife and historical documentaries (older C2D men) by virtue of the subject matter.

Of the factors challenging credibility, the only contested issue (older ABC1 men; older C2D women) is when a programme presents a single viewpoint, or a subjective account. However, accusing a programme of subjectivity often stems from a viewer's own biases:

"I think one of the dangers is that it is actually being presented with the bias of whoever's presenting, whoever's preparing it, and the danger is that you just assume that whatever they tell you is the truth...the truth and is correct." (OMABC1, 500-506)

"I mean they could be wrong if you have a different outlook on what they're discussing, I mean, you might not believe it." (OFC2D, 669-671)

As with the factors guaranteeing credibility the majority of factors challenging credibility relate to characteristics of the programme itself: having an illogical sequence (younger ABC1 men); lacking facts (younger ABC1 men; younger C2D women; older ABC1 women); over simple presentation, a poor interviewer, appearing staged or contrived (younger ABC1 women); an obvious selection of points or editorial control (younger ABC1 women; older ABC1); subjects' awareness of the presence of a camera, the personality used (younger C2D

men); the influence of factors such as commercial gain, emotion and opinion (older ABC1); unbelievable content, an obvious attempt to be appealing (older C2D men); and the use of politicians (older C2D women). The only challenges to credibility which relate to the viewer are possessing prior knowledge about the subject or debate (younger ABC1 men; older men), thereby being able to evaluate a programme's credibility, and being aware of potential contradictions in information over a period of time (younger C2D women; older ABC1 men).

Not all references were so specific or indeed confident about the criteria for credibility. Credibility can depend on the subject matter (older men), a programme's presentation (younger ABC1), the viewer's own opinions (younger C2D men), the extent to which the viewer believes the event or the conclusions drawn (ABC1 men), and the amount of prior knowledge the viewer has (older ABC1 men).

Theme 9: What is the role of objectivity and bias?

Once again, this theme relates to a question directly addressed in the focus groups. The participants were asked whether they thought documentaries were objective, and whether or not they should be.

Table 37 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 8

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Indications of/ detecting bias	32	8	1
Can/Should/Are objective	19	2	1
Cannot/Should not/ Are not objective	18	1	1
How to be objective	10	4	0
Depends	1	1	0

Indications of bias or the detection of bias corresponds either to aspects of a programme which suggest a lack of objectivity, or the ability of the viewer to recognize bias. Various programme characteristics were highlighted as indicators of bias. The obvious ones are

appearing one-sided (younger C2D men; older women), having an unbalanced amount of time devoted to one side (younger C2D women; older ABC1 women; older C2D) and the obvious editing and selection of information (older ABC1 women). Other more subtle factors were an emphasis on entertainment, which involves sensationalism and consequently manipulation (older men; older ABC1 women); the use of politicians (older C2D women); and whether it is a reputable programme or channel (younger men) e.g.:

"Yeah, it's like, you come away from *The Cook Report* and think okay that was mildly entertaining but it didn't really address any of the sort of main points. I mean the fact that so and so didn't want to be interviewed is probably because he thinks Roger Cook is an idiot." (YMABC1, 1437-1443)

The sole debate concerns whether presenting a view and conclusions in a programme is tantamount to bias. The older ABC1 women and older C2D men perceive this as bias, but participants in the older ABC1 male group, suggest that it is the viewer's own biases which determine the perception of programme bias. This supports the theoretical assertion in Chapter One that perceptions of objectivity are rooted in one's subjective perspective. Indeed the two issues raised relating to viewers' perception of bias refer to their assumptions about what is and how to get to the truth, as well as the amount of prior knowledge they have on the subject in hand.

Seventeen references argued that documentary should aim to be objective (all groups except older C2D men), whether or not it is a futile endeavour, as it provokes debate, promotes a programme's credibility and indicates an attempt to find meaning:

"I am not interested in watching a documentary that comes out and says listen we don't like the way Chinese treat their children and we're going to prove it to you, why you shouldn't do that either. I think they should strive for objectivity and strive to try and find some sort of meaning behind the things they're doing. They can strive, they might not pull it off and it might be, on any objective level, evil what's going on there, but they must strive for it." (YMABC1, 1822-1832)

This is debated within the younger male ABC1 group with one argument defending one-sided presentations:

"You don't have to take on their agenda." (YMABC1, 1896)

One respondent proposed that documentary is sometimes objective. Another argued that it could be if there was more interaction between viewer and programme.

An equal number of references argued that documentary cannot be and is not objective (younger ABC1; younger C2D men; older ABC1 women). However, certain documentaries are raised as a challenge to this view:

"But some of them are a lot more sort of..like a nature documentary or something, it's a lot more well, we're just going to film a deer and watch what it does all day." (YFABC1, 53-57)

The younger ABC1 men argue that documentary should not even try to be objective because it is a dishonest and unrealistic enterprise:

"No they shouldn't be, because there's no point in trying to do the impossible, so you should just own up to the fact and be upfront about the fact that you're putting a spin on it, it's far more honest, I think, than trying to say right, let's be objective." (YMABC1, 1749-1754)

However, elsewhere in the data participants outline strategies for achieving objectivity: include people both for and against an argument (younger C2D women; older ABC1 women; older C2D men); use people who are trusted (older ABC1 men); have a code of ethics (older ABC1 women); and use accounts of what witnesses see rather than what they think (older C2D women). Only one person (younger ABC1 woman) argued that the achievement of objectivity depends very much on the type of documentary i.e. advocating a strong point of view versus pure observation.

Theme 10: Is commercialisation good or bad?

This issue was not part of the focus group discussion schedule yet was raised by participants in certain groups. Thus, the theme derives from direct discussion of the issue rather than being interpreted from the data.

Table 38 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 2

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Bad thing	5	1	1
Good thing	2	0	1

Two issues support the notion that commercialisation is a bad thing. One argues that it forces a programme to focus on sensationalist aspects rather than the 'real' issues. The other simply argues that it would be awful if television was purely commercial as, although documentaries may not be as popular, they are certainly important. The former issue is debated amongst the younger ABC1 men on the grounds that a more popular programme attracts more people which is surely a good thing:

"you're right, it detracts from the seriousness of subject matter, of course it does, but my view is better make these things mass appeal, more populous, to get more people semi-educated than have these high-brow academic programmes that no-one's interested in." (YMABC1, 1709-1715)

The same argument is raised in support of commercialisation. However, although it may attract more people, they leave with the wrong impression of an issue as a result:

"[it] happens at the expense of actually highlighting the issues and discussing the issues...I think it's a sort of major obstacle to getting the issues out in the open." (YMABC1, 1678-1681; 1687-1688)

Theme 11: Whose agenda?

This issue was pursued within the group discussions, in which participants were asked if documentary should be and is concerned with what the public wants or what broadcasters feel the public ought to know. This opposition draws on the conceptions of service dimension found in the producer interview study.

Table 39 Summary of responses

Total number of groups referenced = 5

Subcategory	No. of references	No. of undisputed issues	No. of disputed issues
Market	9	1	0
Broadcasters	8	3	0
Public	6	2	1
Depends	3	2	0

The idea that documentary follows a market agenda assumes programmes are made in accordance with past successes, in order to guarantee large audiences and justifying funding (younger ABC1; older ABC1 men). This argument indicates some awareness of the commercial and financial pressures on documentary production.

A broadcasters' agenda (only perceived by ABC1 groups) incorporates three beliefs. Firstly that the public do not actually know what they want, thus the onus is on broadcasters to lead and broaden the minds of the public (younger ABC1; older ABC1 women). Secondly, that the independence of certain channels and producers gives them freedom to follow their own agenda (younger ABC1; older ABC1 men). Thirdly, and consequently, the media creates the agenda (younger ABC1 men). For example:

"It has to lead a little bit, otherwise we'd just be interested in the same old things. If we're going to be broadened in any way, then people have to be..impose things on us to some extent. And then we have a selection as to whether we don't watch it." (OFABC1, 927-932)

A few references support the idea that documentary pursues the public's agenda. One is based on the belief that documentaries cover both what the public want and what they need to know (older ABC1 men). Another believes the BBC is dictated by the licence payers, thus assumes a public agenda (younger ABC1 men). The only other view is that the agenda *should* come from the public as how else can broadcasters know what the public wants (younger women). This issue is debated amongst the younger ABC1 women:

"exclusively you're watching what you're told to watch, you're watching what

the programme-makers are going to give you." (YFABC1, 1408-1411)

A few references remain uncommitted to any particular agenda source. Documentaries both lead and follow (younger ABC1), and some are dictated by neither the media nor the market (younger ABC1 men).

"Well you have a choice at the moment because sometimes you might be watching and you think, oh I think I'll watch this just because it's there, and in which case you're being told to watch it...but other times you might be watching it because you want to watch.." (YFABC1, 1416-1423)

Overview of thematic consensus and debate

Of the eleven themes, some were generally consensual, whilst others were often controversial. The reasons people watch documentary, the effect it has on them, their viewing habits and the factors which maintain their interest in a programme were all areas which generated no debate whatsoever. At the other extreme, by far the greatest area of debate was the question of definition. A certain amount of conflict also exists concerning the inter-related issues of credibility, objectivity and bias. The existence of consensus and/or debate can be interpreted in a number of ways. It could be said that certain subjects incite consensus and/or conflict across the public as a whole. From a cultural/ideological perspective this can be interpreted as the mapping of certain issues onto broader ideological debates within society. However, this approach ignores the specific group context i.e. the situational level, and the patterns of that consensus and debate which may exist according to social background i.e. the positional level. From a purely situational perspective, the agreements and disagreements could be the result of certain dynamics within the group context, which is a criticism often levelled at the focus group methodology (e.g. Paulis, 1989). However, at a positional level, if these patterns of consensus and debate can be linked to socio-demographic divisions, then not only can one argue that there is a link between the two, but also that a focus group methodology is a legitimate technique for exploring such patterns. The following two analyses expand on these suppositions.

5.3.2 Group description

As explained in Chapter 3, the groups were divided along the dimensions of age, gender and

socio-economic status. These are three variables commonly used by commercial audience research organisations as well as in academic studies. According to the BBC's Broadcasting Research Services, the average documentary audience stands at 2.61 million people. The average composition of this audience is 47.3% men and 52.7% women, 14.9% 25-34 year olds and 16.1% 45-54 year olds³, and 45.8% ABC1 and 54.1% C2DE⁴. Whilst these figures do not map directly onto the eight groups in this study⁵, they provide an impression of the make-up of the documentary audience, in which there are slightly more female than male viewers, slightly more older than younger viewers, and slightly more working-class than middle-class viewers.

Before examining any patterns and links between social background and perspective, it is interesting and useful to establish a picture of the nature of each group individually and the way it relates to the general thematic trends in the data. The questions to be answered in describing each group are what do they talk about, what do they agree on, what do they disagree on, and any other interesting observations. The answers to these questions are determined in two ways: firstly, by noting the codes assigned to the text; and secondly, by rereading the text of each group to get an overall feel of the group discussion. The following table indicates the amount of times a reference was made in each group to a particular theme⁶. It corresponds with the number of times a particular code was used, thus a sentence which was double coded will have been included twice.

³The BBC age categories are 4-9, 10-15, 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64

⁴These figures are based on average percentages across ten documentary/current affairs series between September and December 1995. The programmes were: *Cutting Edge*, *Panorama*, *World in Action*, *Dispatches*, *Modern Times*, *Horizon*, *Under the Sun*, *Fine Cut*, *Equinox* and *Network First*. (Source: BARB).

⁵N.B. The BBC age ranges are 25-34 and 45-54 where as this study spans ages 20-35 and 45-60. Also, the BBC's second socio-economic status band includes the category 'E' which was not included here.

⁶The theme 'viewing habits' is excluded as each participant stated once whether they watched and how often.

Table 40 Frequency of group references to themes

THEMES	GROUPS							
	Gp1	Gp2	Gp3	Gp4	Gp5	Gp6	Gp7	Gp8
Documentary definition	93	30	28	26	42	40	24	26
Personal effect *	5	5	7	5	0	6	0	8
Reasons for watching	24	11	17	11	15	11	10	18
Reasons for not watching	13	7	5	11	11	5	22	13
Interest maintainers	13	13	8	2	6	6	0	0
Societal role	8	19	3	3	10	17	6	9
Credibility *	14	14	11	5	27	13	16	12
Objectivity/bias	29	7	4	4	7	23	5	7
Commercialisation*	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Whose agenda?	11	9	0	2	6	1	0	0

[* = indicates a theme generated from the data rather than directly asked in the group discussions]

Group 1: Male; Aged 20-35; ABC1

The tone of this group was fairly argumentative and antagonistic. Whilst every theme on the coding frame was touched on, by far the central issue was that of documentary definition. To illustrate this, all issues raised were usually referred to between one and ten times. In comparison, the issue of documentary characteristics was referred to 52 times, the difference between documentary and news/current affairs 18 times, and the types/applications of documentary 23 times. This theme stimulates the most debate within the group. The most contentious issues are whether documentary has to have an agenda to be a documentary, whether documentary issues are time-sensitive; whether the only way to define documentary is the time taken to make it, and which programmes can be classified as documentary. The only other areas of debate are whether documentary should aim to be objective, and whether commercialisation is a good or bad thing. The group displays an awareness of the market and its effects in broadcasting, and its members desire instant gratification from watching television. Reasons for watching documentary centred around entertainment and interest. Retaining interest in a programme was dependent on its presentation, the inclusion of drama

and sensationalism, and an interest in the subject. It was generally the presentation or slant of a programme which would cause them to switch off. Very little was said about the social role of documentary, and, on the whole, members of the group use their own knowledge of a subject to assess a programme's credibility.

Group 2: Female; Aged 20-35; ABC1

The discussion in this group is more congenial than the previous group, with participants more accepting of each other's opinions. The two central themes in the group were the definition and societal role of documentary. There was general agreement that documentary is more subjective than objective, but the difficulty arose in determining whether the genre is defined by its purpose or structure. This was evident in the discussion about which programmes could and could not be classified as documentary i.e. if a programme with a documentary format is not ground-breaking, can it still be thought of as documentary. This illustrates the general subscription running through the group to a public service oriented role for documentary, indeed the predominant role highlighted was to inform and educate. The group's reasons for watching or not watching were evenly distributed across the categories. However, what is clear is the feeling that broadcasters should make whatever programmes they want, for the benefit of the public. Thus, the credibility of a programme is judged by its honesty, and ability to extract as much information as possible. The fulfilment of this societal role produces conflict for the group in the areas of objectivity and agenda setting. Should documentaries aim to be objective or not, and are they following an agenda set by the public or the broadcasters?

Group 3: Male; Aged 20-35; C2D

This group was fairly courteous, with all participants able to state their opinions freely. The general consensus was that documentary is an in-depth semi-educational programme about one topic. It differs from news/current affairs because it can deal with any topic rather than only those in the present. The main reasons for watching are entertainment and interest, although it is also watched unintentionally and out of obligation. The main reason for not watching or turning off is a lack of new material, and factors which generally maintain interest in a programme are the narrator or characters used, and having a personal interest in

the subject. The societal role of documentary was discussed briefly, whilst the themes 'commercialisation' and 'whose agenda' were not considered at all. Credibility is almost guaranteed by the fact that the programme is on television, and furthermore by the use of visual footage rather than interviews - 'seeing is believing'. The one significant debate within the group was whether documentary is unbiased or tilted in a particular direction. Despite this, there is a general belief in the truth of documentary, thus the question of objectivity and bias was fairly irrelevant on the whole.

Group 4: Female; Aged 20-35; C2D

This group was also very polite and supportive of each other's opinions. There was a strong element of consensus, and not one issue was contested. The general opinion was that documentary is a presentation of several views on one issue, usually something controversial or unknown. Most of the group tends to watch them because of an interest in the subject matter, and the reasons for turning off or not watching are the way the programme is presented, its content or the time at which it is broadcast. This ties in with the factors raised as challenges to the credibility of a programme. One is a lack of objectivity, which is defined by the group as not showing all or both sides. The second is directive viewpoints which contradict their own personal experiences. However, the most important issue for this group is that documentary should be presenting all the information in a balanced way. The group believes this is achieved if a programme represents both sides of an argument.

Group 5: Male; Aged 45-60; ABC1

This group was very vocal, with every participant struggling to get their voice heard. The perspective of this group is very knowledge-based, and the general consensus was that documentary is a persuasive rather than purely informative genre. Watching documentary was dependent on whether they were interested in the subject matter or felt an obligation to watch because of the subject matter. Their reasons for turning off or not watching would be a programme's content, its presentation, or if they were already familiar with the material. The main societal role of documentary is to inform and educate, yet the credibility of a programme is assessed according to their own knowledge together with a subtle, balanced presentation of the facts. In general, television is not to be trusted, and any programme presenting a clear cut answer to a problem only fuels this cynicism. This is substantiated by

the group's apparent view that documentary follows a market agenda, thus having to entertain in order to remain popular. However, this feeling that documentary has to entertain as well as present the facts is debated. Other contentious issues relating to the definition of documentary concerned whether they come to a conclusion or leave you to come to your own, and whether the discussion of current issues in documentary is more in-depth than in the news. The cynicism in this group is clearly evident in the debate over whether documentary is simply a slotfiller i.e. that broadcasters use them to fulfil a mandate rather than believing that they are actually worthwhile, important and popular programmes. There was debate over the role of presentation and reputation in credibility - do they guarantee credibility and or just provide a guise for credibility which members of this group can see through, but other 'less-educated' viewers cannot. The group also debated the notion of whether a programme which arrives at a conclusion is subjective and biased rather than objective and neutral. The worry again is that *other* people would interpret this subjectivity as objectivity and thus blindly accept the conclusions.

Group 6: Female; Aged 45-60; ABC1

The supportive atmosphere within this group allowed participants to both voice their own opinions and listen to those of others. Documentary is viewed very much as a learning tool, which is watched out of interest, as well as obligation. Reasons for not watching it relate mainly to the content and the effect it has on the viewer, and the factors which maintain the group's interest in a programme were the narrator or characters and the way a programme is presented. All the societal roles raised correspond with a public service view of documentary - to form opinion, to raise public awareness, to inform and educate, to convey a message, and to have an effect. There is a general trust in television, but the group's faith in the credibility of a programme rests with its presentation. It has to present both sides of an argument in a logical, coherent manner. The idea that documentaries may not be presenting all sides conflicts with the group's underlying belief in the truth of television and the public service role of documentary. This conflict is evident in the two debates within the group. One was whether documentary tries to persuade or just inform, thus does it present the opinion of the producer or fact? The other, related, debate concerns whether documentary provides an opportunity to form your own opinion or presents an issue in such a way so as to manipulate

opinion.

Group 7: Male; Aged 45-60; C2D

The discussion in this group was fairly consensual. There was an underlying belief in the truth of documentary, due to its informative nature and the amount of research undertaken. The participants all watch documentary, and the main reason they do so is out of an interest in the subject matter. However, the only point of mild debate was over what documentaries should be about. One participant expressed disgust at the amount of documentaries about third world disasters, because programmes on that subject are not so pleasant to watch. However, another believed that we need to have these on television in order to be aware of such world events. Indeed, subject matter was the main reason for not watching, although a programme's slant or presentation was also instrumental. The societal role of documentary was not really discussed, but when mentioned the group talked about its capacity to inform and educate, as well as raise public awareness. As already stated, this group believe in the fundamental truth of documentary, although certain subjects e.g. British history and wildlife, and certain presenters e.g. Alan Whicker, Fife Robinson, are further guarantors of the genre's credibility. This belief is challenged when the participants perceive a clear lack of balance in the programme. Perceiving a programme as unbalanced appeared to be based on their assessment of the views presented, or when evidence is presented to support an issue, which actually contradicts their own personal experience of that issue.

Group 8: Female; Aged 45-60; C2D

The participants in this group were very interested in what each other had to say which created an encouraging atmosphere for them to express their own views. There was general agreement that a documentary is a serious, well-researched, informative programme which concentrates on events in the past thus allowing enough time to collate all points of view. The participants tended to watch documentaries mainly to learn and out of an interest in the subject matter. The main reasons for not watching were the content of the programme and the effort involved in watching it. The central roles advocated for documentary were to inform and educate, and to present a new or different angle on a subject from that which is commonly held. There is a general belief in the truth of documentary in this group too, due

to the amount of research that has gone into making the programme, and the fact that it is on television. However, there was also recognition that if you believe a documentary to be wrong it is probably because you hold a different opinion from the one presented.

Overview of group themes

The key issue which divides the groups is the relationship between documentary, truth and objectivity. It is the different perspectives on these concepts which are used to assess a programme's credibility. The responses across the groups indicated a fundamental belief in either the truth or superficiality, and the objectivity or subjectivity, of documentary. It is also interesting to note the way different groups position themselves in relation to documentary. The academic debate on truth and objectivity centres on whether objectivity exists, can exist or should exist (e.g. Lichtenberg, 1996). To say that it *does* exist implies that it is achieved. To say that it *can* exist implies that it is possible to attain, but is not always achieved. To say that it *should* exist implies that it is something to aim for, whether it is possible to realise or not. All these views, and their counter positions, are evident in the data. However, two types of viewer stand out. The first sees documentary as something to learn from, whilst the second feels the need to assess its credibility in relation to his/her own knowledge and experience before accepting what is presented. Thus, the former trusts the objectivity and truth of documentary facts whilst the latter treats them with suspicion. This corresponds with Paget's (1990) two traditions of documentary - the liberal/conservative and the radical/revolutionary. The liberal/conservative tradition equates facts and information with objectivity and truth, whilst the radical/revolutionary associates them with subjectivity and mediation. Furthermore, from an audience interpretation perspective, the two positions appear to conform to Liebes & Katz's (1995) critical and referential viewers. These categories were created following an audience study of television fiction, but the underlying features can still be applied here. Critical viewers see the programme as a construction and/or are aware of their role as processors of the text, which corresponds with the radical/revolutionary tradition, and the sceptical perspective found in the data. Referential viewers, on the other hand, perceive the programme as real, corresponding with the liberal/conservative tradition, and the unquestioning perspective of other participants in the present study. The link between the results and Liebes and Katz's viewer positions is

explained further in section 5.4.1.

So can these perspectives be linked in any way with the participants' social background? The following analysis explores any patterns or relations which exist between these views on documentary, truth and objectivity and the three variables of age, gender and socio-economic status.

5.3.3 Socio-demographic analysis

The focus groups were assembled according to three socio-demographic criteria - age, gender and socio-economic status. The comparison for age is between the four groups aged between 20 and 35 (1,2,3 and 4) and the four groups aged between 45 and 60 (5,6,7 and 8). The gender comparison is obviously between the male groups (1,3,5 and 7) and the female groups (2,4,6 and 8). Finally, socio-economic class compares the ABC1 groups (1,2,5 and 6) with the C2D groups (3,4,7 and 8). This analysis was done in two ways. Firstly, by using the computer package NUDIST to highlight any overlaps between the references corresponding with each variable and those for each theme. However, a further objective is to identify priorities and patterns of response across the groups, thus just to say that a certain category was referred to in each group is not particularly illuminating. Hence the appropriateness of the second technique which involves a more interpretive and impressionistic comparison of the group profiles emerging in the above summaries. It is worth emphasising, as explained in Chapter 3, that these groups were never assumed to be statistically representative of the different variables, but rather represented a range of participants from different sections of society with potentially diverse perspectives. Therefore any patterns observed between perspective on documentary and social background are suggestive rather than general.

Age

There were very few similarities across all four young groups. The only clear correlation is in viewing habits, as the majority of participants watch documentary. It is the differences between these four groups which are more apparent, suggesting that perspectives on television documentary are not necessarily determined by youth. Amongst the older groups the only clear similarity was that a programme's content is the main reason for not watching.

As with the younger groups, it appears that age is not a factor which determines the perspectives of these four groups. With no apparent uniting factors it is difficult to come to any conclusions on the basis of age alone, other than the fact that this particular set of data does not indicate any clear influence of age on perspective. However, a couple of issues appeared dependent on the combination of age and gender. Only older men claimed never to watch documentary unintentionally. This same combination of age and gender produced the only groups to not directly cite education or information gain as *their* reasons for watching documentary, rather it is interest in the subject matter. Documentary is still perceived as having an educational role, but it is discussed in relation to society rather than themselves.

Gender

Similarities across gender are slightly more apparent. The male groups, to a greater or lesser extent, watch documentary because of an interest in the subject matter, and possibly for entertainment. Only male groups (except younger C2Ds) used their own knowledge as a basis for assessing a programme's credibility:

"Yeah, I mean there's often times when I'll see a programme on law and I'll think there's been an inaccuracy, they haven't reported something correctly..."
(YMABC1, 1369-1372)

"The Cook Report, yeah. Now I'm a member of the badger protection society and he did one a couple of years back, on badger-baiting, and it was so false it was unreal. Up until that moment in time I actually believed the credibility of the guy..." (OMC2D, 349-355)

There was no fixed pattern of assessing credibility across the female groups. They referred to evidence of a balanced argument, consistency between programme content and their own personal experience, and trust in the rigour of the documentary-making process. All the female groups emphasised the documentary's role as informer and educator. This arguably indicates a greater awareness of the benefit of documentary to the 'other' amongst the women, e.g.:

"I think they're also an opportunity for lay people to find out things that perhaps really do fascinate them, but they're not capable because they're not

trained for example in medicine, to open a book or to open some medical journal and read about it, especially medical things, because they're so human and they're things that really do or could touch on everybody's lives, and the way they make things often really interesting, really informative..”
(YFABC1, 832-844)

On the other hand, the discourse of the men centres round benefit to 'self', e.g.:

“if you want to know seriously what issues are then, and you seriously want to make your own decision and form your own opinions on it I think documentaries are the only way you can sort of get that information.”
(YMABC1, 1507-1511)

The most striking bond between all four female groups was the nature of the interaction. Whilst the demeanour of the male groups ranged from antagonism and aggression to politeness, all of the female groups remained expressive, attentive, supportive and friendly. However, as discussed in the sections on age and socio-economic class below, it is the combination of variables which produces obvious distinctions.

Socio-economic status

This variable appears to pinpoint the major differences in perspective across the data. There is a clear divide between the groups which believe in the truth of television documentary, and those which question it. The four groups from the ABC1 category believed to varying degrees in the subjectivity of television documentary. There was a feeling that presentation is used to convey objectivity, which the two female groups supported, and the two male groups condemned. The four C2D groups believed in the objectivity and thus truth of documentary based on a trust in television and a conviction that the presentation of two sides amounts to objectivity. In the assessment of a programme's credibility, ABC1 groups will use their learnt or expert knowledge about a subject, whilst C2D groups will tend to doubt the credibility if the evidence presented contradicts their own personal lived experience of that issue. Furthermore, it is only ABC1 groups which recognised the role of the market in broadcasting and the pressure this places on the nature of documentary programmes. It is also worth noting that the ABC1 group discussions involved much more debate than the C2D groups. However, this could relate to the fact that most of the participants in all of the ABC1 groups knew each other, where as in three of the four C2D groups none of the participants

knew each other. As mentioned above, certain combinations of variables produce interesting observations. It is only the male ABC1 groups which display a degree of aggression and antagonism. They are also the only groups to regard documentary as a medium of entertainment. The female C2D groups are the only groups not to describe documentary as a means of raising public awareness, and the female ABC1 groups stand out as firm advocates of documentary's public service role.

5.4 Discussion

5.4.1 Results of Analyses

The three analyses provide three different types of information. Firstly, a picture of the thematic trends running through the data, highlighting the areas of consensus and debate. Secondly, an outline of the dynamics and discussion in each individual group. Thirdly, a suggested connection between perspectives and social background. Based on the findings of these three analyses, this section aims to do two things. Firstly, to outline the most typical characteristics of documentary, based on the broadest areas of consensus across the data. Secondly, to seek explanations for the various differences which emerged.

An amalgamation of the most frequently cited and consensual issues across the groups enables the construction of typical documentary features. These are characteristics central to the definition of documentary which, in accordance with the perceptions of the audience members in this study, underwrite the genre's identity. A documentary is something which imparts information or educates, is factual or real, well-researched and in-depth, and less urgent and current than the news. Its purpose is to inform and educate the public, it should aim to be objective, its credibility is largely dependent on a programme's reputation, and people generally watch it through an interest in the subject matter. These are the only characteristics that were widely shared. There are, as illustrated in the results, many other attributes within these and other themes, but they are specific to individuals, groups and/or social backgrounds.

The thematic analysis illustrated that the most frequent areas of debate both within and across groups were the definition of documentary, its credibility, objectivity and bias. These same issues emerged in the group analysis, in which it is the relationship between documentary, truth and objectivity which divided the groups into liberal/conservative/referential viewers and radical/revolutionary/critical viewers. The final analysis indicated that both gender and socio-economic status are influencing factors in one's perspective on that relationship between documentary, truth and objectivity.

Two fundamental dichotomies appear in the data. One concerns whether the viewer perceives or interprets with reference to 'self' or 'other' (Gilligan, 1992). The second is based on different types of reading e.g. critical vs. referential (Liebes & Katz, 1990); ritualized vs. instrumental (Rubin, 1984). The dichotomy between 'self' and 'other' describes the prioritisation of either 'self' over 'other' or 'other' over 'self' in the understanding and perception of documentary. Prioritising 'self' involves using one's own knowledge as the benchmark for assessing the credibility of a documentary, watching for purely selfish reasons i.e. personal interest, entertainment, and not really recognising any wider role for documentary. Prioritising 'other' involves trusting the positions presented in a programme (or maybe not trusting one's own knowledge), watching to learn, and believing in the societal, public service-related, role of documentary.

The dichotomy between critical and referential, and between ritualized and instrumental readings illustrates the different types of involvement a viewer can have with a documentary programme and the consequences for interpretation. The referential viewer regards the programme's content as real and relates it to his/her own real world. The critical viewer (according to Liebes & Katz's (1990) definition) is aware "either of the semantic or syntactic elements of the text or the roles of the reader as processor of the text" (Liebes & Katz, 1990, p.117). A ritualized reading of documentary describes a close involvement with particular programmes, and a habitual, frequent and high regard for television as a medium. An instrumental reading involves more critical distance from a programme and more purposeful, selective and goal-directed viewing patterns. The results of this study illustrate a degree of association between these two dichotomies and the divisions based on gender and socio-

economic class.

Whilst there is evidently an element of interaction between gender and socio-economic class, the results suggest a tendency for men to prioritise 'self', and women to prioritise 'other'. For example, only men used their own knowledge as a basis for assessing a programme's credibility i.e. the centrality of 'self' in the acceptance of documentary, whilst all the women emphasised the documentary's role as informer and educator i.e. the clear acceptance of its benefit to society - 'other', with the ABC1 women clearly standing out in their advocacy of documentary's public service function. This trend echoes Gilligan's (1992) theory of gender differences in moral reasoning, a trend also evident in work on audience responses to other genres e.g. the talk show (Livingstone, 1994). According to Gilligan, women's ethical conception centres on one's relationship with others, thus is based on compassion and care, sensitivity to the needs of others, and an awareness of one's obligations and responsibilities to others. Men's ethical conception, on the other hand, is more individualistic, based on principles of justice, autonomous thinking, clear decision making and responsible action. If one regards the gender basis of the focus groups as a microcosm of the way men and women relate to each other in society, this same theory explains the distinct way that participants within the male and female groups related to each other, with the men tending to be more aggressive and the women more supportive. It is worth pointing out, however, that the distinction between the prioritisation of 'self' and 'other' is more apparent amongst the ABC1 groups than the C2D groups. This could be the result of occupying different positions in society. ABC1 participants are more likely to hold managerial positions, or positions of responsibility, whilst C2D participants work under someone else's authority. Consequently, the characteristics associated with a male ethical conception, primarily autonomous thinking, clear decision making and responsible action, will play a more central role in an ABC1 than a C2D lifestyle.

The differences across socio-economic status are much more pronounced and appear to correlate with the different modes of reading i.e. critical vs. referential; ritualized vs. instrumental. ABC1 groups tended to believe fundamentally in the subjectivity of documentary and thus displayed a reluctance to simply accept what is presented. This

corresponds with a critical approach to television interpretation. Conversely, the C2D groups seemed to believe fundamentally in the objectivity of documentary, based on a trust in television. As long as a programme follows certain conventions, these groups would be more likely to accept what is presented, thus corresponding with a more referential approach. The critical distance of the ABC1 groups is further emphasised by being the only groups to allude to the influence of the market on documentary production, thus placing their interpretation in a wider context.

If these suggestions are accepted, it begs the question of why socio-economic status should be influential in one's perception of television documentary. A divergence in perspective between middle- and working-class participants supports Bourdieu's conception of class as a social practice. Thus, rather than a Marxist approach based simply on economic conditions, classes are:

"sets of agents who occupy similar positions and who, being placed in similar conditions and subjected to similar conditionings, have every likelihood of having similar dispositions and interests and therefore of producing similar practices and adopting similar stances." (Bourdieu, 1985, p.198)

Economic capital is obviously still important, but class is an embodiment of more than just a categorisation based on objective factors. Bourdieu talks about the distinction between the dominant and dominated, and also the intellectualism of the middle classes compared with the realism of the working classes. These distinctions are very much related to economic and political factors, but it is the way these divisions are constructed in everyday social contexts which is of significance here. The fundamental scepticism of documentary by the ABC1 groups can be interpreted as reflecting their position of dominance in society. They have the freedom and confidence to question, which relates to the supposed middle-class intellectualism. Similarly, the fundamental acceptance of documentary by the C2D groups can be paralleled with their dominated position in society. They are, antithetically, deferring to the apparent wisdom of the dominant, which in this case is television.

5.4.2 Relation to theoretical framework of thesis

As outlined at the beginning of the chapter, this thesis emphasises the role of social context in the communication process, and uses Doise's (1986) levels of analysis as a tool to explore the different contextual spheres involved. The three analyses of the data in this study map neatly on to the three levels of analysis relevant to the thesis. The thematic analysis is a general investigation of broad issues and debates across all participants which taps into a cultural or ideological level of analysis. The group analysis explores the dynamics and discussions within individual groups, thus accesses both the situational/interpersonal and positional levels of analysis. Finally, the socio-demographic analysis examines the link between perspective and social background, thereby focussing on a positional level of analysis.

The results show that each level produces a different type of information, but that there is also a common thread linking the three. In this case, the central theme running through all three analyses is the relationship between documentary, credibility and objectivity. Each analysis contributes in a different way to the overall results, presenting a more complete picture. This in turn justifies the use of a levels of analysis approach, as well as supporting the theoretical notion that social context is fundamental to a viewer's perspective. Social context being the context in which a viewer interprets television, the way one discusses television with others, the social position a viewer occupies in society, and the broad cultural framework determining widely shared perspectives. The one level not explored here is the intrapersonal, which would shed light on the cognitive processes involved in the interpretation of television documentary. Social context is also relevant here, in terms of the schemas used to assimilate information (e.g. Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Whether or not the intrapersonal level would contribute to an understanding of the nature of communication on a societal level depends on whether beliefs are formed through social interaction (e.g. Mead, 1967) or not. I would argue that it is possible to hold beliefs intrapersonally, but it is through social interaction that the content of those beliefs becomes significant and relevant to social life.

In terms of a theory of communication, the fact that different social contexts affect viewers'

perspectives on television documentary adds further weight to the argument in favour of providing producers with information about their audience. If the commercial audience research bodies could be more specific about both the ways different people interpret documentary, and the characteristics which enhance a programme's credibility, then producers may find their output more useful. However, the counter argument would be that producers will never be able to accommodate all audience perspectives, and indeed may regard such a practice as 'pandering' to their audience. Thus, the value of increased audience information is debatable. The fact that viewers do have different perspectives on documentary and that these perspectives are shared echoes elements within a ritual approach to mass communication. However, the fact that certain viewers accept documentaries without question suggests that information transmission is still possible to some degree. This 'degree' is addressed in subsequent chapters.

This study indicates that the point on which viewers differ is in their fundamental acceptance or questioning of documentary. The scepticism is based on one's own knowledge and/or the use of a certain format to present subjective material in an objective manner. The acceptance is based on a general trust in television and/or the link between that same format, objectivity and the truth. One wonders whether these positions are fixed and whether and how they translate into the interpretation of specific programmes. These questions will be investigated in the final study in which the nature of communication in a particular television documentary is explored. This will reveal whether the findings of this general reception study translate to the interpretation of specific programme content. If such differences only exist at this more retrospective and possibly idealistic level, then the findings call into question broader assumptions about the position of documentary in society, rather than the relation between production and reception in particular documentaries.

5.5 Summary

This study was formulated to investigate the reception context of television documentary. Three separate analyses were carried out which produced both distinct and overlapping

results. The general thematic analysis enabled the construction of a prototype definition of documentary as something which informs and educates, is factual or real, well-researched and in-depth, and less current than the news. Its purpose is to inform and educate the public, it should aim to be objective, its credibility is largely dependent on a programme's reputation, and it is generally watched out of interest in the subject matter. It was issues of definition, credibility, objectivity and bias which provoked the greatest amount of debate both within certain groups and across the data as a whole. The second analysis centred around each group and highlighted different perspectives between groups on the relationship between documentary, truth and objectivity. Different forms of interpretation mirrored both Liebes & Katz's (1990) critical/referential distinction, and Rubin's ritualized and instrumental modes of viewing. These criteria directly affected the way viewers' assessed a documentary's credibility. The final socio-demographic analysis traced the link between different perspectives and viewers' social background. Two dichotomies were identified in the data. The first identified the prioritisation of either 'self' or 'other' (cf. Gilligan, 1992), and the differential effect that has on perspective. The second related to an acceptance of or scepticism towards documentary content. These dichotomies appeared to bear some relation to differences in gender and socio-economic class. The study confirms the existence of variation in viewers' perspectives on television documentary. It remains to be seen whether the results translate to the interpretation of a specific programme.

CHAPTER 6

LINKING PRODUCTION AND RECEPTION

6.1 Outline

This chapter seeks to integrate the results of the production and reception studies, and in so doing aims to fulfil the theoretical and empirical criteria for an understanding of mass communication which were proposed in the first three chapters of the thesis. The first section takes a theoretical perspective, reiterating the need and justification for a link between production and reception and locating it within the theoretical framework of the thesis as a whole. The second section focuses more specifically on the results of the studies reported in Chapters 4 (production) and 5 (reception). It assesses the relation between the emerging themes in both sets of results, the patterns and correlations found, and how the results in general relate to the proposed theory. The third section considers how the theoretical framework of the thesis and the results of the first two studies together provide a basis for a final case study of communication within one particular television documentary programme.

6.2 Theoretical link between production and reception

The link between production and reception is evident in both interpersonal and mass communication. However, it is not possible simply to regard mass communication in the same manner as interpersonal communication because of the different contexts in which each takes place. In the study of mass communication, the relationship between production and reception is one of the key factors distinguishing between transmission and ritual approaches. As explained in Chapter 1, the ritual approach is a more cultural approach to communication, focussing on its role in societal cohesiveness, i.e. its purpose and function within society, rather than simply regarding it as the linear transfer of a message from point A to point B, as suggested by transmission theories. In the transmission approach, the link between production and reception is established through the movement of a message i.e. from producers to receivers. In the ritual approach, the link between production and reception is

less concrete. Producers create an arena in which people participate by assuming social roles, thus the link is established through participation in a shared space.

The majority of models formulated to explain communication as a whole fall into the transmission paradigm (e.g. Shannon & Weaver, 1949; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), with little appreciation of the social context in which the whole process is grounded. Certain models introduce the notion of feedback from the audience to the producer (e.g. Maletzke, 1963), although little emphasis is placed on this aspect. Certain researchers over the years have highlighted the need to recognise the role of the audience in communication (e.g. Bakewell & Garnham, 1970; Katz, 1974; Schlesinger, 1978), which represents a fundamental element of social context, in order to better understand what is going on and also as a means of improving the effectiveness of the communication. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model represents a useful attempt to accommodate the notion of social context into a model of communication on positional and situational levels, although his aim was not to improve the effectiveness of communication but to illustrate that a message is a complex structure of meanings.

This model has faced a variety of criticisms, not least that of collapsing back into a transmission model (Lewis, 1983) and introducing an artificial separation between encoding and decoding (Ang, 1994). However, it crucially recognises the different contextual spheres in which encoding and decoding take place, as well as the link between the two. The model is just that, a model, and consequently cannot be interpreted in any way other than as a *portrayal* of different but related processes within the complex whole. The model is a symbolic template rather than an literal explanation, and thus serves a fundamental purpose in this thesis both as an illustration of the link between production and reception in communication, as well as a starting point for understanding the complex relation between encoding and decoding within a particular form of communication. Rather than just including a token feedback link between the audience and the producer, as with earlier models, the emphasis on the link between encoding and decoding recognises the role of both within each of the respective processes. In other words, the feedback from the audience is not an isolated channel of retrospective audience information, but a fundamental part of the

whole process, contributing to producers' perceptions and image of 'the audience'.

The interrelated and contextually grounded nature of the relationship between production and reception is more in keeping with Carey's (1989) ritual approach to communication. However, my criticism of his conceptualisation, although not of a ritual approach *per se*, is that it tends to only deal with communication on the broad cultural level, without explaining how the ritual approach relates to other societal levels, i.e. positional and situational levels (as outlined by Doise (1986) and defined in Chapter 1). One of the objects of the thesis is to incorporate these other levels of analysis. Having said that, Carey's ritual approach acknowledges and includes large elements of social context. A recognition of social context is not completely new, and is particularly evident in the empirical work on audience reception. However, many of these audience studies focus on the relationship between the text and the audience rather than the communication process as a whole (e.g. Ang, 1985; Kitzinger, 1993; Lewis, 1991). The communication process as a whole refers to the link between production and reception. In such a holistic approach, the understanding and appreciation of reception is fundamental to the production process as is production to the reception process. Both processes contribute significantly to the social context in which each take place. This thesis uses Doise's (1986) levels of analysis as a means of accommodating different elements of social context. The explanation and application of these different levels provides a framework for understanding both mass communication as a whole and the processes within it i.e. production/encoding, reception/decoding. In terms of the link between production and reception, the levels of analysis explored in the thesis are articulated as follows. The cultural level incorporates the common, shared beliefs within which the relationship operates. The positional level refers to the societal groups and structural positions that producers and audiences belong to and the consequent influence which these groupings/positions have in the production/reception relationship. The situational level addresses the factors affecting the actual practice of production and reception e.g. institutional constraints, image of the audience, perceptions of the genre, context of viewing.

The majority of information television producers receive about their audiences or viewers tends to be quantitative and crudely categorised (e.g. Ang, 1991). Much less emphasis is

placed on the qualitative information necessary for producers to have more accurate knowledge about the various ways in which audiences understand and interpret programmes. In the same vein, the results of the production study (Chapter 4) reveal the extent to which producers are unaware of the variety of perceptions and expectations audiences have towards particular television genres. This more qualitative information is what Schlesinger (1978) was arguing for in his identification of a 'missing link' between producers and audiences. It is also the sort of information i.e. varying images and perceptions of the audience, which constitutes the social context, thus influencing both the encoding and decoding processes - the very type of social context overlooked by transmission models of communication. This thesis places emphasis on that gap, based on a belief in the fundamental role of producer and audience perceptions, both of a genre and each other, in the production and reception of television programmes. Thus, the nature of communication in a specific genre, and the subsequent position or purpose that genre has in society cannot be established until the gap is more adequately filled.

6.3 The empirical link between production and reception

This section examines the commonalities and differences between the perceptions and perspectives of the respondents in the first two studies of the thesis. Both studies were general in orientation, thus focussing on the concept of documentary rather than any particular documentary programme. Therefore, neither study has a common concrete object for the participants to concentrate on. As a result, respondents refer not only to their own abstract concept of documentary, but also a personal collection of programme memories which form the basis for and/or exemplify their comments. This amounts to a self-generated sphere of reference which is likely to be different for different people. However, the significance of these differences depends on how well the results of these two general studies relate to the third study (Chapter 7) in which a common object of reference is used. The comparison can offer some insight into the balance between producer, text and viewer in the construction and interpretation of meaning. If, with the introduction of a television documentary programme, people's approach to documentary is different from that of the

general studies, then the role of text is significant in the nature and process of interpretation. This would add weight to the argument for appreciating different levels of analysis. It is also worth noting that the areas covered in each of the two studies were strongly linked to the context under investigation. As a result, certain themes in each are specific to either production or reception. However, the aim here is to examine the commonalities and differences from a general perspective, thus whilst content may differ, the essential structure may remain the same. The following section presents a summary of the findings in each study.

6.3.1 Conclusions of previous studies

Chapter 4 investigated the production context of television documentary. It was based on a series of twenty one interviews, fourteen with television producers and seven with commissioning editors of television documentary series. As well as covering these two separate jobs, the sample consisted of participants from different sections of the industry, at different stages of their career, and of both genders. Eleven themes emerged from the interviews, both as a result of the questions asked and the information volunteered. The themes are: the definition of documentary; its purpose; its audience; the constraints involved; comparisons to the past and projections to the future; its format; different types; reasons for making them; perceptions of control; commissioning criteria; and features of particular programmes or strands. Two general dimensions run through the data. The first is termed 'conceptions of service', which ranged from a public service notion of providing the audience with what they *should* know to broadcasting in accordance with what the audience wants. The second is 'forms of gratification' which describes the varying personal objectives of programme makers. At one end, qualitative gratification indicates a concern with the audience's understanding and stimulation. The other end, quantitative gratification refers to programme makers' preoccupation with commercial gain. These two dimensions represent trends across the themes. Marginal variations were also observed within the themes, based on differences in job, company, career position and gender. Whilst producers were fairly critical, commissioning editors were less willing to 'rock the boat'. Participants from the BBC tended to be more public service oriented, whilst those from ITV, independent companies and Channel Four veered more towards commercial priorities. The more

established producers were less aware of and affected by production constraints than those less established. The women tended to be more public service oriented than the men, although relatively few women were interviewed. As regards the audience, the knowledge that the respondents in this sample had of viewers was based on either the retrospective viewing habits of a population sample according to age, gender, and socio-economic status, or the prospective reactions of close friends, relations and colleagues. Both are assumed to be representative of the population as a whole. It is thus unfair to claim that producers have no appreciation of the audience, but what is disputed is the depth of that appreciation. The overall thrust of the interviews portrayed a struggle between the competing objectives of public service broadcasting and commercial survival, both in terms of the personal goals of broadcasters and the relationship between programmes and their audiences.

Chapter 5 explored the reception context of television documentary. It consisted of a series of eight focus group discussions differentiated on the grounds of gender, socio-economic status and age. Using a similar technique to the previous chapter, the analysis uncovered and explored eleven themes: the definition of television documentary; audience viewing habits; the effect of documentary programmes on viewers; their reasons for watching; their reasons for not watching or turning off; factors which maintain interest in a programme; the societal role of documentary; programme credibility; objectivity and bias; commercialisation; and whose agenda is followed. A thematic analysis detected that the main areas of debate concerned the definition, objectivity, bias and credibility of documentary programmes. It also enabled the construction of a set of typical characteristics associated with documentary. It imparts information or educates, is factual or real, well-researched and in-depth, and less urgent and current than the news. Its purpose is to inform and educate the public, it should aim to be objective, its credibility is largely dependent on a programme's reputation, and people generally watch it through an interest in the subject matter. An analysis between the eight groups indicated two distinct styles of viewing which correspond to Liebes & Katz's (1990) critical and referential modes. The socio-demographic analysis equated a critical style with ABC1 groups and a referential style with C2D groups. Furthermore, the socio-economic status division differentiated between ways of assessing a programme's credibility. The ABC1 groups tended to use factual knowledge, whilst C2D groups included their own

personal experience. Differences according to gender correspond with Gilligan's (1992) theory of moral reasoning, with men tending to prioritise the 'self' whilst women prioritise the 'other'. This was evident in both the content of the discussions and the dynamics of the different groups. Thus, the two interrelated outcomes of the group discussions were conflict between a fundamental acceptance and fundamental scepticism of documentary's credibility and objectivity, and the use of either a referential or critical style of viewing.

The conclusions of Chapter 4 confirm the need for producers to have more knowledge of the audience, and illustrate the circumstances, in accordance with the theoretical framework of the thesis, in which that knowledge would be useful. The conclusions of chapter 5 portray the variation which exists across the audience and its significance for the interpretation of television documentary programmes.

6.3.2 Thematic links

One of the main reasons for investigating the production and reception contexts of television documentary was to ascertain producers' and viewers' perceptions of both the genre and each other. Based on a belief in the existence of a link between perceptions, expectations and the construction/interpretation of meaning, my assumption is that there needs to be some degree of correspondence between these perceptions. The following discussion compares the views of the broadcasters and audiences in the previous two studies on genre-related issues and each other.

One of the central issues is the perception of what a documentary is. Whilst the same areas are mentioned in relation to defining documentary (i.e. its subject matter; its structure; the different types; its relation to news and current affairs), it is the way each of these are discussed and the differential importance of each which distinguishes broadcasters from the audience. The focus of discussion for broadcasters is the structure of documentary, embracing its format and style. They have an appreciation of the difficulties of arriving at a precise definition because of the different types, predominantly due to variations in format and style. For audiences, on the other hand, the principal defining feature is the nature of the subject matter and the way that subject matter is obtained and compiled in order to fulfil the

genre's informational and educational objectives. The main points of debate for broadcasters are how far the format, style and subject matter can be pushed before a programme no longer qualifies as documentary, whether the priority behind these changes is the audience or the broadcaster, and whether documentary is defined by type, structure, subject matter, or in relation to another genre - usually News/Current Affairs. Whilst some of these concerns are shared by the viewers, it tended only to be amongst the younger ABC1 groups. On the whole, although also covering a number of different areas, the viewers' definition is more clear cut and generalised. There is an awareness of different types of documentary, but these correspond to content differences rather than style and format. The main area of debate is whether documentary is objective or subjective, and whether this is compatible with the genre's objectives. It is not surprising that the broadcasters are so much more specific and technical about the definition of documentary as their relationship with the genre is more intense and salient than that of the viewers.

The most frequently cited objectives of documentary amongst both broadcasters and viewers are to inform, to raise public awareness and to educate. Prompting action and deepening knowledge/understanding are cited to a similar degree by each 'side'. However, the most significant difference is the importance of entertainment. Entertainment is the second most frequently mentioned purpose of documentary amongst broadcasters, whereas it is amongst the most rarely cited objectives in the audience study. It is possible that broadcasters are being realistic about what motivates people to watch television, whilst viewers are idealistic, trying to present a particular image of themselves. After all, several viewers did also express a sense of obligation to watch documentary. Alternatively, the viewers may be defining television entertainment as a genre separate from that of documentary, which does not necessarily imply that documentary programmes are not considered enjoyable. Indeed, a similar number of viewers objected to the idea of feeling obliged to watch, and rather do so out of genuine desire. The broadcasters are more keen than the viewers to refer to documentary's role in improving the quality of television, communicating to people, and aiding democracy and justice. The viewers, unlike the broadcasters, cite certain factors external to programme content such as providing programme choice for the viewer, filling slots and simply trying to survive financially.

The last point illustrates a degree of awareness amongst viewers of the commercial pressures endured by broadcasters. However, this awareness was only evident in the ABC1 groups and is therefore not a factor influencing all viewers' interpretation of documentary. Most comments about the impact of commercialisation are fairly cynical, suggesting that the truth is obscured by the methods adopted in the pursuit of larger audiences. Depending on a viewer's own definition of documentary and its role in society, this is seen as a contravention of the spirit of documentary programming. However, other viewers are more sympathetic, either through recognising and appreciating the position of broadcasting institutions as market players, or through seeing the advantages of changing documentary's approach in order to reach more people. These different views echo the two dimensions outlined in the producer study. Furthermore, they illustrate how positive and negative views on the context of production can affect the interpretation of a programme i.e. reception. This once again reiterates the importance of being aware of and understanding the link between the two.

Broadcasters' views on the audience and audience research are very mixed. There is a widespread awareness of the existence of the audience, but the way in which that audience is thought about and the importance it is accorded varies hugely. Broadcasters have a wide range of opinions on the link between the audience and programme-making. The audience can be a vital feature of programme-making, just another feature of the process, or, at the other extreme, totally irrelevant. Of those who do devote attention to the audience, some broadcasters begin from the premise of audience diversity. However, this diversity is based on the crude categorisations of industry audience research, and tends to focus on appeal rather than understanding or interpretation. Other broadcasters think in terms of the mass audience, looking for programmes which will have a wide appeal. However, decisions on what will appeal to the mass are made on the basis of either a gut instinct or their own personal 'representative' sample, often consisting of family members, colleagues and friends. It is widely believed that a well-made and convincing film will be seen by viewers as the truth. However, the way broadcasters and viewers talk about the truth of a programme is quite different. The broadcasters' discourse refers to the more structural elements of a programme. For them, the essential features of a good documentary are a strong storyline, identifiable authors, strong characters whom viewers can relate to and a clear presentation

that is both interesting and entertaining. However, a story can be told in a number of ways, and there are a variety of aspects which influence the way chosen: the aims of the programme; the current fashion; the subject matter; the producer; the particular strand it is for; the technology available; and what has proven successful in the past. The viewers, on the other hand, assess the truth and/or acceptability of a programme using a discourse based on abstract issues of credibility, objectivity and bias, thus focussing on aspects relating to a programme's subject matter. That is not to say that a programme's construction is irrelevant, but that the important features of presentation relate to these conceptual issues. Consequently, a credible documentary is one which is responsible, balanced and well-researched, thereby portraying the whole picture. It is interesting to observe that whilst producers cite clear presentation, strong storyline, good characters and familiar narrators as the route to successful and credible programmes, viewers highlight oversimplification and obvious attempts to appeal as factors which destroy a programme's credibility. What is unclear is how far a producer's idea of clear presentation is oversimplification to the viewer, or an emphasis on story and characters is an obvious attempt to appeal.

On the whole, the factors guiding a documentary's construction refer to the context of production without reference to that of reception. Whilst these factors are important, certain assumptions are made about what viewers, as a mass, will believe, learn and enjoy. The reception study suggests that the situation is not so straightforward.

The most significant contradiction between the results of the production study and those of the reception study are the ways of assessing a programme's credibility. Whilst the producers, as mentioned above, are convinced that credibility depends on the way a particular programme is structured, audiences assess it in relation to the outside world. This is done in two ways. One is to compare the argument to one's own personal experiences. The other is to compare it to one's own knowledge of events. Both of these techniques are set within fundamental beliefs about the documentary genre's ability to show the truth. Thus, the credibility of a programme lies in the relation of its content to the world outside of television, rather than in relation to programme making and the world of broadcasting. It is worth mentioning that much of a documentary's credibility lies in its institutional categorisation as

documentary, and its inclusion within a particular strand e.g. *Horizon*. However, this reputation surely remains intact to a large extent because programmes conform to a certain degree to one's expectations of the documentary genre. One wonders how far a programme need push these boundaries in order to threaten that reputation.

There is therefore very little awareness on the part of broadcasters of potential differences between viewers in the way their programmes are interpreted. The assumption is that if a programme follows certain rules - rules formulated within the institution and tested on a very small range of like-minded people - then it will be widely believed and enjoyed. However, the results of the reception study indicate not only that there are differences in interpretation across the mass audience, but also that these differences are based on both viewers' mode of reading and their diverse ways of assessing a programme's credibility, rather than simply having mixed tastes. There is partial awareness, amongst the viewers, of the environment in which broadcasters are making programmes. Furthermore, those viewers who do display knowledge of the production context are split in their admiration and condemnation of the present situation. What is clear is that viewers on the whole are fairly unaware of how the changing media environment has affected documentary production. They are oblivious to the diverse opinion amongst producers over the conflict between public service and commercialisation, and the shifts and struggles often involved in adapting to this new environment. It is, however, unclear how increased knowledge of this situation would change the relationship between producer, text and audience. This knowledge amounts to an awareness of the construction and thus structure of a documentary programme. As a result, maybe the fundamental scepticism of documentary exhibited by the ABC1 groups would become a more general phenomenon. It is also possible that viewers would *want* to remain oblivious to the process of construction, to believe that what they see is the unadulterated truth. At any rate, audiences may not see any connection between the dilemmas of production and the final product - just as producers do not see a connection between their product and the complexities of reception.

6.3.3 Analytical links

By analytical links, I am referring to the similarities between the observations and

explanations abstracted from the data, thus one step removed from the specific content of the results. These observations and explanations relate to the factors identified as linking similarities and differences in perception, based on the theoretical approach adopted i.e. the focus on social context and levels of analysis.

Any broad similarities in perspective across the production and reception studies are arguably located at the cultural or ideological level of analysis. There were very few broad similarities, but the most obvious and prominent concerned the objectives of the documentary genre. Both producers and viewers believe that its goals are to inform, raise public awareness and educate. But once the discussion turns to how and whether this is achieved, the consensus dissolves. In both studies certain patterns were identified across the data which tend to correspond with positional characteristics of the respondents. However, the subject of those debates differs in accordance with the preoccupations of the two different studies. In the production study, debates cover the role of documentary in relation to the audience and society, and the broadcasters' position in relation to that role. In the reception study, the focus is audience perceptions of the documentary genre and the criteria used to assess how far a television documentary programme corresponds with this. The idea was to establish whether different positioning within debates corresponds with the different positional characteristics of the respondents. In other words, are different views in some way determined by the wider social identities or groupings to which people belong e.g. professional role, socio-economic status, gender. In both studies, some degree of correspondence was found between the arguments and the positional characteristics of the respondents. However, it must be remembered that these characteristics were selected *before* the data was collected, and were specifically looked for, rather than just having emerged through data analysis.

In the production study differences were found on the bases of job, company and career position. However, none of these differences were particularly marked. There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, it could be the result of the small number of respondents interviewed in each of the different categories. However, this suggestion contravenes the spirit of the methodology, in which the aim is not representativeness, but the sampling of a

range of possible opinion. Secondly, the result could relate to the strength of the association between the respondent and the positional characteristic. The characteristics identified as relevant to the production study relate to the respondents' professional role and are therefore only relevant within a professional context. Other positional characteristics, such as socio-economic status or age, are central to respondents across all contexts and would possibly, if relevant, produce a stronger degree of correspondence, as is demonstrated in the reception study. Another possible explanation is that these are not the most significant differentiating variables, or positional characteristics, that could be chosen. For instance, it may be worth comparing respondents involved with different types of documentary, across both subject matter and style. The data suggests that, more often than not, the type of film one makes says a lot about a broadcaster's beliefs and perspectives about documentary and the position he/she occupies in the industry. Alternatively, it is possible that the positional level of analysis does not contribute so significantly to differences in opinion or perception.

In the reception study, differences were identified in correspondence with socio-economic class and gender. The association between these characteristics and differences in perspective were particularly pronounced. This could support the suggestion that certain positional characteristics are strongly influential in one's perceptions. Furthermore, it would strengthen the idea raised above that certain, more fundamental or global characteristics bear more relevance¹. However, the strength of the association could merely be the result of the methodology used. Focus groups have been criticised in the past for producing a false consensus (e.g. Hoijer, 1990), thus exaggerating similarities and differences between groups. However, one can still maintain, based on the results of the two studies, that positional characteristics are influential in different perceptions of the documentary genre.

It could be argued that the reason why different characteristics were relevant in the two studies is located at another level of analysis - the situational. There are two types of 'situation' in these studies. One is the situation to which the research refers. The other is the situation in which the data are gathered. It is possible that the discussion of two different

¹Although it is also worth noting that in the production study gender was not particularly influential, and age was inconsequential in the reception study.

situations, i.e. production and reception, and the use of two different methods of data gathering, i.e. semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups, or even both of these factors together, is influential in making different positional characteristics salient to the respondents. It is difficult to establish any similarities on the situational level simply because of these two differences. The only possible similarity, which is speculation in itself, is a methodological one. It is highly likely that all respondents will have been affected in some way by the data gathering situation. When people are asked to express opinions and recall behaviour, one often finds them trying to convey a particular, often favourable, image of themselves to the researcher (e.g. Orne, 1962). Hence why commissioning editors will be more likely to express a 'party line' than producers, and why ABC1 groups will comment on the naive interpretations and ignorance of less intelligent sections of the population, obviously excluding themselves. The researcher has no real way of establishing just how honest respondents are being. This is not to say that 'true' information about people's opinions and behaviour is only evident outside of the research context. What it indicates is the influence of the situation, of any situation, on social interaction. The research situation is just one situation amongst many in which views and behaviours are discussed. Hence the importance of describing a situation, and analysing findings within the context of that situation. Once again we witness the importance of taking into account both social context and level of analysis.

6.3.4 Theoretical implications

What relevance have the results of both the production and reception studies together to the theoretical nature of communication, as advanced in this thesis? Chapter 1 advocates the importance of translating Carey's ritual view of communication to both situational and positional levels in order to establish a more complete picture of the communication process. A ritual approach regards communication as a more integrated and shared process, rather than the linear and segmented representation constructed by the transmission view. Thus, reception is as much a part of production as production is of reception, and communication involves shared symbols. Furthermore, social context, operating at several different levels, plays a significant role in one's outlook. Consequently, the perceptions of those involved in both production and reception are dependent on the social context in which they are situated.

The empirical design of this thesis is formulated to investigate the nature of documentary communication on these premises. It is believed not only that social context is hugely involved in perception, but also that those perceptions then become part of that social context on which further social action - whether it be production or reception oriented - is based. This is why, from a social context perspective, it was important to understand the context of production and reception. Furthermore, from a communication perspective, it is the relationship between them which sheds light on whether the notion of information transmission is possible within a ritual approach to mass communication.

The two studies clearly show the difference between the production context and the reception context with regard to their engagement with documentary. This appears to be based on the salience of documentary in those two contexts. However, the difference is not global. In other words, the focus amongst producers and commissioning editors on programme structure and technical detail is shared by viewers in the ABC1 category. Some viewers, although not grouped by any of the pre-defined variables, and also very much in the minority, concurred with the producers' emphasis on a good story and strong characters. However, whilst the producers see this as a guarantee of programme credibility, the viewers see it as essential to maintaining interest, but not a factor in assessing a programme's credibility. It is on this point that the gap between producers and viewers is most pronounced. The producers cling to a particular belief about how viewers assess credibility. However, first of all, this does not include the criteria highlighted by the viewers themselves, and secondly, it disregards the possibility that the criteria used are not always the same. In terms of the general theoretical framework, the point is not necessarily what those different criteria are, but that there are different ones which are shared by people of similar social backgrounds. This supports the need to add more detail to Carey's ritual view of communication. The structure and framework of the communication process may be shared across a culture, with different groups using the same strategies to communicate. However, the content of that structure can vary at both the positional and situational levels.

This is not a new finding within empirical audience research. Morley's (1980) *Nationwide* audience study, for instance, illustrated a link between shared audience interpretations and

social background, and similar findings were reported by Liebes and Katz (1990) in a study of cross-cultural readings of *Dallas*. However, social background can be used to link interpretations (e.g. Philo, 1993; Silverstone, 1985) rather than explain them. Obviously, belonging to a particular social group signifies certain shared experiences and thus has certain implications for the discourses and frames of reference available to its members, as emphasised by Morley (1980). However, audience studies are conducted in the context of particular programmes, which introduces the complex issue of the relationship between the viewer and the text. In terms of the link between production and reception, this question is often conceived of in terms of the relationship between audience interpretation and a text's 'preferred meaning' (Hall, 1980). Is the active audience or the framework of the text more influential in the production of meaning? The results of the general production and reception studies indicate a gap between production and reception. They support the role of the active audience in the determination of meaning, but, by virtue of being general, are at the same time vulnerable to the criticism (e.g. Corner, 1995) of emphasising the role of the audience almost to the exclusion of the structuring role of the text. Lewis's (1991) study of news reception argues that despite variations in the ideological resources available to viewers for interpreting the news, the frameworks of interpretation are more often than not taken from the news itself. This is explained in terms of the removed nature of the discourse. It does, however, introduce the role of text, and leads Lewis to suggest that text/viewer interaction inevitably favours textual determinism.

These contradictory arguments do not repudiate the results and conclusions already established in the thesis. It is, after all, possible that the relationship between text and viewer is not consistent across all genres. However, the arguments highlight the need to consider the results in a more specific context. At this point, it remains unclear how or whether general perceptions about the documentary genre as an abstract concept, in both production and reception contexts, relate to perceptions and involvement with a particular television documentary programme. It is possible that the introduction of a concrete focus will downplay, if not eradicate, the influence of some of the factors identified in the general studies. However, the theoretical framework suggests that the findings of the general studies will actually provide some of the context for the construction, understanding and

interpretation of a more specific, focussed object. The introduction of a specific object, namely a television documentary programme, marks the introduction of text into the producer-viewer relationship. The knowledge obtained in the previous two studies about both production and reception contexts in general does two things. It informs our understanding of the construction and interpretation of individual documentary programmes, and, depending on the degree of overlap between the first two studies and the last, is also suggestive of the balance between producer, text and viewer in the communicative relationship.

6.4 Laying the ground for the third study

The discrepancy between the results of the production and reception studies almost suggests that no communication takes place. This is obviously not the case. The concern is not with whether communication takes place, but the nature of that communicative relationship, which in turn depends on an appreciation of the context within which production and reception are based. The final study proposed is an examination of the nature of communication in one particular television documentary programme. The study involves an interview with its producer and a viewing and discussion of that programme with four audience focus groups. The first two studies illustrate the existence of a gap between the perceptions of producers about the audience and the way the audience members both view and believe they are interpreting television documentary programmes. However, the dissimilarity in perception is not global, hence the importance of establishing where the respondents in the final study are located in accordance with the positional characteristics deemed influential in the general production and reception studies.

The first thing to establish in the final study is the degree of similarity between the producer's description of the programme and that of the viewers. At what point, if at all, do perceptions differ, on which points, by whom, and in what way? The results of the previous two studies suggest that it is not the literal understanding of a programme's content that is disputed, but the assumptions about its aims, how it attempts to fulfil them and whether it does so

successfully. If there are differences, then the outcome of the previous studies would predict that these are based on differences at both situational and positional levels of analysis. The validity of this prediction is crucial. It determines the relevance of investigating the general as an explanatory guide and contextual framework for the specific.

In the production study, the outcome of the analysis produced two overlapping dimensions which embrace variations in viewpoint. There was also an element of correspondence between these different viewpoints and the positional characteristics of job, company and career position. Consequently, it is important to ascertain where the producer in the final study lies on these two dimensions and which positional 'categories' s/he falls into. The extent to which this influences the way the programme is made can then be established. As described earlier, the dimensions revolved around varying perceptions of the role of documentary in society and the subsequent relationship between producer and audience. Therefore, one's position on these dimensions would appear to be fundamental in the image held about the audience, how they will interpret the programme and the overall objectives of the documentary.

In the reception study, whilst perceptions of the ideal documentary were very similar, expectations, evaluations and interpretations of actual documentary programmes were strongly dependent on two positional characteristics - socio-economic class and gender. Respondents were divided on two major factors in the reception study. One concerned either an underlying belief in or fundamental scepticism of documentary. The other related to the different types of knowledge used to assess a programme's credibility, i.e. knowledge of issues/events or personal experience. The question is whether these factors translate to the interpretation and evaluation of a particular television documentary programme, and whether these differences correspond in the same way with positional characteristics.

Examining the nature of communication in a particular television documentary programme performs three functions. First of all, it is an application of the results obtained so far to a specific example or case study. Secondly, it represents a combination of encoding and decoding through a common object of investigation. Thirdly, the movement from the general

concept to a specific situation both satisfies and tests the theoretical framework of the thesis. The final study has a specific focus in contrast to the abstract focus of the previous two studies. This amounts to a different context. The question is how far the results of the final study relate to those of the previous two. In other words, how far will the results relate to the specific context, and thus the relationship of both producer and viewers with the text, rather than the more general context, rendering the results of the previous studies irrelevant to documentary communication - although not to public debate about the documentary genre. The outcome of the final study will answer several questions. The most immediate concerns the nature of communication in television documentary. This in itself will inform the theoretical suggestion in this thesis of applying the ritual view of communication to both situational and positional levels of analysis and, in so doing, redefining the notion of information transmission. Furthermore, the study will advance our understanding of the balance between producer, text and viewer within a particular television genre. This lays the foundations for comparisons with other television genres, and hopefully, as a result, a contribution to general reception theory.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the relationship between the results of the first two studies in this thesis, one of which examines the production context of television documentary, and the other, the reception context. The importance of a link between production and reception follows the theoretical framework advanced in this thesis. Thematic similarities relate primarily to perceptions of the 'ideal' rather than actual documentary. There are large differences between producer and audience perceptions of what a documentary is and how, and whether it successfully fulfils its objectives. These differences are not global. When there are similarities between producer and audience, it is often with the ABC1 section of the public. On an analytical level there are large similarities. In both studies, positional characteristics play a part in the perceptions of respondents. However, the influence of those characteristics appears more fundamental in reception than production, possibly due to the centrality of those characteristics to the respondents. However, what is unclear in all cases,

is how far the similarities and differences relate to the situation - be it the different contexts investigated, i.e. production and reception, or the different methodological techniques used, i.e. interview and focus group. In any event, these two previous studies lay the foundation for the final case study of communication in a particular television documentary programme. The comparison between production and reception in a specific context with a shared focus will answer many if not all of the questions posed in the course of this chapter.

CHAPTER 7

A CASE STUDY OF DOCUMENTARY COMMUNICATION

7.1 Outline

This chapter represents the implementation of the thesis's theoretical claims and empirical findings. On the results of this study hang the main questions of the thesis. Firstly, the specific question of the nature of communication in television documentary. Secondly, the more general theoretical concern with understanding mass communication at situational and positional levels, using a ritual approach which appreciates the role of social context and various levels of analysis.

The chapter reports on a case study of communication in a particular television documentary programme - "Parental Choice". The case study combines an interview with the programme's producer and four focus group discussions with audiences differentiated on the basis of socio-economic status and gender. The analysis is divided into four sections. The first presents a summary of the producer's approach and views, and the perceptions of the different groups. The second examines the relationship between the producer's position and the results of the production study (Chapter 4). Similarly, the third explores the relationship between the viewers' responses and the general trends in the reception study (Chapter 5). Finally, the fourth discusses the relation between production and reception in this particular programme. The ensuing discussion considers the results in the light of the specific question i.e. communication in this documentary programme, and the general concern i.e. the theoretical approach to mass communication.

This study is concerned with the relationship between the perceptions of a producer and those of the audience towards a specific television documentary programme called "Parental Choice"¹. The programme serves as a direct object and focus for both producer and audience. In keeping with the theoretical framework of the thesis, both production and reception are inextricably linked to the text as well as each other. It is for this reason that it is unnecessary

¹The rationale behind the choice of programme is explained in Chapter 3.

to include a separate analysis or interpretation of the programme itself. To do so implies, paradoxically, that it *is* possible to detach text from its interpretation, producing some sort of objective account. However, this thesis is not so postmodern as to assume that the programme has no independent existence of its own. It is still possible to give a broad description of content. The programme deals with the transition from primary to secondary school, tackling the concerns and problems involved. It does this by following six North London children and their parents, each of whom are exploring different options and facing various difficulties. The underlying argument is that despite the existence of several schools, a variety of factors such as lack of personal finance restrict the amount of choice available. If this documentary is to be classified, it would conform to Burton's (1990) 'expository' form and Bordwell and Thompson's (1990) 'rhetorical' category of documentary. In accordance with Corner's (1996) typology, "Parental Choice" is a mainstream investigative documentary programme. The visual presentation fits in with his evidential mode 3 (illustrative) in which:

"The visualisation is subordinate to verbal discourses, acting in support of their propositions or arguments, which they can frequently only partially 'confirm'." (Corner, 1996, p.29)

The mode of speech conforms to evidential mode 2 (testimony) whereby interview speech is used to substantiate the argument, encouraging "empathetic feeling from the viewer" (Corner, 1996, p.30). A transcript of the programme (see **Appendix H**) describes the simultaneous visual and verbal chronology of the programme, thus providing some idea of the text with which both producer and audience are interacting. The first analytical section describes those interactions.

7.2 Descriptive accounts

In each of the empirical studies within the thesis, analysis is guided by a thematic breakdown of the data, the object of which is the identification of common themes. However, at the same time this creates a danger of overlooking the holistic content of individual interviews

and group discussions, thus forgetting the context from which the themes are drawn. Indeed, in both Chapters 4 and 5, reevaluating the content of interviews and focus groups in the light of the themes unearthed adds perspective to those themes. This first section presents a summary of the producer interview and the four focus group discussions. It thereby gives the reader an idea of the context within which the further analyses are based. The thematic categorisations act as a framework for the summaries. This is possible because the themes incorporate all the data.

Producer interview

The comments and perceptions of the programme's producer directly relate to nine of the twelve themes. The other three themes (credibility; content-related comment; viewing habits) are more geared to the comments and perceptions of the audience. Riete Oord, the producer, is very clear about the definition and role of the documentary genre. She believes that a documentary programme is content-based and has a political agenda, thereby espousing an argument. In order to accommodate filmic criteria, she claims that an argument must have a clear beginning, middle and end. She presumes the genre to have a social and political role, but only to the extent of making people think.

"I think that documentary, that's when it's really at its best, really because it's observational and it's not political with a big P, but it's political in the sense that it makes people think. I hope that..there is a place for those kinds of documentaries." (INT, 170-175)

Her comments about the audience of the programme relate both to its intended audience and the response of the actual audience once it had been broadcast. The programme was primarily made for people involved in state education, although it is possible that those in the private sector would watch it simply to gain insight into that 'other world'. The producer believes the actual audience consisted of her own friends and children and parents from her local school:

"I sort of hoped that my mates would watch it, and most of, you know, the kids and parents that I meet at Graysborough... I'm sure not a lot of people who were in the private sector who continue in the private sector would watch

it because it wouldn't mean very much to them." (INT, 363-365; 371-374)

She also felt that the unappealing title, "Parental Choice", hindered the possibility of high ratings. For her, only two situations warranted consideration of the audience during the making of the film. One is the inclusion of clear commentary, which the producer believes is essential to the audience's understanding of a programme:

"You know, I didn't want lengthy commentary, but I needed the commentary to help me point the audience in the right direction. Because if you've got a lot of locations and a lot of names, and quite a lot of characters, you really need to be quite clear for it to work." (INT, 422-428)

The other, although relatively infrequent, is in controversial editing decisions. Imagining the response of the audience contributes to the decision about what to leave in and what to take out. The producer commented that a lot of people would or did find the programme depressing. She was also aware that the audience's response to this programme differed according to a viewer's political position, although this was the only difference she had noted. Beyond that, any criticism or misunderstandings are the fault of the viewer rather than the programme or its maker:

"I got a letter from that school saying, you know, they were disappointed because I portrayed Stoke Newington so negatively since all the children, a large percentage of them were going to go there, and should have been much more for the comprehensive and said how wonderful Stoke Newington was. I thought I had in the film, been very straightforward, it was a school on the way up, and people were beginning to take note. But people because of their own neurosis and paranoias, they chose not to listen to that." (INT, 712-723)

The producer's comments about the production process indicate her strong position of control and authority. She believes her intended programme structure did not change and that she retained most of the editorial control. The only constraints related to the subject matter i.e. gaining access to schools and dealing with paranoid parents, rather than the broadcasting environment itself. However, in contrast with broadcasting in general, the freedom she had to make the story she wanted to make regardless of its potential ratings, is a feature of the strand it was made for:

"Well Channel Four obviously want their ratings to be as high as possible, but actually I think "Cutting Edge", for whatever reason, they do take a few more risks. They say that, great, we have our audience pullers but we want to do some serious..more serious films, you know, more gritty, more whatever. And they do, I think, try to cover a diverse section, you know, range of subjects, some more popular than others." (INT, 665-674)

She believes that she conveyed a political story about how the middle classes weigh up and choose between state and private education. The programme deals with people's real experiences and parents' neuroses, and tackles the conflicting, concurrent issues of personal ideology and wanting the best for your own child. She believes that the programme is sympathetic to both points of view, and acts as a microcosm of the country as a whole. In terms of content, she wanted to subtly portray the dreadful state of education and the impossibility of moving from a state primary school to an opted out or private secondary school without being tutored or having money. She emphasises the importance to her of successfully conveying this:

"The main thing is that people understand [the programme]. There's a lot of documentaries that when they're edited..I'm not sure they're any clearer. I think it's pretty important that an audience follows your story." (INT, 411-415)

In terms of programme structure, the school had to be one in which people were making a choice, else there would be no narrative. She wanted a spread of characters pursuing different options, and deliberately used 'ordinary people' as opposed to experts who tend to pursue their own political agenda. The characters were articulate, good on camera and talked with honesty and passion.

Riete Oord is convinced that it would be very difficult to accuse the programme of being an inadequate picture of reality. Whilst every documentary will follow the bias of its maker, simply through their questioning of a situation, it is still possible to construct it in an objective manner:

"[by making it] about people's personal politics, so you're not making a huge political, you know, you're not throwing politics at their face." (INT, 628-

630)

The dominant features of the interview are the producer's sense of control and the relatively smooth running of the production process. Section 7.3.1 discusses the interview in relation to the dimensions established in the production study (Chapter 4).

Focus group descriptions

Table 41 outlines the amount of discussion within each theme and the extent of consensus and debate amongst groups.

Table 41 Framework of group discussions

THEMES/ SUBTHEMES	NO. OF ISSUES WITHIN THEME	NO. OF DEBATED ISSUES	WHICH GROUPS? (frequency in brackets)
Definition	16	3	2 (2) 3 (1)
Role of documentary	9	0	
Audience	8	0	
Programme description: content/subject/ issues	18	3	2 (1) 3 (3)
Programme description: strongest image	12	0	
Aims/objectives: within programme	9	0	
Aims/objectives: external to programme	1	0	
Programme structure	26	7	1 (1) 2 (2) 3 (4) 4 (1)
Credibility	7	2	3 (2)
Objectivity & Bias	10	1	4 (1)
Personal effect: interest/appeal	5	0	
Personal effect: annoy	2	0	
Personal effect: persuade	6	0	
Personal effect: act	6	1	1 (3)
Personal effect: depressed	3	0	
Personal effect: encouraged	1	0	
Content-related comment	NOT BROKEN DOWN INTO ISSUES OR ANALYSED IN TERMS OF GROUP AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT		
Viewing habits: watched it	2	0	
Viewing habits: didn't but would	1	0	
Viewing habits: didn't and wouldn't	2	0	
Viewing habits: don't know/maybe	1	0	

The summaries which follow present a profile of each group, highlighting the issues

discussed and points of consensus and debate.

Group 1: Male; C2D

The group collectively found the programme to be typical of the documentary genre. This is because it was told by real people, it was well put together, and showed the truth by simply presenting the facts, thus enabling the viewer to come to his/her own conclusions. There was similarly little debate over the general role of this and other documentaries. They provide an insight into a topic and how others live. They are both educational and entertaining. It was strongly felt that although the programme was aimed at everyone, it would only be watched by those to whom it was relevant. The group generally thought the programme was about the problems of the school entrance process. It was also suggested, and not disputed, that it focussed on parents rather than children, moneyed families, and a desire to get a better education. The two strongest images retained by the group were pushing children against their will and/or ability, and the cost of having a tutor. The group believed the programme showed that educational choice does not actually exist, and equality ends at the entrance examination. The only issue of contention was whether the programme had a good range of characters. Aside from that, the structure was easy to follow, although one person felt the start was misleading. The only desired additions were the views of teachers and old pupils.

The group as a whole found the programme credible - real life, the truth:

"It's the parents, it's believable, it's natural. If you've got someone who's telling you about it, it's just...that's their opinion. You might disagree, but just to watch other people..because basically everyone gets their knowledge from when people give their experiences, it's the truth." (MC2D, 391-397)

Objectivity and bias were not pressing issues within the group, and although one member described the programme as subjective rather than objective, this did not compromise its truth - indeed it is subjective experience which is believed to guarantee truth. The programme was felt to be interesting and/or entertaining by all except one member of the group, and it was generally assumed that it would not appeal to rich people. All groups commented on how annoying some of the parents in the programme were, but this group was the only group to find the teachers and some of the children annoying too. Rather than persuading, the

programme reinforces their views on issues that they were already aware of. They would not act any differently having watched the programme, basically because it, and they, cannot change anything. Of the five group members, three had not seen it but would have watched it, one had not seen it and would not have watched it, and one had not seen it and was unsure whether he would or would not have watched it. The discussion in this group was the shortest of the four, with little embellishment or anecdotal comment. The conversation itself remained consensual on the whole.

Group 2: Female; C2D

Characteristics cited as typical both to documentary in general and this documentary in particular are that it is well put together, wide-ranging and down to earth. There was a difference of opinion over whether documentary is subjective or objective, but this was not directly debated. However, documentary does provide an insight into a topic and is informative. It is worth noting at this point that the group did not dwell at all on abstract, structural issues, concentrating instead on programme content. Group members described the programme as dealing with the school entrance process and the problems therein. This was the only group to single out stress and pressure as central issues. There was disagreement over whether it dealt with London or the whole country. The group would have liked a follow-up programme. The four strongest images differed to those of the previous group: the exam hall; the pressure; the pain of failure for the children; and the general lack of choice. However, in consonance with the previous group, the aim of the programme was to show that there is no choice. It is unquestioningly believed that this aim was successfully fulfilled. There was some debate over whether there was a good range of characters, although more characters would make the programme harder to follow. However, at the same time, this was the only group that felt, although not unanimously, that the programme showed all possible angles and was honest and true:

“It showed different angles, like..you sort of like went into the higher class schools and you had a typical looking higher class posh speaking person showing them round, and then in the state comprehensive school they was all singing Bob Marley, you know, get down to it, and I thought that was so true.” (FC2D, 465-471)

The programme's honesty and truth is repeatedly asserted. The programme reflects real life which, in this group, represents truth. Credibility is guaranteed through the expression of characters' personal experiences:

"Moderator: Is there anything about it that was slightly unconvincing?

5: No, because it was real life.

1: No, because it's individual people isn't it, what they do and what's true life." (FC2D, 908-914)

Only one member of the group questioned the programme's objectivity. The group agreed that the programme raises awareness, although most of the participants were already aware of the problems highlighted. Watching the programme encouraged the majority of group members to make more effort themselves to combat these problems, although this was coupled with murmurs of depression and helplessness at the prospect. Of the five group members, two had already seen the programme, two had not but would watch it and one had not and would not. There was a huge amount of anecdotal comment in this group and it was consensual and amicable by nature. One particular group member tended to provoke debate.

Group 3: Male; ABC1

Once again the programme was considered to be typical of documentary, but for very different reasons. There are different types of documentary, but they are all subjective, tell a story, and possess certain structural characteristics. Indeed, the main role attributed to documentary in this group is entertainment. There was a general feeling that one only watches a documentary if it is relevant to them, although it does also depend on the reasons for watching documentary in the first place. However, a documentary needs to define its audience and target it. This programme was about parents, rather than children, and *their* perspective on the amount of choice in the education system, rather than the reality of choice. There is debate over whether the programme concerns London exclusively or the country as a whole. However, whether micro or macro, it was an incomplete picture with apparently confusing objectives, lacking both analysis and explanation:

"It wasn't a very scientific thing, it wasn't statistical, it wasn't this is what goes on..so that's what I found quite confusing.." (MABC1, 60-62)

The strongest images mentioned were very specific shots which were considered amusing or, in the case of one participant, poignant. The group rather cynically agreed that the programme was *trying* to show that no choice exists for parents. However, the reality is a programme which was both confusing and misleading. It was seen as a political statement, a Channel Four portrayal of Middle England, a programme about characters rather than issues:

“I mean the guy that came up with the idea for that story must have had some viewpoint..” (MABC1, 1020-1021)

Having said that, the range of characters was considered effective, making for a programme which was both entertaining and easy to follow. However, the programme could only be regarded as entertainment. It was critically described as having a misleading beginning, being confusing, unbalanced, unscientific, lacking facts and highly subjective. The group unanimously rejected the programme’s credibility as an explanation of the issue - its *external* validity, but there was debate about its *internal* validity, i.e. the credibility of the stories and characters within the programme. It tended to be a parent challenging credibility based on personal experience and a non-parent defending credibility based on knowledge of the issue. The programme was not objective, indeed no documentary is, and, as mentioned above, the group overwhelmingly related to it as a form of entertainment:

“I was looking for first of all to have some sort of relaxation, and being entertained, in inverted commas, in a subject area which has a sort of factual background.” (MABC1, 1102-1105)

The group felt it was too middle class and found some of the characters annoying. No-one was persuaded of anything, yet there was a difference of opinion over whether they would act differently as a result. One participant found the programme depressing, another found it encouraging. One group member had made a point of watching it, one had not watched it but would, two had not and would not, and the fifth was unsure. This group was the most argumentative of the four groups, with debate centring around the issues of programme structure and credibility.

Group 4: Female; ABC1

Once again the group found the programme typical of the documentary genre. It conveyed a certain message, was wide-ranging and highly subjective. The group described documentary in general as informative, watchable, educational and thought-provoking, although one participant believes it has no role. People will only watch a documentary if it is relevant to them, and documentaries need to define their audience and target it. A viewer's reaction to the programme depends on his/her own viewpoint, and whilst this group claimed they would not unquestioningly accept a programme's content, *other* people would. The programme is about the school entrance process and its problems. It applies to London and any other urban centre, and it would be nice to have a follow-up programme. Like the previous group, the participants felt the programme's objectives were confusing, further confounded by a lack of explanation and analysis:

“I can't really tell from that programme what the system is really though.”
(FABC1, 340-341)

The group's strongest images were very similar to those of Group 2 - the exam hall, the pressure, the worry for parents and the reinforcing of stereotypes. The programme is intended to create alarm and, in parallel with the feeling in Group 3, it *attempts* to show that there really is no choice in the education system, i.e. the group members are aware that the programme is a construction:

“They're never neutral. Its aim, and anything they have within it, is the one that they want, which was to show that you don't have a choice.” (FABC1, 143-145)

The programme was lighthearted with effective characters. However, again similar to the sentiments in Group 3, it is an unbalanced, incomplete and highly subjective depiction of the issue. Whilst the characters were effective, there was debate over how far their comments were faithful or had been edited purely to create that dramatic effect. Indeed, as far as credibility goes, the group felt the programme did not reflect real life and was clearly constructed for television. The programme is not fully objective, and it did not contain all relevant information:

“I think it could have been more objective. I think it could have fooled more people if it was a little bit more objective.” (FABC1, 984-986)

The group agreed that documentary *should* be objective, but debated whether or not this is possible. The programme was interesting and makes you aware of the issues rather than persuading you. There was no feeling of wanting to act differently as a result, despite sentiments of depression. One participant had not watched the programme but would, two had not and would not, and two were unsure. There were few clashes of opinion, but those that arose concerned programme structure and objectivity.

The relationship between these groups and the results of the general reception study are discussed in section 7.3.2.

7.3 Relation to the previous studies

The previous section outlines the perspectives and opinions of a producer and four different audience groups on the television documentary programme - “Parental Choice”. This section explores the relationship between the results of the general production and reception studies and those of this case study. In terms of production, how do the producer’s views relate to the dimensions identified in the production study? In terms of reception, how far do the patterns and approaches observed in these four audience groups correspond with those identified in the general reception study?

7.3.1 Relation to production study

There are two broad areas to examine. The first is the way in which Riete Oord’s opinions and perspectives on her own programme and the documentary genre relate to the issues within particular themes in the general production study. Furthermore, in the instances in which positional variables were relevant in the general study, the extent to which her comments conform to the patterns which supposedly characterize her positional identity i.e. independent producer, female, fairly well-established. The second concerns the common themes, which embrace the individual themes identified in the production study. These

common themes i.e. conceptions of service and forms of gratification, are abstracted from responses to individual themes. Riete Oord's position on these dimensions can be established in the same manner.

Riete Oord does not directly define documentary, but she believes it has a social and political role:

“it makes people think. I think that documentary, that's when it's really at its best...” (INT, 169-171)

The idea of making people think, and thus raising awareness, corresponds with the most widely referred to role or purpose of documentary identified in the general production study. Furthermore, the above quote supports the general observation that producers are particularly likely to allude to documentary's political role.

Riete Oord's commitment to audience comprehension and her recognition of who she will most likely be communicating to indicates a strong awareness of the presence and importance of the audience. Interestingly, the general study shows that only producers, and particularly female ones, emphasise the importance of communication and comprehension. However, in the context of the theoretical framework of the thesis, the methods they use to achieve this are unsatisfactory - again mirroring the general findings. Audience comprehension is assumed rather than assessed, thus the depth of audience understanding is limited. The general study outlines a variety of ways in which the assumption is made e.g. by consulting colleagues and/or friends, using relatives as representative, using one's own intuition. This producer bases her assumptions on her own intuition and judgement:

“I thought I had in the film, been very straightforward, it was a school on the way up, and people were beginning to take note. But people because of their own neurosis and paranoias, they chose not to listen to that. And then I worried, I thought God, have I not made that clear enough. So I look at the programme again, and to me it is...” (INT, 718-726)

As regards audience interpretation, the producers in the general study widely believed that

a well-made and convincing film will be accepted as the truth, and, concurrently, that such a film needs a strong storyline and good characters. Both of these points are made by Riete Oord.

In terms of constraints, Riete Oord does not feel that her work has been compromised or limited by any external pressures, although she is well aware of the restrictions that can be imposed by particular strands. Interestingly, in the production study, feelings of constraint are associated with a producer's career position. Riete Oord is a well-established producer with her own particular style and expertise. Consequently, and in keeping with the general results, rather than having to conform to a company or strand's own vision, it is they who approach her.

The producer's description of the types of format she uses corresponds with her own aims, the subject matter and her own particular style:

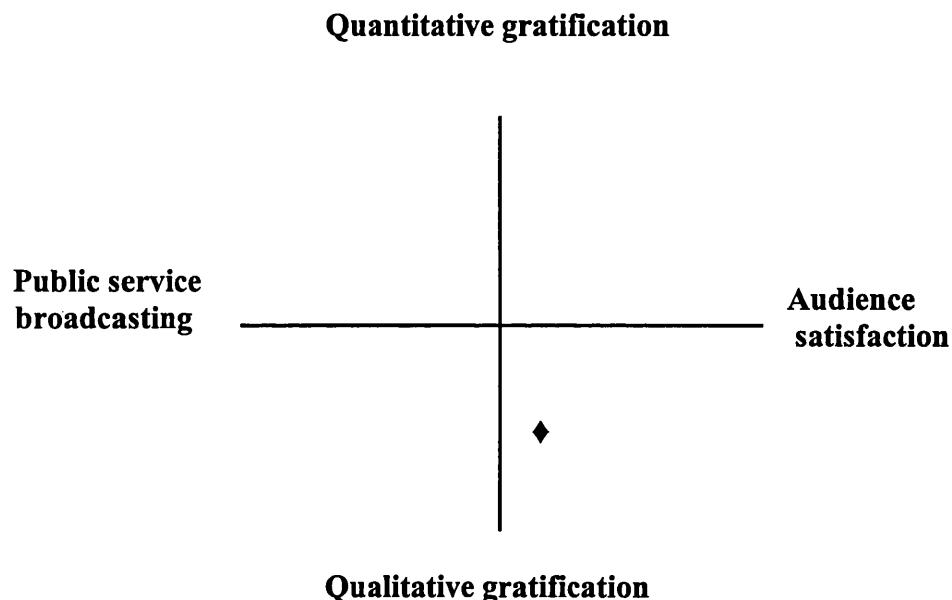
"I think the style it's shot and the observations I make are very similar to my other films. But I think, because it's much more content-based, I was basically having to deal with an argument. The process is very filmic because you're following six kids and they take an exam and you wait for the results - you've got a beginning, middle and end. But the actual content of it, which is really about education, is almost like an essay title, it could have been an essay, which I had to make into a film." (INT, 49-60)

Thus she refers to three of the seven categories mentioned in the general study. However, all three relate to the relationship between the producer and the programme rather than any external influences e.g. current fashions, strand requirements etc. This collection echoes the trends in the production study, where producers cited factors internal to actual programme-making, whilst commissioning editors focussed on external issues. Similarly, Riete Oord's reasons for making the programme stem from an interest in the subject matter and its importance to society, which was the second most widely cited reason amongst producers in the general study.

Riete Oord's views on these different issues can be used to locate her on the two broad dimensions identified in the general production study. The dimensions encapsulate different

perspectives on the relationship between broadcaster and audience and the role of the television documentary genre. The first dimension - conceptions of service - considers the type of service documentary should provide, ranging from a traditional, paternalistic public service broadcasting outlook to an audience-led approach. Riete Oord is concerned with telling stories which she believes are important for people to think about. However, at the same time she does not assume a passive audience, and is aware of targeting a particular 'interested' public. Thus, she lies somewhere in the middle, veering slightly towards the audience-led end of the dimension. The second dimension - forms of gratification - looks at the sort of fulfilment sought by broadcasters, extending from the quantitative gratification of broadcasters at one end to the qualitative gratification of audiences at the other. Riete Oord seems uninterested in ratings and much more concerned with the audience's comprehension of her programmes. Thus, she is located more towards the qualitative than the quantitative end of the dimension. The following diagram illustrates this dimensional positioning:

Figure 3 Riete Oord's positioning on the producer dimensions



In accordance with the relevant positional variables, Riete Oord can be categorised as a female, fairly well-established, independent producer. In the production study, all the female respondents were located below the horizontal line. All the producers except one were located in the left two thirds of the diagram. Whilst both a wealth of experience and being an independent producer did not determine where one would be positioned, all of the more experienced female independent producers could be found in the centre of the diagram just below the horizontal line. Thus, in terms of positional identity, Riete Oord's location concurs with the positioning suggestions of the production study. Despite the marginal correspondence between positional variables and perspectives in the general study, the fact that Riete Oord's position corresponds concurs with those results further supports the assertion that certain positional characteristics influence the perspective one has on the role of television documentary and the relationship between the broadcaster and his/her audience.

7.3.2 Relation to reception study

In a similar vein to the previous section, this comparison examines three issues. One is the degree of similarity between the themes discussed in this study and those in the general reception study. The second is the similarity of viewers' interpretative approaches in the two

studies. The other is the extent to which the positional variables which united and differentiated participants in the general study, guide the perspectives of the audience focus group participants in this case study.

It is important to remember that the object of discussion in the general study and this case study is different. In the general study, the focus was the documentary genre and documentary programmes in general, whereas here the focus is a particular television documentary programme. This has both positive and negative implications for the analysis. On a positive note, my assumption is that the way audiences interact with a particular programme strongly relates to their perceptions about the genre in general. Indeed, one of the central purposes of this case study is to provide an insight into how and to what extent this is the case. Thus, there are certain themes raised in the general reception study which, although not directly addressed in the case study, can be abstracted from viewers' comments about this particular documentary programme. However, the downside of having different foci is that other themes discussed in the general study are either not referred to or are irrelevant in the case study and vice versa.

All the points raised in connection with the definition of documentary related to the programme's characteristics - which was one of the four issues identified in the general study, for example:

"Documentary is about showing the truth about what happens to the best of their ability." (MC2D, 409-411)

From the general study it was possible to construct a list of typical documentary features common to all groups: it imparts information or educates; it is factual or real; well-researched and in-depth; less urgent and current than the news; its purpose is to inform and educate the public; it should aim to be objective; its credibility is largely dependent on a programme's reputation; and people generally watch it through an interest in the subject matter. The four groups in this case study referred to all of these features, except for the comparison with news - probably because they were not directly asked to make such a comparison. Additional characteristics are that it is entertaining and tells a story (ABC1 men), and that it conveys a

certain message and appeals to a target audience (ABC1 women). However, it is the extent to which viewers believe that this documentary programme, or any for that matter, meets these criteria which differentiates occasionally within but most often between groups:

“I think it highlights the..that everybody obviously in their individual area feels the same, that there aren’t enough good schools for their children to go to” (FC2D, 719-722)

“it was a documentary that was just going through a particular part of the system, and it was there to reinforce the stereotype that people have got, and there’s no better way to do that than to use concerned parents, and then that really hits home.” (FABC1, 1397-1402)

As in the general reception study, the key dividing characteristics are reality, credibility, objectivity and bias. These divisions are more evident in other themes.

There are two main observations about perspectives on the role of documentary. Firstly there were only nine issues raised across these groups, compared to fourteen in the general study. Furthermore, no issue provoked direct intragroup debate, whereas two main issues were contentious in the general study. However, it is also worth noting that the contentious issues in the general study - documentary as opinion former and documentary as slot filler - were not even raised in the case study. The main issues for the case study participants revolved around informing, entertaining, educating and raising awareness, for example:

“Well I think they’re all the same. It’s partly to get people watching it, but it brings a small view of a certain subject across. And it’s entertaining and slightly educational.” (MC2D, 268-271)

It is interesting to note that the notion of documentary as entertainment was more prevalent here than in the general study, although also only in the male groups. Most of the issues in the case study echoed those of the general study. Two exceptions, raised in the case study but not in the general reception study were documentary’s inability to change behaviour (C2D men) and its total lack of social role (ABC1 women). These are both negative yet unchallenged. In the case of the latter, there was no debate because other roles had already

been established and the comment was clearly the personal, rather cynical, view of one participant.

All other themes in the case study are directly related to the programme itself, although they draw on beliefs and perspectives about the definition and role of documentary in general. In other words, the participants' comments about the programme indicate how far they believe it conforms to their expectations about the genre's definition and role. This process of evaluation establishes the degree to which the programme is accepted or rejected.

There is unanimity over what the programme is broadly dealing with:

“It’s the problems of getting into a secondary school which you want for your kid” (MC2D, 24-25)

“I suppose it was trying to see whether there is choice for parents in sending their children to a school” (MABC1, 12-14)

However, the data exhibits differences as well as similarities in perspective which together form very clear patterns. These patterns of perspectives parallel those of the general reception study. They are based fundamentally around the issues of credibility, objectivity and personal uses and gratifications, echoing the discussion on documentary definition and role, and thus highlighting the link between the general and the specific.

The variation and difference is not in the viewers' description of the programme's content, but the *manner* in which they describe it, together with their evaluation of the storytelling process. The main patterns of difference also correspond, although not always unanimously, with group divisions. In the themes dealing with programme description and aims and objectives there is a clear difference between comments relating to programme content and those referring to programme structure. In terms of content, viewers refer to the topic the programme deals with i.e. the school entrance process, and the problems it raises for parents. In terms of structure, viewers comment on the way the story is being told, and the effect that has on an evaluation of the story itself. The discrepancy is between those viewers who

explain what the programme *is* doing, for example:

“They go on about parental choice and all the rest of it, but at the end of the day you haven’t got a hope in hell.” (FC2D, 839-841)

and those who outline what the programme is *trying* to do, for example:

“Its aim, and anything they have within it, is the one that they want, which was to show that you don’t have a choice.” (FABC1, 143-145)

In the case of the former there is correspondence between the way the programme is described and its aims and objectives. However, in the case of the latter, whilst their description of superficial programme content is the same as the other viewers, their perception of the programme’s aims and objectives differs based on their awareness of and opinions on the programme’s structure. As a result, a programme’s aims and objectives are perceived to be related to the programme-maker rather than the programme’s content. These same viewers, in this particular study, tend to be critical about programme structure. It is possible that if structure were commented on but not criticised, their perceptions of the aims and objectives of the programme would mirror their description of programme content. Nevertheless, the programme is criticised for being confusing, unscientific, unstatistical, incomplete, and lacking analysis. The inclusion and examination of two other themes - ‘credibility’ and ‘objectivity and bias’ - help to further outline and explain the emerging patterns of difference.

Interestingly, it is those viewers who *do not* criticise the programme’s structure who perceive the programme as true and thus highly believable:

“It’s the parents, it’s believable, it’s natural. If you’ve got someone who’s telling you about it, it’s just..that’s their opinion. You might disagree, but just to watch other people,, because basically everyone gets their knowledge from when people give their experiences. It’s the truth.” (MC2D, 391-397)

The programme is honest and portrays real life. It is the very use of subjective experiences which conveys this, and this is consolidated by these viewers’ knowledge of their own or others’ personal experiences. However, for those who *do* criticise the programme’s structure,

their criteria for its credibility reveal much of the basis for that criticism, for example:

“I think it could have been more objective. I think it could have fooled more people if it was a little bit more objective. I think, you know, if anyone was to actually sit for less than two minutes they’d realise that, yes, it’s a bit worrying, but yes it wasn’t exactly fair, as we just said, we established it quite early, and a lot of people probably established that quite early, that it wasn’t a very fair cross-section of parents or children or anything..” (FABC1, 984-993)

“I didn’t feel some of it rang true entirely, in the sense that I didn’t feel those parents..they were the parents of Lawrence, was it, in Stoke Newington, would ever have put their child in for City of London, I don’t think they’d have had six thousand quid of disposable income to pay for the fees. And I can’t help feeling that someone suggested that to them - well, that would make a good bit of tv - it just didn’t seem in character with them” (MABC1, 162-171)

The first quote aligns credibility with a notion of objectivity. The second quote assesses it in relation to common sense knowledge and experience. It is worth noting that the first quote was from a non-parent and the second from a parent. The difference between parents and non-parents is discussed later. However, whilst some viewers did judge the programme’s validity on the basis of its objectivity, for others it was its *subjectivity* which guaranteed credibility. In parallel with the general study, the majority view is that a programme should *aim* to be objective by employing strategies of fairness and balance, although objectivity will never actually be achieved. The participants in the case study were divided over whether or not this programme attains that fairness and balance. The assessment goes back to the criteria for assessing credibility. If the programme’s claim to reality could be substantiated by a viewer’s knowledge, experience and/or beliefs about documentary, then it is judged to be fair and balanced.

This pattern reflects the findings of the general reception study. The existence of critical and non-critical viewers corresponds with two distinctions in the general study - a critical vs. referential style of viewing, and a fundamental scepticism vs. fundamental acceptance of the documentary genre. However, what has not been considered in any detail, and is not directly addressed in the general study, is the role of the subject matter itself in the relation between

viewer and text. What has become clear both here and in the general reception study is the role of personal knowledge, experience and beliefs in a viewer's assessment of a television documentary programme. The difference in viewers' approaches to documentary is a clear indication of the varying balance between content and structure in interpretation. However, whilst the general reception study provides a foundation for understanding audience interpretation, it only addresses general perceptions and both retrospective and prospective situations. Similarly, the relationship between content and structure is theorised by viewers rather than directly illustrated. Consequently, the effect on interpretation of the relationship between the type and/or amount of knowledge the viewer has about a topic and a programme on that topic is unclear.

This study used a particular type of topic knowledge - personal experience of the process covered in the programme - as a means of examining the role of content in interpretation. The idea being that those with personal experience (parents) bring some sort of expertise to the interpretive process which may or may not affect interpretation². The results indicate that the non-parents, i.e. those assumed to have no direct personal experience of the programme's subject matter, follow the divisions already outlined. One category of viewer has a fundamental scepticism of documentary which ties in with a focus on the structure of the programme and an assessment of credibility based on factual knowledge of the world:

"They had no cross selection of characters in there. They had everyone from exactly the same background, from exactly..they had everyone from the same social class, they looked..pretty much the same economic background, they all living in an area that's all been very socially the same in every other aspect. If it were a true documentary and it's giving people a true picture of what's going on then they'd pick everyone from every social background and area, rather than six people from exactly the same." (FABC1, 871-882)

The other type displays a fundamental acceptance of documentary, tying in with a focus on programme content. For these viewers, credibility is based on personal experience of the subject matter. However, as they do not have personal experience of the issues themselves, they rely on the personal experiences of others:

²Other examples are teachers, politicians, academic educational experts etc.

“It’s the parents, it’s believable, it’s natural. If you’ve got someone who’s telling you about it, it’s just..that’s their opinion. You might disagree, but just to watch other people..because basically everyone gets their knowledge from when people give their experiences, it’s the truth.” (MC2D, 391-397)

The question is whether parents will abandon any other form of credibility assessment in favour of their personal experience. However, there are two distinct approaches which still conform to the underlying distinctions of the general study. One is based on a comparison between one’s own experiences and emotions and those of the characters in assessing the programme’s truth, for example:

“Yeah, my son had private tuition for a year to get in to like a school like that. And we paid £20 a week for private tuition and it was three buses away and he’d have to leave at quarter to seven in the morning. And it got up to the day of the examination, he was physically sick, and I said no, we can’t do it to him.” (FC2D, 136-142)

The other is based on a comparison between one’s own experience and knowledge of the issues involved and how well the programme represents them, for example:

“that made me think that perhaps the people making it had been a bit more..let’s do a social experiment, what would happen if a kid from a Stoke Newington primary school applied to the City of London with no preparation at all. In reality I don’t think they’d ever have done that. So that made me a little bit suspicious.” (MABC1, 179-185)

Thus, whilst having personal experience is relevant in both viewing approaches, it appears that the first approach is still linked with a focus on programme content within a fundamental acceptance of documentary, and the second with a focus on programme structure within a fundamental scepticism of documentary.

The general study examined why people watch, do not watch, stop watching and keep watching television documentary programmes. This cannot really be explored within the case study as the participants were required to watch this particular programme. The personal effect that the programme had corresponds with certain positional characteristics and is considered in the following discussion.

In terms of positional identity, the general reception study found both socio-economic status and gender to be relevant to the distinction between different interpretive styles and approaches. In the case study, all the distinctions that have been outlined - between critical and non-critical viewers, between focussing on structure and focussing on content, between truth through representation of issues and truth through emotions and experiences - clearly map on to the division between ABC1 and C2D groups. Whilst the analysis examined different themes and approaches separately, socio-economic status, as a positional characteristic, highlights the interdependency of various factors. The gender difference in the general study was slight, with men tending to talk in terms of the benefits of documentary to self whilst women referred to its benefit to others. However, the only clear gender differences in the case study were in the way participants described the effect the programme had on them. The men tended to discuss the programme in terms of its entertainment value, whilst the women concentrated on its capacity to raise awareness:

“I think it just shows..I think it just highlights an area for me that I never really think about.” (FABC1, 1246-1247)

When asked about the programme’s strongest image, the men cited issues, shots and comments, for example:

“Trying to push your kids into something they don’t want to do, that they’re not going to achieve.” (MC2D, 600-602)

However, the women remembered specific emotions and feelings:

“I think the strongest image is the disappointment of that woman, when it came to her child, and that..it was told in the most effective way conveying how worrying the whole system is, for me.” (FABC1, 1383-1387)

In a similar vein, only women expressed any emotional response to the programme. Thus, the gender patterns of the general reception study are not clearly replicated in the case study. This implies that the marginality of differences in the general study was purely coincidental, that the differences were linked to its broad and hypothetical nature, or that the particular programme used for the case study does not stimulate the same gender-related differences.

The differences which exist in the case study conform to the usual gender stereotypes which associate men with high self-confidence and action, and women with low self-confidence and emotionality. Due to the reduced number of focus groups it was impossible to identify any gender-driven differences between ABC1 and C2D groups.

The previous two sections establish some useful correspondence between the results of the case study and those of the general production and reception studies. The correspondence guides an understanding and explanation of both the production and reception of this particular documentary. It suggests that the general context and specific context are linked, most notably through positional variables, thus emphasising the role of the viewer in the interpretation of television documentary. All of these issues will be further explored and discussed in Chapter 8. However, what is still unclear is the nature of communication in this particular programme. Which of the producer's ideas are understood? To what extent? By whom? In other words, how far do the patterns of interpretation correspond with the aims and beliefs of the producer? The next section explores these questions.

7.4 “Parental Choice” - the link between production and reception

The fundamental question underpinning the whole thesis concerns whether the transmission of information is possible within a ritual approach to mass communication. In the context of television documentary, this amounts to the extent to which viewers understand or appreciate documentaries in the way the programmes' producers believe or want them to. How far is there a match between the convictions of the producer and the interpretations of the audience? The first two studies illustrate the amount of difference, as well as similarity, in perspectives and perceptions across both producers and audiences. In terms of programme-making, these differences concern the relationship between both television and the audience and the broadcaster and his/her audience, which manifest themselves in the type of programme made. Yet they agree on how to make a programme credible - although it is difficult to assess whether they do in fact use the same techniques, and whether any

differences relate to their perspectives, without comparing programmes made by producers inhabiting different positions on the two dimensions identified in chapter 4. In terms of viewing, the difference manifests itself in the expectations one has of documentary and the extent to which a programme conforms to those expectations. The empirical design of the thesis reflects its theoretical assumptions. Emphasis is put on recognising the social context in which the communicative process takes place. Thus the studies so far illuminate that context and explore its interrelation with the processes of production and reception. Finally, in this case study, the views of participants are compared to the results of the previous two studies in order to assess how well they translate from a general context to the specific context of a particular documentary programme. However, the basic question, in relation to the thesis's interest in information transmission, has still not been answered. Did the viewers understand the programme "Parental Choice" in the way the producer wished or imagined them to? In other words, what is the relation between production and reception? The answer to the question, and the ways in which viewers differ from the producer's expectations and each other can then be explained in the light of the previous results.

There are three issues on which to compare the producer's intentions and audience perceptions. What is the programme about? Who is it made for and who will watch it? How will the audience respond? According to Riete Oord, "Parental Choice" is a political story about how the middle classes weigh up and choose between state and private education. However, of all four groups, only the male ABC1 group picked up on the political angle. Nevertheless, all four groups grasped the producer's aim to portray the education system in disarray and how impossible it is to move from a state primary to an opted out or private secondary school without being tutored or having money. Both the male groups acknowledged her concentration on people's real experiences and the neuroses of parents. However, both female groups talk in terms of stress and pressure rather than neuroses. Riete Oord believes she clearly described the conflict between one's personal ideology and wanting the best for your child, but no-one expressed the debate in these terms - in fact, the male C2D group described it as pushing children against their will. Whatever the debate, only the female C2D group felt, as asserted by the producer, that the programme was sympathetic to both sides. Both ABC1 groups actively denounced this claim. Riete Oord claims that the

programme is a microcosm of the situation in the country as a whole. There was debate amongst both female C2D and male ABC1 groups about this, but the female ABC1 group rejected the suggestion outright. The producer says it is a programme about ordinary people, which only the male C2D group commented on. She also feels it depicts a spread of characters, each pursuing different options. This is recognised in all groups, but debated in both C2D groups - with the male group actually feeling that, despite its aim, the programme focusses on families *with* money.

In terms of the audience, Riete Oord believes it is a programme made primarily for those involved in state education, thus she has defined and targeted a particular audience. Furthermore, it will only be watched by those with an interest in the subject or her. Both the ABC1 groups recognised this, although the male C2D group felt the programme was still aimed at everybody. Riete wanted to make people think, which both the female groups believed the programme achieves. She is also convinced that the programme cannot be accused of being an inadequate portrayal of reality. She accepts that every programme-maker will be biased, but the construction of the programme itself is objective. This conception of objectivity is echoed in the C2D groups but was something specifically *not* sustained in the ABC1 groups. The producer felt that political viewpoint was the only factor which would affect audience response. The study did not compare viewers' responses according to their politics, but only the female ABC1 group acknowledged that this could be a potential source of difference. Riete Oord stated that a lot of people found the programme depressing, which was upheld in the female C2D and male ABC1 groups. A participant in the female ABC1 group felt it created alarm. Finally, it is worth mentioning that Riete's endeavour to make her programme clear and comprehensible was undoubtedly successful in the male groups, both of which stated it was very easy to follow. The women were more vocal about their own lack of ability to keep up rather than about whether or not the programme itself was difficult to follow. However, the important point is that the programme was not explicitly perceived as straightforward by all.

So what do these results say about the structure, content and effect of "Parental Choice" as a case study of documentary communication? The first point to make is that the viewers

recognised the programme as a type of documentary. Thus the conventions and strategies employed by the producer were effective in accessing viewers' expectations of the documentary genre. In terms of content, all viewers were aware of the general picture painted by the producer - of an education system in which movement from a state primary school to an opted out or private secondary school is dependent on wealth and tutoring. However, this was the only point which all groups mentioned in correspondence with the convictions of the producer. The producer claimed to be interested in making people think about the issue presented, rather than persuading viewers of any particular point. However, it is difficult to assess how much this is the case as the study required viewers to think about the issues. Furthermore, one wonders whether the producer really does intend merely to raise awareness rather than persuade.

Viewers may have been aware of what the programme was about, but did it have the desired effect on them? When I say 'effect' I am referring to both the way the programme is interpreted and also any action taken as a result of watching it. In terms of interpretation, the producer wanted the audience to be sympathetic to the political message she was portraying i.e. the existence of inequality of opportunity in moving from primary to secondary education. Herein lie the major differences. Some viewers are sympathetic to the issue but dispute the way the documentary represents it. Others are sympathetic to the issue because the documentary echoes their personal experience. Some viewers are sympathetic to the issue because the documentary representation of it corresponds with their idea of how truth is portrayed. Others are *unsympathetic* to the issue *because* it is portrayed through documentary, and thus is fundamentally biased. Thus, the way in which a documentary programme is interpreted depends heavily on personal experience, personal knowledge, expectations of the documentary genre and beliefs about the representation of truth. As discussed previously, differences across these factors map closely on to socio-economic status and, to a small extent, gender. In terms of prompting action, the producer was not concerned with influencing viewers' behaviour in relation to the issue. This was reflected amongst the viewers, the majority of whom would not do anything different having watched the programme.

The above account outlines how the audience responded to the specific content and audience interpretation issues raised by the producer. All groups concur with the producer on certain issues, but none with her on all points. It is not that their interpretations are vastly removed from the producer's convictions, but that the subtle differences either between producer and viewer or between viewer and viewer demonstrate the heterogeneous as opposed to homogeneous nature of documentary communication. The fact that audience interpretation involves so much more than the producer is aware of, thereby implying that the interpretation of documentary involves factors *beyond* the scope of one individual programme, only serves to reiterate once again the importance of appreciating not only the social context of production and reception, but also the influence and interrelationship of several levels of analysis.

The thesis asserts the importance of appreciating the social context in which both production and reception take place in order to better understand the nature of mass communication. So in what way do the findings of the previous two studies contribute to a more complete understanding of documentary communication in this case study? It is not that an appreciation of social context is necessary to understand *what* a producer is communicating or audiences are interpreting, but that it aids an understanding of *why* it takes that form. These studies were particularly organised to look for patterns based on different aspects of social context, most notably on the situational and positional levels of analysis. Simply establishing how producers make documentary programmes and how audiences interpret them tells us nothing about what is driving that interpretation. When a gap is identified between the intentions of a producer and the interpretations of audiences, it is only through an appreciation of the factors involved in arriving at that situation that light can be shed on why the gap exists and what can be done about it, if anything. In this case study viewers either exhibited a fundamental scepticism or acceptance of the programme's subject matter. This is dependent on their differing expectations of the documentary genre and the different types of knowledge applied to assess a programme's credibility. Thus, expectations and prior knowledge form part of the social context in which the programme is interpreted, and through which it is possible to understand and explain different interpretations. This would not be possible without a prior investigation of social context. However, these differences map on

to a commonly accepted form of social categorization - socio-economic status, which supports the notion of socially located discursive spheres, advocated within the ritual approach to mass communication. Similarly, the producer's beliefs about the effects of the programme correspond with her views on her own relationship with documentary and the relationship between the genre and its audience. Her views also coincide with those of other producers sharing the same positional characteristics, which suggests that these characteristics are influential to a certain degree in the way a programme is made, although, as noted earlier, this is speculative without a comparison with producers inhabiting different positions on the two dimensions outlined in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, the significant characteristics correspond with institutional differences i.e. job, position, company, and constitute the social context in which production takes place. By recognising these factors and the way they relate to perceptions and production, it becomes possible to identify the nature of the gap between production and reception, and, consequently, ways of dealing with it.

7.5 Discussing the nature of communication in “Parental Choice”

The conclusions of this study are effectively the conclusions of the thesis as a whole. As a result, this discussion is fairly short and remains as specific as possible to the case study. Chapter 8 expands on the issues raised here, placing them in a much broader theoretical and practical context.

The first, and overriding, point to make is that the distinction between ABC1 and C2D groups identified in the reception study was strongly replicated in this case study. This underlies even the distinction between viewers with and without familiarity or personal experience of the subject matter. Furthermore, the producer's general pattern of responses coincided with the perspectives of other producers sharing certain positional characteristics i.e. female, fairly well established producer. This again emphasises not only the importance of appreciating social context, but the necessity of understanding the concept of social context on different levels of analysis. However, the gender differences are subtle and do not emphatically support those identified in the general reception study. Nevertheless, the

general studies illustrate the importance, in programme interpretation, of elements of social context located at a positional level of analysis. This is confirmed by their relevance to interpretation in a different situation - the case study. However, although certain factors located at the positional level are involved in the process of communication and must be taken into consideration, it does not automatically mean - as is clearly evident in this research - that all positionally relevant information has a bearing on the way documentary is produced and interpreted.

What the case study illustrates is how the differences in viewer perspectives are translated into the interpretation of a single documentary programme. It also illustrates how an individual producer's perspective on their own programme locates them on the intersecting dimensions identified in the production study ('conceptions of service' and 'forms of gratification'). However, what it does not do is explore whether different positioning on those dimensions actually translates into different ways of making a specific documentary and different convictions about how that documentary will be interpreted. The case study would need to be repeated with producers located at different points on the dimensional spectrum.

Nevertheless, from a communication perspective, the case study's illustration of both discrepancy and correspondence between the assumptions and convictions of producers and the heterogeneous interpretations of viewers is revealing. The discrepancy highlights the gap between production and reception, as outlined by various researchers over the years, and indicated in Chapters 1 and 2 (e.g. Bakewell & Garnham, 1970; Schlesinger, 1978; Hall, 1980; Steven, 1993). However, this does not mean that there is no relation between a producer and his/her audience in television documentary. On the contrary, the case study indicates on what and amongst whom there are matches between the producer and viewers. The point is though that the producer does not know first of all that there is not a widespread match, and secondly, who the match would be with and on which issues. This is the nature of the gap. That there is correspondence between the producer's intentions and the interpretations of *certain* viewers illustrates that a degree of information transmission is possible. Other factors are involved which may affect interpretation e.g. personal experience,

but the important point is that the producer's beliefs about what the audience will find credible matches the beliefs and expectations of this section of the audience. So the problem is not the impossibility of information transmission, but the producer's lack of understanding of the *varying* expectations of documentary amongst its audience and, subsequently, viewers' varying criteria for assessing its credibility. This is addressed further in the final chapter.

Another interesting issue, which is also pursued in more depth in the final chapter, is the relationship between producer, text and viewer in the television documentary genre. Although the introduction of text, in the form of particular subject matter, certainly invoked different types of interaction between that text and its viewers, the underlying interpretive approaches still corresponded with those identified in the general reception study. I would suggest therefore that, in the context of television documentary, a viewer's expectations of the genre provides the framework within which programme interpretation is couched. Thus, it is not a question of where the balance lies between producer, text and viewer, but the nature of the interaction between the three. However, it is certainly necessary to undertake more research of this nature using different types of documentary and different subject matter in order to substantiate these claims.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the results of a case study of communication in "Parental Choice" - a television documentary programme which was broadcast on Channel Four as part of the *Cutting Edge* strand. The programme's producer was successfully located along the dimensions outlined in the production study, in accordance with the positioning of other broadcasters sharing her positional characteristics. Four audience discussion groups, differentiated on the grounds of socio-economic status and gender, containing both parents and non-parents, interpreted the programme in accordance with the predominant patterns established in the reception study. A comparison between the convictions and expectations of the producer and the interpretations of the viewers, found no consistent overlap. The findings support the theoretical assumptions of the thesis and the approach on which they are

based. The final chapter will discuss these findings in the light of communication theory, audience reception research and the television documentary genre.

CHAPTER 8

REASSESSING DOCUMENTARY COMMUNICATION

8.1 Introduction

Mass communication is an object of study across the social sciences, including sociology, psychology and anthropology. There have been many ways of characterising the structure of this diverse field of research, whether it be administrative versus critical (e.g. Melody, 1983; Smythe, 1983), functionalist versus Marxist (e.g. Mattelart & Mattelart, 1998), liberal functionalism versus radical functionalism (e.g. Curran, 1996), and according to what the central focus is taken to be, for example political economy (Golding & Murdock, 1991), the audience (Fiske, 1987), the text (e.g. Eco, 1979). This variety of approaches illustrate some of the major splits or debates within the field of media and communications and leads us to construe the contribution of the various social science disciplines in different ways, therefore directing the research agenda towards particular research questions as a consequence. It is an important task of contemporary media research to transcend these oppositions in order to advance our understanding of the subject. Some researchers are working to move beyond the gap between administrative and critical research, but this tends to focus on epistemology and politics. I want to focus on communication processes, which is why Carey's (1989) work serves as a basis for my research. However, whilst Carey's characterisation of the field focuses directly on the communication process, he does so using another opposition - between transmission and ritual approaches to mass communication. It is this opposition which I wish to transcend. In elaborating on the coexistence of both transmission and ritual processes in communication, this chapter explains how the present work begins to do so.

In Chapter 1 I explained how the motivation for the thesis stemmed from the developments in audience research. The majority of that work, in its acknowledgement of the complexities of the text/viewer relationship, adopts the ritual approach - the features of which I will expand on in this chapter. However, whilst I accept and expect a recognition of these complexities, I also believe that the process of transmission remains part of mass communication. Whilst the ritual process has been intensively rethought in recent years, the

process of transmission has been neglected. Transmission needs to be rethought in a modern light and theorised in association with the ritual view. In this endeavour, as I argued in Chapter 1, the television documentary represents a useful forum. This chapter begins by outlining Carey's definition of transmission and ritual approaches and how they represent separate and incompatible traditions. I highlight their strengths and weaknesses and, in the process, explain how the concept of transmission, as well as ritual, remains relevant. The chapter continues with a rethinking of the notion of transmission of information, thereby pursuing the interrelation between transmission and ritual processes in mass communication. I finish with an assessment of the implications of this work for audience research and the understanding of mass communication.

8.2 Transmission and ritual approaches to mass communication

8.2.1 The problem

Carey (1989) categorises the study of communication into two broad approaches - transmission and ritual. Transmission refers to the movement of a message from sender to receiver for the purposes of persuasion and control. Ritual refers to the role of mass communication in the creation, modification and transformation of a shared culture. The transmission approach is associated more with a focus on the message whilst the ritual approach is more concerned with the construction of identity and the evolution of culture. I base my work around these two approaches because they represent one way of encapsulating two main strands of communications research - namely the administrative and the critical - yet at the same time avoiding the political and geographical divisions which are often associated with the split between administrative and critical researchers. Questions within the administrative tradition are associated with media effects (e.g. Lasswell, 1971; McQuail & Windahl, 1993), whilst questions within the critical tradition focus on the media's role in the construction and impact of ideology and culture in society (e.g. Curran & Seaton, 1997; Seiter et al., 1989). The administrative school is generally, though certainly not exclusively, associated with the field of psychology, whilst the critical is more sociological. The central focus of my research addresses the relation between these two

broad approaches i.e. the transmission and the ritual. If the approaches encapsulate different questions driven by epistemological differences, then one would assume that they cannot be combined. However, this chapter, supported by the present research, argues for such a combination.

The thesis offers a case study of the relation between production and reception in television documentary which involves both of these analytically separate aspects of communication. The process of transmission emphasises the communication of a message from the producer to the viewer. Ritual communication processes instead locate the complexity of that producer/text/viewer relationship within a broader analysis of culture. In this thesis, I have suggested that a ritual approach may also be used to map the circumstances under which and between whom information transmission is possible, thus facilitating a rethinking of the concept of information transmission. To further develop this rethinking, I have advanced two central and interlinked elements. One concerns a recognition of the importance of the social context of communication processes for transmission as well as ritual - for context frames the entirety of communication. The second argues that social context must be analysed at several, different levels, as follows. The first is based on how people's outlook is affected by the situations they live in and the experiences they have had (their social context), and the subsequent effect that has on the communication process. The second concerns the spheres which operate at each of four different levels of that social context. As discussed in Chapter 1, these levels are the intra-personal (i.e. social cognition) the interpersonal/situational (i.e. the situation in which people interact) the positional (i.e. the social groups which one belongs to which constitute one's identity) and the cultural/ideological (i.e. the broad cultural beliefs which frame one's life) (Doise, 1986). As my focus is on the relationship between production and reception in documentary communication, so the research project is located primarily at the situational/interpersonal level of analysis, yet still recognises the influence of the other levels. My assumption is that it is important to recognise the influence of social context at each of these levels of analysis because mass communication is a social and cultural process and thus cannot be properly understood if it is removed from its social and cultural setting.

The television documentary is a genre which is popularly believed to be based around the concept of information transmission. This commonsense belief corresponds with academic theory, especially as regards the explanation of communication processes offered by the transmission view through its concentration on the direct transfer of messages. However, over the years the transmission approach has recognised that various elements of social context muddy the direct transfer of information as explained below. The ritual view however paid little if any attention to the possibility of information in its explanation of communication processes. The ritual approach focuses on communication as a cultural process, and thereby perceives the notion of a direct transfer of information as a simplistic and naive approach to understanding mass communication. Given these contradictions, is there any basis to television documentary's claim to transmit information? And can the nature of communication in television documentary contribute to our theoretical understanding of mass communication?

8.2.2 Differentiating transmission and ritual approaches

The transmission approach, from the early models (e.g. Shannon & Weaver, 1949) to contemporary adaptations (e.g. Bryant & Zillman, 1993; Salmon, 1989), focuses on the movement of a message from sender to receiver, according to a linear model of the transfer of information for the purpose of persuasion and control. However, notions of linear transfer, persuasion and control imply that the audience is rather more passive than active, hence the challenge from audience research (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1990; Morley, 1980) which argues for audience activity and the social context on which programme interpretation draws. By contrast, the ritual approach to mass communication highlights the role of mass communication in the creation, modification and transformation of a shared culture. The approach stems from the work of symbolic interactionists such as Mead and Dewey who believe that our understanding of the world and the meanings we attach to things are derived from social interaction. Thus, the ritual approach emphasises shared elements, recognising commonalities between people and consequently the social and cultural context of communication (e.g. Dayan & Katz, 1992). Consequently, whilst the transmission approach views communication as message transfer, with the possibility of 'adding in' elements which may affect that message's smooth passage from A to B (e.g. Noelle-Neumann, 1988;

Signorelli & Morgan, 1989), the ritual approach views communication as a cultural system, characterising the way people participate in the construction and interpretation of media forms. It is cultural because of the shared nature and purpose of that participation.

This stress from the ritual approach on communication in a cultural system foregrounds the question of context. As mass communication concerns the relationship between media and audiences, social and cultural context is central. Indeed, the findings of audience reception research, for example the role of particular media genres in the (re)construction of one's social identity (e.g. Radway, 1987) and the link between social background and programme interpretation (e.g. Morley, 1980), illustrate the central importance of social and cultural context to an understanding of the relationship between media and audiences. As outlined above, the notion of social and cultural context describes the way in which communication is situated or located, and it operates on several levels (intra-personal; interpersonal/situational; positional; cultural/ideological).

Thus contemporary audience research (e.g. Lewis, 1991; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994) follows more closely in the tradition of ritual as opposed to a transmission approach to communication. While the transmission approach allows for elements of social context to be added in to an explanation of communication in order to account for unsuccessful transmission (e.g. Graber, 1984; McLeod et al, 1994), the nature of social and cultural context in the ritual approach can be illustrated in two ways. Firstly, the approach describes communication as people's involvement with media forms and the subsequent role of that involvement in their everyday social practices. Secondly, this practice is culturally shared, i.e. it is common to the majority of members of a particular culture and thus represents a defining and unifying feature of that culture. My point is not that the notion of social context is ignored by the transmission approach while incorporated in a ritual approach, but that each approach deals with it in different ways. Problematically, the transmission approach positions social context as extrinsic to communication, whilst the ritual approach, by explaining social and cultural context as part of rather than an addition to the mass communication process, positions it as intrinsic to the nature of communication itself. Part of the task of interpreting transmission and ritual approaches to communication, then,

involves locating transmission in its social contexts - both of production and reception.

8.2.3 The relevance of the ritual approach to the production/reception relationship

The two fundamental characteristics of the ritual approach to communication, as described by Carey (1989), are the maintenance of society in time and the representation of shared beliefs. Rather than being centrally concerned with the use of knowledge to establish power relations between people or groups, the ritual approach views communication as the essence of human existence. This is because it describes the way people interact with symbolic forms and with each other in order to establish a consensual reality. Thus, communication is fundamental to social life. The point is that beliefs about self and the world are established through social interaction i.e. interaction between oneself and one's social environment. As social environments, or contexts, are shared, one would expect to find similarities across people, which can be termed cultural belief patterns. The inclusion of cultural patterns of belief in a theory of communication connects the individual with social structure. On this basis it is easy to see why a ritual approach is preferred over a transmission approach by audience reception researchers rooted in social psychological, cultural studies and sociological traditions. The ritual approach allows for the concept of the active audience by focussing on people's belief formation and, by highlighting the interaction between self and social context in the establishment of reality, it provides space for different definitions of that social context e.g. class structure (e.g. Morley, 1980), cultural identity (e.g. Liebes & Katz, 1990), gender (e.g. Livingstone, 1994). This stress on different social contexts supports a more complex and less direct operation of power and control.

Some of the results of the present work conform to this description of a ritual approach. All three studies show how the sharing of certain beliefs links group members, e.g. producers share views on how a documentary should be made, ABC1 viewers share views on the untrustworthy nature of documentary and, conversely, C2D viewers share views on the truth of documentary. These shared beliefs can be linked to respondents' social context, whether analysed at situational or positional levels. Thus, it is not only that producers and viewers are engaging with media forms in order to demonstrate, for themselves and others, their membership of certain groups, but that their engagement with media forms, due to the

complex nature of production and reception, is an indirect expression of their position within a social structure. Thus, the ritual approach posits social structure as intrinsic to the nature of communication whilst the transmission approach presents social structure as an obstacle to the successful flow of communication between individuals.

Having established that the ritual approach is more appropriate to an understanding of the relationship between production and reception, why still argue for including the process of transmission? Surely, if communication is about the expression of identity and the representation of shared beliefs, then there is no basis for persuasion through television, as it merely provides a space for the development of that identity. Consequently, when there is a match between producer and viewer it may not be indicative of the transmission of information from producer to viewer, but rather of a match between the *beliefs* of that producer and viewer. However, this explanation is too simplistic. Whilst the theoretical framework of this thesis incorporates more socially oriented approaches to both the audience and communication, Carey's ritual approach is still problematic. Although he refers to individuals' construction of reality, he does so to demonstrate the role of communication as a theory of culture, and he focuses thereafter predominantly on a broad cultural level of analysis. A broad cultural approach explains the framework of mass communication but does not elaborate how it applies to specific processes of mass communication within that, e.g. the relationship between television producers and viewers. In other words, while elements of a viewers' identity may explain their interpretations of a programme and thus how a programme functions as a means of constructing and reconstructing identity and social positioning, viewers do not claim to choose to watch a documentary programme for this purpose. The reception study and case study in the present research clearly show that viewers watch a programme to learn about a specific topic. Thus, although the differences among viewers' interpretations here certainly reflect aspects of their identity and background through the connection between viewer perceptions and social groupings, the results indicate that viewers do not watch in order to assert their identity but to engage with the subject matter of the programme. Thus, their focus is not the construction of identity, but the information content, or message, of the programme. So, whilst perceptions may reflect differences in identity and background, they are constructed in relation to the viewing of the

genre. Furthermore, the genre is watched because of an expectation that its subject matter will inform and educate. Thus, the nature of the communicative relationship between production and reception in television documentary is also associated with an expectation of the acquisition of information - a process associated with the concept of transmission. The next section assesses the relevance of this concept.

8.2.4 The relevance of the transmission concept to the production/reception relationship

The transmission approach focuses on the movement of a message from sender to receiver, and as a result gives the concept of the message an independent and concrete existence. Consequently, the message appears to have a fixed meaning separate from both production and reception processes - thus not reflecting the social context. However, the results of all three studies in this thesis - and the case study in particular - illustrate the complex notion of 'message' based on the interrelation between positional and situational factors, genre expectations and personal experience. The notion of a 'message' does not just concern an objective piece of knowledge dispersed by a producer which is then potentially blocked by subjective factors at reception. Both producers and viewers have assumptions about the structure and content of the message which, in turn, influence perceptions of that message. Perceptions of message structure and content also vary in accordance with both positional and situational factors. Thus, far from being isolated, objective and independent, the 'message' is inextricably linked to processes of production and reception.

I would argue that although the transmission approach appears inadequate, it does not necessarily follow that the *concept* of transmission is redundant. Indeed strong support for investigating the concept of transmission is the evidence in this thesis that both producers and viewers *expect* transmission to take place. To a large extent the documentary producer uses a programme, or text, to convey his/her ideas. In other words they inscribe their ideas in the text for audiences to accept, thus assuming and adopting a transmission approach to communication. Viewers overwhelmingly expect a documentary to pass on reliable knowledge for the purpose of information and education - again assuming a transmission approach. Furthermore, on a theoretical level, audience reception research is presently

engaged with the nature of the relationship between text and viewer, given both the active nature of the audience and the structuring role of the text (e.g. Livingstone, 1998). Thus, the combination of the way producers use text and the notion of the structuring role of text in the text/viewer relationship suggests some sort of communicative link between production and reception. In sum, the notion of transmission is relevant not only because it embodies the expectations of producers and viewers, but also because it refers to a relationship between, and thereby connects, production and reception.

Thus, it is possible to talk in terms of transmission at the level of the documentary programme for two reasons. Firstly, because both producers and viewers *expect* information transmission to take place. Secondly, because engagement with the message of the programme, which is constructed by the producer in order to be accepted by the viewer, provides the space in which identity is expressed and thus is the forum in which a producer's message is or is not accepted by the viewer (see section 8.3). Thus, the production and reception of a television documentary are the contexts in which elements of social identity and belief systems are activated, and it is the activation of these elements of identity and beliefs which determines whether or not information transmission takes place in accordance with the expectations of both producers and viewers. Understanding this process requires a more detailed explanation of 'message' and 'information transmission'.

8.3 Understanding transmission

I am arguing that it is possible to have message or information transmission within an essentially ritual understanding of mass communication, though this possibility depends upon a recognition of the various levels at which mass communication operates. This incorporation of transmission into a ritual approach has been little considered hitherto because while the ritual approach adequately explains the social outcomes (consensual culture, shared social knowledge, a stable status quo) of mass communication, it does little to explain the lower-level processes at work within that structure to achieve these outcomes.

The relationship between production and reception is one such process, operating at the interpersonal/situational level of analysis. It is at this level that an analysis of the programme itself is relevant to understanding mass communication. It is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, because of a shared expectation amongst producers and viewers about the significance of particular programmes - in this case, documentary. Secondly, because of the way viewers differentially interpret a specific programme's content which, on the interpersonal/situational level, pinpoints the circumstances under which information transmission is possible and simultaneously, on positional and cultural/ideological levels, supports a ritual understanding of the structure of mass communication. The link between expectations and interpretations is established because a specific programme will be interpreted by the viewer according to his/her expectations of that programme, as shown in this thesis and by others (e.g. Philo, 1993).

In terms of expectations, the present work illustrates how producers and viewers share an assumption that the documentary, as a genre, passes factual information from producer to viewer and thereby fulfils an educational and informational role. Consequently, with regards to documentary, producers and viewers share a transmission view of communication. Thus, the education and information criteria of 'good documentary' can be said to constitute a contract between producers and viewers. It is this contract which not only governs the genre's programme conventions, but also, fundamentally, allows the broadcasting industry to assume a connection between the genre and the fulfilment of a public service remit. The assumptions associated with this contract can be broken down in the following manner. Television is required to educate and inform its viewers. Education and information are associated with the concept of truth. The documentary, in attempting to inform and educate, is built on a claim to truth. Objectivity is thought to guarantee the portrayal of truth, thus the truth claim of a documentary is established using journalistic criteria associated with objectivity. There is an assumption that viewers will accept a programme as true, based on their acceptance of the way truth is established in that programme, and thus incorporate the programme within their own knowledge of an issue. Thus, a documentary programme will have informed and educated its audience and thereby contributed to the public service aim of the genre and the medium.

8.3.1 Levels of information

As a result of these genre expectations, viewers' evaluation of a programme, and thus their interpretation, is judged by the programme's credibility - that is, the credibility of its informational and educational content. The assessment of the credibility of a programme's informational or educational content is essentially an assessment of what I would term its 'broad message'. This 'broad message' is either accepted or rejected. Thus, I am defining the 'broad message' as the concept associated with successful or unsuccessful transmission, as described above. Whilst the viewer regards their programme interpretation as an accurate reflection of the programme's information content, the fact that this information content may be accepted or rejected - and thus transmission either succeeding or failing - suggests that transmission in this sense relates to one aspect of a programme's informational content. In short, I am suggesting that transmission does not concern whether or not the viewer has understood the programme (this being the question of reception theory), but rather that of whether he/she has accepted its claims (this being a question which depends on, but goes further than, programme reception).

The above implies a view of programme meaning which comprises several levels of information. The informational content can be regarded on four levels, and here I follow the three levels outlined by Corner (1991) in his attempt to analyse the concept of 'meaning' in media texts. The most micro level is that of the camera angles, shots and scene sequences - described by Corner and others as the denotative level. The next level is a programme's structure, i.e. the way the scenes and characters are woven together with narration into a story format - the connotative level. The third level is that of the broad message, i.e. the point or argument which the producer wishes the viewer to come away with. The final, fourth, level which I am adding to Corner's schema, might be termed the programme's world view, i.e. the broad assumptions on which the programme is based, concerning both a particular outlook on society and on the documentary genre. My third and fourth levels combined resemble Corner's third level. I have split this level into two in order to acknowledge the role of producer and text as well as viewer, i.e. that a viewer's interpretation of the broad message is a combination of their own frameworks of knowledge or world views (on documentary, society and, specifically, the programme's subject matter) and the broad message inscribed

by the producer into the programme which itself is a combination of world views on documentary, society and the programme's subject matter. The present work demonstrates that the problems for transmission, at least for documentary, relate to the third and fourth levels. The early chapters suggest that viewers do not have a problem understanding what the producer is trying to say, thus they have comprehended the way the programme has been constructed in order to formulate the broad message. Although this is often not the case for the genre of news (e.g. Gunter, 1987), what is debated is the credibility of that broad message, and the origins of this debate link to viewers' different world views, i.e. their beliefs about the nature of documentary, their knowledge and experience of society and the subject under discussion.

For example, in the programme "Parental Choice", all the viewers were aware of how the producer had constructed the programme in order both to illustrate the difficulties of moving from a primary to a desired secondary school, and to argue that money and tutoring were necessary to facilitate this, e.g.:

"I just think it looked at the kind of pressure parents put on their children to get in...you know, to succeed perhaps better than they had at school and at the end of the day they put them all through that and only one of them actually got to where they wanted them to be. And I think it kind of showed that, you know, these tests that are set for these schools, you do have to have private tuition for years and years and years, and you don't get the kind of education from the state school to prepare you for that kind of examination. So unless you go to private school from day one, or Dad pays for you to have private tuition, you haven't got a chance, unless you're a very gifted child." (FC2D)

That all viewers understood this demonstrates the comprehension of the first two levels of information, i.e. camera angles, shots and scene sequences, and also narrative structure, in the construction of the broad message. The differences among viewers emerge in the acceptance of that broad message as 'truth'. I argue that this depends on a combination of levels three and four. This combination is evident in the producer's perspective:

"I did try and say something without being sort of politics on the nose, because I think the whole thing is quite subtle. But I think I wanted to say that actually the state of education is pretty dreadful at the moment, and no-

one's really addressing it, and the kids who go to a state school, to get into a opted out school or a private school is almost impossible unless they have private tutoring. But they just...the primary schools just do not equip those kids to actually get in to those schools. And, at the same time, I'm also saying, well, the worst of us can't get our children into opted out schools or private schools because we haven't got the money, and that obviously the state system is preferable but really what are you letting your kid into, will they survive?"

This extract illustrates how her world view on the state of education in society frames the particular argument she is constructing in the programme, forming its broad message. For viewers to accept the programme's credibility they needed to share a particular view on the truth of documentary together with the world view on education and the argument presented in the programme although, as discussed later, the balance between these generic and thematic elements is difficult to discern.

Those viewers who accepted the credibility of the programme were those whose believed in the truth of documentary in general, based on the way it is constructed and given that it did not contradict their own personal experience of the issue, as I have discussed in Chapter 5. Those viewers who disputed the programme's credibility did so based on a scepticism of documentary in general based on the knowledge that it is a construction, even if certain elements of the programme corresponded with their beliefs on the subject, for example, recognising the difficulties and stresses involved in the transfer from primary to secondary schools. Thus, the dispute is not with individual elements of programme content, but the overall explanation of the issue - the context in which it is framed and presented as truth. Thus, in terms of levels of information, the problem is with the combination of levels three and four, i.e. the broad message and the world view, rather than the informational elements at levels one and two. By breaking down the different interpretations in this way, the conditions for successful transmission begin to become apparent. The next section explores these differences in more detail.

8.3.2 Considering information transmission and differences in interpretation

The split between accepting and disputing the programme's credibility was closely linked

to the division between ABC1 and C2D groups, with ABC1 viewers tending to be sceptical, whilst C2D viewers were more accepting of the programme's broad message. This division occurs despite the fact that all of the viewers share an assumption about how truth should be represented, i.e. through the objective presentation of an issue. To oversimplify somewhat, C2D viewers believe the programme correctly represents truth, whilst ABC1 viewers do not. Therefore there are additional factors at play at the level of 'world view' which are also involved in the acceptance/rejection of a programme's broad message. These are factors located at the positional level of analysis, specifically socio-economic status and gender, which illustrate the interrelationship between elements of social context and the relationship between production and reception - in short, how social context is intrinsic to the mass communication process.

Socio-economic status

In Chapter 5 I linked the variations in perspectives in accordance with socio-economic status with Bourdieu's theory of the relation between social class and social practice. Thus, different perspectives are explained in terms of the way economic and political factors are part of everyday social contexts. I want to expand on that link here. Differences in socio-economic status incorporate differences in occupation. Each socio-economic category represents a group of occupation types, yet occupation in itself is not directly relevant to a discussion of television documentary. Nevertheless, socio-economic status was a strong differentiating factor in viewer interpretation, although the label alone does not explain its link with perceptions. An explanation depends on establishing the shared characteristics within each socio-economic category, which may or may not be associated with occupation. It is these less overt group features which explain why socio-economic status is frequently linked to class. The two socio-economic status categories used in this research are ABC1 and C2D. Participants in the ABC1 groups held professional or managerial positions, whilst those in the C2D groups were semi-skilled or manual workers. The work of the former groups required educational qualifications whilst that of the latter tended to involve vocational training. The term 'socio-economic' highlights the link between social and economic factors. Indeed, these ABC1 group members earned a considerably larger amount of money than the C2D members, and this has consequences for lifestyle, opportunities and

outlook. If money influences what you are able and not able to do, then people in the same financial bracket - and thus the same socio-economic category - will work and play together. As a result, they move in a shared discursive sphere, or, as pointed out by Bourdieu (1980), structures of "cultural competence". The clear differences in response between the ABC1 and C2D groups reflect a theoretical assumption in the thesis that meanings are shared within social contexts.

This is further supported by the observation that any similarities between the opinions of producers - who qualify as ABC1 group members - and audiences on points other than the programme's broad message usually lay with ABC1 rather than C2D audience members. These differences represent different ways of interpreting television documentary and so have significant implications for the nature of documentary communication. The tendency was for ABC1 viewers to adopt the sceptical approach to documentary with challenges to credibility based on factual knowledge, whilst C2D viewers adopted the accepting approach with challenges to credibility based on personal experiences. Most likely the factor linking these interpretive differences to socio-economic status is education, as advanced by Morley (1980) in the *Nationwide* studies. I previously highlighted the educational requirements of the different job types - one emphasises the academic, the other stresses the vocational. I would argue that an academic training encourages broader critical and analytical thinking, challenges the concept of truth, and opens up a world beyond that of personal experience.

Gender

Viewers' gender also appears to correspond with certain shared beliefs about documentary. However, I want first of all to emphasise that, following the marginal nature of gender differences in all three studies, any explanation offered to account for differences is tentative. The main finding in both the general production and reception studies was that women were more concerned with the social benefits of television documentary, whilst the men focussed more on its benefit to themselves or the individual. However, the gender differences in the case study related to specific elements of that particular documentary's content, e.g. most prominent image in the programme, rather than towards its contribution to either self or society. Furthermore, the differences in the case study conformed with the usual stereotypes,

as outlined and challenged by Gilligan (1992), equating women with emotional identification and men with rational identification. This latter difference was also evident in Silverstone's (1985) study. However, in his study this particular gender difference was linked to perceptions of bias. Men were more likely to perceive bias based on their identification with the scientific content of the programme, challenging its objectivity, whilst women tended to be more involved with the representations of women and children in the programme, accepting the scientific elements without question. Similarly, in Corner et al.'s (1990) study, although gender is not the focus, it was a minor differentiating factor in one group (representatives of *Friends of The Earth*) in which the men were more concerned than the women about balance and bias in factual programmes. However, the studies reported in this thesis clearly indicate that varying perceptions of bias map on to socio-economic status rather than gender. Although, in the case study, the emotional/rational distinction maps onto gender differences in perceptions of the programme's strongest image, the distinction primarily characterises different ways of assessing credibility, which correspond with socio-economic status not gender. No gender-driven differences between ABC1 and C2D groups were identified in the case study, although this could have been the result of the small number of focus groups conducted in that study.

Although the combined results of these studies are contradictory, they fit into an overall pattern of gender-related audience reception across factual television programmes (e.g. Livingstone, 1994; Silverstone, 1985) in which women focus on the social and personal elements and men on the logical and rational. For example, in the audience discussion programme it was found that:

“...women in particular consider that the debates are of *social* value, while men were more likely to consider them pointless in that they reached no clear conclusion and were considered to have little influence.” (Livingstone, 1994, p.435)

The inconsistency across results depends on whether or not gender differences are mapped on to differences in viewers' use of either expert or lay knowledge and/or the importance they attribute to that chosen knowledge type when assessing a programme's credibility. This

thesis illustrates how preferences for different types of evidential knowledge correspond with socio-economic status rather than gender. As both programme credibility and knowledge - which are central to the interpretation of documentary - map onto socio-economic status, gender does not appear to have an independent determining role in audience interpretation in this regard. The discrepancy between these results and those of other documentary audience studies indicates the relevance of subject matter in accessing and highlighting gender differences in interpretation. The programme used in this case study - "Parental Choice" - dealt with the move from primary to secondary education, thus very much linked to respondents' everyday life and experience. However, Silverstone's study on technology and the Green Revolution and Corner et al.'s study on nuclear power both tackle issues which people may know about but do not necessarily have direct experience of. Consequently, in the present case study it is not a matter of choosing whether or not to accept lay or expert knowledge to determine the programme's credibility because one already has personal knowledge and/or experience of the issue. Yet, even with personal experience, the groups tended to interpret the programme in line with the interpretive divisions established in the general reception study, thus mapping onto socio-economic status rather than gender. Gender differences may be more apparent when one does not have any experience of an issue. In this thesis, the general focus groups refer to the concept of documentary, without reference to its treatment of any particular subject. The case study deals with a particular subject, but one that is familiar, albeit in different ways, to all participants. Thus, further research is necessary using different subject matters in order to test the gender-related findings of previous documentary audience studies. When viewers have no personal experience of the subject matter, criticism or acceptance of a programme may depend on having or not having confidence in one's own ability to criticise. It is this distinction which would correspond with the sort of gender-related stereotypes found in Silverstone (1985) and Corner et. al's (1990) studies.

The role of gender is often a controversial issue, not least because of suggestions about its causal relationship with the object of study. However, I am not suggesting that there is a simple unidirectional link between gender and interpretation, nor that gendered approaches to and interpretations of documentary are either fixed or inherent. On the contrary, the

relationship between gender and viewer interpretation appears to depend on the subject matter of the programme and the resources one has to challenge it. The combined results of the previous documentary audience studies and the general reception study here suggest that women generally believe they are not in a position to challenge a programme's factual assertions, and so instead they focus on emotional elements, whilst men are confident to identify bias, thus comment on elements which could be described as 'rational' e.g. a programme's argument. However, if the subject matter is familiar, as is the case in this particular case study, then gender is less salient to the assessment of programme credibility. Although the discussion here is the role of gender, it illustrates an interesting relationship between generic (characteristics of documentary) and thematic (subject matter) factors (see section 8.6).

The fact that beliefs are both shared and linked to positional variables highlights their connection with one's position within the institutional and societal structure. That broadcasters and viewers form beliefs within a situation based on their position within the institutional or social structure illustrates how the ritual approach to mass communication can be applied on situational and positional levels. I do not wish to suggest that the relationship between positional variables and perspectives, beliefs or interpretations is conditional, causal or functional, but rather I am suggesting the importance of social identity in mass communication. Different situational contexts may call upon or prioritise different aspects of that identity, as is illustrated by the case of gender in this thesis. Consequently, from the perspective of transmission processes, ritual processes complicate the process of information transmission. So how do we define 'successful' communication?

8.3.3 The conditions for 'successful' communication

The discussion so far demonstrates that an assessment of what or whether transmission takes place is tied up with definitions of what exactly is being transmitted. If transmission is defined as the understanding of a programme's denotative and connotative information content, then transmission has taken place as, from the results of the present research, all viewers are clear on how the programme's construction adds up to the broad message which the producer wished to communicate. However, given the expectations of producers and

viewers, I would prefer to define transmission as viewers' *acceptance* of that broad message, i.e. corresponding to the combination of information levels three and four. Thus, transmission is confined to certain groups of viewers. These viewers are those who basically believe in the truth of television documentary. The documentary programme is a credible representation of reality because its construction corresponds with their world view on how to represent truth (namely through an objective presentation) and its content does not contradict their own personal experience of that issue. In this research, such viewers belonged to the C2D socio-economic status category. Correspondingly, those viewers who did not accept the broad message of the programme are those who dispute documentary's ability to be a credible representation of reality. This is not because their world view on how to represent truth differs from the other viewers, but because a programme is unable to represent all possible perspectives which would constitute, for them, an objective presentation and thus represent the truth. This viewer group corresponds with those belonging to the ABC1 socio-economic category. The results of other documentary audience studies (e.g. Corner et al., 1990; Silverstone, 1985) suggest that this belief is challenged by certain viewers, e.g. women, if they have no prior knowledge of the subject matter under investigation. This combination of findings demonstrates a complex relationship between generic and thematic factors, which is discussed later in the chapter.

8.4 Moving away from the uni-directional model of information transmission

I have described information transmission in terms of a combination of the broad message and world views on documentary, society and the subject matter for both producers and viewers. The content of these world views is influenced by the various levels of social context in which both producers and viewers are situated, as evidenced in the studies reported in this research. As a result, the specific comments of producers are not indicative of precisely what is transmitted, as this cannot be determined solely from production. Furthermore, there is a difference between what a producer reports as his/her intentions regarding the making of a particular programme, and what they actually do in the making of that programme, whether because of the difference between the interview context and the

production context or because of the variety of influences at play during production. However, the interviews are representative of an institutional discourse on documentary and of the broad message which the producer wants viewers to accept, both of which are combined in order to construct the programme. Thus, the use of producer interviews does not produce an intentionalist model of communication, but an access point to the key levels of information on which the notion of transmission is based.

Looking at meaning on different levels and recognising the different environments in which production and reception take place echoes Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980). In that seminal paper he offered a two-dimensional model for empirical investigation (cf. Morley, 1980), though both Hall and Morley have attracted some criticism (e.g. Lewis, 1983). The model as it stands is merely a starting point for the explanation of televisual communication, as Hall himself argues:

“...it's a model because of what it suggests. It suggests an approach; it opens up new questions. It maps the terrain. But it's a model which has to be worked with and developed and changed.” (Hall, quoted in Cruz & Lewis, 1994, p.255)

8.4.1 The pros and cons of Hall's encoding/decoding model

Hall's approach is a useful attempt to conceptualise television as a medium of mass communication on situational and positional levels of analysis, because it acknowledges the context in which both production and reception take place and the relationship between the two (see Chapter 1). However, the model was originally constructed to challenge the idea that the media maintains an ideological status quo, by reproducing the dominant views of the ruling powers which are then directly transferred to and uncontested by the mass audience. Consequently, it concentrates on explaining the potential for a mismatch between the message as encoded and the message as decoded because viewers do not necessarily share the same codes as the producer. Viewers' readings are based on the interaction between the text and their own social context and, as responses to the communication of a programme's dominant ideology, can subsequently be either dominant-hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional. The model initiated an understanding of the relationship between the various

viewer readings and social structure and between a programme's dominant ideology and ideology within society. However, the model did not include specific contexts and content, thus it is difficult to determine whether it primarily addressed television's role in the (re)production of meaning in society or the nature of meaning transmission through television.

By referring to television as a homogeneous entity Hall's model overlooks the variation among programmes and the implications that this has for both encoding and decoding. This concern can be addressed using the concept of genre. Genre describes the conventions associated with a programme, and the associated expectations of producers and viewers. The viewers' positions in the present research were closely related to beliefs about the television documentary genre, providing a framework for the interpretation of programme content. Consequently, this research supports other work, on genre itself and other genres, in arguing that genre is central to an understanding of the nature of communication (cf. Dubrow, 1982; Würzbach, 1983; Corner, 1991) - although more work comparing reception of other genres, using similar methods, would be valuable in developing this claim.

8.4.2 The importance of genre in the (re)production of meaning

The television documentary genre adopts certain assumptions about how issues should be represented in order to appear credible e.g. supporting arguments with expert witnesses. Viewers share this belief about the representation of truth, but differ in their assessment of documentary's ability to achieve this. That assessment depends on a combination of viewers' knowledge and experience of the subject matter and their expectations of the genre. Consequently, the difference relates to elements of both the structure and the content of a programme, both of which are organised in accordance with the conventions of the genre. Producers try to make a programme which fits into these conventions in the context of the debates and issues within the broadcasting structure. Viewers interpret a programme in the context of its conventions and their own social experiences within the societal structure. Thus, genre figures as a framework for both encoding and decoding, and a mediating factor in the (re)production of meaning. If the encoding/decoding model is a template for explaining the (re)production of meaning at the interpersonal/situational level, it must include

the concept of genre. Furthermore, expectations and assumptions about a genre form part of the social context of and in which communication takes place. Its significance reaches beyond aesthetic appearance to assumptions about how a text should be used, thereby affecting how it is both read and understood. With such an emphasis within the model on the role of social context, the concept of genre must be included.

Certain elements of the framework for transmission advanced in this thesis are evident in research on other information genres. In the study of news, both Gamson (1992) and Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) talk about the frames used by viewers in the interpretation of television news. These frames are based on events, ideas and knowledge drawn from their own life experiences. Aspects of this thesis support Gamson's approach in linking the construction of meaning with shared beliefs within social groups:

"As participants bring their everyday knowledge to bear on these issues, we are able to observe the commonsense conceptions and taken-for-granted assumptions they share - to use Schutz's (1967) term, their *intersubjectivity*. This process rests, Schutz argues, on the assumption that others see the world in the same way and, hence, is defined socially, not individually. The key variables in the degree of intersubjectivity are personal contact and similarity of socialization." (p.192)

Neuman et al. consider the construction of meaning in the context of the relationship between production and reception, concluding that the inability of journalists to successfully communicate with their audience is the result of their lack of knowledge about how different viewers make sense of different issues and the use of different frames by producers and viewers. Thus, both approaches use a ritually-based framework, recognising the interaction between a viewer's social context and the text, in which the construction of meaning is a negotiation rather than an effect. This thesis is closer to the work of Neuman et al., which acknowledges the problems that this interaction incurs for information transmission. Lewis's (1991) study of *News at Ten* and Morley's (1980) current affairs study on *Nationwide* similarly focus on the interaction between text and the social knowledge brought by members of different social groups. However the focus is on audience reception rather than communication, thus the notion of information transmission from production to reception is

not directly explored.

8.5 The gap between production and reception

The above studies, and indeed the present work, in highlighting the need for producers to have more knowledge of their audience are demonstrating and confirming a problem previously outlined in the literature (e.g. Schlesinger, 1978) of the gap between production and reception. Producers are unaware of who will and will not share their intentions and on which issues. With reference to the present work, the following sections describe this gap and discuss whether or not it can be overcome.

8.5.1 Describing the gap

Documentary producers are in the difficult position of knowing that their programme is a construction, as befits their membership of the ABC1 socio-economic category, and yet, at the same time, wanting viewers to accept the broad message which they are communicating. They believe this is overcome by following the accepted documentary genre conventions associated with objectivity and thus are perhaps surprisingly unaware of the heterogeneity of audience interpretations and, hence, of the widespread mismatch between their intentions and audience interpretations. The combination of broadcasters' conviction about the credibility of their messages and the related irrelevance of audience interpretation, demonstrates their lack of recognition of social context, presumably because of their focus on the effect of the message - in short, producers adopt a rather blinkered transmission approach to mass communication. For their part, viewers assume that documentary should inform and educate, hence the concern over whether a programme is credible and consequently informative and educational. Thus, education and information are the 'effects' which viewers expect from documentary - an expectation which also signifies a lay version of the transmission view of mass communication. On this basis, with both producers and viewers expecting similar results from documentary, one would predict little gap between their perceptions. However, it is the assessment of how and whether those expectations are met which sustains the gap.

The present research indicates that perceptions of documentary are not only linked to the social context of broadcasters and viewers, but also to the situational contexts of production and reception. Consequently, there is a difference between the concerns of broadcasters and those of viewers. In general, it appears that broadcasters tend to focus on debates between public service and market models of broadcasting and their own role within that, whilst viewers concentrate more on the relationship between a documentary programme and reality or truth. The issues of concern to broadcasters, particularly commercialisation, are only briefly mentioned by viewers and the issues dividing viewers are not contentious for broadcasters - indeed there is consensus amongst broadcasters that their programmes are objective and fair representations of reality. Thus, viewers are relatively unaware of, or uninterested in, the pressures on production and broadcasters are relatively unaware of variations in audience interpretation. Whilst the case study provides a common situational context for both production and reception, this context is further complicated by positional variables. Thus the differences not only involve the concerns of production and reception contexts, but the social positioning of producers and viewers and the interrelated issues of their beliefs about documentary structure and content.

All this depends, in addition, on the way personal experience of the subject matter is variably used within the same framework. The case study findings (see Chapter 7) suggest that viewers with no personal experience of the subject tend to assess a programme's credibility in line with the interpretative differences found in the general reception study (see Chapter 5). Viewers with personal experience of the subject tend to assess credibility either by comparing their experiences to those of the characters on the screen, thus focussing on content, or by comparing their experiences and knowledge of the issues to the way the programme represents them, thus focussing on programme structure. A match between the expectations of the producer and those of viewers is most evident, although not absolute, between the producer and those viewers whose interpretation is based on a basic acceptance of documentary. In this case, the viewing experience does not contradict viewers' prior expectations of documentary - expectations which match those of the producer. Indeed, the closest replica of a producer's intentions, as illustrated in the case study, is amongst C2D groups, particularly the women, where their beliefs about the truth of the programme concur

with the producer's belief in how to faithfully represent the issue, and where their personal experience corresponds with that of the characters portrayed. ABC1 groups were aware of the issue tackled, but were unhappy with the way it was represented and the programme's claims to truth.

8.5.2 Can the gap be closed?

The gap which consequently exists between producers and viewers can certainly be significantly accounted for by producers' lack of knowledge about audience interpretation, but the question is whether increased knowledge about that audience would actually help to close that gap. The above discussion highlights the role of different levels of social context in structuring the gap. The variations in viewers' personal experience, social positioning and credibility judgements cannot be controlled simply by a producer having knowledge of them - that is if the goal is to successfully communicate one's intentions to the whole viewing population. However, what such information would do is to illustrate target audiences and how best to communicate to them. This issue echoes the debates across the producer interviews between a public service and market model of broadcasting. Whilst the notion of targeting different audiences corresponds with the picture emerging in this thesis of different viewing publics, the fragmentation of the mass audience contradicts the traditional goals of public service broadcasting i.e. to unite, educate and inform the population as a whole - notions which provide a justification for the payment of a licence fee. The problem is that documentary makers dwell on how to combine commercial requirements with public service criteria. Thus, their perspectives centre around the nature of the industry rather than ways of communicating to the audience. The changing nature of the broadcasting industry, most significantly characterised by the increasing number of channels and subsequent commercial pressure to obtain large audiences, dominates decisions about how to make a programme. A practical example of this in the context of documentary, is the influx of what can be described as 'entertainment' documentaries, for example 'docu-soaps' such as *Cruise* or *Hotel*. A qualitative consideration of the audience is a token gesture, if it exists at all, within the more dominant, broadcaster-defined desire to attract a large audience. The assessment of success is a quantitative one, whether this service is commercially or public service driven. Yet, this thesis demonstrates that *communicative* success, which I would define as a match

between the world views of producer and viewer with respect to society, documentary and a programme's subject matter, can only be assessed qualitatively.

Thus, one wonders whether more qualitative knowledge of the audience is useful given broadcasters' mass audience mentality - a mentality dictated by the demand from either advertisers or the government for high audience ratings - and also given the connection between viewers' interpretations and situational and positional variables as illustrated in this thesis. If the qualitative gratification of audiences *was* paramount, then a potential way forward is the creation of documentary channels which are targeted at and funded by specific audience groups. However, this amounts to narrowcasting, and presents a serious challenge to assumptions about the role of documentary, based on existing definitions of public service broadcasting. It is these assumptions about the role of documentary which dominate viewer expectations, with very little appreciation of the dilemmas and debates within production. This is illustrated by viewers' concentration on the content of documentaries, and the relationship of that content to reality. Viewers watch based on an interest in the subject matter, then assess the credibility of that programme in accordance with their own mode of interpretation. Consequently, the threat of commodification will only affect reception if a connection is made between uninteresting, incredible programmes and sensationalism. However, the general reception study found sensationalism as the overwhelming factor in maintaining a viewer's interest in a programme.

"There's nothing wrong with sensationalising..if they didn't sensationalise no one would watch them." (OMABC1, 1037-1040)

The evidence from the studies reported in this thesis suggest it is the credibility of a particular programme which is questioned rather than the status of the genre itself. In other words, viewers' expectations of documentary remain unchanged. This suggests that Winston's (1995) plea for documentaries to be more self-aware, exposing the methods of their production to prevent viewers from feeling manipulated, would be nonproductive. This change of approach addresses the symptoms rather than the cause. It addresses the criticisms levelled at certain documentary programmes without exploring the basis on which those criticisms are made. That basis is an assumption about how truth or reality is discovered.

Despite viewers' critiques of objectivity in this thesis, both viewers who accept a documentary because it appears to present a balanced picture and viewers who reject it because they believe it does not incorporate all perspectives are basing their assessment on a belief that there is such a thing as an objective reality which can be discovered through objective means. Consequently, it is debatable how useful a more explicitly subjective approach to documentary-making would be. It would only be an advancement if viewers accept the notion that reality is subjective and that, consequently, a subjective presentation is a valid contribution. However, at the same time, viewers want good documentaries. If the trend towards soap-style documentaries continues, and the viewing public is not provided with the range of programmes it desires, it is possible that the public's eyes will open not to the changing role of documentary but to the workings of the broadcasting industry and its inability to provide certain types of programme. If this is the case, I would suspect that a terrestrial documentary channel would be welcomed.

The idea that the documentary is informative and educational aligns the genre with public service broadcasting. According to Scannell (1989), public service broadcasting is supposed to provide the information and education necessary for citizenship, contribute and provide a forum for public debate, and unite society through the provision of common knowledge. Documentary is assumed to be central in this endeavour, but the results of the thesis challenge its ability to realise such goals. A discussion of the implications for public service broadcasting is beyond the scope of the thesis and reserved for future exploration. However, I would note the following. Firstly, the production study reveals the prominence of commercial pressures in broadcasting. Concerns about public service operate within this framework, and thus, any discussion of public service broadcasting has to acknowledge the practical, institutional context in which it is based. Secondly, although the audience's response to documentary is heterogeneous and the genre's content is not considered educational or informative by all, this does not necessarily mean that documentary fails in its public service remit. Rather than a reevaluation of television documentary, the industry may require a redefinition of public service broadcasting and a clear explanation of what is meant by the concepts of information, education and entertainment.

8.6 The relationship between the thematic and the generic

Certain distinctions in this thesis - between production and reception, between viewers' modes of interpretation and between categories within different positional variables e.g. men and women - can be characterised by a conflict between a focus on documentary form (the generic) and a focus on documentary content (the thematic). Generic factors refer to the characteristics of a documentary programme which warrant its inclusion in the category of documentary, e.g. factual content, presentation of two sides. Thematic factors refer to elements of a programme's subject matter, e.g. specific characters, examples, arguments. This section explores the complex relationship between these two sets of factors and the contribution it can make to understanding the production-text-viewer relationship.

There is an interesting link between the generic/thematic distinction and that of production/reception. The different contexts of production and reception, as well as the different variables involved in perceptions within these contexts illustrate differential foci on generic and thematic factors and in turn highlight the complexity of the relationship between the two. On a very general level, the way producers define documentary is predominantly in terms of its format and structure, whilst viewers focus instead on the nature of its content. Generic factors, such as objective presentation and relation to reality, are used by viewers as a credibility gauge (although their methods of assessing credibility differ) whilst producers believe such generic factors automatically guarantee a programme's credibility.

The relationship between viewer and subject matter has considerable impact on the possibility of information transmission. For the accepting viewers, the basic belief in the credibility of documentary is only challenged if the subject matter, i.e. thematic factors, contradicts their own personal experience of the issue (cf. Philo, 1993). For the sceptical viewers, the combined evidence of the present work and other documentary audience studies suggests that the basic challenge to the credibility of documentary is based on personal knowledge of both the genre and the subject matter. However, certain viewers

(predominantly women) place faith in the programme if they have no knowledge of that subject matter and thus nothing to judge it against. In this case the viewer, with no specific world view on the subject matter, reverts to a faith in the genre. This suggests that viewer scepticism of documentary is predominantly linked to a programme's treatment of specific subject matters, and that personal knowledge and experience is instrumental in the success or failure of information transmission.

Given the debates within audience research on the relationship between text and viewer, the differences across viewers in their focus on either structural or content features in programme interpretation is of significant interest. In the case of gendered interpretation differences, as discussed earlier, a comparison between these results and those of other documentary audience studies suggests that subject matter is central to male and female viewers' prioritisation of either structure or content in programme interpretation. This is based on the observation that stereotypical gender differences are more salient when the subject matter is unfamiliar. However, the most prominent division in the thesis was based on socio-economic status. In terms of a crude generic/thematic distinction, the ABC1 groups tended to focus on generic or structural features of the programme in their assessment of its credibility, whilst the C2D groups concentrated on the thematic. I have explained this, as Morley (1980) did, in terms of educational differences. However, given the observations relating to gender, it is possible that the political nature of the subject matter brings one's *political* identity to the fore. This would also apply to Morley's *Nationwide* studies. Given the strong class structure in Britain, and the links between socio-economic status and political affiliation - or rather the distinction between employer and employee, between 'the powerful' and 'the powerless' - it could be argued that a programme which sympathises with the situation of the C2D's - the 'powerless' - would be seen as credible by them and biased by others. It is hard to tell if this is the case or not as the programme used in the case study was politically motivated, hence the need for more case studies on different subject matters.

My observation is that a focus on either the content or the structure of the programme is *not* the fundamental basis of viewers' modes of interpretation, but that the interrelation of subject matter, genre expectations and personal knowledge or experience direct that focus. The

specifics of this interrelationship are unclear without further research on different types of subject matter, form and viewer. However, the interrelationship clearly illustrates the subjectivity involved in assessing objectivity and also strengthens the argument that the relationship between text and viewer is one of varying conditions relating to both text and viewer rather than a question of which has more power - a question associated with the traditional transmission approach to communication.

8.7 Implications for audience research

I have pointed out that the question of meaning in this thesis is explored at an interpersonal level i.e. in terms of the communicative relationship between production and reception, rather than between the intricacies of text construction and viewer interpretation as is the focus in audience reception research. However, much of the theoretical framework and conclusions of this thesis draw heavily on ideas within audience reception research. Two central questions emerge. Firstly, how do the results of these particular studies relate to those already conducted on the documentary audience? Secondly, how do the conclusions relate to contemporary debates on the nature of audience?

8.7.1 Relation to other documentary audience studies

The first point to note is that the main audience-related findings of these studies did not contradict any of the main findings of previous studies of the documentary audience. The identification of fundamental acceptance or fundamental scepticism of the genre underlies the viewer positions outlined in the research of Silverstone (1985) and Corner et al. (1986; 1990). This suggests that a viewer's expectations of the genre provide the framework within which interaction with specific programme content takes place. The major difference between these studies and the results presented in this thesis is the role of gender in the detection of bias, which is discussed earlier in this chapter. The important point is that the thesis substantiates their combined arguments about the importance of viewers' expectations of the documentary genre, their knowledge of the subject matter, their social and cultural identity, and the intentions and context of production in understanding the relationship

between text and viewer. This thesis advances these studies insofar as it connects the results to general perceptions about the documentary genre and, based on producer and audience assumptions about the goals of documentary, examines them in relation to the subsequent implications for mass communication. Whilst broadcasters are aware of the importance of documentary credibility, they are unaware of the ways that this is variously assessed and, consequently, the extent to which programme interpretation departs from their own assumptions about how and what viewers believe. What this thesis does not do is look more specifically at the role of various programme forms, contents and producer perspectives within this framework for documentary communication.

The question of form has been more directly addressed by Corner (1986; 1990; 1996) and Nichols (e.g. 1991). The construction of meaning is based on the interaction between text and viewer, thus I am aware of the importance of recognising the role of textual structure in that relationship. However, the central focus of this thesis is not television documentary *per se*, but the relevance of transmission and ritual approaches to mass communication. Thus, the primary aim is to demonstrate the appropriateness of discussing televisual communication in this manner, using the documentary as useful mode of exploration, and the case study as an example within that. Producers adopt various communicative strategies which link to documentary form and thereby audience interpretation. It is possible that a different type or form of documentary than that exemplified by “Parental Choice” would produce different results. Similarly, although the producer of “Parental Choice” was successfully located on the dimensions outlined in the production study, sharing the same links between positional variables and responses, the thesis does not explore whether *different* positioning on the dimensions translates into different ways of making a specific documentary and, subsequently, different convictions about how that documentary will be interpreted. The case study would need to be repeated with producers located at different points on the dimensional spectrum. However, this thesis does not claim to offer an exhaustive explanation of communication across all types of television documentary. Instead it offers an insight into important considerations when explaining such a process. The next step would be to link studies on documentary form and audience interpretation with this investigation of the nature of communication. The question would concern the extent to

which different types and forms of documentary are involved in producers' ability to communicate their broad message across different audiences, based on the assumptions of producers and the expectations and interpretations of viewers.

8.7.2 Relation to contemporary audience debates

The second area of discussion is the contribution of placing the documentary audience within a mass communication context to contemporary debates across the field of audience research. A central issue is the nature of the balance between text and viewer in the determination of meaning. As I have already argued, the nature of the relationship between text and viewer is not a simple interaction between programme content and the social positioning of the viewer, but a complex relationship between programme content, genre expectations, viewer knowledge *and* social positioning. The results of the studies indicate the centrality of genre in both the construction of text and the expectations of viewers. A viewer's expectations and subsequent programme assessment are linked to his/her social positioning. Furthermore, within this framework, interpretations vary in accordance with the prior experience or knowledge a viewer has of the programme's content. In the main, if the structure of the text corresponds with a viewer's expectations of the genre, and the content is not contradicted by the viewer's personal experience, then the programme is regarded as credible. If the structure of the text contradicts a viewer's expectations of the genre, based on either beliefs about how to communicate 'truth', knowledge of the subject or personal experience, then the programme is treated with scepticism. This could be regarded as an illustration of power on the part of the audience. However, I believe such an interpretation to be overly simplistic. It is hard to tell just how much power the text may have without investigating other forms of documentary and other types of content within the same theoretical framework. I would argue that the question is not about where power lies, but about what factors are important in the negotiation between text and viewer. With this I concur with Morley (1992), believing that interpretation is not a question of audience activity or passivity, but one of varying conditions relating to *both* text and viewer. These conditions are not only related to the specific features of the text and viewer in question, but contextual factors affecting both on various levels of analysis. As a result, the question of whether interactivity inevitably favours textual determinism, and thus a transmission model of communication, as suggested

by Lewis (1991) is beside the point. I have three criticisms of Lewis's claim. First of all, the question again reduces the discussion to an either/or decision between ritual and transmission models. Secondly, this notion of transmission is incompatible with my stress on text/viewer interaction in that it focuses on the effect of text on viewer, rather than approaching the relationship as a negotiation based on cultural, positional and situational factors. Finally, as argued earlier, transmission is not necessarily an outmoded concept. If it is redefined within a ritual approach to communication, it constitutes a step forward rather than a step back for mass communication theory.

With this emphasis on the social/cultural context at various levels of analysis, it may not be possible to establish any general rules about audience interpretation. However, what is interesting is the general correspondence not only between these and the results of other documentary audience studies (i.e. Silverstone, 1985; Corner et al., 1986; 1990), as described earlier, but their relevance to viewer positions and modes of interpretation in audience studies of other genres. I believe audience reception studies can be divided into two kinds - those which just focus on reception and those which focus on some form of transmission between text and viewer. The case of television documentary incorporates both types.

Various studies of soap opera and audience discussion programmes illustrate the first kind of audience research. Silj's (1988) reception study of viewers' readings of soap opera found that programme appreciation was based on an engagement with its content and criticism was based on an engagement with its structure. Those describing the genre as emotionally real, involving and relevant focussed on content. Those describing the genre as repetitive, pointless and unrealistic focussed on structure. Whilst the bases of acceptance and criticism do not map on to those identified here for documentary, both studies similarly display a link between focussing on content and acceptance of the genre, and focussing on structure and criticism of the genre. In Livingstone and Lunt's (1994) study of the reception of television audience discussion programmes, audience interpretation depends on the viewer's understanding of the genre, how the programme fares in relation to these genre expectations, the viewer's view of expertise and the validity of ordinary experience. Those viewers who expected the genre to conform to the criteria of a formal debate, i.e. promoting traditional

expert witnesses and presenting a balanced coverage of the issue, were critical of the programme. Those viewers who expected the genre to conform more to that of a romance, i.e. celebrating lay personal experience and accepting the emotional and incomplete presentation of issues, accepted the programme. These two approaches correspond with the way programme credibility is assessed in the documentary, whereby the fundamentally sceptical approach depends on formal journalistic criteria associated with objectivity, and the fundamentally accepting approach accepts the value of personal, subjective evidence. Both the soap opera and the audience discussion programme promote personal experience, thus their acceptance is dependent on viewers valuing such experience. The distinction between modes of viewing boils down to positive and negative readings of the text, and consequently, acceptance or rejection of the programme and/or genre.

The second kind of audience reception study concentrates on transmission, thus includes studies of genres such as news and current affairs. Because of the desire to contradict the notion of transmission from text to viewer, these studies focus on viewers' heterogeneous understandings of programme content based on their social background and experience. Researchers such as Gamson (1992) and Lewis (1991) do not talk in terms of positive or negative readings but variations in the understanding of news content. This is explained by viewers' use of different interpretive frames. Morley's (1980) study of *Nationwide* explains variations in content interpretation in a similar manner, based on their socio-economic status. However, the concern with transmission is not limited to non-fiction genres. Liebes and Katz's cross-cultural study of *Dallas* was centrally concerned with resistance to cultural imperialism, establishing that viewers from varying social and cultural backgrounds interpreted the same episode in different ways. The case study in this thesis clearly illustrates how viewers from different socio-economic backgrounds interpret the same documentary in different ways which corresponds with strand of audience research seeking to contradict the notion of transmission from text to viewer. However, as the thesis illustrates, this does not mean that the transmission of information from producer to viewer is not possible. Information transmission is part of the communication process and it is possible for a producer to 'transmit' his/her broad message to the viewer when there is a match between the world views of producer and viewer towards society, the documentary genre and the

programme's subject matter.

8.7.3 Connecting audience debates with information transmission

In broad terms, audience reception studies focus on either the interpretation of programme content in light of the social background and experience of viewers, or the acceptance/rejection of a programme based on a viewer's own understanding of the criteria associated with that programme genre. Both these approaches fit within the ritual tradition, but the former can be mapped on to the desire to actively disprove a transmission approach whilst the latter is more closely linked to genre and the factors involved in their heterogeneous audience reception. However, both approaches illustrate a focus on the ritual significance of media rather than the transmission of meanings, thus excluding the problem of effects from the audience research agenda (Livingstone, *in press*). The present study of television documentary, by indicating the possibility and nature of information transmission and at the same time corresponding with the findings of audience research in other genres, demonstrates how the question of effect can be reintroduced without abandoning the role of the audience or the ritual approach to mass communication. Thus, the notion of effects does not have to be linked to the movement and power of a message, as advocated by the traditional transmission approach. Using a ritual framework, transmission in this thesis is redefined as a stage within the communication process which occurs after the comprehension of denotative and connotative meanings. Successful information transmission, i.e. transmission of a programme's broad message, depends on producer and viewers sharing world views, which are embedded in the programme, on society, the documentary genre and the programme's subject matter. As I argued earlier in the chapter, this represents a combination of the concepts of ritual and transmission in communication. Within the same framework, effects could be redefined as the extent to which exposure to a programme or genre affects the way viewers structure their life and time. Furthermore, by acknowledging the potential for transmission, the framework allows the inclusion of the producer in the communication process and thereby reintroduces the author of the text. Reinstating the author complies with the argument presented in Chapter 1, of including both production and reception in an understanding of mass communication.

Corner et al.'s and Silverstone's documentary audience studies (outlined above and detailed in Chapter 2) fit into the second type of audience research, concentrating on the way viewers with different social backgrounds and knowledge interpret documentary programmes. However, the nature of communication in the television documentary genre combines ritual and transmission approaches, as indicated by the assumptions and interpretations of broadcasters and viewers in this thesis. Broadcasters and viewers expect a documentary to transmit information, but the actual process of communication is better explained by a combination of ritual and transmission concepts. In audience research terms, the original neglect of transmission was a theoretical backlash against the notion of hegemony and/or against positivist effects research. However, transmission is reinterpreted in this thesis as a match between the world views of producer and viewer towards society, the documentary genre and a programme's subject matter which enables a viewer to accept the broad message within a producer's documentary programme. Thus, successful transmission is not based on the manipulation of passive audience members, but on the match between the way a producer represents truth - a factor central to the credibility of a documentary programme - and beliefs about the nature of truth (which is a combination of beliefs about society, the genre and the subject matter) circulating within a particular social group (C2D). The fact that the representation is shared by this social group can be explained by their common experiences within the social structure. Thus, the explanation of transmission coupled with the ritual approach integrates micro audience interpretation and macro structures of society, as advocated by Schröder (1994). However, because of the importance of social factors, the match between producer and viewer world views does not encompass the whole audience. The thesis demonstrates the lack of awareness amongst broadcasters of this gap and their concurrent tendency to regard the audience as a mass. Whilst this may be a useful and desirable strategy for appealing to the public at large, the television documentary studies presented here indicate that regarding the audience as a mass is unproductive in terms of mass communication.

8.8 Implications for the communication process

This research provides insight into two issues - the possibility for information transmission in television documentary, and the integration of transmission and ritual approaches to mass communication. The transmission of information in accordance with the assumptions of producers and viewers amounts to the acceptance of a broad message. The broad message is only one of four levels of information in a documentary, and information transmission is only one part of the communication process. Information transmission occurs after a viewer has comprehended the denotative and connotative levels of information in a programme. Transmission of the broad message (third information level) from producer to viewer successfully takes place if the viewer's world views (fourth information level) on documentary, society and the programme's subject matter correspond with the world views inscribed in the programme by the producer. Thus, we can conceive of the communication process as embedded in certain world views about society, genre and the subject matter in hand, within which there follows a process of comprehension of denotative and connotative information in order to establish what the broad message is (cf. Corner, 1991; Lewis, 1991; Livingstone, 1995). As this information is based at lower levels, the broad message is unaffected by those world views. However, acceptance or rejection of that broad message - which amounts to successful or unsuccessful transmission - is based on the world views within which the communication is situated. Within that process, one's social positioning and knowledge and experience of the subject matter further affects the dominance of one world view over another. Thus, personal identity and experience can intervene at any point in the communication process and affect the success or otherwise of information transmission.

In terms of the integration of ritual and transmission approaches to communication, the present work illustrates how programme content is not only the point of contact between production and reception but also the space through which different identities are brought to the fore. Much discussion of media as ritual (e.g. Liebes & Curran, 1998) refers to the impact and role of what have been termed 'media events' (Dayan & Katz, 1992) and the extent to which such rituals are:

“ integrating society, affirming its common values, legitimating its

institutions, and reconciling different sectional elements." (Curran & Liebes, p.4)

Thus, the concentration is on the effect of media on society, rather than the effect of particular programmes on viewers, and the corresponding implications that has for society. Those sort of debates focus on a cultural/ideological level of analysis, and whilst legitimate and worthwhile, they do not apply directly to understandings of the role of media at other levels of analysis i.e. intrapersonal, interpersonal/situational and positional. The present work is located at the situational/interpersonal level of analysis, exploring the relationship between production and reception in television documentary. At this level the central concern for producers and viewers is not the construction or maintenance of identity, but the communication of programme content. It is through this communicative relationship that different identities come into play, affecting the nature of communication. In the television documentary, programme content is linked to education and information. Producers make documentaries and viewers watch documentaries for this purpose, and it is identity and belief which mediate the genre's ability to live up to its expectations.

This investigation of television documentary demonstrates the importance of specifying *which* elements of the communication process are being addressed by a particular mode of communication when exploring mass communication. It is only through a recognition of the different levels at which communication operates and the different stages within the communication process, that I have been able to argue for a combination of ritual and transmission approaches in the understanding of mass communication. Regarding the communication process as a series of stages - of which transmission is one - and viewing information itself on a series of levels, enables the process of transmission to coexist with ritual communication processes. Thus, the thesis not only reinstates the notion of transmission, but extends the ritual view to situational and positional levels, and begins to transcend the opposition between transmission and ritual approaches to mass communication.

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Appendix A

Interview schedule - Commissioning Editors

- How would you describe your job/what are your responsibilities?
(how they fit into the institutional framework)
- What are you looking for, when deciding which programmes to commission?
Why?

what are the aims of the series/the channel?
who does he/she think is watching?
why are they watching?
do they get audience feedback? - how important is it? - do they use it?
- Who determines these criteria? Are they appropriate? Do they restrict you?
- Is it important to have documentary programmes in the schedules? Why? What is its role/purpose?
- Does the doc achieve its aims? Explain answer
- Can you talk about the doc as a unified category for answering questions? If no, how would you categorise them?
- Do you think the tv doc will survive in the current and future broadcasting climate? Why?

(has the situation changed much over the course of your career?)
- Can you envisage different formats and styles in the future? Why?

Appendix B

Interview schedule - Producers

- What type of documentaries do you make? Why?
- Why do you make documentaries at all?
- What do you see as the purpose/role of the television documentary? (what it *should* be doing and what it is *actually* doing)
- Does it depend on the type of doc? - do they have to be categorised? - how?
- Are your programmes made for any particular audience?
- Who do you think watches them? Why do you think they watch?
- How far do the requirements of the broadcasting channels affect the way you make your programmes? Are they a constraint?
- Do you feel you are making compromises? If so, what are they? With what effect?
- Do you see the doc as more of an art form or a piece of journalism?
- Does the doc achieve its aims? Explain answer
- Do you think the tv doc will survive in the current and future broadcasting climate? Why?
- Can you envisage different formats and styles in the future? Why?
- What formats/styles do you tend to use/have you used? Why? What techniques within programmes are used and why? i.e. what are you trying to do through programmes?

Appendix C

Interview Coding Frame

1	BACKGROUND	- Job (1 1) - Company (1 2) - Career Position (1 3) - Gender (1 4)	- Producer (1 1 1) - Commissioning Editor (1 1 2) - Independent (1 2 1) - BBC (1 2 2) - ITV (1 2 3) - Channel Four (1 2 4) - Young (1 3 1) - Old (1 3 2) - Male (1 4 1) - Female (1 4 2)
2	DOCUMENTARY DEFINITION	- Subject matter (2 1) - Continuum (2 2) - Format/Style/Genre (2 3) - Art form (2 4)	
3	DOCUMENTARY PURPOSE	- Information/Public debate/Raise awareness (3 1) - Entertainment/Appeal (3 2) - Education (3 3) - Public service (3 4) - Democracy/Justice/Representation (3 5) - Art (3 6) - Improves TV quality (3 7) - Prompts action/Has effect (3 8) - Getting to emotional truth (3 9) - Archive/Document/History (3 10) - Communication (3 11) - Deeper understanding (3 12)	
4	AUDIENCE	- Awareness/Consideration of/Knowledge of (4 1) - Description (4 2) - Importance (4 3) - Appeal/Ratings (4 4) - Programme perception/Feedback (4 5) - Communication/Comprehension (4 6)	
5	CONSTRAINTS	- Channel (5 1) - Strand (5 2) - Format (5 3) - Financial (5 4) - Legal (5 5) - Commercial (5 6) - Moral (5 7) - Of medium/genre (5 8) - Political (5 9) - History/Past (5 11)	

6 COMPROMISES

7 DOCUMENTARY - Future (7 1)
MAKING/
SURVIVAL - Past/Compared to past (7 2)

8 FORMAT
- By subject (8 1)
- By fashion (8 2)
- By technology (8 3)
- By producer (8 4)
- Link to aims (8 5)
- By strand (8 6)
- By what works/successful (8 7)

9 DOCUMENTARY - Current Affairs (9 1)
TYPE - Observational (9 2)
- Art/auteur (9 3)
- Miscellaneous/undefined (9 4)
- Historical (9 5)
- Biographies/portraits (9 6)

10 WHY MAKE
- Accident (10 1)
- TV power/Effect/Reach wide audience (10 2)
- Love/Enjoyment/Talent (10 3)
- Money/Business (10 4)
- Belief in subject/Importance (10 5)
- Interest area (10 6)
- Other (10 7)

11 IN CONTROL
- Yes (11 1)
- No (11 2)

12 COMMISSIONING
CRITERIA - Of series (12 1)
- Of channel (12 2)
- Subjects (12 3)
- Producers (12 4)
- Personal (12 5)
- Scheduling/Ratings (12 6)

13 AMOUNT

14 PROGRAMME/STRAND
FEATURES - Style/Format (14 1)
- Content (14 2)
- Image/Remit (14 3)

Appendix D

Key to interviewees

PIYM	-	Producer (Independent, Younger, Male)
PIYF	-	Producer (Independent, Younger, Female)
PIOM	-	Producer (Independent, Older, Male)
PIOF	-	Producer (Independent, Older, Female)
PBOM	-	Producer (BBC, Older, Male)
PITVM	-	Producer (ITV, Older, Male)
BCE	-	Commissioning Editor (BBC)
ICE	-	Commissioning Editor (ITV)
C4CE	-	Commissioning Editor (Channel Four)

Appendix E

Focus group discussion schedule

- * What is a documentary?
- * What is the difference between documentary and current affairs?
- * Why do you watch documentary/current affairs?
- * Do you force yourself to watch or do you really want to?
- * What makes a documentary interesting?
- * What attracts you to a particular documentary?
- * Do you ever get annoyed watching them? Why?
- * Is it important to have documentaries/current affairs on tv? Why?
- * Do they have a role/purpose?
- * Do they fulfil this? - for you?
- * What do you get out of them?
- * What is a bad documentary? are there any?
- * Are documentaries objective? should they be?
- * Do you want them on tv?
- * Should documentaries be what the public wants or what it should watch? - which is it?

Appendix F

Focus groups coding frame

1	BACKGROUND	- Gender (1 1) - Age (1 2) - Class (1 3)	- Male (1 1 1) - Female (1 1 2) - 25-35 (1 2 1) - 45-60 (1 2 2) - ABC1 (1 3 1) - C2D (1 3 2)
2	DOCUMENTARY DEFINITION	- Characteristics (2 1) - Same as news/current affairs (2 2) - Different to news/current affairs (2 3) - Types/Applications (2 4)	
3	VIEWING HABITS	- Watch (3 1) - Don't watch (3 2) - Depends (3 3)	
4	PERSONAL EFFECT	- Learn (4 1) - Annoy (4 2) - Opinion formation (4 3) - Enjoyment (4 4) - Depends (4 5)	
5	REASONS FOR WATCHING	- Education/information/truth (5 1) - Entertainment (5 2) - Interest (5 3) - Obligation (5 4) - Unintentional (5 5) - Own field (5 6) - Strand/Presentation (5 7) - No prior knowledge/opinion (5 8) - Depends (5 9) - Social interaction (5 10) - Advertising (5 11)	
6	REASONS FOR TURNING OFF/ NOT WATCHING	- Slant/Presentation (6 1) - Content (6 2) - Sensationalism/annoying (6 3) - Old hat (6 4) - Time slot/Scheduling (6 5) - Emotional effect (6 6) - Effort (6 7) - No prior knowledge (6 8)	
7	INTEREST		

	MAINTAINERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opening titles/sequence/presentation (7 1) - Personal interest/subject (7 2) - Depends (7 3) - Sensationalism/Drama/Surprise (7 4) - Angle/Approach (7 5) - Narrator/Characters (7 6) - Doing something else simultaneously (7 7)
8	SOCIETAL ROLE OF DOCUMENTARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opinion formation (8 1) - In-depth knowledge (8 2) - Public awareness (8 3) - Inform/Educate (8 4) - Indifferent (8 5) - Presenting different angle (8 6) - Entertain (8 7) - Slot fillers (8 8) - Conveying message (8 9) - Motivate action/Has effect (8 10) - Commercial survival (8 11) - Provides tv choice (8 12) - Accessible to all (8 13) - Raise tv quality (8 14)
9	DOCUMENTARY CREDIBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Factors guaranteeing credibility (9 1) - Factors challenging credibility (9 2) - Depends (9 3)
10	OBJECTIVITY AND BIAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to be objective (10 1) - Indications of bias (10 2) - Are/Can/Should be objective (10 3) - Aren't/Can't/Shouldn't be objective (10 4) - Depends (10 5)
11	COMMERCIALISATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good thing (11 1) - Bad thing (11 2)
12	WHOSE AGENDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public (12 1) - Market (12 2) - Broadcasters (12 3) - Depends (12 4)

Appendix G

Key to group codes

YMABC1	-	Younger (20-35); Male; ABC1
YFABC1	-	Younger (20-35); Female; ABC1
YMC2D	-	Younger (20-35); Male; C2D
YFC2D	-	Younger (20-35); Female; C2D
OMABC1	-	Older (45-60); Male; ABC1
OFABC1	-	Older (45-60); Female; ABC1
OMC2D	-	Older (45-60); Male; C2D
OFC2D	-	Older (45-60); Female; C2D

Appendix H

"Parental Choice" Programme transcript

VISUAL	VERBAL
Examination hall - pupils sitting entrance exam	Voice-over (VO): Different parents talking about the perils of their children sitting entrance examinations
Title - "Parental Choice"	
Streets of Enfield, North London	
Kids queueing in the playground at a primary school	VO: The final year at primary school is an important decision time for the future
Face on interview with Alison Hull (Richard's mum)	Interview with Alison Hull (Richard's mum) worrying about what lies ahead
Richard in the classroom	VO: Profile of Richard - motivated and hardworking
Alison Hull	Interview with Alison Hull - ambitions for Richard
Family photos of Richard	VO: Richard's family background - divorced parents who don't always agree on his future
	Voice of Richard's dad - he should go somewhere which suits his abilities
Face on interview with Andrew Hull (Richard's dad)	Emphasis on enjoying himself rather than struggling
James with mum at home doing exam papers	VO: Profile of James - model pupil, one of the brightest in the class
Zoom in on James	Voice of James's mum - concerned about the choice of schools on offer
Face on interview with Tracie Sutton (James's mum)	Interview
Shot of dog	James's mum talks negatively about the local school and its lack of white faces
James with his dad	VO: Profile of James's dad - businessman
Face on interview with Graeme Sutton (James's dad)	Interview - talks about the benefits of competition
James and Richard with their parents at the karting track	VO: At the weekends, James and Richard can be found at the karting track. Experiences of kids there. Dads giving them instructions
The race starts	
Dads watch on	Voice of James's dad regretting not working at school
Face on interview with Graeme Sutton (James's dad)	James's dad talks about having to go back to college later on - doesn't want the same for James
The road to Potters Bar - countryside etc.	Voice of John Major soundbyte about choice

Richard's parents arriving at Dame Alice Owen's school open day	VO: Dame Alice Owen's school described as the 'jewel in the crown' of Conservative party policy - a fee-paying, opted-out school
James's parents arriving	VO: Profile of Dame Alice Owen's
Headmistress addressing open day visitors	Headmistress presents school's ethos
Camera scans audience and focuses on James, Richard and their parents	
Headmistress and pupil	Exchange about football match
Shots of audience listening and reacting	
Kids playing in playground of a Hackney primary school (Inner London)	Sound of kids singing "Every little thing's gonna be alright" - Bob Marley
In the classroom	VO: Kids in inner city primary school are also making decisions
Lawrence working with a friend	VO: Profile of Lawrence - done well at primary school. Parents committed to the state system
Face on interview with Steve and Jan Leybourne (Lawrence's parents)	Interview with Lawrence's parents - they favour the local school but are checking out the options
Family photos of Lawrence	Voices of Lawrence's parents
Face on with Lawrence's mum	Interview with Lawrence's mum - they are rooted in the community and wouldn't move. If everyone did that and sent their kids to the local school, the school would reflect the community
Local high street shots	VO: Tony Blair sound byte on education
Lawrence and parents arriving at Stoke Newington school open day	
Parents in classroom looking round	VO: Stoke Newington is Jan and Steve's local comprehensive. Lawrence would automatically get a place here
	Lawrence and parents discussing favourite pictures
Open day shots	VO: Stoke Newington - school on the up
Catherine talking to a pupil	Catherine asking pupil about the school
	VO: Profile of Catherine - brightest child in the class
Shot of Catherine and mum whilst mum is being interviewed	Catherine's mum - Maggie Harding - must be a place for Catherine in one of the good schools. You only get one chance and she doesn't want to sacrifice her daughter to a school on the way up. Nervous. Talks about the process as a trial
Sign - Latymer School	VO: Description of Latymer School - no fees, high in league tables, top co-ed selective school in the country
Jan and Steve (Lawrence's parents) in car	VO: Despite liking the local comprehensive, Jan and Steve are drawn to look at Latymer

Jan turning round in passenger seat of car	Jan talks about her expectations of Latymer and how to get there
Jan and Steve arriving at Latymer	VO: Profile of Latymer and its achievements
Chris - 6th former - leads tour	A sixth-former introduces himself and takes party on a tour of the school
Tour of school. Shots of party listening to different presentations	Teacher describing arts. Another teacher. Sports teacher describing facilities
Face on shot of Catherine	VO: Catherine is on the tour. Interview with Catherine - she talks about the school's facilities. Expresses a desire to come and to take the examinations
Going into classrooms	VO: Open days are useful for parents to compare notes
Jan and friend, Oleanna, chatting	Discussing approach of the different schools at open days towards both the kids and the parents
Lawrence and Craig in toilets - messing around	VO: Lawrence bumps into his classmate Craig
Face on interview with Lawrence and Craig	Voice of interviewer asking them about Latymer. They both think it's boring and traditional
Shot of parents listening to Latymer headmaster. Focus on Steve and Jan. Back to headmaster. Wider shot of audience	Headmaster talking about the chances of getting in, competition etc. Asking parents to think hard before applying

END OF PART ONE

Kids playing football	
Focus on Craig and Lawrence	VO: Jan and Steve decided not to enter Lawrence for the Latymer exam
Face on with Jan	Interview with Jan - Latymer did not suit Lawrence's personality
Shot of Lawrence playing football	Voice of interviewer - asking if she thought Lawrence would have passed the exam. Jan replies no
Face on with Jan	Interview with Jan - headmaster gave the impression of wanting the top 6-10% - Lawrence wouldn't have blossomed in that sort of environment. Also not prepared for it
Focus on Craig playing football	
Jan and Steve, and rest of family, cheering them on	
Focus on Craig	VO: Profile of Craig - Arsenal fan. His mum is also considering Latymer
Shot of apartment block	
Face on with Carol Bramble (Craig's mum) and Craig	Interview with Carol Bramble - not sure if Latymer is a good choice for Craig, but he'll still sit the exam.

Zoom in on Craig	Voice of interviewer - asks Craig about his impressions of Latymer. Craig calls it boring. Talks about the lack of ethnic minorities. Interviewer asks whether he is frightened of taking the exam. Craig doesn't want to take it (or go there) but he will. Has a tutor who gives him practice Latymer papers
Shot of Latymer papers - Craig with tutor	VO: Local schools don't have the time or resources to prepare pupils for exams, hence private tutors
Catherine studying with her mum	VO: Catherine has had weekly tuition for two years. In the run up to the exams she does extra with her mum
Face on with Catherine and her mum	Voice of interviewer - asks how mum is feeling. She is tired, but both of their maths has improved. She feels the children from independent schools will be streets ahead because they have more homework and concentrate more on the basics
Shot of Louisa in ballet class	
Parents watching on	VO: Latymer entrance exam is 2 weeks away
	Profile of Louisa - creative child and good all-rounder
Louisa's parents in their garden	Family background - Dad is a special needs teacher, recently made redundant. House being repossessed.
Shot of rabbits	Rabbit breeding business also threatened
Face on with Louisa's parents	Interview with Louisa's parents. Dad explains background and why they have to move, which may work out better as they'll be nearer to the school they want Louisa to go to
Face on with Louisa	Interview with Louisa - she wants to go to Latymer or maybe Dame Alice Owen's. Scared about the exam - but thinks she'll pass
Face on with Louisa's parents (inside)	Louisa's dad - aim is for her to come out well adjusted. Both pleased with primary school. Problem is in finding equally good secondary school - not a lot of choice in Enfield
Sign - City of London School Shot of boat on the Thames	VO: Jan and Steve going with Oleanna to see the City of London School - independent, private day school on the Thames
Steve and Oleanna talking	They discuss their positive first impressions
Camera pans round banks of Thames	Jan - comments on the beautiful setting
They all go in	VO: City of London School founded over 500 years ago for poor men's sons. Now it's expensive
Shot of statue and paintings inside Shot of pool	Lots of facilities
Face on with Steve	Steve - they'll put Lawrence in for the exam - very impressed with the school

At the racetrack Shot of James' mum Shot of cars racing	VO: The weekend before the Latymer exam. Time off from revision, but Richard's dad sees racing as useful - working on the desire to win
	Voice of Richard's dad - other kids at the racing track are very aggressive
Face on with Richard's dad	Richard doesn't have that
Back to racetrack Richard's dad urging Richard on	Voice of Richard's dad - he needs more of me in him
Face on with Richard's dad	But his mum thinks there's quite enough of me in him already
Richard and James's dads watching race	Voice of James's dad - kart racing has made James able to cope with pressure
Face on with James's dad	Winning strengthens and builds character
Back to the track - James wins. Richard's dad congratulates James's dad. Richard comes fifth	
James's dad congratulates James	
Shot of Catherine studying	VO: The Latymer exam is tomorrow
Catherine studying with her mum	Catherine stays up late practising test papers
Catherine, her mum, another parent and child arriving at Latymer for the exam	
Shot of parents and kids waiting to go into the exam	VO: Day of exam. The odds of success are less than one in ten
Arriving at the City of London School	
Inside - parents and kids waiting Shot of Lawrence walking down the corridor with other kids, climbing stairs	VO: Lawrence is one of 400 children going for 70 places
Face on with Oleanna - chatting to Jan	Jan and Oleanna talk about their nerves Jan - you want your child to do their best and display their potential. Not confident about how Lawrence will do
Shot of exam hall	VO: First stage of Latymer exam is a two hour paper
Headmaster talking to parents - alternate shots of him and them	Headmaster explains parents' programme whilst waiting for the exam to finish
Shot of Lawrence in exam	VO: Lawrence confronted with new mathematical ideas
Face on with Jan and Oleanna	Jan - feels inadequate. Lawrence is not well enough prepared Oleanna - jokes about their children not knowing about maths equipment and having to buy it last minute
Back to Lawrence - playing with compass in exam	Voice of Oleanna - had to teach them what a protractor is

Shot of exam hall again Shots of Lawrence fidgeting	
Back to overview of hall	Invigilator ends the exam
Shot of children coming out of the exam hall	
Outside - Richard finding his dad	Richard telling dad about the ease of the exam
Catherine finds her mum	Catherine recounts the exam to her mum
Lawrence coming out of the City exam and finding his mum	Lawrence recounting exam
Shot of Richard, James and dads	Still discussing exam - in a positive frame of mind
Catherine and friend chatting	They laugh about having survived the exam
END OF PART TWO	
Shot of the outside of a restaurant	
Inside restaurant	
Focus on table with mothers from the programme	VO: It's 3 months later and the results are due. The waiting is more stressful than the preparation
	Mothers discussing getting the results - apprehensive, worried about their children having to go to Stoke Newington comprehensive
Shot of the outside of restaurant	
Shot of Outside Louisa's family house	VO: Just before Christmas the results of the first stage of the exams arrive
Face on with Louisa	Louisa describes getting her results. She didn't pass. Appealing because she wasn't well on the day of the exam
Face on with Louisa's dad	Voice of interviewer asking about his feelings now towards Latymer. He talks about Latymer as OK - but the main consideration is who your child will be mixing with
Shot of Louisa getting ready for ballet	
Back to Louisa's dad	There are some bad schools which fail children both academically and socially - wouldn't want Louisa to go to any of them
Children dancing at a party	
Focus on Catherine dancing	VO: Catherine has passed the first stage of the Latymer exam
Dancing	
Focus on Craig	Craig's results weren't as he'd expected
Face on with Craig	Craig discusses his results - can't believe he failed
Shot of Arsenal clock	Voice of interviewer asking if he's disappointed Craig - not really, it's a posh school for smart people

Shot of the outside of Craig's mum's hairdressing salon	VO: Craig's mum is worried about Stoke Newington
Carol (Craig's mum) doing someone's hair	Carol - Stoke Newington is no good for kids who need pushing. It's more difficult for black kids
Carol visiting William Ellis School	VO: Profile of William Ellis - comprehensive in Camden, no tests or fees, but they have to move to Camden
Face on with Carol	Carol - looked around and thinks William Ellis will suit Craig - orderly, uniform, all boys
Face on with Craig	Voice of interviewer asking how he feels about moving to Camden
Shot of Craig playing with his friends Back to interview with Craig	Craig - big change, lonely, but will make new friends
Shot of Lawrence eating cereal	VO: Still uncertainty over Lawrence's future
Shot of family having breakfast	When the news arrives, it's a mixed blessing
Face on with Lawrence	Interviewer asks what his results were Lawrence - bottom 30% - failed. He's not bothered - wants to go to Stoke Newington with his friends
Face on with Jan	Jan - it's no reflection on Lawrence, he just wasn't groomed for it
Face on with Steve	Steve - quite happy with Stoke Newington. Voice of Jan - if they lived somewhere where the local comprehensive was bad then you feel forced to go opted out. There is choice but it is a negative choice. Everyone should have a decent school to go to
Shot of kids working in classroom	VO: February - the final results of Dame Alice Owen's and Latymer are due
Focus on Richard	Only three of our children are left. Richard was rejected by Latymer, but is still in the running for Dame Alice Owen's
Focus on James	James is still waiting for news from both
Focus on Catherine	Catherine is still in the running for both
	Finally the Dame Alice Owen's results come through
Face on with Richard, on his bike	Interviewer asks him about his results. Richard - didn't get in. A bit upset, but he tried his best
Face on with Richard and his mum	Mum - it's very upsetting - but they may appeal. She explains about the appeal process
Face on with Richard's dad	Dad - Richard hasn't failed, he just didn't get pulled out of the hat. They're going to appeal - it's not over yet

Face on with Richard and his mum	Interviewer asks Richard's mum if she feels there's much choice in education Richard's mum - clearly not, although there initially seems to be
Face on with Richard's dad	Richard's dad - you only have choice if you have a very bright child
Shot of Richard and his mum again	
Face on with James's dad Shot of James sitting next to him	Interviewer asks James's dad if James got in James's dad - no Interviewer asks what happens now
Back to James's dad	James's dad - they will appeal, because James wanted to go there
Face on with James's mum Back to James - embarrassed	James's mum - appealing is harder, but they've got nothing to lose. Upset - she was quietly confident. Praised James's qualities There is no choice - it is the school choosing the child, not the parents choosing the school
Face on with James's dad	James's dad - there appears to be more choice, but actually there's less. Feels they don't know everything about the qualifying process - there's an underlying political element
Face on with James's mum Shot of James's dad listening Back to mum	James's mum - the 11+ was fairer
Focus on James	VO: James's only hope is the slim one of getting into Latymer
Focus on Catherine	Same for Catherine. She failed Dame Alice Owen's
Face on with Catherine and her mum	Catherine - not disappointed - felt she wasn't going to pass Catherine's mum - didn't expect it to be this hard. She would have moved somewhere with a good school. It's very hard to move from a state primary to one of the selective schools. There aren't enough good schools Interviewer asks if she's optimistic for the future Catherine's mum - there are no choices. No government has got it right. Not sure what will happen. But her concern is with Catherine now.
Shot of kids singing	Primary school kids singing "Everything's gonna be alright" - Bob Marley CREDITS
Shot of Craig reading in his bedroom	VO: Craig is moving to Camden and starts at William Ellis
Shot of Louisa in a ballet lesson	Louisa's appeal to Latymer failed - she has to go to her local school
Shot of James receiving his winners trophy	James failed the final Latymer exam. If his appeal fails, he will have to go to the local school

Shot of Lawrence on his bike	Lawrence is going to Stoke Newington comprehensive
Shot of Richard	If Richard's appeal to Dame Alice Owen's fails, he will go to his local school
Shot of Catherine playing the violin	Catherine got in to Latymer
	Sound of children clapping
END	

Appendix I

Focus Group Schedule -"Parental Choice"

- * If you had to describe the programme to someone who had just come in, how would you describe it? - PROBE FULLY
- * Is it a typical documentary - why/not?
- * Is it interesting - how/why/not?
- * Would you have watched it normally
- * Did it annoy you at all - how/why/not?
- * What is the role of such a programme in society?
- * Did it fulfil this for you - how/why/not?
- * Was it easy to follow - how/why/not?
- * What do you think was the programme maker's aim; what was the intended message?
- * What was it about the programme that indicated that aim?
- * Was it convincing/credible - how/why/not?
- * Was it objective - how/why/not?
- * Should it be objective?
- * How effective are the characters in the programme?
- * Would you have wanted to hear from anybody else - who? why?
- * [If bias is mentioned - Does bias detract from argument - how/why/not?]
- * What is the strongest idea, most memorable - why?
- * What is the strongest image - why?
- * Do you think the programme is aimed at any particular audience - who? why?
- * Do you think the programme is specific to London/ers or representative of the whole country?
- * Did the programme persuade you of anything - what/how/why/not?
- * Does it make you want to act in any way as a result - do what/why/not? topic guide

Appendix J

Case study coding frame

- 1 BACKGROUND**
- 2 DOCUMENTARY DEFINITION**
- 3 ROLE/PURPOSE OF DOCUMENTARY**
- 4 REFERENCES TO AUDIENCE**
(image of; interpretation of etc.)
- 5 PROGRAMME-MAKING**
[production]
 - process (5 1)
 - constraints (5 2)
 - scheduling/ratings etc. (5 3)
- 6 DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAMME**
 - content/subject/issues (6 1)
 - strongest image (6 2)
- 7 AIMS/OBJECTIVES**
 - within programme (7 1)
 - external to programme (7 2)
- 8 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE/CONSTRUCTION**
(technical; abstract..)
- 9 CREDIBILITY**
(is it; how is it; how should it be; ways of assessing)
- 10 OBJECTIVITY/BIAS**
(is it objective; can it be objective; should it be objective; is it biased; how etc.)
- 11 PERSONAL EFFECT**
[reception]
 - interest/appeal (11 1)
 - annoy (11 2)
 - persuade (11 3)
 - act (11 4)
 - depressed (11 5)
 - encouraged (11 6)
- 12 RELATED COMMENTS**
 - Content-related experiences/opinions (12 1)
 - Character-related comment (12 2)
- 13 VIEWING**
 - Watched it (13 1)
 - Didn't watch it but would (13 2)
 - Didn't watch it and wouldn't (13 3)
 - Don't know/maybe (13 4)