

**Documents of Ordinariness: Authority and Participation  
in the BBC *Video Nation* Project 1994–2011**

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I, Jo Henderson confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information had been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

### Documents of Ordinariness: authority and participation in the BBC *Video Nation* Project 1994–2011

This research examines authority and participation within the BBC, using as its case study *Video Nation*, a participatory project that invited those constructed as ‘ordinary people’ to represent themselves in self-made video shorts. These ‘documents of ordinariness’ were broadcast in week-night slots between 1994 and 2000. The project was subsequently relaunched for online distribution in 2001 and as a web 2.0 project in 2009 before its closure in 2011.

The thesis advances a historiography of the BBC in order to contextualise attitudes towards ‘ordinary people’ within the BBC from its formation through to the work of the Community Programmes Unit (CPU) in the 1970s up until 2011. This historiography is largely based on the *BBC Yearbooks* and other Corporation publications, and the work of the BBC’s first historian, Asa Briggs. It explores the changing usage and understanding of the phrase ‘ordinary people’ within the BBC, and the contexts within which they were represented.

The thesis responds to the following research questions:

How has the BBC imposed its cultural authority in relation to the representation of ‘ordinary people’?

What were the affordances and constraints of emerging technologies and working practices on their representation?

What was the extent of participation offered in the various iterations of the *Video Nation* project, and how did this impact on the representation of ‘ordinary people’?

The case study was accomplished through qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. These included attendance at *Video Nation* training days and events, in-depth personal interviews with project participants and institutional players, and content analysis of a randomised sample of the web output of the project and of the website interface. Primary research was undertaken at the BBC Written Archives at

Caversham; substantial secondary materials (institutional documents and publications, newspaper articles and reviews) were consulted alongside the work of BBC broadcasting historians including Georgina Born, Asa Briggs, Tom Burns, David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell, among others, to present this overarching history of an important participatory media project.

The overall contention of this thesis is that, counterintuitively, higher levels of institutional control and authority and diminished participation were evident in the web project, while *Video Nation's* broadcast phase offered considerably more open forms of participation and access, compared with the web project. This runs counter to some new media theory regarding the democratisation of the media and the thesis offers a critical view of 'user-generated' content on the institutional platform of the BBC.

The research aims to contribute to the literature on participatory media forms in institutional contexts. It complements existing work on representation of 'ordinary people' and the BBC and their participation in it in several ways. Firstly, it presents a durational study of a BBC project, investigating the attitudes towards 'ordinary people' and the introduction of specific maximalist modes of participation. Secondly, it presents a narrative of the CPU that identifies some of the concerns within the BBC that this type of participatory content raised, and the fluctuating motivations of channel controllers to its production. Thirdly, the research examines issues created by the introduction of new technology that enabled production in new contexts by new subjects for new formats, channels and delivery platforms.

Key words: *'ordinary people', BBC, representation, access, participation, technology.*

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## List of Interviewees and dates

### Participants

Danousia Malina	12 July 2008
Hamish Bicknell	27 September 2007
Denise Lester	13 January and 17 February 2008

### Project Producers

Mandy Rose	BBC Radio Cardiff, 11 May 2010
Outi Vellacott	The Hub Broadcasting House, 24 November 2005
Simon Fox	<i>Video Nation</i> , Broadcasting House, 15 October 2005

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## Abbreviations

ABS	Association of Broadcast Staff
ACTT	Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians
A-R	Associated-Rediffusion
BAFTA	British Academy of Film and Television Arts
BDM	British Documentary Movement
BETA	Broadcasting and Entertainment Trades Alliance
BECTU	Broadcasting, Entertainment and Cinematograph Trade Union
BFI	British Film Institute
CFU	Crown Film Unit
CPU	Community Programmes Unit

EBU	European Broadcast Union
ENCA	Editor, News and Current Affairs
EMB	Empire Marketing Board
GPO	General Post Office
IBU	International Broadcasting Union
ITA	Independent Television Authority
ITN	Independent Television News
M-O	Mass-Observation
Mol	Ministry of Information
MU	Musician's Union
NAG	National Advisory Group
NATKE	National Association of Theatrical and Kine Employees
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
NVLA	National Viewers and Listeners Association
O/B	Outside Broadcast
PBS	Public Broadcast Service (US)
RP	Received Pronunciation
TAM	Television Audience Monitoring

#### Note on referencing

Radio and television series and films are identified according to standard Harvard conventions. Individual television episodes have their transmission date and time in the bibliography, and their BBC genome reference appears as a footnote on first mention.

In the text, individual episode titles for *Open Door*, *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* are italicised. In the bibliography such texts appear under the series title, and individual episodes are not italicised.

The *Video Nation* project texts were not billed as part of the schedule and so transmission times and dates are unavailable.

## Introduction

*Documents of Ordinariness* takes an original approach to the history of the BBC, in identifying and examining the Corporation's notions of authority and participation. This research is important because it contextualises the emergence of the Community Programmes Unit (CPU), within the BBC, and extends existing work on the unit and its initiatives *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation*. The thesis provides consideration of institutional and regulatory concerns within the Corporation regarding 'ordinary people' in maximalist modes of participatory practices. The analysis of *Video Nation* is situated within a substantial contextualisation of the CPU and the wider institution in order to understand the historical representation of 'ordinary people'. It examines the particular participatory contexts of the CPU and its *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* output. A strength of this work is that it documents the *Video Nation* project in its entirety and enhances previous work through the discussion and analysis of both the broadcast project and its online iteration within the BBC. The scope of the research extends from the launch of the BBC in 1922 to the emergence of the CPU in 1972 and continues until 2011, when the last of the unit's initiatives, the *Video Nation* project, ended. In identifying issues about the representation of 'ordinary people' across three technologies (radio, tv and online), it employs a wide framework for the first 50 years of the BBC and then the focus sharpens more tightly on to the output of the CPU and the specific type of maximalist participation offered by its production context(s).

The opening chapters draw extensively on the institutional histories of the BBC and the construction of its cultural authority through the selection of content, guests and topics. It documents the exceptions where 'ordinary people' were included in its programmes, and identifies some of the concerns and difficulties this created. One concern was the sharp contrast to the extraordinariness the Corporation claimed for itself and extended to those who appeared on it as 'invited guests'. *Documents of Ordinariness* also takes account of the way the Corporation itself was regulated or constrained by successive governments, broadcasting regulations and, importantly in relation to its cultural authority, the Royal Charter that was meant to guarantee the BBC's political independence. The various broadcast enquiries, the recommendations they produced and the subsequent changes made as they passed through parliament all influenced

the service provided by the BBC, and the historiography that is the subject of chapters three to seven is provided as a means of understanding the climate in which the CPU emerged. These chapters draw upon the work of official BBC historians Asa Briggs and Jean Seaton.

The primary research from chapter eight, draws upon archival documents at the BBC Written Archive, in order to enhance the secondary research that exists in the CPU as the focus sharpens onto the output of this project and the maximalist mode of participation extended in this context. The considerations of participation here are focused on the output of the unit, and exclude the many other forms of participation that were being explored in the BBC and franchises. The empirical work presented in chapters 10 and 11 extends across the duration of *Video Nation* (1994–2011) in its broadcast and online stages. *Video Nation* is a significant BBC project that merits attention firstly because of its extension of access and participatory practices and secondly because of the technological innovation that enabled ‘ordinary people’ to occupy new positions in the broadcast sphere.

Additionally, *Video Nation* can be seen as a milestone in the UK’s history of the participatory practices of mainstream media. *Video Nation*’s best remembered output is the two-minute shorts that appeared on television five nights a week, 40 weeks of the year between 1994 and 2000. These very conventions provided a stark interruption to the flow of the BBC’s televisual production values. Other content included themed compilation programmes of extended shorts. Further, the project was unique in its approach because it was not envisaged as a particular format or even as a series, but instead as production context that could serve or supplement the broadcast agenda. *Video Nation* and its predecessor *Video Diaries* exploited the affordances offered by portable video technology; self-filming granted participants higher levels of autonomy and control over their own representations; and the introduction of white balance and simple lighting tips extended the production contexts of television into the domestic environment.

The understanding of terms used in the title – authority and participation, as well as ordinary/ordinariness – is laid out here. The definition of ‘ordinary people’ used is rooted in the British cultural studies understanding as the working class, the masses at the bottom of the class hierarchy. This understanding is articulated in the work of

leaders of postwar British radical and socialist thought such as the Cambridge-educated Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson. Their somewhat romantic and, possibly even then, nostalgic view of the working class built on some of the concerns of the previous generation of British Documentary Movement (BDM) film makers, also left-wing and Cambridge-educated, which included Anthony Elton, Humphrey Jennings, Stuart Legg and Basil Wright. Another, older, configuration of 'the masses' at play in this understanding of 'ordinary people' alluded to those who, within the understanding of the Arnoldian tradition, it was considered possible to educate out of their ordinariness. This relates closely to an intention articulated in John Reith's vision of public service broadcasting as the first Director-General of the BBC.

Other considerations of the ordinary as articulated by Williams (1983) are relevant at different points of this research. These can be described in three categories: the ordinary as in the everyday; the ordinary as in the common; and the ordinary as in the shared. Firstly, the association of the ordinary with the everyday, meaning the ordinary as in the regular, the routine and the familiar; this is the diurnal ordinariness that was of interest to Mass-Observation and to theorists such as Ben Highmore and Claire Langhamer. This was introduced into broadcasting through the work of regional departments, particularly the Northwest Features Department (Scannell and Cardiff, 1982), and into television after the arrival of the commercial franchises (Buscombe, 1981).

Secondly, there is the understanding of the ordinary as the everyday understandings shared by all, which do not require specialist knowledge, as in 'common ground' or 'common sense', which have a particular relevance in relation to media representations. The absence of specialist knowledge has distinct meanings in that it distinguished not only between the educated/uneducated but also between the professional/amateur. This became apparent initially through the use of social actors in the output of the BDM (1930s) and its successor, the Free Cinema movement (1950s); significantly, both of these used the amateur technology of 16mm film, introduced in the 1920s. The distinctions between amateur and professional resurfaced in the discourse of broadcast unions that accompanied the use of the substandard technology of video as it introduced 'ordinary people' to the broadcast output as non-media professionals.

Thirdly, ordinary is used in the sense of the shared experience of the cultural structures of a particular society at a particular time. This can be understood in the extended rhythms of an annual cycle, such as the broadcasting calendar that imagined or imposed a traditional class-based hierarchy in its representation of the nation, and its own cultural authority. As the demographic of the population is constantly changing, so what is seen and described as ordinary and its definitions constantly changes. In this vein, Raymond Williams (1958) understood the ordinary as embodied in working-class people, and culture itself as 'ordinary'. Langhamer (2017) identified that 'ordinary people' was a category of historical analysis of the traditional white working-class. The makeup of what might be described as the working class is substantially different at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than in the 1930s to which Langhamer referred. A consideration of class is nonetheless maintained in this thesis, precisely because class risks being obscured as other categories of age, race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality are foregrounded and there is a danger that class could become invisible. The breadth of the category of ordinariness and its use in a number of different contexts, then, is of paramount importance in this study. The research shows how some of these changed or developed in importance during the period studied in this thesis. The thesis also identifies a conflation that exists between understandings of 'ordinary people' and ordinariness in relation to the output of *Video Nation*.

The distinctions between professionalism and amateur practice are especially relevant in participatory projects that suggest a democratisation of media practices, notably not apparent in the forms that make up reality tv and celebrity culture, which are not studied as part of the subject matter of this thesis. Here the focus is instead on the concerns raised by the *Video Nation* project as the concept of 'ordinary people' expands to reflect a diverse society represented in ordinariness apparent in the rituals of the everyday. Other frameworks through which the *Video Nation* project could be viewed include ethnicity, age, gender and class as well as the imagined national/local constructions of community, as discussed by Nancy Thumin (1999).

The BBC's cultural 'authority' is defined as, initially, that which exists in its embeddedness within the structures of the establishment, through the Royal Charter. Its authority is also based upon its status as a public corporation, with a responsibility to 'inform, educate and entertain' (as per John Reith's much-quoted dictum) its audience who were, at the establishment of the Corporation, viewed as a single

homogenous mass who were not ordinary, as in the working class. This research outlines the development of the broadcaster as it negotiated the various enquiries, committees, broadcasting acts and challenges from competition, unionisation, regulation and relevance, identifying some of the critical moments and issues in the representation of 'ordinary people'.

The participation of 'ordinary people' in broadcasting covers a wide range of contexts from the caller to a phone-in show, to the contestant in a quiz or competition, to a documentary subject. The type of participation considered here is that which goes beyond the use of 'ordinary people' to occupy pre-defined roles in existing formats; instead it is that which enables the participants to extend more influence over their representation of themselves as themselves. It has some similarities with the genre of access television that was possible in some broadcast contexts but not particularly one which was invested in the representation of its cultural authority, because of the accompanying concern of accountability in a public service broadcaster. Even within these parameters there are a number of forms of participation that may be extended, so a further focus is on a participatory production context that enabled the production of content that has been defined, to a greater or lesser extent by the participant(s). Further, this is within the context of the ordinary person lacking the specialised knowledge (including equipment competencies and visual language) available to the professional, who is also aware of the constraints particular to the format, transmission time and motivation of the content/programme. In understanding the centrality of this relationship, I have drawn on John Corner's work that spans British documentary film and access television and its function within public service broadcasting. I have also drawn on Nico Carpentier's work on the *Video Nation* project and his wider work on media participation as well as Espen Ytreberg's discussions of the ways in which participation is formatted for broadcast projects.

The thesis responds to the following research questions:

- 1) How has the BBC imposed its cultural authority in relation to the representation of 'ordinary people'?
- 2) What were the affordances and constraints of emerging technologies and working practices on their representation?
- 3) What was the extent of participation offered in the various iterations of the *Video Nation* project, and how did this impact on the representation of 'ordinary people'?



The historiographic approach for this thesis, as the literature review demonstrates, draws mainly on televisual historiographies articulated in the work of Helen Wheatley and Paddy Scannell. Theories in relation to media participation are rooted in understandings put forward by Nico Carpentier and Espen Ytreburg. Archival research was also undertaken in relation to the CPU, *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* to supplement academic and first-person accounts of media professionals in the literature, including work by Jon Dovey, Nicole Matthews, Giles Oakley, Mandy Rose and the author's previous published work.

The empirical research on the *Video Nation* project, which was still active in its online iteration at the beginning of the research process, included participant observation, formal and informal interviews with producers and participants, and content analysis of the archival practices of the project's online phase. This was undertaken as part of the initial studentship in the Camcorder Cultures project (Institute of Education, now University College London, Knowledge Lab, 2005–2008), the parameters of which had already been defined and access to the *Video Nation* project already negotiated. My initial interest in applying for the studentship was to build upon previous related work undertaken during my BA (Photography, University of Westminster 2004) and MA (Cultural Memory, University of London, Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies, School of Advanced Study 2005).

The structure of this thesis is as follows: the first chapter is the literature review, which identifies the literature that explicitly relates to the theme of themes of the title, the BBC's cultural authority, 'ordinary people' and ordinariness, access and participation and the CPU and its initiatives *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation*. Chapter 2 discusses the methodologies employed and the logic behind their selection. It identifies issues of access to primary and empirical sources and the decisions taken to address or overcome them while maintaining a logical and valid framework to this study. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 cover the period between 1922, the start of the broadcasting service, and 1955, the year that the BBC lost the broadcasting monopoly with the arrival of 'commercial' television. These chapters provide context and outline concerns around broadcasting, examining the development of the cultural authority of the BBC and its representation of 'ordinary people'. Chapter 3 addresses the research question of how, historically, the BBC has imposed its cultural authority through the representation of the

‘extraordinary’ at the expense of the representation of the ordinary and ‘ordinary people’. The fourth chapter investigates the media context in which ‘ordinary people’ were represented outside broadcasting, while Chapter 5 identifies the changing use and understanding of the phrase ‘ordinary people’ and the role of the BBC during and immediately after the Second World War.

The next section, comprising Chapters 6, 7 and 8, covers the period from 1946 to 1990 and examines the introduction of ‘ordinary people’ into the broadcast agenda. Chapter 6 focuses on the arrival of commercial television, and the impact of new technologies and techniques in documentary and docudrama production. Chapter 7 examines the emergence of BBC2, a channel with regulatory responsibility for the representation of minority interests. Chapter 8 takes as its subject the formation of the CPU as a production context that extended access to the broadcast environment to those people whose concerns were rarely heard within that environment.

Chapters 9 and 10 cover the period from 1990, documenting the point where non-professional video technology reached broadcast standards, which enabled the *Video Diaries* series. Chapter 9 focuses on the introduction of new video technologies into television production and the affordances and constraints of this technology in art-activist and televisual practices and for the individuals and institutions. Chapter 10 covers the television phase of *Video Nation*, and new techniques and modes of production that disrupted the broadcast output. It investigates the establishment of new production mechanisms and forms of participation extended to participatory projects that used a focus on ordinariness as a means of including a diverse range of participants, who became framed as ‘ordinary people’. The penultimate chapter examines how the project responded to its switch to online and the changes in the working practices in the production and delivery of its content. It examines the archival impulses of the website and BBC-wide campaigns that *Video Nation* contributed to. This is followed by a short concluding chapter demonstrating how the research questions have been answered.

## Chapter 1 Literature review

This literature review encompasses texts from a broad range of sources, including institutional publications, official documentation, academic works in the fields of media, communication, broadcasting and cultural studies, individual accounts, interviews and media articles. Given the nature of the study, many radio, television, film and video sources feature in the work. While acknowledging overlapping areas and interests, the sections of the literature review are divided into the historiographic, the archive, participatory practices, and participatory television projects within the BBC. The main themes of this thesis – access, participation and ‘ordinary people’ – are considered in relation to each of these sections. A focus of this research has been on particular forms of participation framed as access that emerged within the unique institution of the BBC, whose formation and history reflects the attitudes of the broadcaster towards those it classified as ordinary. There is an emphasis on material that has been produced by the BBC in the official histories, yearbooks, handbooks and regular magazines as well as a range of other books that the Corporation published. This has been to identify attitudes towards participation within the institution and to consider the ways in which it has responded to calls for more access and accountability within broadcasting.

### Historiography

The writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, and the synthesis of those particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods (*Merriam Webster's collegiate dictionary*. (n.d.). 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam Webster).

According to the broadcast historian Paddy Scannell, ‘the task of historiography is to discover the story, and write the narrative of the historical event, thereby disclosing its significance’ (Scannell, 2004, p.130). The historiography of the era of the BBC that preceded and contextualised the case study of *Video Nation* is drawn from an understanding that discussions in the fields of media, broadcasting and television history are embedded in the socio-economic and political histories of the national and institutional contexts in which they occur (Branston, 1988; Scannell, 2004; Seaton 1997; Wheatley, 2007). Here, the historiography covers the period between 1922 and 1972, and while focused on the cultural authority of BBC and its representation of ‘ordinary people’, it also brings into the discussion ordinariness as represented by the British

Documentary Movement in the 1930s where 'ordinary people' were represented as 'social actors', people playing themselves or people like them, 'who do not coalesce into characters' (Nichols, 1994, p.100). Also considered is material from the Mass-Observation movement, where, in some contexts, 'ordinary people' had the opportunity to anonymously represent their own experiences, and the photo-journalism magazine *The Picture Post* (1938–1957), which offered more sympathetic representations that reflected the lives of 'ordinary people' in a social-documentary style.

### The Cultural Authority of the BBC

A critical issue when researching and identifying a narrative thread within a long-standing mainstream media institution like the BBC is the amount of scholarly work that has already been produced in the fields of media, broadcasting and television studies. For the fullest possible understanding of the cultural authority of the BBC, the world's first, national, public service broadcaster, this thesis has most extensively turned to the work of the official historians of the BBC. Asa Briggs, the first official historian, produced a five-volume history of the Corporation, *The History of Broadcasting*, (Volume 1: *The Birth of Broadcasting 1896–1927* (1961), Volume 2: *The Golden Age of Wireless* (1965) Volume 3: *The War of the Words*, (1970), Volume 4: *Sound and Vision* (1979) and Volume 5 *Competition 1955–1974* (1995) were all useful for understanding the areas under discussion in this thesis. Unfortunately, Briggs' account ends in 1974 and, while it references the formation of the Community Programmes Unit, this discussion is not continued in any depth in the work of the second BBC official historian Jean Seaton. In *Pinkoes and Traitors: The BBC and the nation 1974–1987* (2015), Seaton continues the historical account of the Corporation with a more thematic approach that does not focus on the areas of interest for this research. In fact, her earlier work, particularly her chapter 'Reith and the Denial of Politics' in *Power without Responsibility* (1985), co-edited with James Curran, proved far more useful to understanding attitudes within the BBC in the historiographic element of the thesis.

Material from the *BBC Yearbooks*, *BBC Handbooks* and other BBC publications produced by the Corporation enhanced the examples and accounts selected to construct a historiographic narrative of the BBC. This material helped to illuminate and develop the themes of authority, participation, and 'ordinary people'. This includes the popular history of the Corporation, *The Biggest Aspidistra in the World* by the long-standing *Daily Mail* television critic Peter Black (1982), a source that Briggs draws

upon in *Competition* (1985). Although published by the BBC, Black's work provided an unofficial counterpoint to the official reflections found in the Corporation's annual accounts. It offered particular insights into the ways in which programmes were received by the audience, providing viewpoints and counter narratives that are absent in the institutional histories. Another contribution to the historiography of the institution presented here was Tom Burns' case study of the unionisation of the Corporation in *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World* (1977), which provided an understanding of the internal response to commercial television and the impact it had on working practices.

The substantial development and increasing availability of the 'History of the BBC' section of the BBC website,<sup>1</sup> in preparation for the Corporation's centenary in 2022, was helpful although late in the research. This was updated in 2018 to reflect some of the discussions that feature in this thesis – most notably with the article by David Hendy of University of Sussex, *One of Us – Opening Doors* (2018). The article was informed by material that had only been released to the BBC archive or been made available in other broadcast projects; the timeliness of this article's appearance (September 2018) has confirmed the importance of the work of the CPU and identified further areas for exploration and study, as increasingly material is becoming available in online archives. Another example of this is the BBC genome project which provides the listings of weekly BBC preview magazine *Radio Times* (1923–present), which has proved invaluable in checking transmission dates and times of the television output discussed in the thesis, and in confirming ideas for programmes and formats that made it on to the screen. It also helped to identify the ways that the BBC framed output in the programme descriptions. The genome links have been provided as footnotes for individual programme episodes discussed within the text.

Equally, columns by documentary critics Reginald Pound and Anthony Burgess in *The Listener* (1929–1991), the weekly review magazine published by the BBC, provided insights into the reception of some of the techniques and production technologies that emerged after the arrival of commercial television in 1955. Their columns contributed to an understanding of the critical reception of BBC output and at times made comparison between BBC and commercial franchise aesthetic as techniques and their effects –

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/>

most notably in Pound's comparison with the aesthetics of the ITN news production. The Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams was another television critic for *The Listener*. His work has influenced this research far more widely than the columns he wrote for the magazine between 1968 and 1974, even if they were the basis for his seminal work *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, originally published in 1974. His centrality to this work is evidenced by his appearing in most of the sections of this literature review.

Doctoral theses of case studies of BBC production contexts for science (Jones, 2010) and nature (Davies, 1997) were consulted and provided relevant considerations of the durational aspect of themes and production contexts. They also highlighted some of the constraints or limitations of the BBC Written Archive and related issues of gatekeeping faced by researchers discussed in the methodology (Jones, 2010). Additionally, as Jones identifies, '... the BBC Written Archive was not created for the benefit of historians, but as a form of institutional memory. Documents in the archive need to be interpreted with care. What survives is often incomplete' (Jones, 2010, p.14). Another common issue in the use of archival material is the danger of the reader imposing an intention or motivation; the modern reader might also perceive an irony that did not exist at the time but becomes evident with the benefit of hindsight (Jones, 2010, p.15). The documents in the archive identified in the primary research undertaken here relate specifically to participatory projects in the BBC and are discussed in further detail in the final section of this literature review.

### 'Ordinary people' and Ordinarity

Raymond Williams's work was of substantial use in understanding the term 'ordinary'. His essay *Culture is Ordinary* (1958) argued that democratic participation in the arts was critical to counter the sequestration of the arts as an interest or concern only of the elite. *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (1963) provided a historical perspective of the particularity of the British class system and the position of the 'ordinary person' within it. Williams' definition of ordinary in *Keywords* (1976) identifies three uses or contexts; the ordinary as the 'common' or shared traits of lived experience, the ordinary person as the non-expert or lay person, and the ordinary person as situated at the bottom of the hierarchy of the British class system, which in turn leaves the phrase open to being used pejoratively. Reading these three texts by Williams contributed to clarity about distinctions between the ordinary and common, the ordinary and extraordinary, and

about the contexts in which ordinary might be applied to people as derogatory or pejorative. His wider work on the nature and function of culture and the interactions between culture, society and mass communications contributed to the establishment of the field of British cultural studies.

Arguably, a pejorative interpretation of the term 'ordinary people' is especially hard to avoid when it is used by an organisation that has established itself as a major cultural and moral authority of the nation. Michael Collins' *The Likes of Us* (2005) provided a different understanding of how 'ordinary people' might describe each other in a non-pejorative or derogatory fashion with the phrase 'the likes of us'. This opened up a line of enquiry relating to the impossibility of 'ordinary people' being used as an inclusive term in a multicultural society. The unfortunate association that 'ordinary people' is a euphemism for the white working class with racist attitudes may not be true, but the description of people 'not like them' as ordinary created enough discord to prompt the BBC2 series *White* (March 2008) to redress the misrepresentation of 'ordinary people' who now featured across the entertainment-based reality formats.

Arthur Marwick's *Class: Image and Reality* (1980) reiterates a theme of this thesis explored in Chapter 2: Representations of the Ordinary that the representation of 'ordinary people' in the 1930s often 'meant educated upper class people affecting to be sympathetic about uneducated lower class people, while succeeding only in being resoundingly patronising about them' (Marwick, 1980, p.162). This was a concern that was voiced in relation to the work of the British Documentary Movement. In relation to broadcasting, the most relevant discussions of the historical representation of 'ordinary people' in the BBC were found in the work of Scannell and Cardiff in *Serving the Nation: public service broadcasting before the war* (1981) and *A Social History of British Broadcasting 1922–1939 Serving the Nation* (1982). The authors identified and described the contexts in which 'ordinary people' appeared or participated in early radio formats, particularly in the work of the Northwest Features Department. Using some of the same examples as Briggs, but written from a different perspective, they provided a counterpoint to the narrative that is recounted in the official history.

Scannell continued to explore this area in his work; most usefully for the purposes of this thesis in *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (1996), which extended some of the observations he had identified in *Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Life* in 1989.

Both of these sources identified the ways in which the participation of 'ordinary people' was managed in broadcasting, in the instances where it was allowed. Scannell's *Broadcast Talk* (1991) expanded areas discussed in his earlier work, such as his concept of the communicative hierarchy and the introduction of more informal speech and regional dialects on the national service. His earlier work with David Cardiff (1982) identified restrictions on 'ordinary people' and ordinary speech in the broadcast sphere and the early exceptions where they occurred.

The representation of 'ordinary people' was a central concern of the British Documentary Movement, according to the histories of Aitken (2001) and Swann (1998). Aitken situated its output within the wider context and history of British cinema, whereas Swann provided a historical account of the movement and many of its players. This allowed identification of three practitioners, Humphrey Jennings, Pat Jackson and Harry Watt, whose work for the British Documentary Movement explored new techniques in the representation of 'ordinary people', featuring them as named individuals playing themselves or people like them, and allowing a greater form of participation through speech or through a demonstration of competencies.

John Corner's work in *The Art of the Record* (1996) on the documentary techniques used in the film *Housing Problems* (1936) identified the 'self-contained access slots', where participants responded to questions posed by an unseen interviewer, while being filmed in their domestic environments. A camera was placed, with additional lighting, on a scaffold outside a window, because the domestic environment was too small to accommodate the film equipment. This alerted me to the necessity of many of the tropes that are associated with the representation of "ordinary people" as the lower classes, such as shots on the doorstep, an emphasis on the exterior of the house, a focus on the activity in the street and an emphasis on the representation of working life rather than leisure. These tropes of ordinariness became embedded as techniques when forms of television documentary began as a distinct genre after the launch of commercial television.

Pat Jackson's autobiography, *A Retake Please! Night Mail to Western Approaches* (1999), makes a claim for the first use of the 'subjective camera' as a technique in his 1942 film *Builders*, where a workman on a building site addresses the camera as though it were his foreman. 'Hello Guv', he cheerily calls in direct address to camera in



a low-angle mid shot. This interaction was, according to the director, completely spontaneous but within it is an explicit performance of a white working-class man as an ordinary person, particularly apparent in the use of dialogue and the subjective camera. This technique of treating the camera as a friend or at least as an acquaintance was encouraged in the *Video Nation* project and was employed within a more explicit confessional tone in the project's predecessor *Video Diaries*.

The subjective accounts of 'ordinary people' were of substantial interest for one strand of the Mass-Observation movement practices, the diurnal accounts of self-selected volunteers reproduced in Jennings and Madge's *May 12<sup>th</sup> Mass Observation Survey Day* (1937). This book brought a fuller understanding of the role of broadcasting in co-opting the ordinary person into the extraordinary events on the day of the Coronation of George VI. The Mass-Observation archive website maintained by the University of Sussex further informed my understanding of the project's range of practices. These included the management of contributions through the identification of subjects or topics that people were asked to respond to in some forms of their practices. *Video Nation* explicitly references Mass-Observation as its predecessor and adopted some of its practices to generate responses on particular themes. Equally important is that both projects are based on an archival intent as a form of social research project and resource for future historians. This is made explicit in output by some of the British Documentary Movement practitioners. One such film, *Ordinary People* (Holmes and Lee, 1941) is the subject of a discussion by Claire Langhamer, the social and cultural historian based at University of Sussex. Her conference paper 'Who the hell are 'ordinary people'? Ordinarity as a category of historical analysis' (2017) contributed to my understanding of the changing use of the phrase 'ordinary people' and its potential redundancy as a contemporary framework for academic understanding.

The work of Ben Highmore, again from University of Sussex, also proved useful. *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (2002) helped to identify important distinctions between the everyday and the ordinary, and in considering the relationship of the diurnal to diary practices and self-representational shorts. Highmore's *Ordinary Lives – Studies in the Everyday* (2011) made clear that, interesting though the discussions of lived experience were, the focus of this research was on representations and their use within a national, mainstream media outlet. However, the adoption of particular

representational techniques centred on diurnal or everyday tasks became one of the signifiers of 'ordinary' in *Video Nation*.

### Access and Participation in the BBC

Access is a complicated term in relation to broadcasting, referring potentially to universal access to the service, as well as to variations of access to participation, and full access to the mechanisms of the broadcast channel. The framework that has been used here to understand the specific form of media participation possible in CPU, *Video Diaries* and the various iterations of the *Video Nation* project was based on John Corner's understanding of access television as fulfilling a corrective function. The term access television certainly had currency when it emerged to describe forms of artistic, activist and community practices in some commercial television systems, particularly, but not exclusively in the US in the late 1960s. There is also an understanding of the access in terms of the universality of the broadcast service, and in a recognition that some form of access is a pre-requisite to even the most minimal forms of participation. The notion of full access, where anyone who applies for airtime is granted it, is not possible in a public service broadcaster, or at least not one established on the terms that the BBC operates under, where the license fee structure arguably places more accountability on the broadcaster for the content it transmits. The tension between access and accountability in relation to British broadcasting is first raised by the Beveridge Committee (1950) – the most extensive of the broadcast enquiries looking as it did at the provision of the broadcast services in their entirety. These concerns have been identified by Briggs (1979) in his extensive, 200- page account of the context to and findings of Beveridge Committee, Heller, *Broadcasting and Accountability* (1978) and Williams *Communications* (1962) which identifies the different types of broadcast systems and responsibilities.

An important understanding in this research was prompted by Williams' discussion of 'the flow' of television (1992), which made apparent that one of the issues of access or community content was that it was made with lower production values than mainstream television. Further, its inclusion within the schedule disrupted the aesthetic of the continuous stream of professional images that adhered to generic conventions of the format and, importantly, that of the rest of the content on the same channel. His consideration of the flow of television identified how the professional broadcaster's reputation was at stake with the broadcast of amateur or non-media professional

produced content. This was the point made by David Hall's artwork *Ten TV Interruptions* (1971) for the Edinburgh Festival of Television of the same year and discussed in Chapter 7. It was also at the root of the original scheduling of access content at the end of the schedule, where it was hoped that disinterested viewers would switch off without fear of missing something interesting later in the schedule.

In employing a Marxist framework in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1992), his seminal work and a cornerstone in the field of television studies (Wheatley, 2007), Williams investigated broadcasting in relation to the understanding that it was access to the means of production and distribution which distinguished the bourgeoisie from the proletariat. Williams' hope that 'equal access to media participation would allow for a more democratic culture in which people and chances to discuss issues, formulate ideas and creatively envision their lives' (Spiegel in Williams, 1992, p.xiii) is at the root of the purest form of access television. The purest model is one that is probably not possible in the public service structure of the BBC, for fear at least of an abdication of responsibility. Williams' initial articulation of this access ideal were made in his columns for *The Listener* and were in keeping with suggestions being made in the long run-up to the Annan Committee, discussed in Chapter 8. His criticism of 'television's display of the working class as a piece of exotic "lowlife"' (Williams, 1992, p.41) could be remedied, as he believed that the 'best television arguments and discussions are in fact those which open themselves towards people not assumed in advance to be already represented; for example, in BBC2's *Open Door* series' (Williams, 1992, p.47). Unfortunately, and like Briggs, Williams' work on television ends in 1974, before the impact of the CPU could be discussed.

The most extensive piece on the access idea in the UK and the formation of the Community Programmes Unit is John Corner's article *Mediating the Ordinary: the access idea and television form* (1994). Corner positioned the access idea as a continuation of some of the intent of social documentary film from the 1930s, in the representation of the ordinary, referring again to the film *Housing Problems* and the self-contained access slots. His account of the formation of the unit was informed in part by an interview he undertook with Mike Fentiman (a one-time Head of the Community Programmes Unit), who made explicit the role of *Late Night Line-Up* producer Rowan Ayers in progressing the idea of access television in the BBC. This account is absent from the narrative told by archival documents. The text provided a

useful framework within which to contextualise its activities and gain a wider understanding of the institutional intention in its establishment. This complemented and synthesised the more subjective accounts of broadcast personnel and their individual involvement in interpretations of the wider access project itself. Corner's article also took account of the position of the unit within a bigger system and its formation as a response to wider, international calls for access television formats and techniques. His identification of access, in national or public service systems, is 'a general corrective to what is seen as a systematic imbalance in social and cultural power' (Corner, 1994, p.23). Its introduction to British broadcasting and the BBC is an admission of this imbalance within and by the BBC. The Community Programmes Unit sought to give voice to groups of people under-represented by the BBC in order to redress this imbalance. Access slots sometimes introduced difficult subjects to the broadcast agenda but could also be used as a useful 'safety-valve' or to counter claims that the BBC only represented its invited guests.

The institutional function of access television has informed this thesis more than was originally anticipated, and it contends that media participation in the Community Programmes Unit was an admission of, at best, omission and occlusion from the broadcast sphere. This theme and practice is reflected also in the archival holdings, discussed below. Furthermore, access and participatory media practices in the BBC are understood in this thesis as a corrective function that was a negotiation of redress between the pillars of authority and 'ordinariness' in large part regardless of the formats or initiatives in which they featured. The understanding here is that the CPU, *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* were initiatives that were established in order to enable the selected participants to exert high levels of agency and control over the way in which they were represented and the contexts in which they were shown. However, the terms access television, access programmes and community programmes were used within the BBC to refer to the type of practice established in the CPU, therefore the use of these phrases in this thesis reflects their use by the broadcaster at different times, in each of their usage they are referring to a form of mediated access identified by Gutch.

The work of the Community Programmes Unit is only discussed in detail in a limited number of texts. Each proved useful because of their different and specific approaches and perspectives, their omissions and inclusions and the contribution that these have made to this work, which pursues a more holistic approach to access television in the

UK seeking to identify institutional tensions to frame more accurately what was at stake for broadcaster and participants. Corner's article discussed above was referred to in Sylvia Harvey's account of the unit's formation, *Access, Authorship and Voice: the Emergence of the Community Programmes Unit* (in Izod, Kilborn and Hibberd, 2000) and in Jon Dovey's *Old Dogs and New Tricks: Access Television in the UK* (1997).

Perhaps the most relevant aspect of Harvey's account to this research was that it was published in 2000 when the BBC had started to develop a wide range of digital services, which included the online iteration of *Video Nation*. Her account initially identified a minimalist participatory mode of the radio phone-in as the lead-in to a discussion about the 'one-to-many' model of broadcasting moving on to more maximalist modes of participation enabled by digital broadcasting where, ultimately, everyone could receive and transmit. While her focus was on the Community Programmes Unit built on Corner's account, Harvey identified a concern of the Annan Committee, that access television might be a Trojan horse, which was in part a warning for broadcasters to manage the process carefully.

Robin Gutch's article *Who's Telly Anyway?* (1984) took the form of a review of the Access Television conference at the National Film Theatre on 12 May 1984, a forum to discuss the first decade of national access television in the UK. Gutch, a former Community Programmes Unit producer (at time of writing, an executive producer of *Film 4*), outlined three forms of access. These were: purist, where the accessees have complete control; mediated access, where the producer and the participant work in partnership to produce content, the model adopted by the Community Programmes Unit; and representative access, where independent media producers from particular communities make programmes about themselves. The latter was the model adopted by Channel 4 in the *Eleventh Hour* strand. The constraints of each model were also articulated: the absence of media literacy in non-media professionals is problematic in the first; and the embedded professionalism of media producers in the second model is challenged by the implicit and/or explicit effect this might exert on people having, as the unit's tagline suggested, 'their own say, in their own way'. The third model, representative access, was also problematic as it established an '... "alternative elite" whose representativeness is gradually eroded by assimilation in the broadcasting industry' (Gutch, 1984, p.125). These distinct modes of access made by Gutch were a useful model in relation to particular practices of the unit and its initiatives, particularly

within the broadcast phase of *Video Nation*, which to some extent produced an 'alternative elite' of 'star' performers.

Georgina Born's discussion about the Community Programmes Unit is threaded through *Uncertain Vision. Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (2004), her anthropological study of the BBC which investigated among other themes the adoption of 'producer's choice', the internal market within the Corporation. Concerns about 'value for money' were expressed as the Corporation prepared the document *The Future of the BBC* for the 1996 Charter renewal. The efficiency savings necessary to finance the launch of BBC24, the rolling news channel, were drawn from the departmental budgets of News and Current Affairs, Community Programmes Unit and Documentary. It navigated a course between what was happening to the unit and the wider concerns of the broadcaster as it incorporated practices to improve the cost effectiveness and accountability of the corporation under Director General John Birt (1992–2000). Born's account based on participant observation and interviews with anonymous (but not necessarily unidentifiable) BBC personnel highlighted the atmosphere created between departments as the efficiency savings resulted in reduced slots for factual output, and internal competition became a bigger concern than competition from the independent production companies. As Born identified, many of the techniques associated with the representation of 'ordinary people' were being bowdlerised in various 'factual' or infotainment formats and early reality genres.

Born concentrated on participatory opportunities with factual programming and she identified three kinds of 'non-trivial' participation, juxtaposed against trivial forms that she categorised as record requests, contestants and competitors. Born's 'non-trivial' forms were: those based on access principles with a suggestion of some control being handed over to non-media professionals to present their opinions, such as the CPU; those in which audience members might introduce a different perspective on a topical issue, such as *Question Time* (BBC1, 1979–present); or those that enable audience members to respond to broadcast content, in programmes such as *Feedback* (Radio 4, 1979–present; see Livingstone and Lundt, 1994).

This framework of non-trivial participation was useful for a deliberation of BBC factual output during this period, particularly in conjunction with Born's consideration of different systems of diversity and minority representation in use in British broadcasting

in the 1990s. The three systems identified by Born (2004) are: the established form, where the majority 'hosts' differing minority opinions in debate (BBC); forms of inter-cultural communication where minorities speak to the majority or other minorities (Community Programmes Unit); and the intra-cultural system where minorities speak to themselves and other minorities (Channel 4). In this way Born's work reflected the changes in British public service broadcasting in relation to access since Gutch's 1984 article discussed above. Additionally, in the absence of archival records, Born's account enhanced the author's understanding of the reasons that contributed to the closure of the unit.

Jon Dovey's *Old Dogs New Tricks; Access Television in the 1990s* (1993) offered an examination of the working methods and programming of the Community Programmes Unit, which is supported by interviews with Mike Fentiman and Jeremy Gibson, who had both been heads of the unit. Coming from a practitioner background, Dovey's investigation was substantially informed by understandings of film and video practice and his concerns rooted in British documentary film practices. He reflected on the introduction of 'the wobblscope visions of amateur directors' (1993, p.164) into broadcasting representations by the unit's new initiative *Video Diaries*. This text provided an overview of the output of the Community Programmes Unit and other public service access projects at the point where the *Video Diaries* initiative had just been launched and prior to the broadcast of any *Video Nation* material. (Dovey's more detailed discussion of both of these in 'The Confessing Nation' in *Freakshow* (2000) was more useful early in this research, and features in the next section of the literature review.)

Schaffer's *The Vision of a Nation – Making multiculturalism on British Television 1960–80* (2014) looked at the work of the Community Programmes Unit in relation to the representation of a narrative of multiculturalism. It identified two of the most controversial editions of *Open Door* as important milestones in raising questions about and inserting opposing opinions of race and national identity into the broadcast sphere. *The British Campaign to Stop Immigration* (1976) and the *It Ain't Half Racist Mum* (1979) programme made by Campaign Against Racism in the Media (CARM) strongly suggested that the BBC, far from being part of the solution as it liked to present itself, was in fact part of the problem. Schaffer's work led me to consider to what extent or in

what ways can a person who isn't 'just like us' be contained in a shared commonality that depends on familiarity and similarity rather than difference.

The account provided in 'Opening Doors: the BBC Community Programmes Unit 1973–2002' in the *History Workshop Journal* (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2017) by former Head of the Community Programmes Unit Giles Oakley (1993–1998) with former *Open Door* producer Peter Lee-Wright contained useful contextual information to underpin the close study. This also provided a loose chronology of the unit and personnel, the range of content and variety of formats that the unit produced as well as documenting the shift away from traditional access participants which occurred after 1980. This shift may well have been motivated by the negative attitude towards the unit and its output expressed by other BBC staff that this article demonstrated was an ongoing concern throughout the duration of the unit. The authors identified that the Unit was in a precarious position. It was dependent for its survival or for its ability to make innovative programming, on the priorities of not only the BBC2 Controller but also the attitudes of the Director General himself, concerned about the Board of Governors and the animosity towards the BBC and the public service agenda under successive Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997. Oakley's account of the precarious position of the unit, amplified after the introduction of Producer Choice and the commissioning rounds that the unit had to participate in, supplemented Born's account of the same period discussed above. Having spent most of his 37-year BBC career working in the Community Programmes Unit and been the person in charge at the time of its closure, Oakley's account is tinged with sadness, regret and anger that what he saw as its importance was not recognised within the BBC and its management structures.

The most recently published article on the participation of 'ordinary people' in the BBC and the Community Programmes Unit, *One of Us – Opening Doors* by David Hendy (2018), appears on *100 Voices*, an online archive that appeared on the BBC website in preparation for the Corporation's centenary. Hendy, who is the lead on Connected Histories of the BBC, a BBC / University of Sussex research collaboration funded by the AHRC, utilised some BBC archival documents that were only made available for researchers in September 2018. The proximity of the publication date of this article to completion of this thesis meant that the usefulness of Hendy's article for this research has been in the confirmation of material found in the subjective account of Oakley with



Lee-Wright (2017) and as an extension to the original archival research undertaken by this author (Henderson, 2009). The article title 'One of Us' also reflected some of the tensions within the phrase 'ordinary people', which are discussed throughout this thesis.

### *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* broadcast

Like the unit itself, its initiatives *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* have been widely, positively but briefly referenced in the fields of broadcasting, television and documentary studies. There is little material that exclusively addressed the initiatives themselves as examples of participatory media practices. The work on *Video Diaries* focused on the potential therapeutic benefits of the making of a video diary, with Kilborn and Izod in *An Introduction to Television Documentary* (1997) and Kilborn in 'Shaping the Real' in the *European Journal of Communication* (1998), which discussed the output of Willa Woolston, the only *Video Diaries* diarist to make two programmes for the strand.

The output discussed in Chapter 8 identified the potentially therapeutic nature of the long-form diary. This is a theme that was also addressed by Sue Dinsmore in 'Strategies for Self-Scrutiny: Video Diaries' (in McCabe and Petrie, 1995), which looked at forms of confessional and reflective practices apparent within the strand. Jon Dovey's *Real Lives: Camcorder Cultures* (1994) made an explicit connection between *Video Diaries* output and the emerging first-person documentary form that was being explored in the UK in the work of film-makers Molly Dineen and Nick Broomfield. Humm discussed in *Real TV: Camcorders, access and authenticity* (1998) the techniques that were used in *Video Diaries* to signify ordinariness, which he framed as authenticity. Keighron in *Video Diaries: What's Up Doc?* (1993) discussed how the appropriation of these techniques by mainstream programming challenged the integrity and veracity of *Video Diaries* content returning to concerns raised by both Born (2004) and Oakley with Lee Wright (2016) and discussed in relation to the Community Programmes Unit above and in Chapter 8.

Much of the literature about *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* drew on accounts of the project written by ex-project staff (Humm, 1998; Rose 1994, 2000; Rose and Dovey 2013) or were based upon those accounts or interviews with project staff (Blunt, 2016; Dovey, 1994, 2000; Dowmunt, 1997). The benefits of these subjective accounts were

in their particular insights and interpretations of the affordances that participation brought, at the expense of an investigation into the constraints. They faltered in considerations of the project's position within the institution and were written from a privileged position of not having been subject to the same gate-keeping processes that project participants (and researchers) experienced. This thesis extends the existing work on the project by discussing the contexts and circumstances of individual shorts and the range of production contexts and variables to which a participant might be subject. This includes the motivations of the media professionals (rather than the participants), whose use of the representational techniques that signified ordinary/ordinariness have become naturalised. In addition, the thesis provides a historiography of the institution to contextualise the institutional imperatives that underpinned the project in both its broadcast and online phases.

The broadcast phase of the *Video Nation* project was subject to specific studies by former project producer Mandy Rose, who wrote about the production context of the project in *Vertigo* (1994). Her later account 'Through the eyes of the Video Nation' (2000) offered more consideration of the experience of project participants, drawing on interviews undertaken by Nancy Thumin for her MSc dissertation 'It's about horizons: Television and community space: the case of Video Nation Shorts' (1998), which examined the construction of community in the project.

Dovey focused on different forms of confessional practices apparent in the shorts and in wider 'first-person media' output, offering an analysis of two shorts in his chapter 'The Confessing Nation' in *Freakshow* (2000). He understood the project as a neo-Griersonian appeal for national unity, relating it back to the British Documentary Movement, but he also made the connections between the project, or certainly the shorts element of the project's output, and the interventions in television proposed by early video artists and activists, such as John 'Hoppy' Hopkins and David Hall, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. In 'Confessions to a new public sphere' in *Media Culture and Society* (2007), Nicole Matthews focused on the confessional element of the short form and discusses particular texts in which this practice was the dominant feature.

## Online participation

As the first of the BBC's online projects, *Video Nation* is important and this phase of the project has been investigated by Nico Carpentier in his article 'The BBC's Video Nation as a participatory media practice', (2003a) which presented an analysis of the complexities of participation in mainstream (rather than community) media and identified some of the tensions that may occur. His analysis of *Video Nation* was structured on three points; 'ordinary people', the diversity of British society, and the partnership between the participants and the production team, which was indeed a central element to the broadcast phase of the project. Carpentier drew on interviews with Chris Mohr, one of the original broadcast project producers and Carole Gilligan, the first producer of the web project.

This understanding was expanded by further work by Carpentier, 'Participation is not enough: The conditions of possibility of mediated participatory practices' (2009) and *Media and Participation. A Site of Ideological–Democratic Struggle* (2011), which considered participation practices in other projects, broadcasters and national contexts. Carpentier articulated that media participation needed to be understood as a spectrum of practices from minimalist to maximalist. This idea of a spectrum of practices has been combined here with Ytreberg's 'Formatting Participation within Broadcast Media Production' (2004), which offered an understanding of participation as a process that was itself dependent on the way that the process of participation was formatted and defined as participation from the point of first contact. Earlier work by the author of this thesis, 'Handing over Control? 'Ordinary people' and *Video Nation*' (Henderson, 2009) countered claims being made by the online project that it continued to reflect the practices of the broadcast phase.

The literature review identified two notable absences; firstly, that of a chronological account of the Community Programmes Unit, subsequently partially remedied by recent publications of Oakley with Lee Wright (2016) and Hendy (2018). The second absence was raised by Mandy Rose in her 2000 account that more consideration of the experiences of participants in relation to the project was needed. The proposed methodology became a historiographic account of the BBC in relation to its representation of 'ordinary people'. A tighter focus on the *Video Nation* project

introduced a case study structure that incorporated a range of qualitative data-collection methods.

Additionally, the literature review highlighted some of the ways that the phrase “ordinary people” and its use was conceptualized and debated over may be used, and the sometimes conflicting uses as one of the traditional uses of the phrase, to describe the white working class, lost traction through the fragmentation of the body politic and the change from hegemony to multiculturalism.

## **Chapter 2 Methodology**

In this chapter I describe the methodological strategy and explain how and why I dealt with the particular circumstances of this research in these specific ways, which also highlights issues of gatekeeping that impacted on the case-study approach that was originally anticipated. The BBC *Video Nation* Project was already defined as the area of research within the terms of the AHRC-funded Camcorder Cultures: Media Technology and Everyday Creativity project at the Institute of Education (2005–2008). Substantial access to the project had been negotiated in the preparation of the funding bid by the project lead by my original PhD supervisor, Professor David Buckingham.

An initial concern was to construct a methodology flexible enough to incorporate whatever means of data collection were necessary or indeed possible, in a study that sought to identify the interface between the macro and the micro, and the institutional and individual dimensions of a participatory media and archival project that emerged within a particular mainstream media outlet. The methodology needed to be devised in such a way as to be able to respond fully to the following research questions that emerged from the literature review as underpinning the project:

### **1 How has the BBC imposed its cultural authority in relation to the representation of ‘ordinary people’?**

In response to this question, I produced a historiography that investigated the representation of ‘ordinary’ people within the BBC up until the emergence of the Community Programmes Unit in 1972. For this secondary research, previous work on the institutional and recognised histories of the BBC by Briggs, Scannell, and Scannell and Cardiff provided examples through which to unravel the representation and participation of ‘ordinary people’ in particular programmes, periods or initiatives that sought to embed the cultural authority of the institution through the broadcasting calendar. The particular examples from these accounts enabled a chronological narrative of the representation of ‘ordinary people’ to be constructed from the existing histories of the first 50 years of the public service broadcaster. However, as the examples used were necessarily drawn from historical accounts it was important to remember, as Branston identified that, in the case of the BBC in particular, even the

‘more formal histories – those constructed by historians – are also implicitly positioned’ (Branston, 1998, p.51).

## **2 What were the affordances and constraints of emerging technologies and working practices and how did these affect the representation of ‘ordinary people’?**

This question is addressed through a critical reading of examples from the official and recognised histories of the Corporation (again, Briggs, Scannell, and Scannell and Cardiff). This was supplemented by the work of Tom Burns, in particular *Public Institution, Private World* (1977), an account of the unionisation of the Corporation that occurred after the emergence of the commercial franchises that introduced new types of representations of ‘ordinary people’. Output from the commercial franchises has also been considered, in relation to the dilution of the cultural authority of the BBC in the face of competition and the articulation of alternative regional narratives. Some of the techniques used in these new representations were adopted from documentary film and successfully translated for television. Current affairs programmes such as *Man Alive* (BBC2, 1965–1981) and the drama documentaries of *The Wednesday Play* (BBC1, 1964–1970) and later *Play for Today* (BBC1, 1970–1984) drew on the techniques utilised by the British Documentary Movement and Free Cinema. [The introduction of firstly mobile and then portable technologies afforded new possibilities and new subjects. However, unions were resistant to their introduction and some of the new subjects and circumstances represented generated concerns of accountability. The limited access to participants resulted in a more considered focus of affordances and constraints from the institutional perspective – taking into account the pressures placed on the BBC rather than the participant.](#)

The selection of materials discussed reflects some of the shifting debates about media representation and differing claims about the capacity or responsibility of public service broadcasting. Examples demonstrate the issues at stake in the face of alternative versions of society being represented in ways that were more appealing to the changing demographic of society. In particular, the response to this question has relied on John Corner’s work on access initiatives in both documentary film and in public service broadcasting, particular his chapter *Mediating the Ordinary: the access idea and television form* (1994), which discussed access in the BBC, the emergence of the CPU and wider concerns and tensions in access and public service television. The

existing secondary accounts were supplemented by primary archival research at the BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC), and the archival documents relating to the formation of the CPU. The limited range of documents available was an issue with the archive material, although this expanded over the duration of the research. The most recent additions to the archive are already the subject of an article by David Hendy (2018) on the history of the BBC website discussed in the literature review. It is important to remember that omissions in the BBC archive were not just in the delay in making material available but also, as Branston indicated, 'inextricably bound up with value judgements and struggles over choices and preferences for limited space' (Branston, 1998, p.54).

The archival documents enabled a fuller understanding of the attitudes towards the Community Programmes Unit and some of the constraints under which the unit operated at different points in its existence. The archival information expanded the understanding that could be gained from the existing literature, which often relied on interviews with BBC personnel. I have also used in places the descriptions of access television programmes that appeared in *Radio Times* because, as Branston identified, 'in the case of the BBC its unofficial history-making can be discerned in its publicity ...' (1998, p.9).

### **3 What was the extent of participation offered in the various iterations of the *Video Nation* (1994–2011) and how did this impact on the representation of 'ordinary people'?**

For this, the empirical element of the research, the original methodology was to provide a holistic case study of the project, which would identify and investigate the production context of particular shorts. These would be identified through a sample of those produced for the online phase of the project and then in 2005/6 uploaded to the website. This in turn would provide a framework through which to identify distinctions in practice between the television and online phases. The intention was to conduct primary interviews with the project staff and the participants and to relate these to an analysis of the particular shorts.

It was envisaged that this methodology would be developed through the framework of access already negotiated with the project. These questions emerged after the literature review confirmed Rose's assertion that more work was required in relation to

participant motivation and experiences. An early starting point was to undertake a random sample of both broadcast and online texts in order to highlight similarities and differences in themes, subjects and contexts evident in the text themselves and to identify participants who represented a wide range of production contexts and positions within the project. In order to respond fully, I adopted a case study approach, as the intention was to examine the production of content holistically using a range of data, material and sources to illuminate issues experienced by the individual and/or the institution in the making of content, and ways in which they might have been resolved.

### Historiography

The method of historiographic approach involves uncovering the narrative of the subject under investigation (Scannell, 2004, p.130). Importantly, attention is paid to the critical and theoretical qualities of the materials studied through the identification of relevant and reliable sources, and in the selection of examples used to underpin the narrative (Wheatley, 2001). The amount and range of potential sources is an important issue in work such as this that covers the output of a long-established mainstream media, but particularly the BBC. Emphasis has been given here to the material that exists as institutional documents – in the work of official historians, BBC publications (print and online), archival papers and minutes – in order to interrogate the claims presented by the institution. The selection of these sources was to contextualize the position and motivations that underpinned the formation of the CPU; to provide a fresh account of the Unit's practices and to follow this account through the initiatives of Video Diaries and Video Nation. These institutional accounts have been supplemented by the accounts of project staff and project participants to identify points of slippage and contradiction. The limited range of material specifically on the CPU was not used to critically assess its treatment of participation, but to use as the basis to contextualise the practices and understand the development of the unit.

### Case Study

The framework of a case study enabled me to fulfill what Schramm identified in *Notes on Case Studies of Instructional Media Projects* as a central tendency of this approach to 'illuminate a decision or set of decisions; why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result' (Schramm, 1971, p.4). This understanding was complemented by Yin's assertion that the 'distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena.



In brief, the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events ...' (Yin, 1994, p.3). The ability to utilise different types of data also allowed for elucidation of the decision-making process, such as examining the process of particular events and the identification of a range of tensions in the way that the project formatted the process of participation to the participants and the level of control that was granted to them. Additionally, the case study method was suitable for what became, through the duration of this research, a historical initiative following the project's sudden closure in 2011. In this case, an exploratory, descriptive case study offered, or indeed necessitated, a flexibility that was helpful when the most useful methods of empirical data collection were yet to be determined, and the full range of relevant primary and secondary sources had not been identified.

Although the case study suits a holistic approach, it can rely on narrative and tend toward the descriptive, which Yin suggested in *Case Study Research Design and Methods* might be both a strength and a disadvantage of the case study approach. As a strategy, it 'may be used to explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear single set of outcomes' (Yin, 1994, p.15). The anticipated use here was, firstly, to maintain chronology as an organising principle of the wide-angle focus of preceding historiography, and secondly, to present a more specific and detailed analysis of the context, the project, its aims, practices as well as an investigation into the motivation and experience of multiple participants. The intention was to use it to manage a shift between the macro of the institution and the micro of the participant experience, and to incorporate a wide range of techniques. As Yin identified, 'The case study relies on many of the same techniques as a history ... although its unique strength is the ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews and observations' (Yin, 1994, p.6).

Given the breadth of possible sources, a case study approach afforded the freedom to employ a range of data-collection methods, including content analysis, participant observation, and formal and informal interviews with project staff, producers and participants. Additionally, and highly importantly, was the inclusion of participant texts gathered from the various incarnations of the project as it moved from broadcast to web platforms. The ability to incorporate different data types and methods offered a particular advantage as unpredicted strategies and sources needed to be employed

due to the gatekeeping issues experienced with the BBC in relation to access to participants, as discussed below, and concerns about its responsibilities regarding online data protection.

## Interviews

Initially it was anticipated that interviews with participants would form a more substantial element of the empirical research, however this intention was greatly affected by gatekeeping issues that limited the amount of access to both project producers and participants. Access to participants and producers had been discussed with the project producer Carole Gilligan (2001–2005), who was no longer at the project by the time the AHRC funding came through. I had expected to conduct a substantial number of formal interviews with participants and producers for the project and with full-time project staff. However, the incoming producer Rosemary Richards (2005–2011) was new to her role and to the BBC and had different priorities and ideas about the project: an inherited research project was not on her list of concerns. A misworded email sent by Richards suggested that interviews producers undertook for this research would not be anonymous. Although this was corrected, it was nonetheless understood by producers and project staff as a suggestion that they should not take part.

I also unsuccessfully sought interviews with Jeremy Gibson, one of the architects of *Video Nation*; Alan Yentob Controller of BBC 2 and commissioner of the project; and Giles Oakley, the final Head of the CPU. Rosemary Richards, as the new project producer at the time of the empirical research, was also unwilling to be interviewed at such an early stage of her tenure. The lack of BBC personnel willing to be interviewed affected the ability of this research to provide a holistic case study.

Project staff who I was able to interview were: Mandy Rose, project producer of the broadcast phase (1992–2000); Outi Vellacott, assistant project producer for the first iteration of the web phase (2001–2003); and Simon Fox, who was, in November 2005, a recently seconded editor on a short-term placement, whose job was to package *Video Nation* content into compilation programmes for broadcast transmission, such as the Community Channel.

The focus in the interviews with staff centred on the management of participation and the production contexts, as well as the editing and framing processes of both the broadcast and online iteration of the project to identify the demands of different delivery platforms, as the project became an early part of the online provision of the broadcaster. It was clear from the data collected from the original broadcast project producer Mandy Rose and that from the two other online iteration interviewees that there were substantially more points of institutional intervention in the online iteration than in the broadcast. The imposition of campaign themes and the identification of potential participants to fit the themes identified by the institution are two ways this increased intervention was apparent.

The project's move to a new department (New Media Central) necessitated new interpretations of data protection regulations that the BBC needed to use in the online environment and access to participants was substantially delayed and for a long time seemed as though it might not after all be possible. Ultimately, I conducted interviews with three participants, two formal and one informal, the focus in these semi structured interviews their individual experience of making their shorts and the context in which their relationship with the project developed. Of the three participants interviewed, two, Denise Lester and Danousia Malia, had created multiple shorts. Danousia was involved in the broadcast phase and refused permission for her shorts to be uploaded to the website. Denise Lester was involved in the broadcast and online phases, and the third participant Hamish Bicknell made one short for the online phase. Even though the interviews resulted in a far smaller element of this thesis than anticipated, there is a range of different production contexts and experiences incorporated in the output of these participants. In preparation for the formal interview with Denise, the multiple shorts for the project over her long involvement of both television and online output were viewed, to identify similarities and differences in content and approach, and in relation to distinctions between the broadcast and online phase. Central themes of these interviews were the circumstances in which participation occurred, the duration and terms of the participation and their experience of the process of participation. Denise's longstanding involvement with the project offered the opportunity to discuss how she experienced the process of participation in both the broadcast and online phases.

Preparation for the interview with Hamish centred on the singular short he made for the online project. His short *Kilts* appeared on a compilation DVD circulated to promote the *Video Nation* project to BBC staff as a means of involving the project in wider and more mainstream programming priorities. Again, the interview focused on his experience of the process of participation and engagement with the online project. The other participant that I interviewed Danousia Malina was a chance encounter and so no specific preparation was undertaken, however I had by this stage already interviewed the other participants and so used the same framework to discuss Malina's work. However, the substantial difference is that it was not been possible to view any of her shorts they did not appear online. As explained above, access to participants was difficult to negotiate with the BBC, and the three participants who I did interview were all confident, articulate, outgoing people who had some experience of speaking in public, from their professional lives. Their involvement with *Video Nation* also came about in a similar way as all the interviewees had been approached by the project to participate. A wider range of subjects and access to participants who had not been approached by the institution but had gone through the selection process would have resulted in a wider range of practices about participant selection being identified and discussed.

For most people, being interviewed is an unusual thing and whilst my interviewees were all experienced public speakers, in reflecting on their Video Nation experience there was a potential that the narrative of events was rewritten, equally their experience was not recent. In this research, it was interesting that the participants understanding of their self representation became very blurred with their memories of the person they were at the time.

### Participant Observation

Participant observation is a data-collection technique that enables 'researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting, through observing and participating in those activities' (Kawulich, 2005, p.2). I was able to conduct participant observation at three events that I was invited to, which were a National project day at the newly developed Media Tank at White City (10 November 2005); a regional training day for new producers in Reading (16 November 2005); and a screening event at the ICA (6 June 2006). In the event setting, the researcher makes observations of the activities, interactions, relationships between and responses of the

participants to the activity or situation. One of the benefits of participant observation in these contexts was that it enabled a far greater understanding of the working practices of the project and the producers. Participant observation also provides the context for the development of other methodologies such as sampling guidelines and interview guides. Its effectiveness in this instance was in some ways limited as each of these sessions started with the introduction of all the attendees and their roles. It might be argued that the position I occupied was one of the 'observer as participant', in what Patricia Adler and Peter Adler describe in their chapter *Observational Techniques* as a 'peripheral membership role' (1994, p.378) as I was invited by the project but did not work for the BBC. My role as a researcher was known to the other participants from an introduction from the project producer Rosemary Richards. At each of the events that I attended my presence as a researcher was pointed out, this may have impacted on what or how much project staff were prepared to say, particularly when in the presence of their new boss. The unwillingness of other attendees to be interviewed diminished the opportunities to explore many of the themes that emerged in the training days. The timing of the events so early in Richard's tenure as the project producer was also unfortunate in that she was meeting many of her producers for the first time.

At the national project day for *Video Nation* producers at the Media Centre at BBC White City (10 November 2005), incoming project producer Rosemary Richards articulated the role the project was to play in digital media production training and cross-platform content production in the New Media Central department. Importantly, she described the opportunities for the *Video Nation* to contribute to BBC-wide campaigns, through which, it was hoped, the project would still have a presence on broadcast television. Richards stressed the importance of new mechanisms of interaction such as audience-generated content and citizen journalism practices. The majority of participants were employed on local radio; some had worked for the project since its relaunch as a web project. Richards outlined the transition as responsibility for the project moved from television to the New Media Central department that was launching a new network of local and hyper-local *Where I Live* sites to which the national *Video Nation* site would be integrally linked. Access to this internal event drew out an understanding of the complexity of the relationship of the project to other parts of the BBC and of the demands on the producers both in their *Video Nation* roles and in how they were incorporated into a range of wider production and or presenting roles.

The event took place less than a month after a large explosion at the Buncefield oil depot,<sup>2</sup> when the broadcaster's request for images on the breaking news story had generated 6000 responses. Buncefield was the first event since the London bombings of 7 July 2005 where the BBC utilised audience-generated mobile content. It was an occurrence, like the 7/7 bombings, that demonstrated the capacity of citizen journalists to provide content in the immediacy of an unfolding event when facts were unclear and media professionals were not yet present. Only a handful of the amateur images were looked at before three were selected and used, in broadcast only and accompanied by a disclaimer, until the professional content was packaged for transmission (Dovey, 2000; Buckingham and Willett, 2009)<sup>3</sup>. In the BBC, many of the requests were more benign, asking for images to accompany local weather or appear at the end of a local news broadcast.

Richards, who was meeting the producers for the first time on the project day, outlined that responses to London's bid for the 2012 Olympics and the BBC campaigns due to roll out over the course of the year were important areas for the *Video Nation* project over the coming months. These included a project with CBBC (Children's BBC) for content on 'the magic of the winter season' and a cross-platform project on hidden homelessness and *Family Wanted*, a strand to accompany a broadcast season on looked-after children. The project was keen to explore people's responses. The affordances and constraints of these campaigns, discussed in more detail later in this chapter, required producers to recruit participants to respond to existing projects.

The newly appointed Richards stressed the importance of *Video Nation* being included in the broadcast output for the project's internal profile and survival. She offered suggestions as to how producers might supplement this output by 'producing' individual stories on the same themes, returning to the corrective function of access television, although in very different contexts to the public service function of the Community Programmes Unit. The campaign structure

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<sup>2</sup> The Buncefield depot in Oxfordshire was the site of the largest explosion in Europe since the Second World War.

<sup>3</sup> At this time a range of citizen journalist practices and opportunities were being suggested by many media outlets for a more detailed discussion of these practices see Buckingham and Willett, 2009 and Gillmor, 2006. A more scathing critique of such practices, that counters these arguments can be found in Keen, 2007.

(also looked at in more depth later in the chapter) required participants (or audience members) to respond to existing priorities in the implementation of the wider BBC agenda. The projects introduced as priorities on this day were *No Home* and *Family Wanted* – both discussed in Chapter 11.

The morning session also included screenings of shorts made by the producers in attendance, which were discussed in relation to ‘good practice’; the producer of the best short won a bottle of champagne. This was a BBC Radio Kent producer who made *Cop in a Frock*<sup>4</sup> with Martin Ives of the Isle of Thanet’s police force amateur dramatic society to promote an annual pantomime staged to raise money for charity. This example documented the policeman who played the pantomime dame, as he dressed and makes-up for his performance. The text drew on staples of British humour (men in frocks and mother-in-law jokes) and ended as the participant told how his wife wouldn’t come to watch his performance of the dame because he reminded her of her mother-in-law.

The second part of the day was taken up with a screening of shorts selected by the producers who had made them as examples of good practice. This was followed by a feedback session where producers explained the context in which the short was produced, and Richards identified the examples she felt were most suitable for the project as it moved forward. It also provided an opportunity to understand the contexts in which particular terminologies were used and techniques and practices used to encourage and enable ‘ordinary people’ to engage with the project.

To reiterate, the regional training day on 16 November 2005 was aimed at new and inexperienced producers who had been employed as online producers, mainly but not exclusively for *Where I Live* sites, new to *Video Nation*, with the exception of one long-standing producer. In the introduction to the event, Richards again introduced herself as the new executive producer and presented the new ‘vision’ for the online website, and the cross-over with the *Where I Live* sites and how the two projects could work together in the production and delivery of content. Although the attendees were responsible for the production of *Video Nation* content, this was only a small part of their role.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/k/kent\\_copinafrock.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/k/kent_copinafrock.shtml)

The same campaigns from the earlier development day were presented to the producers, followed by a brainstorming exercise where we worked in small groups to identify potential 'story ideas' that would be appropriate for them. Producers were asked to think of people that they knew who they might be able to approach or to suggest ways that they could make contact with people who had a connection to the themes (homelessness and adoption). As online producers, staff were expected to produce content and upload it straight from their phones, and so the morning session was spent on 'phoneotography' or mobile journalism, where content was uploaded remotely. This was discussed as a more immediate and time-effective way for content to be produced; the model for this envisaged form of practice was an extended vox pop on a locally breaking news story rather than a participant-driven and -motivated short. Producers were set individual training exercises to experiment with this approach, using each other as subjects. By the end of the two-hour session, most of the producers had not yet completed filming, while those who had finished filming, had been unable to upload via Bluetooth.

The afternoon focused on standardised procedures and paperwork for the project, how different types of files should be named, saved and uploaded to the website. Producers were warned to ensure that none of their shorts included copyrighted material, in the form of incidental or performed music that would require publishing or performance payments. The training day also included a discussion of the conventions (rather than the ethics) of institutional online content and the ways in which they differed from traditional BBC practice, including the issue of contracts and rights. At this time, the BBC was keen to instigate new 'in perpetuity' contracts for participatory content so that separate permissions would not be needed for multiple and cross-platform uses. The afternoon session involved a series of exercises about music copyright, an area that project staff struggled to get to grips with, and a session on the format in which files for *Video Nation* needed to be named and uploaded to the intranet. There was also a screening of a short made by the long-standing producer in attendance, who was also a radio producer and line manager to two of the new producers. This was followed by an 'ideas exchange' where producers were asked to suggest themes that might be taken up by the project as a whole: allotments and recycling were the ideas that most time was spent on.



At the screening event at the ICA on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2006, producers of the BBC campaigns presented the themes or seasons that *Video Nation* producers could potentially contribute content for broadcast output. The themes presented had an explicit focus on the experiences of people who had been affected by the events at the focus of these campaigns, rather than those of traditional 'ordinary people'. The first that was looking for content was *Abolition*, a BBC-wide campaign that commemorated the anniversary of abolition of slavery; the second strand related to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Partition between India and Pakistan that was planned for 2007.

These three days took place early on in my research and were originally anticipated as exploratory or scoping events that would lead on to further opportunities for observation and the establishment of rapport with some of the producers. However, the issues of gatekeeping outlined above minimised the opportunities to develop productive relationships with producers, although I encountered one producer at all three events and a further two producers at the two of national events. I was able to conduct informal interviews with these three producers and share tea and lunch breaks on these days; all were long-standing producers, one was a radio producer and two were radio presenters. It was harder to engage with the newer presenters, as they were new in their roles at *Video Nation* and motivated by the demands of acquiring the necessary skills to create multi-platform content, rather than in empowering people to 'have their say'.

## Content Analysis

Content analysis is 'a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson, 1952 p7). The purpose here, was twofold. Firstly, the *Video Nation* texts were analysed to identify any obvious distinctions between broadcast and online content, and secondly to explore the way that content was described on the web site. The demands of the online archive introduced further elements of intervention, texts were now titled and accompanied by brief descriptions of the content to appear in the cross-referenced archive. This was undertaken without discussion with the participant or the producer of the short, and in some cases with little relationship to the text in question.

Taking as a sample 50 broadcast texts subsequently uploaded to the website and 50 shorts that had been produced for the web site to foster and develop an understanding of contemporary project practice. Content analysis is 'any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages' (Holsti, 1969, p.14). Here the unit of analysis – was the video shorts, of which 50 broadcast shorts and 50 online shorts were selected to identify distinctions of practices apparent between the different types of production. Texts were selected by taking the earliest examples of a broadcast and an online text from each of the 42 categories and 8 of the project campaigns.

Every text was viewed twice, once to identify the number of edits that appeared in each, and the second time to compare the texts to the archival description. It was immediately apparent that a number of distinctions of practice were apparent, firstly the use of participant self-filmed footage was far less frequent – which was expected as the change in the production context made this a likely result. Secondly, the online videos were not made to slot in between other items of content, so were not restricted to below two and half minutes. Lastly, the number of edits was substantially higher in the shorts produced for online. As these shorts were of a longer duration some increase in edits might have been expected, however the content analysis also suggested higher levels of institutional intervention in the finished text.

The total duration of the 50 broadcast shorts was 105.5 minutes and the average length of the broadcast shorts was 2:11 minutes, whereas the total duration of the online shorts was 156 minutes, so the average length of each short was 3:12, Broadcast shorts had an average of 8 edits in the 2:11, whereas the online shorts had an average of 19 in the 3:12 minute duration, the highest number of edits in a single short of the sample was 21 edits in a 2:49 web short. Each edit is an example of institutional intervention in the representation of an individual, and there are many reasons that might have necessitated an edit – to exclude unusable, or inarticulate elements, as well as the imposition of an institutional narrative over the individuals. Further institutional interventions are present in the archival practices of the website. An additional purpose of the sample was to identify potential participants from the shorts that either conformed to what could be identified as more standard forms of practice, or indeed challenged such forms. However, other issues that arose from this sample were the increasingly generic nature and structure of the more recently produced content.

This reflected the switch in the production context from participation to staff training, where the ordinary participants had substantially less control over the means by which they were represented. This resulted in saturation being achieved within a limited number of texts, although the total number viewed was 100 (50 broadcast and 50 online texts); as Seale describes it: 'Theoretical saturation of data means that researchers reach a point in their analysis of data that sampling more data will not lead to more information related to their research questions' (Seale, 1999, p.89). The centrality of the relationship between producer and participant to the finished text was emphasised in the random sample.

However, as delays occurred in responses to requests for contact details for particular participants, my focus turned to an examination of the institutional practices of the project's archival system, and the descriptions and subsequent classification of the shorts into the prescribed project-defined categories. This is discussed in Chapter 11. The additions and subtractions of texts into and out of particular categories contributed to an understanding of the priorities of the Corporation and gave insights into the narrative of nation these priorities represented in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The original intention that motivated this research, to provide a holistic case study of the *Video Nation* project informed by and building upon a historiographic approach to the representation of 'ordinary people' by the BBC, was not fully realised. The gatekeeping practices of the *Video Nation* project and of the BBC did not allow the negotiated access to the full range of data expected. Consequently, the data that was available to answer the research questions that emerged from the literature review was more dependent on existing literature and archival data. This led to a more historiographic approach than had been intended initially which has been incorporated in the triangulation of multiple methods and data to develop a comprehensive understanding of the *Video Nation* project and the context within which it developed.

Another issue that affected the shape of this research was its extended duration; this can be seen as a disadvantage in that the project was no longer an ongoing concern. An advantage of the protracted duration is that this research can be used to understand the changes in the ways that the BBC's fulfills or doesn't, particular elements of public service broadcasting,

### **Chapter 3 The Cultural Authority of the BBC – Representations of the Extraordinary**

This opening chapter presents a historiography of the BBC from 1922 to 1938, the duration of John Reith's stewardship, and illuminates the means by which the BBC was able to establish itself as a national, cultural and moral authority. In doing this, the chapter identifies the constraints and demands that the monopoly broadcaster faced in the development of its service and audience. The formation and early structure of the Corporation is discussed here in relation to the ways in which the broadcaster itself was regulated and how its cultural authority quickly became embedded. It also demonstrates how the extraordinariness of the technology occluded the representation of the ordinary. The chapter also outlines the progression from the commercial British Broadcasting Company to a licence-fee funded public service broadcaster, subject to regular parliamentary regulation and scrutiny while (theoretically at least) guaranteed political independence by Royal Charter. The sole licence to broadcast guaranteed the regular service required by the manufacturers, to encourage the adoption of the technology, and at the same time curtailed the growing amateur radio network (Briggs, 196; Born, 2004).

The concept of public service broadcasting was in large part defined by the vision of John Reith, the General Manager and subsequently the first Director-General. His Scottish Presbyterian upbringing influenced the shape and function of public service broadcasting as interpreted by the BBC, not least through the substantial element of religious programming during his period of control (Scannell, 1996, and Scannell and Cardiff (1981). Reith's vision of the public service broadcaster constituted a continuation of Matthew Arnold's ideas, which led to social reforms that introduced both the 1850 Libraries Act and the 1870 Education Act in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Arnoldian principles were popular with Victorian social reformers, with their impetus broadly to educate the masses in order to lift them from their wretchedness. Such ideals were central to the construction of the Reithian edict that broadcasting should 'inform, educate and entertain' ( Reith, 1924, Born, 2004). Reith also provided a sense of paternalistic moral authority at a time of massive national and international upheaval: the effects of the First World War were still being sharply felt, the Irish Free State had just come into existence, and universal suffrage was on the way. There was

considerable concern about ensuring that newly empowered voters would learn how to use their votes in ways that the 'establishment' considered prudent. (Scannell and Cardiff, 1981)

The cultural authority of the broadcaster was further imposed through the provision of London-centric content, reflecting the audience of the 80,000 'licenced' sets reached by the sole transmitter in 1923. That this audience was assumed to be interested in the arts, traditions and culture of a capital city that prided itself on the role it played in the world did much to establish the broadcaster's cultural authority, alongside the Royal, National and State events of the 'broadcast calendar' (Scannell 1996). The areas covered in this chapter include the substantial changes to the scope and scale of the broadcast service introduced by the various broadcasting committees, which structured the and regulation of the service during the period of John Reith's Director-Generalship (1922–1938).<sup>5</sup> This framework in turn was affected by the formation of the European Broadcasting Union and the impact of the subsequent reallocation of European bandwidths on the structure of domestic broadcasting (Briggs, 1961).

### The extraordinary and the exceptional

The exciting new technology of wireless was focused on the 'extraordinary and the exceptional' and this largely necessitated the occlusion of the ordinary and the everyday. The extraordinary as presented by the BBC concerns the people of the traditional ruling class: white, educated, land-owning men and the establishment institutions of monarchy, church and state. The relationship that Reith developed with the monarchy greatly assisted him in positioning the BBC as a cultural authority. The staging and coverage of Royal and national events and spectacles enabled the broadcaster to privilege moments in which it could emphasise the extraordinary. The establishment of the Royal Charter in 1927 was a mechanism to 'ensure' independence from the British government. The BBC acquired its motto, 'Let Nation Speak unto Nation'<sup>6</sup> in part through this relationship with the monarchy and introduced the Empire Service in 1932, which was before more remote areas of Britain could receive the domestic service. (Scannell and Cardiff, 1981)

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<sup>5</sup> The Sykes Committee 1923, the Crawford Committee 1926, the Selsdon Television Committee 1934 and the Ullswater Committee 1935.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/crest>

For those who could afford a wireless, the broadcaster provided access to many events that not everyone could attend, whether for reasons of finance, class or geography; it did much to democratise high culture, while reiterating the authority of the existing cultural canons. Reith's aim to transmit the best of culture left little space for content or people who could be defined as 'ordinary' from the lofty heights of his aims. The moral authority of the broadcaster was founded upon the strength of Reith's Scottish Presbyterian beliefs, which assuaged the concerns members of the Religious Advisory Board, the largest of the bodies of interested parties established to discuss the content and purpose of broadcasting. A broadcast calendar of Christian festivals was quickly established in the schedule, including a daily service and a strict and staid Sunday offering with an interval for attendance at Evensong (Scannell and Cardiff, 1982, p 27 -29).

### The British Broadcasting Company

The British Broadcasting Company was launched on 14 November 1922, the day of the first General Election since the 1918 Representation of the People's Act (Briggs, 1961, p.140). The company was the result of sustained negotiations instigated by the government's representative, Postmaster General Frederick Kellaway and the 'big six',<sup>7</sup> the largest radio manufacturing companies (Briggs, 1961, p.108). Through Kellaway, the government '... persuaded the manufacturers to merge into a single cartel, to which they would grant a licence' (Scannell and Cardiff, 1992, p.161). These negotiations resulted in a two-year singular 'licence to broadcast' being granted to the British Broadcasting Company. During this two-year period the first of the government enquiries into broadcasting, the Sykes Committee, sat to consider the wider concerns and implications of the new medium.

The sole licence to broadcast was seen as a way to avoid the chaos experienced in the US where broadcasting had started without regulation (Briggs, 1961, p.64). Another advantage of the single licence was that 'it wiped-out a network of amateur radio enthusiasts' (Born, 2004, p.87), a network that had sustained four weekly magazines with sales over 100,000 copies (Briggs, 1961, p.77). Many amateur enthusiasts built

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<sup>7</sup> These were Marconi Company, Metropolitan-Vickers, Western Electric Company, Radio Communication Company, Thomson Houston and General Electric.

their own sets and transmitters, creating concerns that revolutionary ideas and propaganda from a still unsettled postwar Europe could be invisibly disseminated by the new medium (Briggs, 1961, p.112). To counter these security concerns as well as to protect the economic interests of the wireless sector, a manufacturing monopoly was established for the 'big six' and their affiliates (Briggs, 1961, p.107) to ensure that commercially available sets had a limited frequency range that made reception of non-UK based broadcasts difficult or at least irregular (Briggs, 1961, p.182).

The appointment of John Reith (14 December 1922) as General Manager for the company that was to produce the regular service might have seemed surprising, as he had no experience or knowledge of the sector but as Briggs identified, only amateurs or Americans did (Briggs, 1985, p.37). Reith had to look up the word broadcasting when he saw it in the advertisement offering four positions at the newly formed company (Briggs, 1961, p.135). The advert requested that 'only applicants with first class qualifications need apply'; quite what these were and how Reith met them is not clear (Briggs, 1961, p.135). Reith grew up in a manse house in Aberdeen, where his father was a minister in the Free Church of Scotland. His education was limited to a clergy bursary at Gresham's School in Norfolk, followed by two years at a technical college, and then service in First World War as a private. In the absence of qualifications, it might have been his Aberdonian background that added to his appeal. When he discovered that Sir William Noble, who was making the appointment, was also from Aberdeen, Reith famously retrieved his application from the post box to add a postscript that suggested they would know people in common (Briggs, 1961, p.137).

Once in post, this 'Scotch engineer, Calvinist by upbringing, harsh and ruthless in character' (A. J. P. Taylor in Seaton, in Curran and Seaton, 1997, p.112) used his strategic mind and sense of righteous purpose to develop 'a high conception of the inherent possibilities of the service' (Briggs, 1985, p.53). This vision, published as *Broadcast Over Britain* (1924), served at least in part to counteract some of the substantial opposition to the medium. The most loudly voiced concerns were, perhaps predictably, those of the 'press barons', newspaper owners who sat in the House of Lords, who were concerned that national broadcasting would destroy the profitability of the national, regional and local titles under their ownership.

Reith espoused many of the concerns raised by Victorian social reformers, such as compulsory education, a notion of service and an Arnoldian view of culture (Scannell, 1990, p.22). Arnold's understanding of culture was as 'the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and this with the history of the human spirit' (Arnold, 1970, p. xiii), and it was widely understood that the '... pursuit of cultural values would have intrinsic social benefits ...' (Born, 2004, p.28). Reith's interpretation of Arnold's understanding of culture is rooted in his belief that it was the responsibility of broadcasting '... to carry into the greatest number of homes everything that is best in every human department of knowledge, endeavour and achievement, and to avoid the things which are, or may be hurtful' (Reith, 1924, p.16). Reith applied Arnold's philosophy to a public-service vision of broadcasting where the best of culture and knowledge would be made available to 'the people' – those formerly known as the masses – who would instinctively eschew the more vulgar forms of popular entertainment and aspire to raise their standards and expectations.

Reith also fended off the concerns of religious and education lobbies that the service would corrupt or stultify newly enfranchised working-class people. Reith alleviated many of the fears raised by the print media that 'the wireless' would challenge the establishment and disrupt the status quo. To this end, Reith established numerous advisory boards (the Religious Advisory Board, as noted, was the largest and possibly most influential) to represent the interests of unelected power of the monarchy, military and clergy (Scannell, 1990, p.17). In this way he was able to reiterate the cultural hegemony of the establishment. The decision to launch the service on the day of the 1922 General Election demonstrates another of Reith's concerns, one that has been largely forgotten, '... to establish a genuine political independence for radio so that it might effectively realise its potential as an agent of a more informed and enlightened democracy' (Scannell and Cardiff, 1982, p.166).

The first operational stations were in London, Birmingham and Manchester, which all produced content for that first day's transmission, '... and the first programmes consisted in the main of election results' (Briggs, 1961, p.140). However, the print media was concerned about the 'immediacy' of the wireless and successfully lobbied for restrictions that prevented the broadcaster from producing its own news content. Instead, the news agency Reuters produced two 15-minute news bulletins, for national broadcast after 7pm (Briggs, 1961, p.148). Regional news development on the wireless



was also curtailed as the establishment interests of press proprietors covered the regional and local weeklies and morning and/or evening dailies.

There were other difficulties in creating content: theatre owners, concerned about attendance, were reluctant to broadcast performances. Equally, stage artists were concerned that their material would become familiar or that their act relied too much on visual performance. The performer unions Equity and the Musicians' Union had standard three-hour minimum contracts,<sup>8</sup> so short appearances were not cost effective. Recorded music was also too expensive to use frequently, with payments due to record companies, song publishers and artists. The facilities in the Savoy Hill studio were cramped and inadequate, and the General Post Office often refused to supply the dedicated phone lines needed for outside broadcasts.

Given these constraints, it is not surprising that the initial service was erratic and haphazard. Programme start times and durations were undefined, and signal strength and reach were frequently affected by adverse weather, so the early service was often silent (Briggs, 1961). A structure to the content of the broadcast service was nonetheless quickly developed. A regular Monday to Saturday service evolved, commencing with a morning concert;<sup>9</sup> after this the set fell silent until 5pm when the misnamed *Women's Hour* (British Broadcasting Company, 1922: 30 minutes) started, this was followed by the similarly misnamed *Children's Hour* (British Broadcasting Company, 1922: 45 minutes) and then a short broadcast for older children from the Scouts, Guides or the Boys Brigade. After a short interlude for the evening meal the schedule restarted at 7pm with the first news bulletin. An evening concert, symphony or military brass band lasted for an hour and was followed by a lecture or talk from a prominent man until the second news bulletin. A set from a dance orchestra, an outside broadcast (O/B) from one of the nearby hotels or a violin recital from the studio ended the evening service at 10.30pm. Saturday evenings were given over to drama or opera, where excerpts from different plays or operas were compiled into an evening of entertainment with an interval for the news.<sup>10</sup> The Sunday programme started with a choral concert at 3pm, followed by a topical religious discussion that lasted until an

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<sup>8</sup> This was in order to reflect the contracts for live performances.

<sup>9</sup> These frequently came from St Martin-in-the-Fields, where morning and lunchtime concerts had been introduced during the First World War and continue today.

<sup>10</sup> <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/>

interval for attendance at Evensong. The service restarted at 7pm with the news, a concert of sacred music and a short talk on a moral theme, followed by the news and closedown (Briggs, 1961). Reith's observance of the strictest Christian values and traditions might have inspired the confidence of the Religious Advisory Board 'but it held far less appeal for many of the listeners', as Peter Black, a broadcast critic and writer (Black, 1972, p.53).

### 'Early adopters' and launches

There were three types of 'early adopters': firstly, a full licence-fee payer who bought a set made under a manufacturing monopoly and paid a licence fee. The BBC received a royalty on the sale of the set and a percentage of the licence fee. Secondly, there were experimental users, amateur enthusiasts who built their own set and got a licence, and thirdly, 'eavesdroppers', those who built their own set and neglected to get a licence. Within six months of the launch 80,000 full licences had been issued across the Home Counties (Briggs, 1961, p.243), although it was thought that the licenced listeners were outnumbered 3:1 by 'eavesdroppers' (Black, 1972, p.23). It is possible that had the print media not imposed an embargo on the radio schedule, many of these 'eavesdroppers' might have seen something in the schedule that appealed to them and bought a licence. It was only when Selfridges (the department store in London's Oxford Street on whose building the transmitter of the original London station 2LO was situated) displayed the radio schedule in their adverts in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the summer of 1923 that listeners knew what to expect (Briggs, 1961, p.142).

Reith discovered that the circulation of the paper increased during the campaign in the *Pall Mall Gazette*,<sup>11</sup> and rapidly launched *Radio Times* (1923–present)<sup>12</sup> to publicise the schedules of the national station and the regional variations. Schedule information was supplemented with additional content about the making of programmes or the building of stations and the transmitter networks, alongside readers' letters and responses. The first edition printed the views of a dissatisfied listener who concluded that '... the BBC are mainly catering for the listeners who own expensive sets and pretend to appreciate and understand only highbrow music and education "snob stuff"'

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/research/culture/reith-5>

<sup>12</sup> The country's longest-running listings publication, sold by the BBC in 2011, had a weekly print ABC of 783,042 in February 2015; <http://www.mediaweek.co.uk/article/1333599/magazines-abcs-top-100-glance>

(Briggs, 1985, p.47). The educational 'snob stuff' was most evident in the evening talks. These covered a wide range of content, including astronomy, Esperanto, sweet-peas, 'the ancient civilisations', military history and insects, but they were frequently presented by titled speakers. Among Right Honorable Lords, Major Generals, Lieutenant Colonels, First Rear Admirals, Reverends, Right Reverends and one Very Reverend, Mayors, Sirs and Professors, one ex-Lady Mayoress was slipped in (Black, 1972, 33).

Further indications of the assumed status of the imagined audience are apparent in other content too, with weekly review programmes about theatre, books, classical records and films designed to cater to the affluent Home Counties audience in the reach of the transmitter. The assumed prosperity of the audience is evident in *Motoring*, a weekly car review programme (introduced by a Captain Twelvetees) which began in 1923 when there were 350,000 cars in the country, mainly in London and the Home Counties (Stevenson, 1984, p.63). It was to this audience that the series *Music and the Ordinary Listener* (1924)<sup>13</sup> sought to popularise the BBC music policy by educating listeners unfamiliar with classical music in how to listen effectively.

The perceived status of the audience is also reflected in the adoption of a house-style for announcers, who were expected to convey a sense of 'the BBC's collective personality' through 'received pronunciation' (RP) for clarity and precision (Briggs, 1985, p.72). According to the British Library:

RP is standard English that avoids non-standard grammatical constructions and localized vocabulary of regional dialects. RP is also regionally non-specific, that is it does not contain any clues about the speaker's geographic background. But it does reveal a great deal about their social and/or educational background.<sup>14</sup>

RP is an accent that signified or indicated the higher status of those educated in public schools that largely populated the professional classes. At the formation of the BBC, it was the language of the civil and diplomatic services and was also known as the 'King's English', the 'Oxford accent', or the 'public school accent' (Crystal, n.d).<sup>15</sup> This distinction in speech patterns of the broadcaster and its audience was not so

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<sup>13</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/4709258b83c44f5081b2bc590f8d44f8>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/find-out-more/received-pronunciation/>

<sup>15</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/voices/yourvoice/feature2\\_4.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/yourvoice/feature2_4.shtml)

pronounced in the early years of broadcasting as many of licence-fee payers were also more likely to adhere to the conventions of RP. The mode of 'proper' address was not restricted to speech acts, but also to the invisible announcer's attire. Evening announcers, all male, were viewed as both duty officers of the Corporation and as Masters of Ceremonies and were expected to wear dinner jackets while on duty (Briggs, 1985, p.73).<sup>16</sup>

For Reith, the highlight of 1924 was his success in persuading King George V to broadcast his opening speech from the British Empire Exhibition on St George's Day, 23 April 1924 (sponsored by *The Daily Mail*), which 'ten million people are said to have heard' (Briggs, 1985, p.67). The King warmed to the idea of broadcasting, having been assured by Reith that people most wanted to hear the direct speech of the monarch and to be reminded of their position as loyal subjects (Black, 1972, 120).<sup>17</sup> This 'Royal seal of approval' of broadcasting, three years before the Royal Charter, did much to encourage religious and cultural institutions to view the BBC with fewer concerns (Briggs, 1985, p.69). 'Running commentaries' from the Lord Mayor's Show were introduced in the same year, as were the after-dinner speeches from the Lord Mayor's Banquet. There were also some attempts to produce content for people outside the capital with the introduction of the programme *Market Prices for Farmers*, an attempt to increase the relevance of the service to the non-urban audience. *The Shipping Forecast* and weather reports from the Meteorological Office from 1923 are further examples that demonstrate public service functions of the medium (Black, 1972, p.119).

### Early broadcast regulations

The first broadcasting enquiry, the Sykes Committee (1923) was established to discuss the introduction and management of the broadcasting service after the first, two year experimental license had been granted to the British Broadcasting Company. (briggs, 1961) During the sitting of the committee, the company created a regular broadcast service that did not upset too many and had enough appeal to their affluent and/or aspirant target audience. It was recognized that the Sykes Committee might have been

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<sup>16</sup> Briggs also notes that from 1925 announcers were given a clothing allowance to enable them to do so (Briggs, 1961, 118).

<sup>17</sup> This was in much the same way that the technology of photography had enabled pictures of Queen Victoria to adorn the walls of many homes.

unduly hampered by having had four Post-Master Generals during the time that it sat (Briggs, 1961, p.186), and that the broadcasting sphere was now an international concern. To this end, an independent broadcasting board was also established to advise the Post-Master General, Sir William Mitchell-Thompson, on international developments (Briggs, 1961, p.174), and the second broadcasting enquiry was established under Earl Crawford in July 1925 and the experimental license granted to the company was extended for a further two years.

It had done little to persuade listeners beyond the Home Counties that the service was relevant to them; for many, indeed, it was not yet possible to receive the service, as the infrastructure was still extending between regional centres. It is well documented that for those outside London who could receive the service the events and topics covered did not engage with the reality of their lived experience (see Briggs, 1985; Born, 2004; and Scannell, 1996). Even so, by the time the Crawford Committee Report was published in 1926, it agreed that the company had done enough to prove its competence in providing an appropriate service. It also recommended that the company, should become a public corporation and take on complete responsibility for broadcasting in the UK, in a way that mirrored by Reith's own suggestions for the service articulated in his book *Broadcast over Britain* in 1924. The decision to entrust, for the foreseeable future, the whole of broadcasting to a single national institution was a bold move (Smith, 1974, p.53). The force of Reith's personality and the scope of his vision for the service, 'played a considerable part in persuading Parliament to accept the plan (Smith, 1974, p.54).

The extension of the single licence brought further development of provincial stations (Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and Newcastle), which were to operate as hubs to distribute and disseminate locally produced content across the region they served as an alternative to the national service. Until this point, they had only produced content for the national service; Birmingham, for example, produced *Children's Hour*. With the licence extended, these stations had more opportunity to produce vernacular content, but the size of the regions frequently meant that this content was no more relevant to some parts of the region than the national service to which it was the alternative. It did however provide respite from the standard RP pronunciation with some minor allowances being made for vernacular speech, and regional accents and dialects. This

content was less formal in tone, and held more appeal to those outside the rhythms of life in the south-east, but speakers were still issued with precise instructions from Reith ... not to dwell on either “drink or prohibition”. Not to make clerical impersonations, not to make political allusions and not to introduce “vulgar” or doubtful matter (Briggs, 1961, p.289).

All programmes were scripted, submitted, checked for advertising, libel, bad taste or ‘anything else’ that might cause offence before they could be approved (Garnham, 1978, p.36). The content, delivery and regularity of the service greatly improved as new genres and formats with higher production values emerged alongside regular presenters who engaged with, and became familiar to, the growing audience.

Relationships between the broadcaster and the press were still strained; a difficult relationship between Reith and Winston Churchill (then Chancellor of the Exchequer), came to a head in the 1926 General Strike. In the absence of print media, the government insisted that the broadcaster transmit ‘official announcements’ in place of news (Briggs, 1985, p.93). While Reith may have balked at being told what to broadcast, especially if it was Churchill telling him, he did ‘most of what the government wanted’ (Black, 1972, p.75) since ultimately ‘the Government had the legal authority not only to order the British Broadcasting Company to broadcast whatever messages it chose to provide, but, if it wished, to commandeer the BBC’ (Briggs, 1985, p.97). Reith’s acquiescence was perhaps more pragmatic, given that the Crawford Committee was incorporating many of his ideas about public service broadcasting into the recommendations being made to Parliament in the committee report, such as the inclusion of religious and educational programmes into a licence fee-funded service for the next ten years.

According to Scannell and Cardiff, the General Strike caused Reith to abandon his intentions that broadcasting should ‘effectively realise its potential as an agent of a more informed and enlightened democracy’ (Scannell and Cardiff, 1982, p.166). The broadcaster failed to represent left-wing or trades union voices or ‘to allow Labour or pro-Labour speakers to be broadcast ...’ (Briggs, 1985, p.99), and this ban included the Leader of the Opposition Ramsay MacDonald (Seaton, 1997, p.121). This was a criticism sustained long beyond the General Strike, the end of which was announced by Reith in the 1pm news slot on 12 May 1926. The Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson recounted that at the very many meetings she addressed during the General Strike, ‘...

complaints were bitter that a national service subscribed to by every class should have given only one side during the dispute. Personally, I feel like asking the Post-master General for my licence fee back' (Wilkinson in Briggs, 1985, p.100). Renamed by some at this time the British Falsehood Corporation (Seaton, 1997, p.121), the Corporation's action in the General Strike confirmed for many that the broadcaster was an instrument that only represented views that upheld the establishment.

In the four years of its existence as a commercial enterprise, the British Broadcasting Company established itself as a reliable, respectable and, as proved in the General Strike, responsible broadcaster across regional and national services. As well as broadcasting, the company had launched a number of magazines, including *Radio Times* that announced the radio schedule that newspapers had refused to run, unless as part of an advert. On a smaller scale, they also published a magazine that dealt with the technical aspects of wireless infrastructure and new technology, first as *The Radio Supplement* in 1925 and renamed in 1926 as *World Radio* to reflect the Corporation's outward-facing focus that came with the Royal Charter.

### The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

The recommendations of the Crawford Committee were accepted and introduced, and the broadcasting company was granted the status of a public corporation, the world's first national public service broadcaster, under the Director-General Reith. The BBC launched on 1 January 1927; this sole licence to broadcast became recognised as a monopoly and was granted for ten years. The manufacturing monopoly was removed and the licence fee became the sole funding mechanism for the service and infrastructure. While this gave the Corporation some stability to its operations, it also meant that more licence-fee payers were needed from a much wider area.

The concerns that wireless technology would 'undermine the financial security of the press, the theatre and the music-hall – all of which were actively campaigning to prevent the BBC expanding into their respective spheres' (Smith, 1974, p.51). were countered by the realization, after the Crawford Committee Report that broadcasting was a long-term, if not permanent, fixture of society. Those previously reluctant – theatre owners, performers and their agents – begin to view broadcasting as an opportunity rather than a threat. Stars became available to appear to promote their shows. London cultural institutions whose seasons were already sold out allowed

excerpts and arias from their productions to be performed for broadcast, and soon those theatres whose shows had not sold out were prepared to pay their cast to perform an excerpt for broadcast (Black, 1972, p, 87). Even the relationship with the press became less hostile, with the radio critics employed by the broadsheet newspapers being in general agreement that radio content was largely satisfactory, and that the genre of radio drama being developed by Val Gielgud, Head of Radio Drama, was 'a sometimes intriguing, and certainly a novel experience' (Parker, 1977, p.143). High-profile theatre performers became keen to appear in radio adaptations of plays or to perform excerpts of West End plays they were appearing in.

When the BBC took over the staging of the Proms in 1927<sup>18</sup> it made sense for the Corporation to employ full-time salaried musicians and establish its own orchestras, to avoid reliance on session musicians at high hourly rates (Parker, 1997, p.231).

The British Phonographic Industry (BPI) held firm about rates for the transmission of their copyrights, and so the weekly record review show remained one of the few occasions when the BBC played recorded music. Like the rest of broadcasting output, music was live and performed by unnamed session musicians. Securing the Proms provided a substantial amount of content over the summer months and provided another opportunity for the BBC to establish itself as a national cultural authority. It can be seen as an extension of the intent behind the earlier series *Music and the Ordinary Listener*, since the Proms enabled the BBC to provide musical and cultural education to listeners unfamiliar with the canon of classical music.

Events that in 1926, the BBC had been refused the dedicated phone lines needed for outside broadcasts by the Post Office, were now granted the rights, and have become established features. These include the Oxford/Cambridge Boat Race, Wimbledon, the Derby, the Grand National and the FA Cup Final, all of which have been broadcast since 1927 (Briggs, 1961, p.261).<sup>19</sup> These events, alongside non-denominational coverage of Christian festivals, royal events and annual state occasions, formed the basis of a broadcast calendar that is still adhered to. The establishment of the broadcast calendar, the support of high culture and the literary canon, alongside its Royal seal of approval and relationship with the church, enabled the BBC to adopt a

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<sup>18</sup> The annual eight-week season of Promenade concerts (the Proms) was founded by the conductor Sir Henry Wood in 1895.

<sup>19</sup> Except for the duration of the Second World War.



paternalistic cultural authority in the representation of the best of human endeavour, outlined in *Broadcast Over Britain* (Reith, 1925).

The structure of the service had been envisaged as clusters of short-wave local stations; however, the Geneva Plan of 1927, established to rationalise European wireless communication, substantially reduced the number of shortwave frequencies available to Britain (Briggs, 1985, p.367). The idea of an alternative locally led service feeding into regional hubs of distribution was reduced so that the hubs became responsible for the vernacular content for the entire region. One immediate and obvious impact of the Geneva Plan was that it encouraged the BBC to maintain its focus on the development of the London-based, long-wave service, as well as the Empire Service. The changes in spectrum allocation reduced the amount of local rather than regional content that could be produced and, while the number and range of transmitters increased, the size of the regions meant that content could still be irrelevant to the listener. The regional service also had reduced transmission times, and although there may have been some concession to regional speech in the acts of comedians and artists, such content rarely featured on the national service. Regional programmes were still scripted and invited speakers were scrutinised by Reith who regarded broadcasting as an activity for professionals and experts, not amateurs and lay people, for the exceptional and the extraordinary, not the ordinary. His belief that 'having one's voice broadcast was a privilege that should be restricted to the professional intelligentsia'<sup>20</sup> resulted '... in the virtual exclusion of the working class from the airwaves' at least on the national service (Hutchby, 2006, p.82).

In the first edition of the *BBC Handbook* in 1928,<sup>21</sup> alongside adverts for parts and kits to build radio sets, a feature entitled 'Announcer's English', discussed the house style appropriate for the broadcaster – anonymous, objective, even-toned and standardised pronunciation, stress and inflection. According to the article, 'Announcer's English' was 'not the prerogative of any social class, of any university or of any profession' (James, 1928, p.358), but there were then, as now, many who found the tone objectionable. Reflecting on the extraordinary nature and capacity of broadcasting, the article continues:

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.soundsurvey.org.uk/index.php/survey/radio\\_actuality\\_recordings](http://www.soundsurvey.org.uk/index.php/survey/radio_actuality_recordings)

<sup>21</sup> The title of these was changed to the *BBC Yearbook* in 1930.

... (T)he BBC is responsible for a feature that has never hitherto been present in the life of any language since the world began; it enables a certain type of language to be heard simultaneously over the whole extent of these islands. Soon its voice will be heard over the whole world (James, *BBC Handbook*, 1928, p.359).

The year after it published the *Yearbook*, the BBC launched *The Listener* (1929–1991), a weekly review programme that was, according to its editor Richard Lambert, ‘... a medium for intelligent reception of broadcast programmes by way of amplification and explanation of those features that cannot now be dealt with in the editorial columns of *Radio Times*’ (Briggs, 1961, p.114). Transcripts of some of the radio lectures and talks were printed, alongside listener responses and other background information and images relating to the topic. Advertising was restricted to 10 per cent of the content, featuring programme reviews and commentary, transcripts of talks, gardening tips, recipes and a very tricky cryptic crossword (Briggs, 1965, p.189). It was soon outselling the combined circulation of the *New Statesman* and *The Spectator*, although a substantial proportion of its sales were international (Briggs, 1985, p.115).

As the domestic transmitter infrastructure expanded and more people could receive the national service, there remained an emphasis on ‘broadcast events’ that came from London, such as the annual radio link-ups across the Empire and Europe. These emphasised the extraordinary nature of the technology, of broadcasting and of Britain’s role in its development by the BBC. Ultimately it was the broadcaster’s relationship with the monarchy that allowed it to occupy, and perhaps maintain, the position of authority in society that Reith had carved out. Initial requests to broadcast royal occasions were refused because, infamously, ‘men in public houses might not remove their hats during the playing of the National Anthem’ (Scannell, 1996, p.77).<sup>22</sup> The first Royal broadcast from the British Empire Exhibition in 1924 reached an audience of 10 million, enhanced by the event’s sponsorship by *The Daily Mail* and prompted King George to explore this new medium as a way of talking to his subjects in this country and further afield (Briggs, 1961, p. 290). Reith produced the first *Royal Address to the Nation* in 1932 and this was subsequently expanded to messages to the Empire.

#### The Selsdon Committee (1934)

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<sup>22</sup> The concerns about audience behaviour during broadcasts of Royal Events can also be seen as an inversion of the more traditional concerns of the broadcaster, which were to ensure that the audience was treated with appropriate levels of respect.

The renewal of the Royal Charter extended the monopoly broadcast licence for a further ten years, even though there were 'continued complaints against the overweening power of its monopolistic status, against high-handed cultural dictation by Reith, and against the forcing of 'high standards' down the public throat' (Smith, 1974 p.62). When the Selsdon Committee met in 1934 to discuss the arrival and regulation of television It had been decided that responsibility for the television service should fall to the BBC (Smith, 1974, p.62). The response by the BBC to these new responsibilities was less than enthusiastic as the new technology did not enjoy the support of Reith who saw it as 'an unnecessary evil' and called those who ran it the 'fools on the hill', referring to the location of Alexandra Palace studios, one of the highest points in London. As a consequence of Reith's attitude, the television system was under-staffed, under-funded and treated with some contempt within the BBC (Briggs, 1985, p.78). However, one advantage of Reith's opposition to the medium was that it at least allowed the tiny team of enthusiastic and innovative television staff to work relatively autonomously, although in difficult conditions.

When regular television started in November 1936, at the height of the abdication crisis, transmission times were limited to two hours a day and confined to London. The audience was minimal yet enthusiastic; reception was inconsistent and there was a licence-fee supplement on top of the substantial expense of the set. The most basic domestic technology was £21 for a table model with a screen smaller than a postcard, while a 'deluxe' cabinet model cost £220 (Black, 1972, p.151). The first broadcast was a documentary film *Television Comes to London* (Norman, 1984, p.142), which recounted the preparation that had gone into the launch of the service. The most regularly transmitted programme, *The Picture Page* (BBC 1936–1939, 1946–1952), was a magazine-style show that broadcast two daily editions live from one of the studios. Regular features included a newsreel, an excerpt from a West End production (opera, ballet or theatre) or a recital, an interview with a film star, writer or musician, and a *Mickey Mouse* short supplied free of charge by the Disney Corporation (Norman, 1984; Thumin, J, 2004). In a sense the cartoon was the most essential element in the programme as it provided time off-air in the live broadcast for the studio set to be struck or restaged.

The decision had not yet been made whether to invest in the Baird system of the technology's inventor, or in the EMI system developed by Marconi. The early television

service (1936–1939) was transmitted live from one of these studios at Alexandra Palace, with incompatible technology. With such limited facilities, the television staff, engineers, producers and technicians were highly motivated to develop O/B techniques, as much to explore what could be done as to provide a variety in content. Events already established in the broadcast calendar, such as the Boat Race, the Derby and the FA Cup were all quickly introduced to television. The Ullswater Committee met in 1935 to discuss the upcoming renewal of the first Royal Charter in 1936, and there was little doubt that the Committee, under a national government, would recommend its renewal (Smith, 1974, p67). In fact, the Ullswater Report later the same year, went much further and commended the BBC for the service that it had established. The report acknowledged that the committee had ‘recorded its deep sense of gratitude to the wisdom of Crawford in founding the BBC in its established form and to the prudence and idealism that have characterised its operations’ (Black, 1972, p.79).

#### Monarchy and establishments

The Corporation grew in scope, stature and confidence; to reiterate, its status was no doubt helped by the relationship with the monarchy and by Reith’s respect for the traditional establishment. This privileged relationship with the monarchy reiterated the BBC’s authority and the future King Edward VIII, the Prince of Wales, proved to be an effective broadcaster (Briggs, 1985, p. 363). Reith exploited his ability to deliver speeches and more ‘off-the-cuff’ exchanges in more than 50 broadcasts that contributed to the Prince’s popularity as the ‘people’s Prince’ and to the extraordinary nature of broadcasting, as the future King was able to address each listener as a loyal subject.

No protocol existed to determine who should announce the death of King George V since there had been no broadcasting service when previous monarchs had died. Given Prince Edward’s competence as a broadcaster and his role as future King, it might seem surprising now that he did not make the announcement of his father’s death. Instead, the person who stepped into the vacuum at the top of what Scannell terms ‘the communicative hierarchy’ was John Reith, who also announced the suspension of broadcast services until the funeral as a mark of respect (Scannell and Cardiff, 1982, p.327). The question of who was entitled to speak in the absence of the King was left unanswered for many months as the abdication crisis took hold. The

possibility that the popular and dashing 'people's Prince', might be prepared to give up his throne for love posed a constitutional crisis of such enormity that the print media operated a self-imposed embargo when it was discovered in October 1936 that Wallis Simpson was seeking a divorce (Hubble, 2006, p.76). The absence of information available to the public took on a mythic symbolism and, as shown in the next chapter, prompted the formation of the Mass-Observation Movement.

The regularity and familiarity of the daily and weekly routine of the BBC played a crucial role in calming the nation. The most dramatic public act of the crisis, the Abdication Speech, was introduced and produced by John Reith, live from Windsor Castle, against the express wishes of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. The relationship with the monarchy again provided the opportunity for the BBC to demonstrate its cultural authority and place itself at some distance from government. Aside from a difficult relationship with the print media and occasional difficulties with government, the BBC managed to cement itself into the establishment through its relationship with the monarchy and the church throughout the abdication crisis. This relationship also enabled the BBC to play an important role in the staging and representation the Coronation of George VI on 12 May 1937. This gave the fledgling television service an opportunity to stage the 'world's first media event' (Scannell, 1989; Dayan and Katz, 1992). On the day of the coronation, a public holiday, the nation was truly 'united as one' with 13 hours of blanket radio coverage, culminating in the live broadcast of the King's Speech. Previous concerns about audience behaviour seem to have been outweighed by relief that the abdication crisis was over, traditional structures and order had been restored, and life could return to normal.

Alongside the extensive domestic radio coverage, the coronation was broadcast simultaneously to the parts of the globe reached by the Empire Service; an event recognised as the one that marked the emergence of radio as a mass medium (Scannell, 1989). The more limited television coverage that had focused on the coronation procession from a number of carefully placed mobile units along the route also had more limited reach; Ipswich was the furthest point from Alexandra Palace where the service was reported to have been received (Norman, 1984, p.167). This event cemented the BBC's role as an uncritical protector of the values and virtues of the cultural hegemony to all parts of the Empire and marked the point where Reith's ambitious aims for the technology were achieved. Less than a year later, Reith

resigned from the BBC with immediate effect having declared that ‘... his organisation of the BBC was complete ...’ (Black, 1972, p.84).

## Conclusion

Throughout his Director-Generalship, Reith’s BBC served an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991), of the largely unelected, English establishment whose authority was amplified, echoed and reiterated in ‘Announcer’s English’ across the ether, rather than the invisible audience of the licence-fee payers. The extraordinary nature of broadcasting was in part established by its relationships with the traditional institutions of church, state, monarchy and empire. In the hands of Reith, radio was a medium that favoured and preserved the concerns of an older aristocratic ruling class by reinstating and reinscribing, in deferential tones, the stratification of society by class as well as the importance of the opinions of great, white men. Broadcasting, including the new technology of television, was an extraordinary medium representing ‘extraordinary people’: the magic of the airwaves opened out new worlds and allowed the listener to experience events and occasions from which they were geographically, economically or socially excluded. Airtime on the national service at least, was largely restricted to the titled, the clergy and to professionals, the latter a category that was assumed by Reith to include programme presenters, producers and announcers and by ‘the great and the good who trooped into studios to educate and inform on every subject’ (Scannell and Cardiff, 1982, p.77).

At the beginning of the 1930s the concerns of ‘ordinary people’, even those who were reached by the service, were of little import to the broadcaster, as it sought to cater to its target audience, a London-centric, middle-class. However as the decade progressed and the BBC’s statute became more secure, new forms of content were produced, and ordinary people were catered to by the cover versions of popular hits were provided by the BBC light orchestras and dance bands, rather than the popular and commercially available recordings (Frith, 1986). The 1930s were seen as the BBC’s golden age, as it developed more content that might appeal to a wider target audience than previously (Briggs, 1985, Parker, 1977, Smith, 1974). For others ‘it became an additional established church, a source of authority over language and an arbiter of cultural taste’ (Smith, 1974, p.62).

This chapter has identified the ways in which, under John Reith, the BBC established itself as a paternalistic, cultural authority, and broadcasting was a mechanism for reimposing the traditional Christian values and ideals that listeners were assumed to adhere or aspire to at the time when democracy was becoming more representative through the extension of suffrage. The emphasis on the extraordinariness of the medium, and of the individuals whose achievements it promoted, or the events that it could transmit on the National Service, was still, too often at the expense of the representation of the ordinary, and throughout a lot of the decade, too expensive for many 'ordinary people'. The reports on the findings of broadcast committees were supportive, sometimes enthusiastically, but there were growing concerns as the broadcaster's services grew from a single wireless channel to an institution 'which possessed so great an accumulation of cultural and political power' (Smith, 1974, p.63).

## Chapter 4 Representations of the Ordinary

The previous chapter focused on the representations of the extraordinary and the establishment of the broadcaster as a cultural authority as the BBC adopted a model of broadcasting that legitimised itself not by the audience the service attracted, but by reference and proximity to the elite. (Seaton, 1997, p. 116) It also identified a substantial bias, discussed in the literature review towards the extraordinary and the important that resulted in a scarcity of representations of the ordinary and of 'ordinary people' on the national service Chapter 4 investigates the contexts in which such representations appeared, firstly on the regional service and the emerging technologies that facilitated this.

The phrase 'ordinary people' is a nebulous one, with multiple associations and contexts in which it might be used. The ordinary relates to the daily and everyday tasks and customary routines, normally or regularly undertaken. The diurnal nature of the everyday was first investigated by Mass-Observation, and further developed by scholars of Mass-Observation and the everyday such as Highmore (2002, 2011), Hubble (2005), Silva (2004) and Langhamer (2017) who have discussed the role of the ordinary in everyday life. The concept of ordinary and ordinariness has associations with the common, as in shared by the majority. Raymond Williams articulated some of the slippage in the phrase 'ordinary people' in a number of texts some of which are discussed in the literature review. Firstly, 'ordinary people', along with 'common people' and 'working people' are what the people formerly known as 'the masses' became after limited suffrage in 1928 (Williams, 1983, p.194). It was the point where 'the "ordinary man" (as culturally "weighted" a term as the word "masses") had begun to assert his social claims' (Briggs, 1961, p.43), at least outside the broadcasting sphere.

Secondly, there is ordinary as a descriptor of the 'uneducated' or 'unskilled', as an antonym to professional or expert, and which is not necessarily used in a negative context. For example, someone may describe themselves as an ordinary or lay person to claim their ignorance of a specialism. One of the first uses of the word ordinary being used in relation to broadcasting was in the series *Music and the Ordinary Listener* discussed in the previous chapter, in this context referring to the ordinary listener as the non-expert, the lay person, the individual who is, as yet, uneducated in an understanding of classical music. Those who tuned in to the programme might be



exposed 'to 12 little-known and seldom-heard overtures by Handel, analysed at the piano and then played on the harpsichord'.<sup>23</sup> Listeners were expected to be selective, attentive and focused on what they were listening to, and to approach listening as a serious educative experience. Many working-class families held three or four generations in noisy and cramped accommodation and had little opportunity to be the focused and concentrated listener recommended by the broadcaster. The more pressing concerns for working-class people were the General Strike in 1926 where, as we have seen, 'ordinary people' as in the working-class Left-leaning strikers were left unrepresented and voiceless by the BBC.

Equally, someone might describe themselves as 'ordinary' to signify an absence of privilege in terms of education, profession or property; someone who knows that in the 'order of things' they are at the bottom of the hierarchy or the usual order of things. However, when the term is applied to someone else it can be used to express 'explicit ideas of superiority and inferiority' (Williams, 1983, p.225). 'ordinary people' were those outside what would now be described as the 'metropolitan elite' and were not perceived as members of the BBC audience, at least in part because the service did not reach them technologically speaking. The concerns of 'ordinary people' were still unheard on national radio, just as they were invisible in the pages of the national print media (except as a problem), until the launch in 1930 of *The Daily Worker*,<sup>24</sup> the Communist Party paper (Griffiths, 1992, p.423), perhaps inspired by the formation of the second Labour government (1929–1935). In the context of the 1930s, the correlation between 'ordinary people' and working-class people was at its strongest, at least until the outbreak of the Second World War.

This chapter seeks to explore the contexts within which 'ordinary people' as the working-class were represented at a time when they and their interests were largely absent in the national broadsheets and the national output of the public service broadcaster.<sup>25</sup> The contexts that are explored begin with the continental commercial pirate stations; most notably, Radio Luxembourg broadcasting in English to advertise to the working class in this country from 1929. Additionally, the chapter examines the

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<sup>23</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/4709258b83c44f5081b2bc590f8d44f8>

<sup>24</sup> Relunched as the *Morning Star* in 1961

<sup>25</sup> They did however appear in and were catered to by tabloid papers such as *The Daily Herald*, a left wing, popular national daily, run in partnership with the union movement (see Bingham and Conboy (2015)).

work of the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit and the output of the wider British Documentary Movement (BDM) from the early 1930s, and the regional output on the BBC, particularly the northwest region. After a brief flirtation with fascism, *The Daily Mirror* relaunched in 1934 as a left-wing paper (Bingham and Conboy, 2009, p.641) and there was considerable interest in the ideals of communism from Cambridge intellectuals throughout the early 1930s. Later in the decade, the social research project Mass-Observation (M-O) formed in response to the abdication crisis to give opportunities (in one of their projects) for literate people from all walks of life to represent themselves in regularly submitted diary extracts.<sup>26</sup> The arrival of *Picture Post* in 1938, a weekly photo-journalism magazine, which under the editorship of Tom Hopkinson reached a circulation of nearly two million within three years of its launch (Hopkinson, 1970, p.88). There were even some opportunities for 'ordinary people' in unusual occupations, to appear on the *Picture Page* show (Norman, 1984, p.87).

### 'Pirate radio'

Alternative forms of media content first arrived with the 'pirate radio' stations, of which Radio Luxembourg was the first, in 1929. These continentally based, commercial stations broadcast in English to the large group of working-class consumers in Britain who were ignored by the BBC and the vast majority of the print media. The pirate stations were able to exploit a loophole in European broadcasting regulation in the Geneva Plan that had not foreseen a situation where a broadcaster's audience was in a different country to the broadcaster. Consequently, no system of payment for copyrights had been established (Street, 2009, p.8).

Radio audiences, at least in the Eastern and Home Counties where Radio Luxembourg's signal was received most clearly, finally had an alternative service to listen to, particularly on a Sunday. What, according to the radio critic Peter Black '... ensured the success of the commercial station was Reith's "obstinacy" in maintaining a strict observance of the Sabbath' (Black, 1972, p.66). In contrast to the BBC, Radio Luxembourg welcomed the listener in a light-hearted and informal tone every day of the week, inviting the audience to have fun as they listened to the most popular records rather than the staid cover versions played

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<sup>26</sup> Fragments of these were sometimes reproduced in publications that were too expensive for many of the participants to buy (Hubble, 2006, p.47).

by BBC dance orchestras. (For further discussion about the relationship between popular music, the 'pirate' stations and the BBC (see Scannell and Cardiff, 1982; Curran and Seaton 1997, and Frith 1986). Audio adverts and jingles were a novelty and their popular singalong refrains and catchphrases from presenters were adopted into everyday conversation and familiarized the audience with the interruption of content by commercial breaks (Nicholas, 1999, p 66).

While audience figures are hard to come and should be, according to radio historian Sean Street, taken with a pinch of salt, by 1936 advertising revenues for Radio Luxembourg stood at approximately £630,000 (Street, 2009, p10). Games and quiz shows were staged in London, with contestants selected from the live audience and the whole show recorded on disc and flown to Luxembourg for broadcast. These shows, based on successful US formats, enabled 'ordinary people' brave enough to appear in front of a live audience to win cash prizes. For the commercial broadcasters, the popularity of these formats enabled them to package audiences for advertisers, and the role of London based advertising agencies and English language content transmitted from mainland Europe has a substantial history in itself (Street, 2009). For the audience members at least part of the appeal was in the novelty of these formats. The few selected from the audience to appear as contestants, were introduced with an obligatory 'whatsyournamewhereyoufrom?', before shifting into the position of either the unlucky loser – gracious in defeat who's had a 'luvverly' time and that's what it's all about – or as the lucky winner who just can't quite believe it!

The extensive use of recorded copyrights on Radio Luxembourg led the British music industry to lobby Parliament for changes in broadcasting and copyright law. Record companies were keen for the BBC to play recordings covered by UK copyright rather than the orchestra versions that excluded the record labels from any copyright claim (Frith, 1986). The BBC did not see this as the solution, nor were they concerned about the troubles of the music industry, whose refusal to negotiate copyright fees with them had resulted in the establishment of the entire infrastructure of radio orchestras. The potential loss of licence-fee revenue was one concern for the BBC around the pirate stations. For Reith, the self-appointed moral guardian of the nation, the commercial output of the pirate stations both

diluted the cultural authority of the BBC and engaged the working-class audience in frivolous and possibly vulgar entertainments (Street, 2009, p.6).

### British Documentary Movement

Far more relevant to the lives of many of 'ordinary people' were the films made in the emerging British Documentary Movement (BDM) that coalesced around the ideas of John Grierson, another Scottish Presbyterian. Having graduated from University of Glasgow with a Master's degree in Moral Philosophy, Grierson moved to Chicago in 1923 to take up a Rockefeller Research Fellowship in the psychology of propaganda, advertising and public opinion. His ideas developed into a framework for 'socially useful' cinema that would educate through a 'documentary' representation of 'real life'. By 1926 Grierson was working as a film editor where he became very familiar with the Soviet style of montage editing as he subtitled the films of Sergei Eisenstein for a US audience (Hardy, 1979). For Grierson, Soviet-style editing applied to realistic footage could expose reflected truths about the nature of capitalist society and might counter some of the influence of the fictional fantasies produced in the Hollywood cinematic experience (Swann, 1998, p.97).

Grierson also reviewed films for the *New York Sun*, one of which was *Moana* (Robert Flaherty, 1926), which described the technique used in documentary as 'the creative treatment of actuality'; this is often claimed as the first definition of the term documentary in relation to film practice (Swann, 1998; Hardy, 1979; Kilborn, Izod and Hibberd, 2000). This allowed for considerable leeway in the restaging or reconstruction of events that has contributed to the richness of the documentary form. It was, however, a long way from an earlier definition of the documentary value of animated photography by the anthropologist Boleslaw Matuszewski, who in 1898 ascribed to film technology, the characteristics of '... authenticity, accuracy and precision which are not present anywhere else. It is an eyewitness par excellence, reliable and infallible' (Matuszewski, 1999, p.25).

On his return to Britain in 1928 Grierson established a promotional film unit at the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), a government department for the promotion of

goods of the Empire, and 'a bizarrely innovative anomaly of interwar Britain'.<sup>27</sup> The EMB Film Unit was staffed by Grierson, his two sisters, Marion and Ruby, whom he trained as editors, and a post-boy, Pat Jackson.<sup>28</sup> They were joined by a variety of Oxbridge-educated artists, designers, poets, writers and set designers, all keen to make films that displayed a social conscience and a certain valorisation of working-class people (or of men, at least). As the impact of the US stockmarket crash was felt, the focus of the unit's campaigns encouraged people to 'Buy British' and 'Eat More Fish', for which Grierson directed his only film *Drifters* (1929), a depiction of Scottish herring boats unloading their catch at Great Yarmouth (Swann, 1998; Jackson, 1999).

Grierson and the film unit followed the EMB's director, Stephen Tallents, on his promotion to the GPO in 1934. The focus of the renamed GPO Unit's output became the promotion of GPO services, often told through the diurnal yet widely varied routines undertaken by its employees in the delivery of the service. This ranged from mail delivery to a remote croft in the Scottish Highlands, to the laying of underwater cable to improve international telephony, to encouraging people to save and buy government bonds issued by the Post Office.

The output of the BDM provides a wide range of interesting representations of working-class and 'ordinary' people that has already received considerable acclaim and attention from academics such as Aitken (1998) and Swann (2008). There remain issues to examine relating to the impact of the films and the position that they adopted in their representations. One issue raised by the work of the BDM is that although the movement's aim was 'to make films that spoke to, for or about Britain's working people' (Hubble, 2005, p.37), most of its practitioners were from relatively privileged backgrounds.<sup>29</sup> Many were Oxbridge-educated, and their interest in working-class people might be read as a form of 'negative identification', 'in which the need to reject the outmoded social values of their bourgeois upbringings outweighed any real commitment to the social experience of the group' (Hubble, 2006, p.38).

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Baker, *Land of Promise*, BFI, DVD notes, n.d.

<sup>28</sup> Pat Jackson went on to be nominated for an Oscar for his wartime film *Western Approaches* (1945), in which all cast members were 'ordinary people'.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/513790/>

Sir Anthony Elton, 10th Baronet of Clevedon, a Marlborough-educated Cambridge graduate, is perhaps the starkest example of the privilege of many of the BDM directors. His background aside, he was one of the group's most prolific directors and made the earliest films that featured direct and unscripted speech from 'ordinary people'. *Workers and Jobs* (Elton, 1936) was made by the GPO Film Unit and was described in a disclaimer in the credits as 'an experiment in un-enhanced speaking'.<sup>30</sup> The credits also specified that the 'cast' were actual employees and job seekers at the unemployment office. The film preceded by a matter of weeks the release of *Housing Problems* (Anstey and Elton, 1935), earlier identified as the first example of direct, unscripted speech by working-class subjects (Chanan, 1980; Corner, 1996). *Housing Problems* was made by the GPO, although financed by the Gas, Coal and Coke Company and demonstrated the lived experience of tenants in poor housing.

While it may not be the first example of working-class speech in film, *Housing Problems* was one of the first to feature the reality of the domestic environment of many working-class people who were housed in overpopulated and unsanitary slums. Such locations had previously been excluded from representation, not just because of associations with the familial, the personal and the private, or the reluctance of tenants to show the squalor in which they were forced to live. As this film makes clear, the already confined spaces cannot accommodate the subjects, crew and equipment. *Housing Problems* was able to achieve this by having the subjects address a camera mounted on scaffolding outside a window, as they responded to questions from an unseen interviewer (Swann, 1998; Corner, 1996). These interviews operate as 'self-contained "access slots" within the film' (Corner, 1996, p.67), although the harsh artificial lighting situated next to the camera on the scaffold, the shallow focal length defined by the depth of the room and the static mid-shot created an aesthetic similar to the mugshot. The importance of these two films is more than the extension of direct address to working-class subjects. Significantly, working-class subjects were representing themselves in speech, albeit within the limited contexts of interviews.

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<sup>30</sup> Simon Baker, *Land of Promise*, BFI, DVD notes, n.d.

Not all the BDM directors were as far removed from the people they were representing as Elton, Anstey, Rotha, Jennings, McAllister and others. The aforementioned post-boy at the EMB, Pat Jackson, progressed to director/camera operator and developed a productive relationship with Harry Watt that has particular relevance here. Although Watt was the son of a Scottish Liberal MP, he had dropped out of his degree at Edinburgh University and joined the Merchant Navy. The pair worked together regularly, and they were responsible for the majority of footage on *Nightmail* (1936 credited Watt and Wright), the most acclaimed film by the GPO Film Unit. Their precise roles on many films are unclear because of Grierson's idiosyncratic system of allocating the credits on BDM films (Swann, 1998). They are credited with extending new forms of representation to 'ordinary people'; according to Jackson, they were able to do this because they were more like their subjects than others in the film unit (Jackson, 1999, p.137). Watt in particular expanded the roles extended to 'social actors' (people playing people like themselves) in some of the earliest examples of British docudrama films such as *The Savings of Bill Blewitt* (Watt, 1936) and *North Sea* (Watt, 1938). This incorporated short, post-synched dialogue in more complex narratives that marked a move away from the authoritative 'voice of God' narration that accompanied most factual output.

Whatever their individual roles, the loosely connected BDM group were involved in making hundreds of short films, not just for public service or commercial film units, but also 'moonlighting' for other factual film companies that made shorts that did not necessarily offer, in Grierson's terms, 'a social usefulness' (Swann, 1998, p.72). Unlike the vast majority of the GPO Film Unit output, these were guaranteed to be shown to 'ordinary people' as part of the cinematic programme: as newsreel, documentary short, cartoon, feature. The regular urban cinema-going audience was already familiar with this form of cinematic programme and the higher production values of 35mm content. The cinematic short was often from the film unit of a commercial company such as the Shell film unit established by Sir Arthur Anstey.

Another important issue about the work of the GPO relates to the economies of the 16mm format, which had a higher percentage of emulsion than 35mm and did not reach cinema's fire-safety standards. Even if it had, UK cinema was

established on the vertical integration system of Hollywood so cinemas only showed content produced by themselves, sister companies or international affiliates and distributors. Content made by the GPO Film Unit was screened around a network of non-theatrical venues including schools, church halls, libraries and other community spaces. Converted GPO vans toured round these spaces as mobile cinemas, creating opportunities for rural communities to see film in non-cinematic environments although there were never more than 400 such venues and never more than 20 vans (Swann, 1998). Sitting on folding chairs in a community venue watching BDM shorts was not a widely undertaken activity and it is unlikely that it was considered a cinematic experience. Consequently, only a small percentage of the UK population had an opportunity to see these films on release (Swann, 1998). Indeed, it is quite possible that by the time of writing in 2019 the number of documentary historians and students who have viewed the films is far greater than the audience numbers the films were able to reach at the time.

### Radio documentary

Attempts to represent working-class people remained problematic; the necessity for the worker to be at the studio rather than at work instilled an unfortunate and seemingly inherent focus on unemployed people, who in this context stood in for working-class. Early studio-based programmes aimed at a working-class audience, such as the Midland region's series *Time to Spare* (1934)<sup>31</sup> broadcast on the National Programme and *Man Time* (1934)<sup>32</sup> both featured guided studio discussions with unemployed men. Scannell noted that producer Olive Shapley held placards in the studio reminding the guests not to say 'bloody or bugger' in an episode for the national series *Men Talking*<sup>33</sup> (1935), produced by the northwest region for national transmission (Scannell, 1996, p.137). Reith's response to these programmes, believing that broadcasting was a privilege to be extended to the expert and the extraordinary, was to remind regional stations and department managers of his concerns when he saw '...men down to speak whose status, either professionally or socially, and whose qualifications to speak seem doubtful' (Reith quoted in Garnham, 1978, p.29).

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<sup>31</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/bb09e8d01fe7459ab993c147dabc140b>

<sup>32</sup> Transmission information unavailable.

<sup>33</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/bd5174107d36463a9195f86819d8ea58>



Studio-based programmes with 'ordinary people' were problematic, in part because of the earlier mentioned difficulty in getting workers (as 'ordinary people') into the studio, and the issues faced by non-professionals in the unfamiliar studio environment surrounded by technology (Scannell, 1996, p.26). The pressures of live broadcasting denied 'ordinary people' the time they needed to develop competencies in self-presentation in this environment, impeding their ability to make effective use of the broadcast sphere. The knowledge that John Reith personally inspected the regional services' output and was likely to disapprove of the content as well as the manner of its delivery did not encourage producers to create live content with novices (Garnham 1978),

### Mobile Technologies

Only after mobile recording equipment was introduced was radio documentary removed from the tyranny of live broadcasting. Once established as a form, it focused on the located realities of regional and working-class lives and could reflect them more sympathetically. Recording enabled the BBC to dispense with written scripts and still retain control over what went out' (Black, 1972, p.129). The ability to record actuality and speech, dialogue in dialect with local sayings and phrases, and insert them into live studio transmissions proved another exciting new form of content. It was the regional services that 'under much greater financial constraints were responsible for genuine innovation in bringing more "ordinary people" to the microphone' (Briggs, 1985, p.137). The Northwest region was the first outside London to acquire a mobile recording van, and two distinct styles of radio documentary emerged from the features department, sharing some of the BDM film-makers' interests.

Geoffrey Bridson produced proud, poetic industrial documentaries such as *Coal* (1934) and *Steel* (1934), which valorised the worker and combined their speech with the sounds of industrial activity, harsh and unfamiliar to many in the audience. The aesthetic valorisation was a major concern of early Soviet cinema, whose techniques and approaches had influenced Grierson. Consequently, it was present in the output of EMB and the GPO Film Units, where it was translated most authentically in the work of Watt and Jackson, but also in the work of some of the Left-leaning members of the unit, such as Anstey, Jennings, Rotha and MacAllister. The use of experimental sound in Bridson's output may

well have been influenced by the experiments in documentary film as it increasingly tried to move away from the 'voice of God' narration. As with radio, mobile sound-recording technology was changing the possibilities of documentary film.

The most interesting producer in terms of this research is Olive Shapley, briefly mentioned above, who focused on the individual human element in the manner of Watt and Jackson and 'interviewed' 'ordinary people' involved in activities relevant to their lives. One of her programmes *£.s.d.*(1934) featured a conversation between a shop assistant and a mill worker buying a pair of boots (Scannell, 1996), a rare example of a 'worker' simultaneously constructed as a 'consumer'. Shapley recounts the difficulty she had in getting participants to talk unselfconsciously and that 'people were not used then to having a microphone thrust in front of them with the instruction to "be natural – just be natural"' (Shapley quoted in Scannell, 1996, p.54). This understanding that 'ordinary people' were unaccustomed to the situation and technology or to addressing others in an authoritative manner in such contexts raised concerns about 'effective broadcasting'. These were reduced by the possibilities of the rudimentary editing but still not eliminated. A subsequent 'documentary feature' by Shapley, *Canal Journey* (1939) was described by *Radio Times* as 'Sketches of life on inland waterways illustrated by recordings made on the Leeds and Liverpool canal'.<sup>34</sup> A disclaimer preceding the programme attempted to address these concerns:

On this occasion I went after the human interest story – as the newspapers say – and tried to get the canal people I met to tell me in their own words something of what their life is like, some of them found it very hard to believe that anyone could find the details of their ordinary life interesting, and, when they had been reassured on this point, it wasn't very easy for them to put their ideas into words. All the recordings you will hear were made without script or rehearsal (Shapley quoted in Scannell, 1996, p.72).

This use of a disclaimer prior to non-professional or amateur content is one of the mechanisms through which broadcasting has positioned itself as a profession and broadcasters considered themselves to be media professionals. Distinguishing amateur content in order to maintain the mystique of professional

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<sup>34</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/page/5fc4c5e0b9cc48f4be300f20bacff12e>

representations (Sherman, 1997; Dovey, 2000) remained a central concern in the representation of 'ordinary people' in the broadcast sphere.

'Ordinary people' could also be heard as the audience in the weekly variety show that featured in most regions' schedule once mobile technology enabled outside broadcasts from theatre locations around the region (Scannell, 1996; Crisell, 1997; Hutchby, 2006). As these programmes were not broadcast on the national service, allowances were made for accents, dialects and vernacular humour, particularly in the ad libs and catchphrases of local comedians and performers and 'ordinary people' of the audience. Non-professional performers were introduced in skits and sketches, where they could say things that the professional could not. This relates to the construction of an ordinary person as one who in some way 'breaks the rules' or shows their non-professional status, whether through ignorance or guile.

*Harry Hopeful* (1935/1936) featured an eponymous fictional character played by Frank Nicholls who conducted scripted and rehearsed interviews in staged O/Bs from theatres or works canteens with vernacular experts or characters. In these programmes, where the live audience members were known to each other, the possibilities for interaction were heightened since familiarity lowers levels of reserve. Participation by audience members subsequently featured more personal and informal contributions, and the programme ended as the audience sang the theme song on cue (Scannell, 1996, p.26). These O/Bs may have sounded informal but they were scripted, rehearsed and performed to ensure standards of 'effective broadcasting' were maintained. The audience of 'ordinary people' was co-opted to perform particular roles in content focused on the shared and situated cultural practices of work, leisure and consumption. According to Scannell, the 'show was the first to take 'ordinary people' and their ordinary experiences and transform them into a public, shareable and enjoyable event' (Scannell, 1989, p.147). The series aired on the regional programme although the programme *Harry Hopeful's Party* described as 'a northern foretaste of Merry Christmas' aired on the National service (1936).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/5f6f0963b1614cbdb511552058aaeaa6>

Regional content rarely transferred to the national service, and so one of the first occasions of vernacular speech on the BBC national service was in 1934 when ‘... an elderly Warwickshire shepherd introduced the King to deliver the highlight of the broadcast calendar – at least in the eyes of the BBC – the Royal Address to the Nation, which united the regional and national services, and all subjects under their monarch’ (Black, 1972, p.75). Even in this rare example of regional speech on the national service, it is used to privilege tradition and the establishment.

### Mass-Observation

At this time the substantial international concern that Europe was on the brink of serious conflict was first realised in the Spanish Civil War. This followed the death of King George V that sparked the Abdication crisis which ‘exposed the forces of tradition and modernity’ (Hubble, 2005, p.46) and motivated the formation of the Mass Observation movement. Mass-Observation (M-O) was a social research project launched by BDM filmmaker and painter Humphrey Jennings<sup>36</sup> and a *Daily Mirror* journalist (and surrealist poet), Charles Madge. M-O published their manifesto in the *New Statesman* (January 1937) to ‘register the unregistered and to document that which was unrepresented’ (Hubble, 2006, p.179) through the submission of anonymous written accounts of participants’ daily lives. The manifesto caught the attention of anthropologist Tom Harrisson, recently returned from a field trip to Borneo, who wanted to conduct a study of the British, ‘an anthropology of ourselves’ (Hubble, 2006, p.183).

According to the M-O website:

These men met through a strange coincidence. Early in 1937 Harrisson’s published poem appeared in the *New Statesman* on the same page as a letter from Madge and Jennings, in which they outlined their London-based project to encourage a national panel of volunteers to reply to regular questionnaires on a variety of matters. Interested by the similarity in arms to his own current anthropological study of the British, contacted Madge and Jennings.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jennings, a Cambridge graduate, was a filmmaker at the GPO Film Unit, but was sidelined under Grierson who considered him a ‘dilettante’ (Swann, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.massobs.org.uk/about/history-of-mo>

The men joined forces and within a couple of weeks had established two distinctive projects for M-O, Tom Harrison based himself in Bolton to establish the Worktown project and Madge and Jennings set up the collation of observers' diaries in Greenwich.

Launched during the abdication crisis, with high levels of press coverage, readers in the *Daily Mirror* were asked to contribute to the Mass Observation National Survey Days, planned for the 12th of each month, to coincide with the forthcoming Coronation on 12 May 1937 (Highmore, 2002, p.54). The findings and methodology would be published after the coronation of George VI in order to demonstrate the slippage between the lived and the represented experience. (Highmore, 2002, p.57). Tom Harrison accepted an invitation to promote M-O on *The Picture Page*, a daily magazine-style show on newly launched BBC Television service. Each edition was produced twice, the first show transmitted in the evening, and a repeat performance the following morning which retailers used to demonstrate content. The evening edition regularly featured 'ordinary people' in unusual jobs such as a muffin man and a statue cleaner, alongside elaborate and eccentric characters, a Pearly King and Queen and a blacked-up racecourse bookie (Norman, 1984, p.112).<sup>38</sup>

When Harrison appeared on the BBC to talk about M-O in February 1937, the intention was to recruit more volunteers to participate by submitting an account of their activities to coincide with the accounts of Coronation Day scheduled for publication in the *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation-Day-Survey* (Jennings and Madge, 1937). This was the first of the M-O publications where research was grouped into themes and a wide spectrum of experiences represented. However, the books and pamphlets were expensive, and only a very few submissions could be featured, so it is unlikely that their authors ever saw them in print (Hubble, 2006, p.167).

*May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation-Day-Survey* (Jennings and Madge, 1937) provided extensive detail about the experience of the media representations available on the day of King George VI's coronation: the television footage,

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/resources/tvhistory/audio\\_video.shtml#two](http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/resources/tvhistory/audio_video.shtml#two)

blanket radio coverage and the use of cinemas to relay the coronation speech by the new King. Some submissions referenced his now famous stutter and concerns that he would not be able to deliver his speech.<sup>39</sup> The book also identified that an observational newsreel film was made available to a few cinemas for a same-day screening – perhaps not as impressive as the simultaneous broadcast to Empire, but still quite a remarkable achievement. The film, observational footage of the procession, had to be processed and edited before being shown to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had conducted the service, before it could be copied and distributed, in one instance being flown to Glasgow for a 10pm screening (Jennings and Madge, 1937).

The main issue for M-O, and particularly for Jennings, was that once the coronation had taken place, life returned to normal, and people, ordinary or otherwise, did not have the same need to confess their doubts and fears. Although some of the thousands of contributors continued to submit regular diary entries, the movement lost its impetus. Humphrey Jennings left M-O in 1938 and became more active in the General Post Office Film Unit and then the Crown Film Unit, leaving Tom Harrison responsible for the substantially larger than anticipated archive. M-O did enable the representation of some ‘ordinary people’ but like the BDM, the project was motivated by those unlikely to classify themselves as ordinary, and the output was not readily available to those who were represented.

### New Documentary Subjects

Under Albert Cavalcanti, Humphrey Jennings became one of the most important of the BDM directors, and worked in three very distinct styles: the docudrama style first suggested by Harry Watt in films such as *North Sea* (1938); the more poetic output that used montage editing and ambient sound; and a more straightforward social-realist documentary style. The latter was demonstrated in the highly regarded and atmospheric *Spare Time* (Jennings, 1939), which featured ‘ordinary people’ at leisure in four locations associated with different industries. While the film has become very well regarded, it was not shown to British audiences as it was made for the New York World’s Fair of 1939, to be

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<sup>39</sup> This became the subject matter of the feature film *The King’s Speech* (2010).

shown as part of a fundraising programme. This film demonstrated a more sympathetic representation of working-class subjects by 'abandoning the editorialising approach of the documentary movement' (Anthony, n.d.). In *Spare Time*, narrative and narration are absent and the images are left to speak for themselves. One section of the film concentrates on a man tending his pigeons and, although shot in close-up and close proximity, the subject studiously ignores the presence of both camera and audience.

In *Builders* (Jackson, 1942), Jackson employed the opposite approach, when he used a 'technique now known as "subjective camera", perhaps for the first time' (Jackson, 1999, p.89). Charlie Fielding, a bricklayer, working on a London building site addressed the camera as a familiar person. The subject acknowledged the camera in a low-angle, mid-shot, as though it were a foreman – 'Hello Guv' – while reading an editorial about the importance of productivity. The subject continued to address the camera in a conversational tone while also demonstrating his bricklaying competency in what Jackson described as 'one of the most spontaneous performances from a non-actor' he ever recorded (Jackson, 1999, p.89). Patrick Russell remarked that '[T]he result is an experimental crossbreed between Paul Rotha's 'multi-voice' style and the direct-to-camera interview technique of *Housing Problems*' (Russell, n.d.).

The inversion of power suggested by the subjective camera and the direct address is now embedded as a technique employed in the representation of 'ordinary people'. This provides a relevant example of the technique that appears to empower 'ordinary people'. However, the director himself acknowledged that the technique, the spontaneous direct address to camera, should be used sparingly. It was, he identified, fine for 'a gimmicky five-minute film' but 'the limited eye line is too inhibiting' for a feature (Jackson, 1999, p.89). These three distinct documentary styles, all introduced 'ordinary people' to the screen in new ways and the output of BDM was instrumental in identifying positions or roles that 'ordinary people' could occupy in representing themselves. However, the impact of this output on 'ordinary people' as the audience at the time was minimal, *Spare Time* and *Builders*, were not made for the British market; even those that were only had a few prints doing the rounds of the non-theatrical circuit of church,

village and school halls, which held little appeal to cinema-goers accustomed to the cinematic experience (Swann, 1998).

On the early BBC television service, 'ordinary people' were not the target audience; so they rarely appeared and, in the exceptions where they did, such as in *The Picture Page*, the examples were those with unusual jobs, such as statue cleaner, people with exceptional hobbies or those who had achieved extraordinary things. In 1937 the BBC introduced Viewer Research and conducted a survey to understand what people were watching and in which contexts. Many questions were quite vague, relating to genres rather than particular programmes and only 74 people responded to the sample. *The Picture Page*, the weeknight evening magazine show that featured the 'stars' of contemporary cultural output of opera, theatre, ballet and classical music, was approved by 90 per cent of the audience. The most unpopular content was 'the demonstrations of cooking, washing, ironing etc. which were condemned as of little interest to those who could *afford* television sets' (Norman, 1984, p.211). This also could be taken as a demonstration that the BBC was making some attempt to attract an audience who did their own washing and ironing.

Aspirational consumers were constructed as 'ordinary people' when they appeared in *Come and Be Televised*, an O/B show from the annual RadiOlympia exhibition, which made demonstration content for television retailers. Potential consumers were given the opportunity to appear on television, where having been granted access to the technology they extolled its virtues and benefits and constructed the act of appearing on television as an exciting experience. It was in a live transmission from this programme on 1 September 1939, when the television service was closed down in anticipation of the announcement of war. *Come and Be Televised* was, in one last light-hearted moment that would never have been allowed in Reith's day, replaced with a *Mickey Mouse* cartoon, which ended with Mickey announcing, Garbo-style, that he wanted to be alone, and the television service fell silent until 1946 (Norman, 1984, p.212).

## Conclusion

While this chapter has identified examples where 'ordinary people' were represented in different media spheres, it is important to remember that when



they appeared in broadcast content, it was as an occasional exception to the majority of content. When they did occur, outside of broadcasting, such as in documentary film, it is sensible to be realistic about the number of people who experienced them and about any influence they might have had on wider society. Where 'ordinary people' appear in the work of the GPO Film Unit, they were represented most frequently as industrious and productive workers. Content often used the diurnal routine of work as its narrative structure and it is only occasionally that workers at leisure the focus. Other content showed 'ordinary people' as sensible savers making use of their Post Office accounts. Smaller, mobile recording technology enabled new types of actuality recordings to be incorporated, including at times domestic environments, although limitations in sound recording restricted the speech of 'ordinary people' to post synched utterances. Whilst limited this development signalled a move away from the 'voice of God' narration, and allowed therefore, different and less authoritative narrative constructions and a move away from the expository style. In this way it has demonstrated how technological affordances impact on the types of representations that can be made and the people who can be represented.

In radio broadcasting, studio programmes used the negative metonym of the unemployed to represent 'ordinary people' as workers and guided or restricted participants' vernacular speech. The ability to record location sound allowed for new constructions of 'ordinary people', such as consumer, and the use of vox pops, to counter the inarticulateness of many when faced with a microphone. Ambient sound could also now be included as part of the programme adding to the seeming authenticity and directness of radio documentary formats. Alongside sound recording technology, the provision of O/B trucks and vans to the regions certainly extended the contexts and locations from which 'ordinary people' could be represented, although the roles they fulfilled were limited.

The focus for television was the establishment of an affluent and culturally aspirational, if not cultured, audience unlikely to consider themselves as ordinary, at least in the understanding of 'ordinary people' as working class. The expense of the technology and of the combined licence fee were also indicators that television was a signifier of status or 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.18). However, the outbreak of the Second World War curtailed the development of

television, and radio broadcasting was co-opted for a different function which included a new context in which the phrase 'ordinary people' was understood.

## Chapter 5 Wartime and Postwar Representation

This chapter focuses on the status of 'ordinary people' during the extraordinary period of the Second World War and its aftermath. It identifies concerns of the propagandist nature of the BBC, as it was tasked by the Ministry of Information, with the reiteration of a national narrative of 'the people's war' (Calder, 1969). After the outbreak of war, the phrase 'ordinary people' became used in the context of a military rather than a class hierarchy, where it took on a meaning of civilians: those not in active service, signified by uniform. This did not remove the hierarchy of military rank, nor disguise the fact that those of the lowest class were most often those in the lowest ranks in the military. This research suggests that all those without a stake in now dominant military hierarchy were now collectively or commonly referred to as 'ordinary people'. In fact, the phrase was used to great effect as part of the war narrative, where domestic class distinctions were reduced, in theory at least through rationing. Alongside the documentary film units, newsreel companies, feature films, and the Press the BBC had a role in providing a narrative about how the efforts of 'ordinary people' would contribute to victory and support those fighting in the extraordinary circumstances of war. J. B. Priestley frequently used the term 'ordinary people' in his weekly *Postscript* radio shows that ran through 1940 and 1941 and attracted audiences rivalled only by Churchill (Langhamer, 2017). Priestley, a well-known socialist (and Yorkshireman), used the phrase frequently, often in ways that made an explicit connection between him and the listener, as in 'ordinary people', like you and me', suggesting a common or shared understanding or perspective, and a levelling of class distinctions. At other times he used the phrase to explicitly make a distinction of 'ordinary people' as the non-elite. For example in an episode of *Postscript* (tx: 30<sup>th</sup> June 1940), Priestley identified that 'all of us "ordinary people" are on one side of a high fence, and on the other side... are the official and important personages...' (Langhamer, 2017, p.4).

### The Ministry of Information

The Ministry of Information (MoI) had been established in the First World War by the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act and its authority was reinstated on 4 September 1939, two days after Neville Chamberlain's announcement that the country was at war with Germany. Immediate and stringent restrictions were put in place: cinemas, theatres and concert venues were closed in what George Bernard Shaw described as 'a

masterstroke of unimaginative stupidity' (Briggs, 1985, p.176), as it forced people, ordinary or otherwise, to retreat to their homes and subjected them to what is now widely recognised as the blatant propaganda being broadcast. Even though these most stringent restrictions were loosened after ten days, all forms of media and communication were strictly controlled by the Mol throughout the war. The Mol's responsibilities included the output of commercial and documentary film and radio broadcasting and oversaw a return to strict practices of scripting and editing, with further restrictions added in relation to locations and timetables. A central function of the media, under the control of the Mol, was in constructing the conflict as 'a people's war', to mobilise the population to contribute to the war effort, whether through growing their own vegetables, saving scraps, reducing consumption, respecting the blackout, becoming a land girl or fire or air raid warden. The country was, according to the Mol, all in together, and every 'ordinary person', in this case as a civilian, had a role to play (Calder, 1969). The routineness and regularity of broadcasting, and its availability in domestic environments, was particularly well suited to the dissemination of the propaganda necessary to persuade and motivate the population to suffer the hardships of the times. For a more extensive understanding of the particular role of the BBC in mobilising support within the context of the wider aims of the Mol, see Calder, 1969, Nicholas, 1996, and McLaine, 1979.

The new BBC Director-General F. W. Ogilvie was angered by both the restrictions imposed on the BBC by the Mol and the lack of recognition of this in parliamentary discussion and in the print media. Newspapers were affected by the rationing of newsprint and concerned about the threat of broadcasting to their postwar survival. They launched a united, and not unjustifiable, attack on the 'veracity' of what was transmitted on the BBC without acknowledgement that these were statements produced by the Mol. Even the Labour leader Clement Attlee admitted in the House of Commons that, at times, he felt depressed when he listened in (Briggs, 1985, p.177). The content produced during the 'phoney war', the latter months of 1939 when the declaration had no immediate effect other than the restriction of entertainment, 'seemed inadequate either to reflect people's mood or change it' (Briggs, 1985, p.176). For many listeners their joy when restrictions on observing the Sabbath were lifted after Reith's departure was short-lived as the reality of the reduced wartime service became apparent. Listeners switched to Radio Luxembourg or one of the other 'pirate stations'

that broadcast from the European mainland (Radio Normandy, Radio Brittany and Radio Fenerbache), or the Republic of Ireland (Radio Athlone).

The print media, many of whose proprietors now sat in positions of power in various wartime government departments, could be relied upon to stay within acceptable and responsible boundaries in respecting government policy. Collectively however, the press took great delight in attacking the BBC, which was after all only broadcasting government-approved and -produced content. The *Daily Mail* went so far as to suggest that Lord Haw-Haw's German propaganda broadcasts on commercial European stations were as accurate as anything you would hear on the BBC (Black, 1972, p.123). In fact, Lord Haw Haw's broadcasts, which had been dismissed by the BBC Home Broadcasting Board as only being listened to 'by adolescents and middle-aged women' were being listened to by 30 per cent of the population, according to a survey undertaken by the BBC (Seaton, 1997, p.132).

MacMillan was replaced as Minister of Information by Reith in January 1940, to the horror of the print media and presumably of many listeners. This has led to claims that the Mol was modelled on the BBC (Born, 2004), and certainly Reith understood the issues of a national communications infrastructure better than either his predecessor or his successor at the Mol. However, his tenure lasted only four months, his swift departure the result of Winston Churchill becoming Prime Minister after Chamberlain's resignation in May 1940. King George V invited Churchill to lead the formation of the National Coalition government, at Chamberlain's suggestion. The already fractious relationship between Reith and Churchill saw Reith shunted off to the Ministry of Transport to be replaced at the Mol by first one Churchill acolyte, Duff Cooper, and then in 1941 another, Brendan Bracken, (later, Viscount Bracken)<sup>40</sup> the founder of the *Financial News*,<sup>41</sup> who stayed in post until 1945 (Briggs, 1985, p.179).

The Naval Intelligence department of the Mol seconded M-O as both a form of security and a possible intelligence-gathering arm; Tom Harrisson remained at its head. The loss of independence, coupled with many participants being stationed

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online/content/bracken1952.html>

<sup>41</sup> which merged with the *Financial Times* in 1945

overseas, led to a decline in submissions although some of the original participants contributed for many years. M-O continued to work for the MoI as an arm of Naval Intelligence throughout the war, although the original impetus for the organization dissipated once King George V was crowned, and uncertainty and the possibility of change was replaced by the reiteration of the establishment and tradition. Interestingly, the M-O's simple methodology of asking people what they felt was employed in the BBC Listener Research Department from 1941, when nearly 300,000 people were interviewed about their listening habits in relation to BBC content.<sup>42</sup> R. J. E. Silvey, the Listener Research Director, identified: 'There had been unprecedented shifts of population, and the black-out had caused fundamental changes in the public's leisure habits, no-one knew what effect the war had had upon the public's taste' (Silvey, 1946, p.26). Alongside the continuous survey, a number of smaller research projects were undertaken, including one to identify whether night-shift workers wanted programmes between midnight and 6.30am, and another that measured the efficacy of up-tempo music on factory productivity (Silvey, 1946, p.27).

The closure of cinemas and other venues lasted ten days, when the realisation came that cinema provided the mechanism to distribute government-produced public information films and propaganda to large audiences and that to deprive people of popular forms of entertainment would possibly cause social unrest. The GPO Film Unit, renamed as the Crown Film Unit (CFU), was one of the film companies that made propagandist output showing communities united in their efforts to stay cheerful, tackle any problem and make the best of it. According to Black, the '... most promising discovery, vital to the BBC war effort, was that "ordinary people" were the richest single source of raw material' (Black, 1972, p.128).

### 'Ordinary people' at war

As noted above, new definitions of 'ordinary people' emerged during wartime, when the term referred to those without a title or military rank and was used to describe anyone not on active overseas duty, although distinctions were made for those in uniformed civilian roles (fire wardens, WRVS, nurses etc) working for

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<sup>42</sup> *BBC Yearbook 1942*, p.79.

the war effort. On the BBC Home Service an additional use of ‘ordinary people’ meant those subjected to the restrictions of rationing and blackouts. Formats were infused with advice and instructions as people were exhorted to cut out careless talk, not pass on rumours, watch their step in the blackout, and ‘above all to cook economically, shop wisely, dig for victory and raise chickens, pigs, rabbits and goats’ (Black, 1972, p.123). Information and instruction programmes filled the single, national schedule, offering advice on how to replace a pane of glass, how to stretch money or make the most of rations in programmes such as *The Kitchen Front* (1940–1945) and *Making the Most of a Wartime Larder* (1941–1945) where listeners were asked to send in their tips and recipes in an early participatory broadcast format. At the same time, as factory life became dominated by women, shows such as *Workers Playtime* (1941), *Go To It* (1939), and the twice-daily *Music While You Work* (1940–67), featured up-tempo, dance-band arrangements of popular tunes, designed to maintain increased productivity in the factories where they were transmitted through public-address systems. The latter indeed became a ‘national institution’ (Briggs, 1970, p.514).

When the Forces Programme, designed to cater to those serving overseas, launched in January 1940, some of the light-heartedness apparent in some prewar regional content reappeared. Programmes such *Those You Have Loved* (1941) utilised mobile recording technology to create a new form of audience-generated content: personalised requests and dedications recorded and played for those stationed overseas (Black, 1972, p.95). One of the most popular wartime radio shows *Sincerely Yours, Vera Lynn* (1941–1945), developed a new form of participation and audience engagement. The eponymous Vera Lynn, the popular singer, read out personal letters to service personnel serving abroad written by their loved ones in between her versions of popular songs and her own multi-million selling hit song *We’ll Meet Again*, the programme’s theme tune. The show’s title, using the less formal address ‘sincerely yours’,<sup>43</sup> related to the content of the show and demonstrates a growing informality in the BBC’s wartime mode of address.

The ‘genuine innovation’ that pre-war regional content had shown ‘in bringing more ‘ordinary people’ to the microphone’ (Briggs, 1985, p.137) was made evident in Home

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<sup>43</sup> The formal signing off was ‘Yours faithfully’.

Service formats such as *In Britain Now* (1940) and *The Kitchen Front* (1940). Regional speech became more common and ‘suddenly the wireless began to sound like the nation was talking to itself’ (Black, 1972, p.121). Some of the programmes, such as *We Speak for Ourselves* (1940–1943) demonstrated a form of social ventriloquism; its aims, according to an internal memo written by producer D. G. Bridson (whose prewar industrial radio documentaries are discussed in Chapter Two), were to reflect the ‘fighting spirit, cheerfulness and morale of the workers, done by the workers themselves, [and] would be of immense value (Scannell, 1996, p.38). Wilfred Pickles, the Lancastrian presenter, described the programme as ‘[R]ank propaganda disguised as entertainment’ (Pickles in Scannell, 1996, p.39).

With more informality in the programmes, it remained important, according to A. P. Ryan, Home Affairs advisor at the Ministry of Information, that ‘the BBC should still speak “authoritatively” and the announcers should be people who were ‘obvious gentlemen’ (Briggs, 1985, p.187), echoing Reith’s preference for RP. This proved difficult to impose, and of little relevance to an audience whom the BBC needed to address as a collective of ‘ordinary people’ who were all experiencing the same or similar deprivations (Calder, 1969); a substantially different audience to that imagined as the cultural elite and the aspirational middle class. In 1941 the above-mentioned Wilfred Pickles became the first Home Service announcer with a regional accent, not as ‘an early attempt at appealing more to the general public, but actually a move to make it more difficult for Nazis to impersonate BBC broadcasters.’<sup>44</sup>

The inclusion of ‘ordinary people’ and their vernacular speech in so many broadcast formats was a matter of wartime necessity on two counts. Firstly, many ‘professional’ broadcasters and entertainers were on active service, and secondly, as documentary film production had discovered, ‘ordinary people’ were both cheap and eager to please (Black, 1972, p239) There are many caveats here in the manner and tone of what was being represented, the contexts in which people were represented and the subjects that they were allowed to talk about. The narrative of the ‘the people’s war’ was imposed by the Mol across all media, suggesting that ‘we are all in it together’ and every ordinary person was

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/yourvoice/accent2.shtml>



making the same sacrifice, and the BBC played an important role in disseminating this. (See Calder, 1969; McLaine, 1979 and Nicholas, 1996.)

'Ordinary people' were represented in the popular tabloid press, and in the pages of popular magazines, most notably *The Picture Post*, the weekly photo-magazine with an anti-fascist, socialist editorial policy. The magazine regularly featured photo essays depicting 'ordinary people' at work and leisure, trips to the seaside, picnics by the roadside etc, alongside images from prisoner of war camps and concentration camp survivors, and other non-domestic content. The candid nature and immediacy of these images suggested an authenticity and truthfulness perhaps not so apparent in other war time media content. The wartime readership of the magazine was likely to be substantially higher than the two million per week print run. The editor Tom Hopkinson saw the popularity of the magazine as a mandate for the political representation of 'ordinary people', going so far as to devote an issue to a Plan for Britain in 1941. In this edition, Hopkinson and Julius Huxley outlined many of the socialist policies that became incorporated into the Beveridge Report and subsequently the framework of the welfare state (Hopkinson, 1971, p.15).

### The Crown Film Unit

All documentary film came under the control of the Mol and the Crown Film Unit (CFU), the renamed GPO Film unit, was heavily involved in promoting the Mol agenda. *If War Should Come*, a short made by the GPO but released by the CFU, demonstrated the civic responsibilities of ordinary citizens and was re-released under the title *Do It Now* (1939) and shown in '2,000 cinemas throughout the country in the week beginning 18 September', the week the Mol ban on cinemas was lifted. One of the earliest films from the CFU was *The First Days* (Jennings, Watt and Jackson, 1939), reunited the ex-GPO Film Unit directors in one of the only films to represent 'the phoney war' in a series of vignettes that 'comes across as a patchwork of several of the styles they had been pioneering and those to come; plainly explanatory, awkwardly dramatised, socially inclusive, beautifully impressionistic' (Russell, n.d., p.34)

These three directors, already identified as the most relevant for the purpose of this research, utilised 'ordinary people' as social actors in different ways. For

example, the docudrama style was furthered by Jennings's *Fires Were Started* (1940). This was filmed at a London fire station with all but the lead played by 'social actors'. *London Can Take It* (Jennings and Watt, 1941) represented the diurnal routine of 'ordinary' Londoners as they left work and prepared for the nightly bombing raids.<sup>45</sup> The post-synched narration by Canadian announcer Quentin Reynolds anchored the meaning for the domestic audience and allowed the films to operate within wider fundraising appeals in the US (Swann, 1998). In *Listen to Britain* (Jennings and McAllister, 1942), national and regional identities are united in recognisable and shared activities. It employed the form of the poetic documentary, using long- and mid-shot observational images and factuality sound as equal elements in montage, rather than a continuity editing style.

The credits on documentary film were now expanded to extend thanks to the 'ordinary people' in whichever town or city the footage had been shot, for their participation in the making of the film. This type of credit had previously been used in radio as a disclaimer to excuse any amateurish content, but now became used to suggest pride in the recognition of the hardship that everyone faced during what Calder (1969) identifies as 'the people's war'. This is most explicit in the film *Ordinary People* (Lee and Holmes, 1941), produced primarily for export (Dixon, n.d.), which followed a diurnal structure from the dawn all-clear to the nightly blackout and sirens. It starts with an address that suggests the perceived importance of the film as a documentary record as well as for fundraising: 'To the future historian – this film was played by 'ordinary people' of London'. It is, as film historian Byrony Dixon notes, 'for all its "cockerney" gorbimeyness ... as true as it needed to be then' (Dixon, n.d.; see also Langhamer, 2017).<sup>46</sup>

Documentary is dependent on 'ordinary people' as social actors, and wartime output reflected the changing status of women as they played their part in the war effort. Films such as *Night Shift* (Chambers 1942) and *Summer on the Farm* (Keene, 1943) depicted women factory workers and the Women's Land Army

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<sup>45</sup> This was one of a number of US-funded CFU-films made for the explicit purpose of raising awareness of Britain's plight in America; <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/520084/>

respectively. *The Countrywomen* (Page, 1942) documents the 'often overlooked contribution of the Women's Institute to the war effort' (McGahan, n.d., p.40). Under the Mol's narrative of the people's war, all wartime documentary output, presented a version of the 'lived experience' of 'ordinary people' that was recognisable enough to those who saw it and, as wartime restrictions on cinema ensured that British documentary films were a regular and essential part of the cinematic programme, many people did. Audience figures for wartime cinema attendance suggest that some people went as many as four times a week (Aitken, 2001). As the war drew to an end, more forward-looking documentary film titles went into production, notably *A Diary for Timothy* (Jennings, 1946), which started from the premise of a child born on the fifth anniversary on Britain's entry into the war, and constructed a narrative of what might lie ahead envisaged through the lives of four different Britons chosen to represent the national experience. By the time of the film's release in peacetime, the words in E. M. Forster's narrative have an 'achingly sad' undertone, and a 'dismaying question' about the future (Jackson, n.d., p.45).

### Postwar broadcast representations

Preparations for a return to peacetime came with the recognition that, while the war might have ended, it would take a long time to before life returned to normal. The BBC was now under its fifth Director, General Sir William Haley, who was appointed after the 'somewhat calamitous' F. W. Ogilvie resigned in 1942 and the ineffective (under the Mol) partnership of Cecil Graves<sup>47</sup> and Robert Foot<sup>48</sup> (Briggs, 1970, p.363). Haley, an ex-editor of the *Manchester Evening News*, joined the BBC in 1942 and the following year was made its Director-General, where he oversaw the return to peacetime programming and the reallocation of the wavelengths.

At the start of the war the BBC lost credibility with its audience when its associations with the Mol were amplified in the print media which accused the BBC of being a government instrument of propaganda, and failed to disclose the ways in which they too were subject to Mol constraints (Nicholas, 1996, p 76).

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<sup>47</sup> Previously Director of the Empire Service.

<sup>48</sup> Previously General Manager of the Gas, Light and Coke Company, which had financed *Housing Problems*.

However, through the framing of the experience as a people's war the BBC produced an effective and cohesive narrative that aimed to motivate and sustain 'ordinary people' in exceptional circumstances. In peacetime, there was a need for the establishment of a new narrative, one that recognised victory without gloating, for an audience who would continue to endure rationing for some considerable time, as well as any personal losses they had suffered. The reorganization of the services started with the introduction of *The Light Programme*, 'designed not so much to appeal to a certain class of listener but to all listeners when they are in certain moods' (*BBC Yearbook 1946*, p.53, n.a.) alongside the continuing Home Service, which now embraced content from all the regions and aimed 'to provide a carefully balanced series of programmes which will entertain and inform many kinds of British listeners in many kinds of ways' (*BBC Yearbook 1946*, p.51, n.a.). Regional networks could now programme their own content in combination from the national networks by opting in or out of the content. For the first time, in 1946, a report from each of the broadcasting regions (North, Midland, and West) and the nations (Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) appeared in the *BBC Yearbook 1946*. The Third Programme also launched that year, which transmitted for four hours on midweek evenings and offered more highbrow content with classical music recitals and lectures on art. Haley was proud of this strand of content; he responded with less enthusiasm to the return of television.

In 1946 the newly appointed Head of Television, Maurice Gorham, announced that '... the BBC has been charged with the task of operating the television service' (1946, p.18). According to Black, as the fourth editor of *Radio Times* in 1923 Gorham was 'an old (BBC) hand' (Black, 1972, p.93). Unlike Reith, he had substantial enthusiasm for television and believed that 'there was no limit to what the viewer could hope to see' but that it would include 'ordinary Londoners' (Gorham, 1946, p.19). The problems he faced in relaunching the service were substantial. Those outlined here are to do with the position of the service within the Corporation, the effects of rationing, the expense and take up of the domestic technology by 'ordinary people', the size of the existing audience and the television service's relationships with performers' unions. (See Briggs, 1995). All of these had impacts on the availability and the possibilities for representations of people previously known as ordinary. At the end of the war, the term 'ordinary

people' no longer functioned as the inclusive term for those not in uniform. As people returned, or didn't, from active duty, too often in circumstances that many households and communities struggled to make sense of and that did not seem so ordinary or shared after all.

Within the Corporation, television remained largely insignificant, having an initial audience of only 20,000 pre-war consumers (Black, 1972, p.149). Rationing and the general poverty affecting many households impacted negatively on the adoption of the technology of television. Television was expensive, and the increased licence fee an ongoing expense for potential viewers.<sup>49</sup> Rationing affected the completion of the network and until 1951 the television service continued to be restricted to the Home Counties audience.

The cross-media output of the BBC was also affected by rationing: the annual Yearbooks did not appear in 1948 or 1949 due to paper shortages, *Radio Times* was restricted to publishing four million copies per week, a record sale for a weekly periodical (*BBC Yearbook 1946*, p.140, n.a). The sister publication, *The Listener* (1929–1992), the weekly review magazine, had halved in size but doubled its circulation during the war (*BBC Yearbook 1946*, p.140, n.a). Television was presented, as radio had once been, as extraordinary, and as a luxury, at odds with the ideology of 'make do and mend' and thrift that the BBC had presented during the war and continued to do across the postwar allocation of three national radio services. For many, the television service was frivolous, expensive and/or not available to them.

The decision to relaunch the BBC Television Service was made in haste, both in practical terms and in the planning of the service (Briggs:1985 and 1995). The under-equipped studios at Alexandra Palace had gathered dust for the six years of wartime and the number of BBC staff with television production experience was even lower than it had been six years earlier. The unexpected landslide Labour victory in the 1945 election was achieved on a ticket that appealed to 'ordinary people' with a socially democratic agenda that proposed healthcare as part of a wider welfare state, among other provisions. Society returned to a

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<sup>49</sup> Additionally, unlike radio, television did not have a substantial network of amateur content producers and enthusiasts who could receive the content on unlicensed technology.

traditional hierarchy where 'ordinary people' were working class, who were now exercising their political power. This was coupled with an understanding of 'ordinary people' as the working class as the consumer, and London advertising agencies were keen to reproduce the success they had had with commercial radio on television (Street, 2009).

When Maurice Gorham suggested his ambitious plans to include 'ordinary Londoners' (Gorham, 1946, p.19) in the postwar television service, he was ill-advised since no 'ordinary Londoners' could afford television. In fact, the BBC could not afford to develop the television service, as audience numbers were lower than the prewar 20,000 viewing figures (Black, 1972, p.149). When the television service relaunched, it was with a repeat of the Mickey Mouse cartoon with which the service had closed at the outbreak of war (Norman, 1984; Thumin, J, 2004). While this may have helped to instill a sense of familiarity and continuity for those 20,000 households identified by Black, with a still-working television and long memories, the formality of prewar formats such *Picture Page* appeared outdated<sup>50</sup>. Some of the radio formats were considered too populist for the Home and Third Service but not popular enough for the Light Programme transferred to television with seemingly little or no consideration of televisual presentation (Thumin, J, 2004). BBC Television staff struggled to match Gorham's predictions for the return of the service. Extended transmission times of television put substantial pressure on the still-inadequate Alexandra Palace studio and much content had to be developed through O/Bs and observational and documentary techniques suited to the representation of the traditional events of the broadcasting calendar. The coverage of these events was expected to drive sales of the technology to the ordinary consumer and this eventually occurred, but it also maintained television's association with the rituals and the spectacles of the extraordinary and the exceptional (Black, 1972, p 173/4).

An emergent practice in O/Bs was the production of a 'tele-film' recording of the transmitted images that could be reused for broadcast or demonstration content or kept as a documentary record of the event, although of substantially lower quality. To extend this technique to studio productions, the BBC started to

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<sup>50</sup> even so, the format continued until 1952

develop Visual Electronic Recording Apparatus (VERA) in 1952, a tape-based audiovisual recorder that would allow television studios to be used to record material when they were not being used for live transmission (Henderson, 2013). This was seen as cost effective and enabled television to create new formats and types of content. Recording was problematic to the performers' unions, Equity and the Musician's Union, who would 'not permit their members to work for a television recording at fees so far offered by the BBC for repeat performances' (Bailey, 1951, p.30). This was an indication of '... the whole problem of trades unions vis-à-vis the BBC, which Lord Beveridge's inquiry will report on ...' (Bailey, 1951, p.30).

### The Beveridge Committee and Report 1950

The first meeting of the Beveridge Committee took place in June 1949, under a Labour government, to discuss the shape, direction and future of British broadcasting, According to Sendall, this committee was far wider in scope and far more critical than previous ones (Sendall, 1982, p.6). Concerns centred around whether the broadcasting monopoly should be retained by the BBC; the expansion of the infrastructure and its financing, and concerns about what the function of television should be. Selwyn Lloyd, one of the Conservative MPs on the committee, was opposed to monopolies in principle; other members were fearful of a lowering of standards, as an 'Americanisation of content'; still others were concerned about the time it would take the BBC to build the infrastructure needed to deliver, and about the concentration of power in one organisation. After 62 committee meetings, and a change in government to a Conservative administration, the Beveridge Report recommended that the BBC retained the broadcasting monopoly while outlining some of the options that had been proposed in the process of their discussions (Sendall, 1982, p.7). The BBC submitted a five-year plan suggesting that extending their television services to 80 per cent of the population that was found generally acceptable and this was incorporated into the report (Sendall, 1982, p.6).

One criticism of the Beveridge Report was that, having recommended that the BBC retained a monopoly across television and radio, there was perhaps not enough consideration given to the medium off television. In fact the division and structure of the radio output across the nations and regions of the UK received far more attention in the debate. This is an important issue that relates to later

concerns in this thesis, as Beveridge was interested in the issue of access to the representation of views from all of the regions and nations in the UK, Recognition of the trade unions associated with broadcasting, (electricians, journalists etc) as well as the performers unions was another recommendation of the Committee, although at this time BBC staff were represented by a staff organization, rather than a trade union. Despite some considerable opposition, the committee recommended the continuation of the ban on advertising and, to avoid 'a degrading competition for a number of listeners', the monopoly status (Smith 1974, p, 86), although this was overturned by the minority report.

In the absence of any Conservative Party policy on the subject of broadcasting, Selwyn Lloyd submitted a 'personal minority report' declaring his opposition to monopolies as restrictive to trade, which became the basis of a broadcasting group within the Conservative Party (Sendall, 1982, p.10). The group, chaired by John Profumo, met 'to discuss the termination of the monopoly and the creation of a second competing commercial service' (Sendall, 1982, p.5). Lloyd was persuaded that that it would be more expedient to exclude radio, that 'changes in the arrangements for television presented fewer difficulties' within the party (Sendall, 1982, p.10). The Conservative Party was divided on the issue since many, like Lloyd, were opposed to monopolies as restrictive to free trade. There were concerns that if British television remained a single service, 'pirate' television stations would be established and have the same success as Radio Luxembourg and Radio Normandy, the two remaining Europe-based stations broadcasting English content. However, there were a substantial number of cross-party politicians who were completely opposed to any form of advertising on either radio or television (Sendall, 1982, p.18).

The slow adoption of the technology had been anticipated; the 1943 Hankey Committee had suggested, rather vaguely, that extension of the television service should reach 'the larger centres of the population within a reasonable period after the war' (Gorham, 1946, p.20). The impact of rationing on the infrastructure allowed no possibility for audiences outside London, and no budget to improve facilities. Gorham's vision for the service disappeared and the television service returned to what it was before the war. The extension of the service was delayed by five years during which time industrialists, entrepreneurs and politicians



expressed concern to the Beveridge Committee that the BBC-produced content did not or would not reflect the interests of people who would soon be able to receive the service (Bailey, 1951, p.32). In 1951 the committee report recommended the provision of a commercial television service that would operate on a regional franchise basis that were determined by the reach of the transmitters and the size of the audience rather than by any shared cultural identifications.

### Monarchy and cultural authority

King George VI did not take to television as a medium and initially at least struggled with radio, but Princess Elizabeth was accustomed to radio broadcasting. The broadcasts she had made as a child with her younger sister, Princess Margaret, to the children evacuated during war were just the start. Her wedding to Prince Philip in 1947 was recorded and broadcast to over 200 million people worldwide (Heald, 2007, p.86). Her ascension to the throne in 1952 was the start of 14 months of preparations for the coronation, an event that was staged with media representation in mind. The Corporation's new Director-General, Ian Jacob, arrived to oversee this coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. 'At the young Queen's insistence and against the unanimous advice of the political Establishment' cameras were allowed inside the Abbey... [and she] became the first monarch to be crowned "in sight of all the people" (Briggs, 1985, p.274).

The Dean of Westminster raised the habitual concern about behaviour of the viewing public who, removed from the ritual of the occasion, were not guaranteed to maintain its solemnity. It was felt that the viewing audience should be able to see the procession only. The spectators lining the route of the procession could participate in the event itself, and its media representation in clearly defined roles: watching, waving and cheering. They knew what was expected of them and their participation in such events reaffirmed and reiterated the power of the institution they bowed towards. Princess Elizabeth's insistence that cameras should be allowed inside Westminster Abbey determined that the broadcaster had input into the staging of the event, much to the disappointment of Prime Minister Churchill. This opening up of the rituals of tradition to the gaze of the common people provided the BBC with another opportunity to prove its ability in

the staging of the extraordinary and the spectacular, putting itself at the heart of the event and the people's experience of it (Ross, 1961, p.142).

The BBC orchestrated the event and the proceedings, providing seven hours of continuous radio coverage on the Light and Home Programmes, followed by three hours of additional coverage in the evening, including a ten-minute speech at 9pm. A Coronation fireworks event at 11.30pm provided a suitable culmination for 14 hours, some of which was broadcast live to the Commonwealth countries.<sup>51</sup> Other Commonwealth countries, such as Canada, chartered flights to get films of the coverage to be broadcast the following day. The broadcast of Royal events is one of the occasions where establishment institutions – monarchy, church and state – reinforce or reimpose the frameworks of governance on society.

As was the case with radio, it was a royal occasion that provided the impetus for television to finally become a mass medium. In a population of 36 million, an estimated 27 million people listened to some radio coverage and 11 million watched some of the television coverage, suggesting that statistically at least every person in the country participated in the broadcasting occasion (Ross, 1961, p.144). As Scannell sees it, it was the extraordinary and exceptional occasion of a new Queen, not just a new monarch, that drove sales of the technology up (Scannell, 1996, p.86). The event increased the appeal of the technology, but what made the scale of the adoption possible was the increasing use of hire purchase and television rental agreements (Stevenson, 1984).

After the Coronation, with the worst of the postwar economic hardship passed, it became easier for the BBC to construct a more forward-looking narrative. Had this event occurred a couple of years earlier when the Beveridge Committee was still sitting, it is possible that the BBC might have maintained its television monopoly. By the time the BBC lost the monopoly in 1955, it had already established the conventions by which the highest authority was represented. The BBC was the privileged mediator between the realms of the ordinary and the extraordinary, connecting the individual to the institutions of the establishment.

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<sup>51</sup> <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/schedules/third/>

The relationship between the BBC and the establishment allowed the Corporation to maintain its cultural authority, while also dealing with issues of audiences and universal access to the television service.

## Conclusion

The chapter has identified that in times of military hierarchy the phrase 'ordinary people' was used to refer to those not engaged in active service. It has investigated the representation of 'ordinary people' in particular contexts outside the BBC, such as in film, and takes account of the wartime role of the broadcaster under the control of the MoI. New representational techniques such as the subjective camera, first used according to the director Pat Jackson, in his 1942 film *Builders*, extended opportunities for production outside the studio. This enabled 'real life', seemingly less constructed, content to be produced, some of which suggested the shared experience of wartime restrictions.

This chapter has also identified some of the concerns raised in the most extensive broadcasting enquiry so far undertaken, the Beveridge Report and shown how parliamentary processes contribute to the regulation of broadcasting and the BBC. After the War, people's conception of the nation changed, as did the demographic of the country, and by the early 1950s something that looked like a promise of a brighter future under a young, female monarch was the narrative that was promoted by the BBC and their coverage of her Coronation. This brighter future was fully exploited with the arrival of commercial television, which alongside hire purchase and television rentals, contributed to the adoption of television technology discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 6 Commercial Television**

This chapter introduces the emerging forms of content that offered 'ordinary people' chances to represent themselves in contexts more relevant to everyday life and as participants within the structure of broadcasting. This historiography is based on accounts of the official historians of the BBC (Briggs, 1979) and the first of the three-volume ITV history by Bernard Sendall (1982). It covers the decade of the 1950s in British broadcasting from the publication of the Beveridge Committee Report (1950) up until the Pilkington Committee that was established a decade later. It identifies the circumstances that led to the unexpected formation of commercial television in the UK and the impact of the subsequent unionization of broadcasting, and issues that were raised by new technologies and techniques. It also identifies the level of interplay and exchange between the broadcasters, their content and personnel. This includes the surprising number of popular commercial formats that originated on the BBC Light Programme, migrated to Radio Luxembourg and subsequently became successful on the commercial television channels, particularly A-R, the London franchise that catered to the largest audience who could also receive Radio Luxembourg. Commercial television introduced new understandings of ordinariness and 'ordinary people', not least in the adverts that promoted everyday and domestic products. Aspirational and largely unrealistic settings suggested a new, improved ordinariness was attainable. New-to-television observational techniques from documentary film, direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* were introduced into docudrama formats, and the later popular 'soap opera' format that showed those portrayed as ordinary, in domestic and vernacular locations.

The 1954 Television Act was passed after an arduous passage through the House of Commons and the Lords, where the White Paper was met with a ferocious attack from Lord Reith in the House of Lords.

Somebody introduced dog-racing into England...And somebody introduced Christianity and printing and the uses of electricity. And somebody introduced smallpox, bubonic plague and the Black Death. Somebody is minded now to introduce sponsored broadcasting into this country...Need we be ashamed of moral values, or of intellectual and ethical objectives? It is these that are here and now at stake. (Reith in Hansard, quoted in Smith, 1974, p.103).

The newly established Independent Television Authority (ITA) met for the first time five days later. Potential contractors were invited to submit outlines of their plans (Sendall, 1982, p.68) and 26 applications were received. Of these, four were successful and

were allocated contracts that split the three regions of London, Midlands and the North, divided into weekday and weekend services across the four providers to give them access to equivalent audiences (Sendall, 1982, p.68).

Commercial television franchise holders were committed to a public service remit, regulated by the ITA, not least to produce content that would be relevant and of interest to the audience where it was produced. Each of the companies could broadcast a maximum of 35 hours from Monday to Friday with no more than eight hours between 9am and 11pm. Like the BBC, they respected the 'Toddlers Truce', (a break between 6pm to 7pm to get children to bed). Equally, there was no service on a Sunday morning and a break in broadcasting on Sunday evenings, (the 'God slot'), inserted to mitigate the effect of broadcasting on church attendance, (Sendall, 1982, p.95). Both of these elements were legacies from BBC radio broadcasting; there were also expectations about the 'proper proportions of British origin and British performance', a figure of 80 per cent had been discussed during the debate stages of the 1954 Television Act, but there was no figure written into the bill (Sendall, 1982, p.106).

#### Franchise structure and unions

To fulfil another part of the ITA remit, the franchises established a subsidiary company Independent Television News (ITN), which had to provide the shared national news service, overseen by the ITA for accuracy and impartiality. Regional and local news was produced by the franchise holders within their areas of transmission. Another area where the franchises collaborated was in having unified agreements with the 14 different unions whose members were involved in television production (Sendall, 1982, p.110). This was a marked difference from the practices of the BBC, whose contact with unions had been restricted to the performers' unions. Staff members could join the BBC Staff Association, an organisation that was not affiliated to the TUC and whose General Secretary Leslie Littlewood asserted in 1950 that, 'Staff of the Corporation, whether or not they are members of this Association, regard the broadcasting service as one which, above all, should be free from interruption by disputes' (Littlewood, quoted in Sendall, 1982, p.111).

Unionisation of television production was one impact of the arrival of competition, and the importance of it to this research is in the ways that it affects the access of 'ordinary people' to the production contexts of television. The complex relationships between

broadcasters and their recognised unions and the associated trades and performer unions rise to the surface after the introduction of commercial television. Early concerns of the broadcasting and related trades unions concerned differences in terms and conditions and other distinctions between film, BBC and independent franchise workers. The BBC Staff Association changed its name to the Association of Broadcast Staff (ABS) to include both radio and television staff, but the commercial franchises employed film industry technicians who were members of the Association of Cinema Technicians (ACT), who were substantially better paid than those in the ABS, and later became the Association of Cinema and Television Technicians (ACTT). The BBC refused to recognise it, as it did not represent radio technicians and the union had already negotiated their agreements with the franchisees on better terms than the Corporation wanted to meet (Burns, 1977). The franchises signed an agreement with the ACTT but did not recognise the ABS and the BBC did not recognise the ACTT (Sendall, 1982, p.110).

Many BBC television staff belonged to both the ABS and the ACTT; the first to protect their current employment and the second to safeguard their future employment with a commercial franchise (Burns, 1977). The blanket agreements that the franchises had with the performer unions already included an automatic repeat performance fee. Granada, one of the four franchise-holders, had made a commitment in their application that all their content would be tele-recorded so that it could be shared with the other franchises, and potentially other English-speaking markets (Buscombe, 1981, p.22). These union agreements put pressure on the BBC to improve their contracts with external performers and, in the longer term, with television production staff (Burns, 1977). However, even before the first of the London franchises went on air, independent, or more accurately, commercial television, had already experienced three days of industrial action by members of the ACTT union (Sendall, 1982, p.110). The investigation is picked up in later chapters, when access to the mechanisms of broadcasting became particularly problematic within unionised working practices that are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Associated Rediffusion (A-R), the London Monday to Friday franchise-holder launched their service on 22 September 1955. In preparation for their launch they produced *TV Times*, a magazine that promoted the weekly schedules of London television; its first edition sold 300,000 copies (Sendall, 1982, p.126). Some of

the most popular A-R shows were based on established and successful Radio Luxembourg shows, at least two of which had started as BBC Light Programme formats. *Take Your Pick* (A-R, 1955–1968) offered cash prizes to participants drawn from the audience. *Opportunity Knocks* (BBC Light Programme, 1949; Radio Luxembourg, 1950–1955; A-R, 1956–1964; Thames, 1966–1978, BBC1, 1987–1990) was a talent contest that afforded the opportunity for amateur (non-professional, non-unionised) performers, the ‘ordinary person’, to be seemingly transformed into an extraordinary presence by media technology. The kind of ordinariness promoted by *Opportunity Knocks* and other programmes is further discussed in Holmes 2014. In this and other entertainment formats ‘ordinary people’ were used as participants to fit the often competitive demands of the format. Other levels of participation were extended as the studio audience voted for their favourite act and their preferences, alongside those of a postal vote decided who would return to perform the following week.<sup>52</sup>

These shows were produced in Studio 9, a large, raked seating auditorium built for ‘audience participation’ shows in the basement of Television House (Sendall, 1982, p.117). At the root of their success is the presenter’s management of what Scannell terms the communicative hierarchy, the control and management of speech in the broadcast sphere (Scannell, 1996, 1991). In these examples this relates to the relationship between the contestants, the studio audience and the remote audience. It is easy to see how the informality of speech used in commercial versions of these formats allowed them to be more successful and appealing to the audience than the original BBC versions. As well as launching on what were originally BBC radio formats, many of the technical and production staff employed by the channel came from the BBC.

Norman Collins, the head of the London Weekend franchise holder ATV, had resigned from the Corporation in frustration at the paucity of its vision for the television service.<sup>53</sup> It is clear that the ideas of BBC radio personnel influenced the content and formats that appeared on commercial channels, many of which proved to be long-running series, and also sustained repeated revivals. ATV had

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<sup>52</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/whenwillibefamous/funstuff/trivia.shtml>

<sup>53</sup> Collins had been Controller of the Light Programme (BBC 1946–1947) and Controller of BBC Television (1947–1950).

an immediate hit with their programme *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* (ATV 1955–1974 LWT 1998–2000; ITV Studios 2014–present), the first show transmitted on 25 September 1955. It featured Gracie Fields, a BBC radio star whose programme *Our Gracie's Working Party* (BBC Light Programme 1947–1950) transferred to Radio Luxembourg in 1950. ATV also provided the weekday service for the Midland region which launched its service on 17 February 1956 with the weekend service allocated to ABC, who would also provide the North region weekend service (Sendall, 1982, p.119).

Howard Thomas was another ex-BBC staff member who, after a short period working for Radio Luxembourg, became Producer-in-Chief of Associated British Pathé, and then Managing Director of ABC (Sendall, 1982; Miall, 1994).<sup>54</sup> An early flagship programme of the ABC, *Armchair Theatre* (ABC 1956–1974) has relevance here as it developed into hard-hitting drama series of single plays, or 'kitchen sink dramas' as they became known. These took the domestic lives of "ordinary people" as their basis, dealing with contemporary social-realist issues such as race, poverty, poor housing, out-of-wedlock pregnancies. The representation of the domestic environment transmitted into the actual domestic environment was one mechanism by which (commercial) television established a relationship with the ordinary. In so doing, it extended some of the docudrama practices and intentions demonstrated by the BDM filmmakers Humphrey Jennings, Harry Watt and Pat Jackson, discussed in Chapter 4.

The final franchise, for the North region weekday, rather than seven-day contract applied for, was Granada. The North region was split across Lancashire, which launched on 3 May 1956, and Yorkshire, which followed on 3 November 1956 (Sendall, 1982, p.119). Granada developed many interesting formats that featured the representation of 'ordinary people'; an early innovation was the content produced in the franchise's two 'Travelling Eye' mobile studios. Powered by their own generators, these could create live or recorded content from any location in either region. This enabled the development of formats such as the influential series *Roving Reporter* (Granada 1957–1964) and ITN introduced the vox pop (Goddard, Corner and Richardson, 2007, p.10), an 'irresistible stock-in-

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas had produced Vera Lynn's wartime show *Sincerely Yours*, discussed in Chapter 5



trade of every news bulletin and news magazine for the ensuing 25 years' (Sendall, 1982, p.124). This technique, new to broadcast, allowed "ordinary people" from the same region to talk to viewers who might consider them to be 'just like us'. There are examples of the use of the technique in some strands of output of the BDM; certainly, the intention is evident in *Housing Problems*, the film that Corner identified as having 'self-contained access slots' discussed in Chapter 4. The transfer of the technique to television production and the locations, topics and subjects that it introduced became possible due to technical advances and the diminishing size of mobile and portable recording technology. The emergence of portable technology increased the representations of "ordinary people" in television as it had in both radio and film previously.

### Modes of address

The shared news output of ITN played an important role in distinguishing the service from the BBC; it was the one strand that the entire audience of commercial television could see and compare to the presentation of news on the BBC. Until a couple of weeks before the launch of ITN, the BBC presented the news as 'radio with static pictures ...' (Born, 2004, p.39) where from 1954 newsreader Richard Baker delivered the narration but did not appear in vision, the 'voice of God' narration. ITN on the other hand, 'unencumbered by a radio past' (Born, 2004, p.40), developed a dynamic televisual news format that 'the BBC had not dreamt of attempting ...' (Sendall, 1982, p.123). Firstly, as was apparent across all commercial television output, the tone and mode of address to the audience was substantially different. The original newscaster Christopher Chataway, a former Olympian athlete and gold medal winner, delivered in close-up a well-rehearsed direct address to the audience. His more informal language and a more subjective tone was far more appealing to many of the audience than the BBC's practices, although the documentary critic of *The Listener*, Reginald Pound suggested:

... that the rigid BBC formula for news presentation is preferable to the wavering values of ITA news judgments and especially the first-person pronoun approach. Christopher Chataway reading "the latest news I have from Cyprus ..." does not impress as much as his amateur status in another form of endeavour ... (*The Listener*, 1955 p.964).

The growing television audience begged to differ and Chataway was the recipient of the first Television Personality of the Year Award in 1956, perhaps not

unsurprisingly as he appeared most frequently to the largest audiences. The introduction of more informal speech in news and documentary presentation marked a distinction from the RP or 'Announcer's English' favoured by the BBC. In popular entertainment content, the distinction was more profound, as accents and local dialect were used in content designed in principle at least for a vernacular audience.

Another element of content that could be seen by the whole commercial television viewers was the advertisements, which introduced many elements of the ordinary and the everyday to television. Everyday essential products such as toothpaste, soap and washing powder and the contexts within which they were represented, and the more personal nature of these products, marked a substantial difference from anything which had been seen on the BBC. Previously it had not represented the domestic environment on television, except in broadcasts made from stately homes and castles. The representation of domestic environments, particularly in what Erving Goffman identified as the 'backstage' areas of kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms (1990), contravened long-standing associations with the private, the familial and the intimate (see, for example: Douglas, 1966; Berman, 1971; Goffman, 1963, 1990). Advertising staged new representations of the domestic populated with idealised performers as they carried out explicitly gendered ordinary and everyday tasks.

The different franchises all developed distinctive forms of content that foregrounded the "ordinary people" who, to recap, had previously only been represented in the context of an unusual job or skill, eccentric habits, or as individuals who had done something extraordinary. Commercial television showed 'ordinary people' in a far wider range of contexts and everyday situations allowing for audience identification with the programmes and the products being advertised. ITN and ITV current affairs programmes incorporated the opinions of "ordinary people" in vox pops, a format familiar from both radio and documentary film (as discussed in Chapter 4) but rarely used in the BBC representation of news (Baker, 1966 p.26).

The BBC news output was like all the rest of their television production hampered by the of inadequate technology and facilities of the Corporation (Briggs, 1995,

p.13). In 1950 BBC Television service converted Lime Grove, 'a rabbit warren of studios and offices connected by torturous corridors and filthy fire escapes' (Briggs, 1995, p.14). It was meant to be a temporary measure until the completion of Television Centre, the 'world's largest television factory' (Beadle quoted in Briggs, 1995, p.31). This was a clear indication that the industrialisation of the broadcasting sector had influenced the BBC who recognized that 'the development of television recording was a top priority, and [the BBC was] conscious too that ITV competition gave the issue new urgency' (Collins quoted in Briggs, 1979, p.838). However, substantial issues in the building delayed the opening of BBC Television Centre until 1960, whilst the ITV franchises had access to well equipped, purpose-built television theatres from 1955.

At that time, recording only happened in O/B content, which could be recorded by cine-film or tele-film technology, where the transmitted signal was recorded from screen by a film camera. This provided a documentary record of media events worthy of being recorded, such as coronations, which could be replayed in news coverage and compiled into documentary film for parts of the Empire that television had not yet reached. The technique for recording the output of live studio shows was imperative to the BBC; in theory, content could be recorded on film but the expense of filming all output was far too expensive for the public service broadcaster. Pressure increased when the commitment that Granada had made in their franchise application, to tele-record all of their studio-produced content, was adopted as a shared practice by the ITV companies, the four franchises that made up the commercial sector. This made economic sense as it enabled franchises to share their content, as there was nothing that restricted content made for weekday transmission in the north region by Granada being screened by A-R in a London weekday provision, and for ABC to then show it in the Midlands as part of their weekend programme (Buscombe, 1981).

### Unionisation of broadcasting

The franchises were aware that with agreements with 14 different unions they were particularly susceptible to industrial action. Their chosen provider of production staff was the ACTT, who had, as noted above, called a three-day strike prior to the first transmission (Sendall, 1982, p.111). Having prerecorded content was essential to ensure that there would be a service that could be

punctuated by adverts, the anticipated income from which was the source of potential profit for the shareholders of the franchises. To this end, all the franchise holders had committed to at least one of the AMPEX videotape recording systems, the emerging US standards. Granada's commitment to recording their content was not restricted to studio content. The mobile 'travelling eye' studios enabled Granada and ITN to record content outside the studio, from anywhere across the regions in fact, but the development of mobile film technology sowed the seeds for later disputes between the unions and the broadcasters, regarding quality and crew sizes.

Ultimately, the arrival of AMPEX marked the end of VERA, the BBC technology mentioned earlier (see page 96); the use of AMPEX technology linked US and British broadcasting and other English-speaking television markets. The Corporation realised that '[o]ptions may have to be taken up even when this means that the results of years of research must be discarded' (Briggs, 1995, p.839). These years of research had produced a working version of the VERA technology that was demonstrated on an edition of *Panorama* in April 1958 (after the BBC had already ordered their first AMPEX). The footage shows a live demonstration of an enormous and unwieldy machine the size of a wardrobe; it was recorded for posterity on tele-cine but the project was terminated. AMPEX was a far more compact and stable unit and afforded the production technique of 'discontinuous recording' to be employed in television programme-making, without the expense of film (Henderson, 2013, p.47). The BBC took delivery of their first machine in 1958, with which they produced a 'trailer' for their forthcoming (but long-awaited) adaption of *A Tale of Two Cities* (BBC Television 1965).

In 1959 Tony Hancock, the highly popular comedian who had achieved success through his BBC radio and subsequent television show, refused to sign a new contract unless his programmes could be made on tape.<sup>55</sup> With commercial television franchises offering contracts that offered a single payment that included repeats at higher rates than the BBC paid for two performances, Hancock, a 'valuable property' of the Corporation, negotiated his fee from £500

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<sup>55</sup> Hancock, who had made his reputation on radio, hated appearing on live television.

per episode to £1750 for an episode and one repeat (Briggs, 1995, p.213). The BBC agreed but restricted this experimental production technique of 'non-continuous' or 'discontinuous recording' to *Hancock's Half Hour* because in addition to financial and 'engineering issues, there were trade union issues affecting the programme-making techniques ...' (Briggs, 1995, p.213 fn16).

As television production expanded, so it had become unionised. Content for the BBC was exclusively produced by members of the ABS, as the ACTT was not recognised, but other trade unions, such as the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) were represented in the Corporation for equivalence across the sector for impartiality, and for health and safety reasons (Burns, 1977, p.65). Although the ABS was not recognised by the commercial television companies, it was the union that represented the staff of the ITA (Burns, 1977, p.65). In terms of developing new forms of content this gave the BBC an advantage, although not necessarily in studio productions as this was still subject to the regulations of other unions such as the ETU. The role of the unions and the closed shop status of television studios restricted access to union members, and thereby excluded 'ordinary people' outside of the narrow frame of contestant or competitor. The role of the unions is discussed in later chapters; here, however it is important to recognise the ways in which the broadcasting industry was subject to at times conflicting union demands.

There is a perception that the BBC did not create relevant and popular content for the first decade or so of competition but this has more recently lost traction. According to Seaton, at the start of commercial television 'BBC drama, serials and documentaries were consistently preferred to those of ITV' (Seaton, 1997, p.169). Early viewing figures suggested that ITV programmes consistently received substantially larger audiences. In the third quarter of 1957, ITV had 'on the BBC's own calculations, achieved a 72 per cent share of the viewing public, whenever there was a choice' (Briggs, 1995, p.20). There are issues with the data collection, since it was only from the newer sets that could receive both services that choice could be detected. The BBC Listener Research department collected their data by a methodology of surveys and interviews, adopted from M-O, as introduced in Chapter 4. It is therefore not surprising that viewing figures reflected badly on the BBC, but it also meant that parts of the long-standing

television audience (in other words, BBC viewers) were not being accurately represented in the audience figures (Briggs, 1995, p.21).

However, BBC television started to develop and excel in the area of current affairs and short documentaries. The appointment of Paul Rotha, the BDM filmmaker and film theorist as BBC Head of Documentary (1953–1955) defined the development of the genre within the broadcaster. According to film and media theorist Brian Winston, Rotha introduced representations of the ‘ordinary person’ as a victim, in unfortunate circumstances that were not entirely of their own making (Winston, 1995). *Rock Bottom* (BBC 1957)<sup>56</sup> presented ‘a harrowing realism’ on the subject of alcoholism, which had already been brought to the screen in the documentary series *People in Trouble* (BBC 1956). In *The Listener*, the television documentary critic Reginald Pound reviewed *I Was a Stranger* (BBC, 1957)<sup>57</sup>, a documentary about life in a Salvation Army hostel that was produced by Norman Swallow and extended the use of the direct address to camera to the residents.

The absence of a BBC representative mediating between the viewers and the inmates [sic] allowed the programme to make its full impact and left an extremely vivid impression (Pound, 1957, p.5).

In documentary production the BBC had a substantial advantage over the ITV network providers as they were not subject to the stringent ACTT regulations over programme-making techniques that the franchises were. The BBC union, the ABS, allowed ‘experimental’ programme techniques to be explored in content produced outside the studio, where production was not subjected to other union restrictions (Burns, 1977). The BBC exploited this by recruiting BBC radio staff, already ABS members, to make television programmes/segments. One such staff member was Denis Mitchell, a South African broadcaster who was making music documentaries for BBC Northwest regional radio. After attending a Lime Grove training session, Mitchell realised that what he was trying to achieve in words could be enhanced by images and demonstrated this on *Teenagers*,<sup>58</sup> his first film segment for *Special Enquiry* (BBC Television 1954) a cutting-edge current affairs programme launched in 1954 that dealt with topical concerns. A

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<sup>56</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/0ae38eb1ccdd43a09192132dc183b6f5>

<sup>57</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/da46c9d7a1cf4a83bc7092e4475ff8a5>

<sup>58</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/d3ceb712adc54847a8b229ad2fb4f704>

positive response encouraged Mitchell to adapt programmes he had made for his *People Talking* radio series for television. Most notable of these was *Morning in the Streets* (BBC 1959)<sup>59</sup>, which won the Prix d'Italia for documentary in 1959.<sup>60</sup>

Mitchell developed an evocative, poetic and impressionistic style reminiscent of Jennings' wartime films *Spare Time* (1939) and *Listen to Britain* (1942). His use of sound and vision as equal elements moved away from narration using ambient sound and speech fragments and overheard conversations to emphasise ordinary, everyday lives in the Northern vernacular, accents and patterns of speech. His work influenced the development of a distinct British television documentary style but it emerged because of the ABS union's acceptance of techniques such as 16mm film and three-person film crews, which were not allowed by the ACTT. Other programmes such as *Zoo Quest* (BBC 1954–1963) also took advantage of these techniques to create original content and introduced a young David Attenborough to the television screen.

### New genres and techniques

In the late 1950s BBC Documentary introduced some of the concerns of the BDM movement to television at the same time as 'Free Cinema' emerged; this reinvigoration of the film documentary was funded by commercial companies such as Ford and through the newly formed British Film Institute. The 'free' in Free Cinema refers to the films having been made free from the pressures of the box office or the demands of propaganda (Dupin, n.d.), as well as to the unpaid 'ordinary people' who featured in loosely connected observational vignettes of working-class people at leisure in, for example, *O Dreamland* (Anderson, 1959). Other content was more narrativised and featured combinations of observational footage and reconstructions; see, for example, *Momma Don't Allow* (Reiz, 1959), a short financed by Ford, that depicted a group of working-class youths as they prepared for and went on a night out at a local dance. Other genres were also utilising new programme-making techniques, particularly sports where 'the BBC had enjoyed a lead in most events in the sports broadcasting races from the start of competition' (Briggs, 1995, p.217). The Corporation had covered national major sports events since the early 1920s but the Saturday afternoon

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<sup>59</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/66542315c57d42a5acca951f0380b9a8>

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/1224984/index.html>

*Grandstand* (BBC, 1958–2007) became a popular programmes that focused on the more regular sporting events, although the emerging issue of broadcast rights would add further levels of complexity and expense to the output of the department (Briggs, 1995, p.217).

Content for teenagers, the next generation of licence-fee payers, started with *Six-Five Special* (1957–1958) and developed production contexts and strategies new to the UK and new forms of audience participation in the production of the content. The no stage/ low stage studio set allowed the youthful audience to appear on screen mingled in close proximity to the performers, and established conventions for popular music shows that are used today. *Juke Box Jury* (1959–1967) was a more static, and staid format that featured images of the seated audience watching while a panel of judges listened to new record releases. The camera slowly panned round the youthful audience, putting the young consumer as the major visual content. Children’s television was also a priority for the BBC with *Crackerjack!* (BBC 1955–1983), followed in 1958 by *Blue Peter* (1958–present). All these shows did much to build the relationship between the BBC and the people who would become licence-fee payers. Despite these and other successes, the BBC struggled to compete in the large-scale ‘audience participation’ shows with which A-R in particular had early successes, including the previously mentioned *Opportunity Knocks* and *Take Your Pick*. The BBC did not have the facilities in which to stage such events; Television Centre was still not complete, so Lime Grove studios turned out to be not so temporary after all, but it was inadequate to stage shows like this (Briggs, 1995, p.212).

The BBC Television service had always been hampered by inadequate or outdated studio facilities, from it’s start in the non-compatible dual studios at Alexander Palace, and even after the Lime Grove extension was completed (Briggs, 1995, 212).It had, however, still managed to produce sufficient regular content that appealed to enough of the ‘ordinary people’ in the context of the mass audiences for mass media. The already popular BBC radio stars and some formats transferred successfully to television bringing their audiences with them. New formats that were distinct from ITV content had also been established. In the commercial franchises US influence was apparent, particularly in participatory game shows with cash prizes where, again, the BBC could not compete; *Double*



*Your Money* (A-R 1955–1968) and *The \$64,000 Question* (ATV 1956–1958) were effectively both versions of the same US format, also called *The \$64,000 Question*. Whereas the most successfully adapted US format in the BBC was *What's My Line?* (BBC 1951–1963) which invited popular contestants back as panel members. Another suggestion of the potential of television to transform an 'ordinary person' into a 'star' and shed their trappings of ordinariness. As a public corporation, the BBC was restricted in the prizes it could offer; it could not offer monetary prizes for example, but it was able to offer a new house in the new town of Harlow as the prize in *A House in Harlow for its Ideal Family*.<sup>61</sup> The show was a competition format, in which success was predicated upon the demonstration of ideal attributes of citizens needed to populate new towns and fulfill the growing aspirations of the postwar period.

The BBC had retained and extended coverage of most of the events of the broadcast calendar and, in 1957, had for the first time produced *The Royal Address to the Nation* (BBC Radio 1932–46; BBC Television 1947–1967; 1969–present),<sup>62</sup> as a live television broadcast in which a new informality and optimism was displayed in its representation of the female monarch. Queen Elizabeth was seated at the desk in the same study where her father had made his radio broadcasts, surrounded by framed photographs of her family and dogs. The Queen referred to her own family, her children who were watching her on television, as she took time on Christmas Day to welcome her subjects into her home.<sup>63</sup>

The representation of the female monarch in (one of) her private, domestic locations alongside the feminised domestic environments of much advertising contributed to a feminisation of the television sphere (Thumin, J., 2004). Again, for 'ordinary people', the locations shown in contemporary plays and docudramas were likely to be more accurate reflections of their reality. Distinctions between public and private spaces introduced different, more informal, conventions into speech patterns and language use. Just as it took time for a new national

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<sup>61</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/1cf53ad7d0aa4b6aa6f6c6a8bc0f6f98>

<sup>62</sup> The 1968 edition was not made at the Queen's request. *The Royal Family* (BBC, 1968), an hour-long documentary of a year in the life of the monarchy produced by Richard Cawston aired on BBC and ITV, alongside the extraordinary in the investiture of Prince Charles (Briggs, 1995).

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBRP-o6Q85s>

narrative to emerge postwar, and for rationing to end, so too it took time for the BBC to identify a suitable tone and appropriate form of address to retain the existing television audiences and appeal to new ones. This distinction in modes of address, is evident even in the titling of programmes, the BBC's drama anthology series *Appointment with Drama* (BBC, 1955), offers a distinctly more formal invitation to the audience than the ABC drama anthology series, *Armchair Theatre* (ABC, 1956–1974).

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the developments of postwar BBC and commercial television and provides a contextual framework for understanding some of the complexities of the broadcasting structure in the UK. It has discussed the central themes of this thesis, authority and participation. The arrival of commercial television diminished or diluted the cultural authority of the broadcaster in the representation of a cultural narrative potentially counter to that of the BBC. It also introduced more 'ordinary people' to the screens although still in restricted roles – and identified new although still limited forms of participation of 'ordinary people' – such as the use of the vox pop in news output. It has also discussed the introduction new, mobile and portable technologies and new techniques, such as discontinuous recording, and union constraints to new practices that facilitated the inclusion of non-professionals. continue to play a central role for the remainder of this thesis.

By the end of the 1950s, BBC News had established itself as the more 'authoritative' news service alongside a relevant and incisive current affairs schedule. Examples of documentary output discussed above featured 'ordinary people' in a variety of real-life situations and varying levels of difficulties, although there was a tendency to present such 'ordinary people' as victims. The Corporation had paid attention to securing future licence-fee payers in the popular content strands created for youth and children. Sport and O/Bs had pioneered new experimental techniques. When Television Centre finally opened in 1960, the BBC had a new Director-General, Hugh Greene, and another broadcasting inquiry, the Pilkington Committee, was underway.

## Chapter 7 The Pilkington Committee

At the start of the 1960s, the 'baby boomers' the first 20<sup>th</sup> century generation that had not suffered either unemployment or war, reached maturity changing the demographic of the country. This societal change might be identified by *Juke Box Jury's* status as the BBC's most popular format of 1960 (Briggs, 1995, p.265). The new Director-General, previously Director of News and Current Affairs, Hugh Carleton Greene had to in some way incorporate the traditional audience into the modern version of the BBC to appeal to existing and future licence-fee payers.

BBC Television had managed to gain some ground on the commercial franchises, and in its new flagship building could start to present itself as an institution in step with the optimism of the new decade and the new audience(s). The move to Television Centre took considerable pressure off the BBC in terms of production, but Lime Grove and Alexandra Palace were still used. A Video-Tape Unit with two dedicated studios each equipped with an AMPEX VR1000 was housed in the basement of the new headquarters. A further four machines arrived and were modified by BBC technicians, perhaps those who had worked on the VERA technology (Nash, 1970, p.16), for use as a synchronous sound source by the studio mixer, which 'extended the possibilities of sound/ vision combinations and opened up a range of possibilities for programme making' (Henderson, 2013, p.48). In 1961 the first of the mobile (not portable) VR100s were bought by the BBC and 'news, schools programming and sports coverage was transformed' (Henderson, 2013, p.48).

The next broadcasting enquiry, the Pilkington Committee was established on the 30th July 1960 by Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. The Committee chaired by the northern industrialist Sir Harry Pilkington started with 14 committee members although four resigned; the remaining ten included Harold Collinson, an agricultural trades union leader; Joyce Grenfell, the comedienne and BBC radio writer and performer; Richard Hoggart, the cultural studies theorist who had recently published *The Uses of Literacy*; Elizabeth Whitely, a housewife; and the ex-England football captain Billy Wright. This was the sixth Committee into broadcasting and the first that was not comprised exclusively of

educated men. The Committee was established to consider three things; 'the future of broadcasting services', 'services which should in future ...be provided by the BBC and the ITA', and whether additional services should be provided by any other organisation' (Pilkington Report, 1962, p,1). There were other motivations in play too, Petley identifies four. Firstly, there was an assessment of the first five years of the 10-year experimental service period granted to ITV in 1955, Secondly, there were concerns that the franchise-holders were making excessive profit from poor quality programming, Thirdly, proposals regarding who the third television channel and who it should be awarded to, and lastly in recognition that the current BBC Royal Charter was due to expire in 1962. (Petley, 2015, p,4). Alongside these issues, the committee report expressed familiar concerns about access to the broadcast sphere, and the accountability of broadcasters and broadcasting structures. (See Milland 2004 for a more detailed account.) The function of the committee was to map out a framework that would provide a fuller range of relevant content across the television duopoly. The committee needed to consider regulations, licences and the delivery of public service responsibilities, in order to respond to a more 'modern' and seemingly more equal society. The opinions and thoughts of a far broader selection of people, their interests and experiences, were fed into its consultations. Where the committee might have sought to understand and incorporate the concerns of a wider range of people in a changing demographic and range of attitudes, and did again raise the issues of access and accountability (Petley, 2015 and Milland 2004) its report, heavily supported the BBC and their recommendations included a far more substantial role for the Corporation.

Another criticism of the Pilkington Committee members was that they were 'romantically committed to' (Seaton, 1997, p.179) the concept of a folk culture,<sup>64</sup> that they perceived was at threat from the Americanisation of content and from the effect of advertising on the working classes. These were certainly concerns of Richard Hoggart, the cultural studies theorist who was a powerful voice on the Committee. The debate spread to the print media, and some of the newspapers were swift to take advantage of the opportunity to criticise the BBC (Seaton, 1997, p.169). Some of the daily papers regularly published the weekly television

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<sup>64</sup> See also Milland, 2004, and Briggs, 1995.

audience figures supplied by the Television Audience Monitoring (TAM) service, in which regular BBC content rarely appeared. If it did, it was most likely to be an edition of the BBC News. This provided ammunition for the Left- or Right-leaning press to maintain a critical narrative and turned the weekly charts into an ongoing popularity contest that the BBC could not win because of the limitations of the data collection methods used by TAM. Additionally, the most popular formats of the franchises could be transmitted simultaneously across the ITV network, so the A-R programme *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* attracted audiences of nearly 17 million viewers (Briggs, 1995, p.247).

Major concerns for the Pilkington Committee also included: the level of profits that were now being made by franchise holders; more extensive regional provision, rather than the franchises sharing content; how public service responsibilities including educational television were to be split across the BBC and the ITA; the awarding of a second channel to the BBC; and the funding structure of the licence fee (Briggs, 1995, p.276). When the report was published on 27 June 1962, 'reactions were ... sharply divided' (Briggs, 1995, p.297). Some saw it as 'an attempt to return to strict Reithian values with the broadcaster making moral decisions about what audiences wanted to hear'; for others, the report 'was utterly contrary to the whole tradition of free enterprise' (Briggs, 1995, p.297).

For campaigners such as Mary Whitehouse, the report did nothing to address concerns. In part this perceived lowering of standards came not just from the representation of 'ordinary people' in difficult circumstances, but also from the satirical programmes that emerged. Most famously, *That Was The Week That Was* (BBC 1962–1963), or *TW3* as it came to be referred to, was able 'to shock Mrs Whitehouse, and, not least, to disturb, even ruffle the Governors of the BBC' (Briggs, 1985, p.336). The programme regularly attracted audiences of between 9 and 12 million (*BBC Handbook 1964*, p.30, n.a) and, in undermining many elements of the traditional authority propounded by the BBC, was seen by its critics as further diminishing the cultural authority of the Corporation which had also been challenged by the loss of the television monopoly. One of the many complaints about the series, from one P. J. S. C. in Bognor Regis, Sussex, on 12 January 1963 includes the following section:

It is particularly disgraceful that the people who have the power to influence the minds and lives of thousands of people show such terrible things, not only blaspheming the name of God, but condemning themselves in the process, and also corrupting that which is designed to build men up (in Schindler, 2017, p.115).

Although the Conservative government, still led by Harold 'you've never had it so good' Macmillan, rejected many of the recommendations of the Pilkington Committee, there was good news for the Corporation on two counts:

Its role as the national instrument of broadcasting was confirmed. The test of performance was applied and BBC "professionalism" was praised and its claim to run a third channel on 625 line UHF was accepted' (Briggs, 1985, p.326).

In the final quarter of 1962, TAM viewing figures showed, for the first time since the arrival of commercial television, that the BBC had achieved a greater audience penetration than ITV (Briggs, 1995, p.313). The BBC was awarded a second television channel although there was an expectation that the commercial provision would also be expanded. It is likely that, had a Conservative government been elected in 1964, an equivalent commercial channel, an ITV2 would have been launched within two years (Harvey, 2000, p.106), although this was not articulated in the 1963 Television Act that came into force at the start of 1964 (Briggs, 1995, p.316).

BBC Television had developed particular strengths, many of which were recognised by the Pilkington Committee. The expertise that had created the VERA technology involved ways to modify the AMPEX systems and new techniques were developed benefitting sports broadcasting, particularly football, and the news service. BBC News had already established itself as the more authoritative of the two broadcast news services, but the higher production facilities of Television Centre changed the aesthetic and some of the presentation, though the familiar newsreaders remained. The move to Television Centre also introduced what Briggs identified as the 'cult of professionalism' in news and studio-based factual programming, which irritated critics who were 'more concerned with the values of the society and of the culture' (Briggs, 1985, p.332). The emphasis on professionalism raised problems in relation to the 'amateur' governors (Briggs, 1985, p.332) 'overseeing' the work of media professionals.

## Docudrama and new representations

Technology also introduced the techniques of *cinéma vérité* to television, with a series of six portraits of individuals in John Boorman's series *Citizen 63* (BBC 1963). This featured the subjects being interviewed in their own homes, but with their responses delivered in first-person direct address to camera, which normally signified authority. It is however similar in technique to the 1935 film *Housing Problems*, and to the subjective camera technique that Jackson pioneered in his 1942 film *Builders* (both discussed in Chapter 4), although filmed in closer proximity. The novelist Anthony Burgess, then the documentary critic of *The Listener*, noted how 'the honesty and the sincerity of these portraits and the immediacy of the camera work was striking' (Burgess, 1963 p.724).

The docudrama genre pioneered in the 1930s by Jennings and Watt was developed further in *The Wednesday Play* (BBC1 1964–1970), a drama anthology series that introduced representations of 'ordinary people' who found themselves in situations not of their own choosing. Two episodes of the series are the most frequently referred to in discussions about the emergence of the representation of 'ordinary people' on British television. The play *Up the Junction* (BBC1 1965), written by Nell Dunn and directed by Ken Loach, was an account of six young Londoners as they became couples and the fate that befell each relationship. Depicting marital difficulties, botched back-street abortions, and death, it presented a powerful representation of young people and issues that were relevant to them and the wider audience. The other episode is *Cathy Come Home* (BBC1, 1966), written by Jeremy Sandford, directed by Ken Loach and produced by Tony Garnett. The film deals with the issue of homelessness brought about by the loss of employment, and the inadequacies of social provision for people in such circumstances.<sup>65</sup>

It was content like this, which showed the difficult realities of contemporary life that prompted Mary Whitehouse to form the Clean Up TV Campaign, which became formalised in the National Viewers and Listeners Association (NVLA). In 1965 the NVLA issued a manifesto in the form of a petition that 'could muster

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<sup>65</sup> The impact of the film was such to prompt the formation of a national homelessness charity; not Shelter, which had just come into existence, but the second such charity, Crisis.

365,355 signatures', which was presented to Parliament by the MP James Dance. In it they called upon the BBC 'for a radical change of policy and ... programmes that build character instead of destroying it, which encourage and sustain faith in God and bring Him back to the heart of our family and national life' (*BBC Yearbook 1966*, p.12). The 1966 Yearbook devoted an eight-page article, 'The Focus of Controversy' (1966, n.a) to presenting varied views and opinions of the output of the BBC, but the Clean Up TV Campaign was gathering momentum, not least because of its support by much of the national print media, for whom the BBC was a long-standing target.

It was not just BBC Television that was introducing new positions for 'ordinary people' to occupy on television; the Granada franchise in particular was exploring innovative new forms. The first televised UK soap opera *Coronation Street* (Granada 1960–present) introduced fictional characters in recognisable situations and environments. Through the frequency of transmissions, it was able to replicate some of the patterns of everyday and domestic life identifiable to the vernacular audience and others.<sup>66</sup> The biographical portrait constructed in interview in *Citizen 63* was utilised in the Granada series *Seven Up* (Granada, 1964, 1971, 1978, 1985, 1991; BBC, 1998; Granada, 2005, 2012), a continuing series that has followed the same group of people throughout their lives starting when they were seven years old, and with a new series every seven years. The series started as a one-off investigation into how the class system affected the aspirations of a group of seven-year-olds from a variety of backgrounds.<sup>67</sup> Children had been identified as an important audience demographic for television but were rarely used as subjects for fear that they would break the conventions of decorum and deference and say something inappropriate. In *Seven Up* the innocence of the speaking subjects was used to raise some awkward questions about class and social mobility (Gauntlett and Hill, 1999).

Denis Mitchell continued to make documentaries with non-fiction storylines that treated sound and vision as equal elements. His work on 16mm for the BBC in the late 1950s had drawn great acclaim and a Prix d'Italia for *Morning in the*

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<sup>66</sup> An early BBC television soap opera based on three girls sharing a flat in London, *199 Park Lane* (BBC1, 1965); it ran for only 18 episodes.

<sup>67</sup> Subsequent episodes have continued to be made at seven-year intervals (see Bruzzi, 2000).



*Streets* as described in Chapter 6, but his work in the 1960s for Granada involved a pioneering documentary technique that utilised O/B film recording techniques in a mobile studio equipped with a VR1000. The first in the series of these documentaries was *The Entertainers* (Granada, 1964), a feature on the performers backstage at a northern working-men's club. The reversal of perspective, in showing the preparation for the performance rather than the performance itself, was an innovative dramatic conceit. However, the use of the VR1000 as a production rather than transmission technology proved problematic to the unions involved in broadcasting, particularly the ACTT, who were wary of technological innovation and the impact it might have on working practices. The opportunities for editing were far more restricted and expensive: once a tape was edited by cutting and splicing the tape together, once edited the videotape could not be re-used as a production format. Additionally, the tape could only be wiped in its entirety rather than in sections for immediate retakes, both factors negated some of the economic advantage of the format (Nash, 1970, p.17).

## BBC2

BBC2 was the second television channel granted to the Corporation, and it aimed to 'provide more opportunity for programmes of an experimental nature for those people who are interested in the *uncommon* denominators' (Briggs, 1985, p.404; [author's italics]). The channel's first Controller Michael Peacock left a year after its launch (20 April 1964), and the structure and output of the second television channel fell to his successor, David Attenborough.<sup>68</sup> It may seem strange that someone better known as a natural history programme-maker had such an important role to play in the televisual representation of 'ordinary people'; however, the arrival of the *Zoo Quest* presenter Attenborough as Controller of BBC2 in 1965 marks an important juncture in this research.

Attenborough was responsible for expanding the output of BBC Television in response to the provision of a second channel as the 1963 Television Act was introduced. BBC2 was to provide an alternative programme for BBC1 viewers wanting more traditional content, and to provide particular elements of public

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<sup>68</sup> It may be that Peacock (who had previously been Editor of Television News) never fully recovered from a power cut on night before the launch of the service, which affected both Television Centre and Lime Grove.

service provision, non-mainstream content that might appeal to different sectors of the television audience. The channel's remit included educational, natural history, high culture, national sport and minority-interest programming, all of which enabled it to become a magazine-style service after the arrival of Attenborough. BBC2 also had remit responsibilities in developing new techniques in representation or 'experimental programme making techniques' (Attenborough, 1972, p1); unrestricted by the agreements negotiated with the ACTT, the BBC was at a distinct advantage to the franchises. The arrival of BBC2 'meant more opportunities for extending the uses of television and for experimentation, and more provision for minority interests at favourable viewing times. For example, a regular feature from the outset had been *Tuesday Term*, consisting of a series of educational programmes and televised during peak hours every Tuesday evening' (*BBC Handbook 1965*, p.38). Minority audience programming also included the weekly review programme *News for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* (BBC 2 1964 - 1966); this was also the first BBC programme regularly produced on video, as it was compiled from existing news bulletins (Baker, 1966, p.27).

BBC2 was the first channel to broadcast in colour, available on sets produced after 1967. Content, such as the broadcast of the Trooping of the Colour was enhanced by the new technology, as was a new popular format *Gardener's World* (BBC2, 1968–present).<sup>69</sup> Historical dramas such as the channel's flagship programme *The Forsyte Saga* (BBC2, 1967) and the major art history documentary series *Civilisation* (BBC2, 1969), written and presented by Sir Kenneth Clark, were also substantially augmented by colour. Sports coverage was already one of BBC Television's strengths, and games such as tennis and snooker and darts, where colour is within the structure, benefitted enormously from television coverage. Snooker coverage in *Pot Black* (BBC2, 1969–1986) introduced the phrase 'for those of you watching in black and white ... the pink is next to the yellow' and brought the televisual close-up and extreme close-up further into the lexicon of programme-making techniques. The combination of the technical expertise that had been acquired in the development of VERA and the new facilities at Television Centre allowed for the further development of distinctive technology-enhanced sports programming; the 1966 World Cup demonstrated slow-motion and replay techniques developed by the BBC technical team (Nash, 1970, p.19).

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<sup>69</sup> An annual demonstration of Queen's Regiment on her Royal, not actual, birthday.

Current affairs provision was enhanced by series such as *Man Alive* (BBC2, 1965–1981), which took a thought-provoking insider view on subjects still seen as taboo, such as sexual permissiveness and the sex industry, as well as more intimate portraits of individuals and the situations they found themselves in. Other episodes took a more journalistic approach as they reported on workers' co-operatives, factory workers and tactics of exploitation (Kilborn and Izod, 1997). The increasing miniaturisation of technical equipment, such as the lightweight Nagra cameras attached to a sync sound unit, saw the adoption of techniques developed in US 'direct cinema', a method of observational 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary style (Holland, 2001). Content could now be produced from new locations where 'ordinary people' could be found. Later in the decade, *Yesterday's Witness* (BBC2, 1969–1981) developed a technique 'for an inexpensive film series of 'ordinary people' talking about their memories of historic events or periods',<sup>70</sup> extending the position of expert witness or authority to those caught up in extraordinary events in a form of illustrated oral history.

The weekday evening alternative magazine programme *Late Night Line-Up* (BBC2, 1964–1974) was given considerable freedom; not least, as the last programme broadcast, it was not constricted by the demands of the schedule.<sup>71</sup> Produced by Rowan Ayres, the intention of the programme was to explore some of the issues it featured in performances, interviews, studio discussions on contemporary topics, poetry and filmed inserts and segments from non-studio locations. In *Late Night Line-Up*, filmed segments might be followed by a discussion on the aspect of contemporary life that was often controversially represented (Dovey, 1993; Dowmunt, 1997). Mary Whitehouse and the NVLA again questioned the appropriateness of the licence fee being used to make such content, and the BBC's moral standpoint. It was not Attenborough who incurred the wrath of Whitehouse but the Director-General Hugh Greene, who Whitehouse regarded as 'the cloven-hoofed begetter of the permissive society, responsible for the erosion of standards and morality' (Miall, 1994, p.108).

The real issue was that society had already changed, postwar, and in order to maintain relevance to its future audience the BBC had to develop content that its traditional

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<sup>70</sup> *The Guardian*, Obituaries, 27 February 2006, p. 67.

<sup>71</sup> The programme started as a nightly preview of the BBC2 TV schedules but this format was unsuccessful.

audience might disapprove of. *Late Night Line-Up* was placed at the end of the schedule in order to avoid affronting viewers tuning in slightly early for the programme they were expecting, and precisely to have a space within which contemporary issues, such as the recent decriminalisation of homosexuality, the availability of birth control and sexual permissiveness, could be discussed by commentators with a range of viewpoints. *The Wednesday Play* continued to be a major source of irritation for Whitehouse and of concern for the BBC Governors, but it also attracted audiences of 8.6 million in 1966 (Briggs, 1995, p.519). One appeal of the content was the ways in which “ordinary people” and their concerns were represented, in close-up, in domestic locations, in conversation and in informal and/or vernacular language. A lack of decorum and deference in speech and gesture was one indication of new distinctions between public and private life of the postwar generation which offended the traditional audience. (Despite the offense that these programmes caused, Whitehouse and enough of her supporters seemed to tune in regularly. Whitehouse’s vociferous Clean Up TV campaign brought sustained pressure on the BBC, through Parliament and the pages of the print media and contributed to the long debate about the function of public service broadcasting, about the BBC and its regulation.

As differences and distinctions between generations emerged with the increasingly youthful demographic, and the arrival of ex-Empire and Commonwealth citizens, introduced new elements to the national narrative, as it expanded to contain conflicting interests. Elements of the national narrative did not necessarily affect all of the regions, making some national content irrelevant in some areas of the country. *Nationwide* (BBC1 1969–1983), the nationally broadcast weekday evening magazine programme, was the format that most keenly recognised this with its inclusion of a 20-minute slot devoted to coverage of the BBC regions. This allowed for the weaving of a regional element into the format driven by, as the title suggests, the national narrative.<sup>72</sup>

However, a major focus for the BBC towards the end of the 1960s was in the major reallocation of radio frequencies, and the development of new local and national services (Briggs, 1995, p.758). Although long overdue, the reorganisation of the Light, Home and Third programmes came about through the popularity of the new pirate

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<sup>72</sup> Although a detailed examination of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, the programme itself has been subject to a substantial audience-research study, *The Nationwide Project* by David Morley and Charlotte Brunson (1978).

radio stations, such as Radio Caroline and Mi Amigo, which were based on ships moored just outside English waters (Briggs, 1995, p.506). The broadcasting of unregulated content and the illegal exploitation of music industry copyrights had been an issue for the BBC since Radio Luxembourg started transmitting in 1929 (see Chapter 4). A further complexity for the BBC and the music industry was that teenagers had become the largest demographic in the country. The international music industry bodies finally successfully lobbied the European Broadcasting Union to legislate against the practice in the Strasbourg Treaty of 1965, which became ratified in the UK in the 1967 Marine Broadcasting Offences Act.

The BBC was tasked with providing a youth-oriented music station to cater to this demographic in their radio provision and reorganised the distribution of service across four national radio channels. The provision of the Home Service became Radio Four, the old Light Programme was now reflected on Radio Two and Radio One, and the Third Programme extended its limited short-wave service to a national medium-wave service, Radio Three (Frith, 1986). The freed-up short-wave frequencies were utilised by an experimental network of local radio stations, developed by Frank Gillard, to serve local audiences (Miall, 1994, p.64). Radio One developed into an all-day pop music station designed to cater to the audience who had listened to the offshore 'pirate' stations and who BBC Television already catered to in the pop music chart-based programme *Top of the Pops* (BBC1, 1964–2008).

## Conclusion

At the end of the 1960s the BBC had four national radio stations, two national television stations with a provision for six local radio stations. It also had an audience that was recognised as demographically split and geographically divided. BBC2 was initially designed for an audience with uncommon, as in rare, interests that might once have been the preserve of BBC1, but over its first few years had introduced minority interest programming in particular sports or pastimes as BBC provision sought to serve different audiences with different interests and tastes, potentially diluting the singular culturally authoritative narrative. Despite complaints from some quarters, documentary and current affairs programmes on BBC1 had introduced more 'ordinary people' and their particular circumstances and concerns to the screen, enhanced by the affordances of the new techniques enabled by new technologies.

Advances in technology had enabled a shift in television from a live studio medium to being able to produce programmes entirely outside the studio. The development of ENG techniques brought new voices into news coverage, and as the practices of discontinuous recording were adopted in some formats, new narrative styles could be explored and subjects could be represented in more direct and transparent ways. For example, using tight and mid close-ups in domestic locations as though the subject was sitting directly opposite the viewer suggested both intimacy and familiarity: '[n]ew technologies and experimental techniques meant that there was an increase in the range of styles that producers could choose from to cover an expanded range of topics and themes' (Turnock, 2007, p.105). 'Ordinary people' as the traditional working class appeared more frequently on the television screen, in drama, soap operas and documentaries, although often in more extreme circumstances than were considered ordinary. Since there are too many examples of innovative programming to deal with in detail, the intention here has been to identify those critical elements that introduced 'ordinary people' on to the screen and enabled participation in the production of content.

While not all positive, the findings of the Pilkington Committee at the beginning of the decade had been largely supportive of the BBC and suggested that it should play a far greater role in the organization of the broadcast sector. Parliament however restricted the broadcasters growth to the provision of the second public service channel (BBC2) with a suggestion that a further commercial channel would be granted. However, the expected progress towards a second commercial channel had not transpired, which irritated the free marketeers in Parliament just as the Conservative Party narrowly won an election in 1970 (Smith, 1974).

## Chapter 8 The Community Programmes Unit

This chapter continues to explore the themes of authority and participation and the representation of 'ordinary people' made possible by new practices emerging within British broadcasting in the 1970s. The focus here sharpens tightly onto the formation within the BBC of a specific unit that developed a maximalist mode of participation in broadcasting. The Community Programmes Unit (CPU), was a BBC2 initiative that sought to extend participation to people whose interests and concerns, ordinary or otherwise, were rarely represented and it is this unit and its initiatives that are the subject of the remainder of this thesis.

Preparations started at the end of the 1960s for the Annan Committee, the broadcasting enquiry that engendered wide media debate into the function of public service broadcasting. Much of the debate centred around what form the second commercial broadcaster might take and the responsibilities it might be given. Broadcaster-turned-academic Anthony Smith supported a campaign for an Open Broadcast Authority that, alongside other campaign groups such as the National Advisory Group for Voluntary Action through Television, sought broadcasting that fulfilled civic and educational functions of public service broadcasting. The broadcast union ACTT was also involved in the debates about the future and function of broadcasting, a fuller context of the Annan Committee can be found in Curran and Seaton (1997), Darlow (2004) and Harvey (1994 and 2000). Here though it is important to recognize that the Annan Committee report reframed the idea of public service, moving away from the idea that broadcasting had a responsibility to raise the standards of the nation, to an understanding that the broadcaster should instead serve the desires of the various sections of the audience (Curran and Seaton, 1997, 304). Television producers such as Rowan Ayres (producer of *Late Night Line-Up*) were keen to see television formats and contexts that allowed people to represent themselves in ways and contexts that were meaningful to them (Downumt, 1997). Mary Whitehouse and others in the NVLA<sup>73</sup> repeated their requests for broadcasting that presented the traditional hegemony of Christianity and family. The commercial television sector voiced frustration about the lack of progress on the second

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<sup>73</sup> Mary Whitehouse was not the only campaigner, although perhaps one of the most vocal, and a considerable thorn in the side of the BBC.

commercial channel. The unexpected Conservative election victory in 1970 delayed the Annan Committee and the discussion about the fourth broadcast channel for the entire duration of that Parliament (1970–1974).

The discussion about broadcasting also considered the impact of technologies used outside the professional broadcasting industry, which had started to impact on the content that was being produced within, initially, the US broadcast industry and subsequently to television and radio broadcasting contexts across Latin America and Europe (Boyle, 1997). The emergence of the new ‘amateur’ technology of Super-8 in 1965 was one example, a substandard (or, in other words, one that was below professional requirements like 16mm) film format designed for domestic use to enable people to create home movies as easily as they created a family album of photographs. Although the quality of Super-8 was too low for televisual broadcast, it enabled the production of new types of amateur or artistic practices as a more affordable film technology. In 1967 the Japanese electronics firm Sony launched a new audiovisual recorder aimed at a professional but non-broadcast market. The intention was to create a visual demonstration recording technology that could be used by corporations and organisations for training and education. The DV-2400 49 Rover, otherwise known as the ‘Portapak’, was a single-person operated, low-gauge, closed-circuit television (CCTV) system designed as an affordable, portable, narrowcast technology. Although ‘its affordability and portability are certainly questionable’ (Willett, in Buckingham and Willett 2009, p.3); early Portapaks were bulky, awkward and heavy. The technology was adopted as a production method by cable companies and community television organisations in the US where the commercially operated system of broadcasting included elements of public broadcast service (PBS) that could be shared across local networks. The PBS channels of the regional and locally based commercial broadcast system provided an outlet for content of lower technical quality, and the economics of the Portapak increased the amount of content that could be made and therefore the number of advertising slots that could be sold.

The adoption of the Portapak by two strands of the emerging counterculture allowed for the production of different types of content. In the US community groups, artists, and activists or a combination of all three produced participatory content that sought to challenge the misrepresentation and under-representation of certain sections of the community (Boyle, 1997). In American cities where the counterculture had traction,



new television stations were established to broadcast content that did not follow the usual conventions of televisual representations. For activists and artists in America, Europe and Latin-America, video technology became a technique used to deconstruct the myths and distance inherent in traditional forms of representation (Boyle, 1997). The New York-based artist Nam Jun Paik saw the Portapak as a means for challenging broadcasting misrepresentation: he announced that 'television has been attacking us all of our lives, now we can attack it back' (Jun Paik in Hanhardt, 1986, p.19).

#### The possibilities of portable video

... stimulated two distinct, occasionally overlapping new traditions. One involved social and political initiatives, usually in documentary form and often addressed to a particular local problem. The other adopted the rather unsatisfactory label of video art (Wyver, 1989, p.266).

Similarities across the two strands existed in the use of more proximate techniques, intimate locations and candid first-person address, as video was used to 'provide an alternative to both broadcast television and the mainstream institutions of the art world' (Tamblyn, 1996, p.16). The limited editing possibilities of video led artists to explore simultaneous real-time recordings and performances at 'happenings', participatory screenings and installations. Works such as Bruce Naumann's *Lip Sync* (1969) highlighted the constructed nature of representations and challenged the notions of truth and veracity embedded in mainstream televisual techniques and conventions. Jun Paik's adversarial announcement quoted above became 'a slogan for an independent video culture in North America and Europe' (Hartney, 1996, p.22).

Output from the independent video culture in the UK is discussed in the following chapter; here, the focus moves on to the incorporation of new technologies and methods of representation into the British broadcasting sector, and the opposition to these technologies and techniques by the ACTT and other broadcast unions. Their opposition took the form of restrictions on the use of sub-standard technology, on the grounds that image quality did not meet professional broadcast standards, although exceptions were allowed in particular contexts (Holland, 2000, Buckingham and Willett, 2009). The notion of broadcast standards is important but it is flexible according to the needs of the broadcaster, News production, for example had separate standards to other output, electronic

news-gathering (ENG) employed the same techniques as earlier formats such as Granada's *Roving Reporter* (discussed in Chapter 6), but recorded on to video rather than film. Amateur film and video footage was at times, and in the absence of better quality images, used to illustrate news events.

### *TV Interruptions*

In 1971 artist David Hall was commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council to produce ten short video pieces to be broadcast during that year's Edinburgh Festival of Television on STV, the largest of the Scottish ITV franchises. It was crucial to the work that the videos would be inserted unannounced into regular programming, disrupting what Raymond Williams defined as the concept of 'the flow of television' (Williams, 1992, p7). By this, Williams was referring to television's constructed temporality through the regularity of scheduling and the repetition of tropes and techniques in particular genres, formats and images that combined into a continuous temporal stream of output.

Hall met with resistance from the broadcaster, the ACTT and other broadcasting unions who were keen to maintain distinctions between amateur and professional practice.

My *TV Interruptions* were on film (not video) – the reason for this was because STV would not accept non-broadcast standard video recordings at the time and the union would not accept a non-union director using their studios. I therefore had to produce the work outside, on an acceptable format, ie: 16mm film. However, the intention was very much that they were TV works (Hall in Knight, 1996, p.353).

It is quite possible that if the broadcast partner of Hall's art project had been BBC Scotland and the ABS union, *10 TV Interruptions* (STV 1972) could have been transmitted as envisaged. Instead they became *7 TV Interruptions* (Hall, 1972), an incomplete work that toured as a video installation in the growing circuit of art institutions recognising the importance of video art (Knight, 1996, p.225). The following year Hall established the Hornsey Light and Sound Workshop, a joint venture between BBC2 and Hornsey Art College, to produce broadcast-quality content outside the unionised production centres of television studios. The series *Disco 2000* (BBC2, 1972) was intended to showcase this experimental video work, but a complaint from Mary Whitehouse about the use of the clenched fist of the Black Power movement as a graphic, even though it was being used in the context of the Northern Soul movement that was then gathering momentum, led to it being shut down after the first episode

(Hartney, 1996, p.28). The portability of video made it a perfect medium for community-based content, as well as for artists, but the substantial difficulties in getting video content broadcast diminished its effectiveness.

### *Late Night Line-Up*

The nightly weekday format *Late Night Line-Up* was responsible for exploring experimental television, appearing as the last show in the schedule of the evening and often reflecting on content that had been transmitted earlier that night.<sup>74</sup> Producer Rowan Ayers was a vocal supporter of access and participatory television as a function of public service broadcasting although his judgement about content and production techniques was sometimes questioned by the BBC. In one example, in 1972 *Late Night Line-Up* commissioned film activist John 'Hoppy' Hopkins' production company TVX to produce a video item about cannabis for broadcast. The content produced prompted a police raid on the company's office, and Hopkins filmed the raid on Portapak and aired it instead of the original content on that evening's edition of *Late Night Line-Up*. The transmitted footage showed a seemingly incompetent raid undertaken by 'flat-footed bobbies' uncertain of what they were looking for. It generated substantial criticism within and outside the BBC about the editorial policy and intentions of the programme and about the integrity of Ayers (Hartney, 1996, p.29).

The questions being raised by experimental or alternative practices, new technologies and non-professional forms of content contributed to the debate, fuelled by the delay to the Annan Committee, about the function, form and regulation of broadcasting. Campaigns for an alternative broadcast structure to be applied to the anticipated fourth television broadcaster were launched by Social Action Television, the TV4 Campaign, the ACTT and the aforementioned Anthony Smith (Harvey, 2000) amongst others, all proposing different structures and public service responsibilities in the provision of alternative forms of content to that provided by existing broadcasters. Christopher Chataway, the Minister of Communications announced in 1972 that there would be no fourth channel until after the report of the next broadcasting committee, which was still to be activated. Instead there would be a provision for six 'community' television stations to be awarded on a franchise basis. This non-commercial service was meant

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<sup>74</sup> The programme had started as a week-night early evening preview of BBC content, *Line-Up* (BBC2 1964) and so had been produced in the Presentation Department that was also responsible for announcements and introductions and the presentation of news.

to provide 'specially designed content to appeal to the local communities in the areas that they served' (Lewis, 1978, p.67).

The focus on the local rather than the regional was another attempt to address complaints about the relevance of broadcast output, which was a recurring theme. Occasionally some alternative content was aired in the regional opt-out slots in the weeknight *Nationwide* programme, such as in 1973 a short campaign feature about squatting as a way to redress the housing shortage was shown in the London region slot (Nigg and Wade, 1980, p.22). The Pilkington Committee had recommended that the BBC develop a local radio provision as a function of public service. However, neither the BBC nor the government wanted to pay for this provision, so under Frank Gillard (BBC Director of Radio), an experimental network of eight stations funded by local councils was launched at the end of 1968 (Edwards, 1968, p.29).<sup>75</sup> Gillard's intention was that these stations should offer 'modern radio journalism geared to the interests of the local community' (Miall, 1994, p.68). The stations employed some of the techniques used in US radio and video formats to enable local audiences to engage in civic life, broadcasting council meetings, weather and traffic news. They also offered opportunities for participation in vox pops and fan reports from matches, phone-ins, requests and letters read out on air (Edwards, 1968, p.30). The success of the experiment led the BBC to expand the local radio service and fund it from the licence fee; Gillard's experience of US community broadcasting fed into some of the discussions taking place within the BBC regarding access television.

### Participatory programmes

One of the earliest programmes that exemplified experimental techniques was *All Our Own Work* (BBC2, 1972). The programme, about life on a Croydon council estate, extended high levels of participation to the residents. The programme, and responses to it and the wider issues of participatory programming were discussed in the BBC Weekly Television Meeting on 9 August 1972, with participants including David Attenborough, BBC2 Controller; Joanna Spencer, Assistant Controller Television Documentary; John Cain, Assistant Head of Factual Entertainment; and Desmond Wilcox, producer of the influential documentary/current affairs series *Man Alive* (BBC2, 1965–1981).

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<sup>75</sup> Leicester, Sheffield, Merseyside, Nottingham, Stoke-on-Trent, Brighton, Leeds and Durham.

The programme received a divided response from the attendees at the meeting. Spencer was unsure of the programme-makers' intention, whether it was an '... indication of a future trend in television or whether it had been an opportunity for viewers in general to look at animals in the zoo.' Wilcox commented that one of the problems of *All Our Own Work* was that 'only the articulate people come through.' It was his opinion that 'a professionally made programme about a community could speak more effectively for the community than the community could speak for itself.' Wilcox cited a programme that he had made earlier in the year *It's Ours Whatever They Say* (BBC2, 1972) about life on an Islington housing estate, as an example of a professionally made programme that represented a particular community. In seeming disagreement, Attenborough stated that 'one of the benefits of professional production was, or should be, that it helped inarticulate people to speak effectively and *All Our Own Work* had turned out to be very like a BBC programme, only less well done' (Attenborough).<sup>76</sup>

In his summing up of the meeting, Attenborough supported the intention of some producers in the exploration of alternative viewpoints, content and production techniques in BBC2 minority interest programming. He went on to identify that professionals in the television service

... should be able to put their feelings to one side and put their expertise at the disposal of people who had something to say on television. There were members of the public who said this was never done and some professionals who said that it was impossible for them to work in an impartial and detached way on any subject (Attenborough).<sup>77</sup>

Participation in the broadcast sphere was a recurring theme in the ongoing media debate about broadcasting with campaign groups and activists<sup>78</sup> calling for increased representations of the experiences of 'ordinary people' in their everyday lives. Within the BBC, *Late Night Line-Up* came off air, in some part due to the concerns about the editorial policy, but Ayers started to develop the idea of an experimental series of access programmes within the Presentation Programmes department (Oakley, 2017).

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<sup>76</sup> Weekly Television Meeting minutes, 9 August 1972.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> ASTV, the ACTT, NAG and ex-BBC staffer Anthony Smith.

In the minutes from the Board of Management meeting held on 20 November 1972, the experimental access series is referred to as *Open House*.<sup>79</sup>

However, it was low on the agenda for some in the BBC: even after a draft editorial code was produced the National Governor for Scotland, Lady Avonside wondered ‘why the BBC should have to present programmes of this nature at all’.<sup>80</sup> A week later at another Board of Management meeting, David Attenborough strongly supported the provision of participatory programming, when he identified that ‘there were useful production methods in use in the underground, which never reached the screen because they failed to conform to the BBC’s expectations of productions’. By developing participatory programmes the BBC could deflect criticism that it ‘was blinkered by its own professionalism ...’ and that ‘... broadcasting organisations and their unions and their audiences may have to accept lower technical standards to provide a broader based public participation in television’ (Attenborough, 1972).<sup>81</sup>

Ayers gave an interview to Elkan Allan that appeared in *The Sunday Times* (3/12/1972) in which he suggested that considerable editorial control would be extended to the participants, more than that intended by others in the BBC, and in the Board of Management meeting the following day, future Director-General, Ian Trethowan expressed his displeasure at Ayers, who had already been informed on 24 April 1972, that ‘he should not again, without consultation expound publicly about public access to BBC Television’.<sup>82</sup> Ayers had already proved to be a controversial figure at *Late Night Line-Up* and his role in this BBC access initiative was of considerable concern to those present.

### Community programmes

David Attenborough presented a confidential five-page report titled *Community Programmes*<sup>83</sup> for the Board of Management Meeting on 7 December 1972, proposing

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<sup>79</sup> Weekly Television Meeting minutes, 9 August 1972.

<sup>80</sup> Board of Management Meeting Minutes 24 November 1972.

<sup>81</sup> Board of Management Meeting minutes, 30 November 1972. WAC Access Programmes R78/2/540/1

<sup>82</sup> Board of Management Meeting minutes, 4 December 1972. WAC Access Programmes R78/2/540/1

<sup>83</sup> Attenborough, D. Community Programmes Internal BBC document. WAC Access Programmes R78/2/540/1

a 13-week series of community programmes to start in April 1973. The report provides a definition of how the BBC understood what it now referred to as community programmes.

“Access” or “community” programmes, which are spoken of so frequently in the current debates about broadcasting, are taken to be programmes which are made by viewers who have applied for air time, and for which professional broadcasters supply the technical facilities necessary for production and transmission, but play only a minimal part in editorial decision (Attenborough, 1972, p1).

According to Attenborough, the advantages of community programmes were, importantly, that they could bring ‘voices, attitudes and opinions that, for one reason or another have been unheard or seriously neglected, by mainstream programmes’. These points were already being discussed in the ongoing debate about broadcasting in general, but they had a particular relevance for BBC2, which had a responsibility within its remit to explore new ideas, formats and methods of representation. However not everyone foresaw these elements as advantages; Mary Whitehouse’s NVLA, for example, was striving for a return to hegemonic cultural values rather than the representation of those outside of those values. Concerns about the type of content produced for access channels in the US were countered in Attenborough’s document, which warned that it should not be assumed that community programmes in the BBC would be comparable to community programmes in other countries because of differences in the broadcast structures. However, Attenborough identified a US access format, *Catch-22* on WGBH Boston, that presented a model for citizen television that had been adapted by Frank Gillard for the local radio service pilot funded by local councils. Gillard’s interpretation of public service broadcasting rested upon mechanisms that provided civic functions and democratic participation and included broadcasting council meetings. Gillard’s vision for broadcasting was to encourage participation in democracy, demonstrated by *Any Questions* (1948–present) the format he developed for radio 20 years earlier, and the television equivalent *Question Time* (BBC1, 1979–present).

Some producers, like Ayers, had a genuine desire to bring new voices and new methods of representation to the screen, whether on film or video, and Attenborough identified that community or access programmes could incorporate ‘stylistic innovations, new ways of handling film or videotape which professional broadcasters have either ignored or rejected.’ New techniques and technologies might be effective in

this new programming, Attenborough suggested. It was very unusual to see videotape being directly referred to in this report. Instead, video was mostly referred to in euphemisms such as 'stylistic innovation' (Attenborough, 1972, p.1), 'experimental programme-making techniques'.<sup>84</sup> minutes or 'new methods in use in the underground'.<sup>85</sup> Broadcast unions were wary about the impact on working practices and crew size that increasingly compact technologies would have (Holland 2000, Hartney 1996). Some technical and creative staff were reluctant to produce content that did not maintain the 'professional mystique of broadcasters' (Sherman, 1997, p.102) that had been embedded in the Corporation under Hugh Greene's tenure as Director-General.

Union insistence on a minimum broadcast quality was established as a means of retaining professional standards at the same time as ensuring that non-professionally produced content, that produced by the ordinary person on video (whether amateur, artist or activist) would not be transmitted, except in exceptional circumstances of news and sometimes current affairs. In such cases it was accompanied by a disclaimer to show that the broadcaster was not responsible for the (poor) quality of the image. However, the professionalism of broadcasting was not just considered to be present in the quality of the image, but equally in the construction of representations and the positioning of subjects in relation to the broadcaster. It was, Attenborough suggested, possible that

... considerable numbers of people who have something, both didactically and stylistically but regard professional broadcasters as a closed group who filter everything through their professional production standards and thus crucially distort what the contributors are trying to express (Attenborough, 1972, p.2).

Attenborough acknowledged that *Late Night Line-Up* had already transmitted several editions in which groups had had a considerable say in putting the programme together, including one identified by Corner 'as a decisive moment in the development of the idea' of access television. This featured the workers at a Guinness factory challenging the mechanisms of representation employed by broadcast media (Corner, 1994, p.20). According to Mike Fentiman, the producer, the workers identified ways that their opinions could be manipulated. '...[Y]ou'll take this film back and you'll edit it into what you want, and you'll shorten this and change that and you can make it do

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<sup>84</sup> Attenborough, Board of Management Meeting, 30 November 1972.

<sup>85</sup> Attenborough, BBC Weekly Television Meeting, 9 August 1972.



what you want it to' (Fentiman in Corner, 1994, p.21). Instead, the programme transmitted 'every single word, including the clapper board shots', unedited (Fentiman, in Corner, 1994, p.21). The workers talked knowledgeably about representational techniques and narrative structures and how editing influenced and altered meaning, and clearly understood how particular strategies introduced or reinforced negative stereotypes. Biressi and Nunn (2005), Brunt (2017) and Dovey (1992) refer to this interview in their work on the emergence of the CPU.

A substantial advantage of these experimental editions of *Late Night Line-Up*, according to Attenborough, was that they would allow 'new editorial attitudes that do not derive from the assumptions of the university-educated elite who are commonly believed to dominate television production' (Attenborough, 1972, p,1).<sup>86</sup> In 1968 the only person accepted on to the BBC graduate training scheme for producers who was not Oxbridge educated was Alan Yentob, who graduated with a 2.2 in law from Leeds University (Born, 2000, p278).<sup>87</sup>

The programmes would give 'very considerable editorial freedom to contributors' so the experimental series would be managed through a gatekeeping process that was not yet fully defined, but decisions about inclusion in the series would be 'taken at a high and very responsible level'.<sup>88</sup> An undated internal memo confirmed that a committee of the 'D.P. Tel' (Director of Television Programmes) David Attenborough, the 'E.N.C.A' (Editor, News and Current Affairs) Paul Bonner and the Controller of BBC2 Robin Scott would act as permanent members and specialist members such as the Head of Religious Broadcasting could be co-opted as necessary. Rowan Ayers was not named as a committee member or mentioned as the producer in any of the documented meetings discussing the experimental programmes,<sup>89</sup> although he had certainly been the original impetus for access in British broadcasting. Prior to his work with *Late Night Line-Up* he was the first producer of the far more traditional access format, featuring the response of viewers in *Points of View* (BBC1, 1961–1971, 1979– present) and *Junior Points of View* (BBC1, 1963–1970).

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<sup>86</sup> Such concerns still have currency today particularly as that university-educated elite were, then as now, also the elite university-educated. (Turvill, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> In the UK the academic classification system awards 4 types of undergraduate degree, a 1<sup>st</sup>, a 2.1, a 2.2 and a 3<sup>rd</sup> class degree.

<sup>88</sup> Attenborough, BBC Weekly Television Meeting, 7 December 1972.

<sup>89</sup> WAC, Access Programmes R78/2,540/1

Ayers headed up the production unit and was 'responsible for organizing and producing the programmes, and for investigating applications to ensure that the requests are responsible ones' (Attenborough, 1972, p.2). Attenborough warned against thinking that these programmes would 'be made exclusively by the lunatic fringe, nor that they would form an unbroken series of vociferous radical manifestos.' Instead the aim was, 'within the limits of the editorial code, to provide a lively varied and entertaining series that was not a corner for cranks nor weighted in one particular direction' (Attenborough, 1972, p.3). As an additional safeguard all contributors would be required to sign an editorial code, to protect the Corporation, 'as publishers from legal proceedings for libel, contempt of court and so on' (Attenborough, 1972, p.3).

There was, Attenborough warned, a real danger of 'the programmes being dull, and the remedy must, from the nature of their definition, lie largely in the hands of the participants' (Attenborough, 1972, p.4). The programmes would strive to be relevant, but it was acknowledged that the content was unlikely to be topical because of the extended production time needed when working with non-professionals. However, 'existing applications ... look very promising' as campaigners 'wished to put forward quite straightforward solutions to ordinary problems such as traffic congestion, radical alternatives to prison, preventative dentistry' (Attenborough, 1972, p.2). It was not recorded in meeting minutes how these existing applications had been sourced.

The BBC would provide 'a small and limited budget' for film stills, copyright payments and some minimal expenses. Even though it was envisaged that prerecorded content was the most effective production method for community programmes, the budget did not stretch to it, although if any group wanted to 'spend money on their productions outside the budget – for example, on film – they would be able to' (Attenborough, 1972, p.4). This was probably not an expense that was possible for most community or campaigning groups and it could 'lead participants to transferring the onus on to the BBC by virtually challenging it to excise offensive or controversial passages that had been included as try-ons' (Attenborough, 1972, p.4). This suggested that if the cost of film had to be borne by the participants, studio production was the anticipated format, as content produced on portable video was, like 16mm, limited to news and in some current affairs and documentaries, because it did not meet the broadcast standard.

Despite the opposition to community programmes within the BBC, Attenborough successfully made a case for an experimental series in which the process of participation would be managed in what it was admitted, or possibly even predicted, might be rather dull output (Attenborough, 1972, p.4). Attenborough's proposal certainly did not express the enthusiasm and motivation that some BBC producers such as Ayers, Fentiman and Bonner felt towards alternative and experimental programme-making techniques and subjects. However, the Board of Management Meeting on 14 December 1972 approved the proposal for the experimental series, renamed as *Open Door*, to reassure other BBC staff, management and governors that this type of programming would not extend the invitation to everyone (as was suggested more vividly perhaps in the originally proposed title of *Open House*). Even so Lady Avonside, at least, still had 'the gravest reservations' about the BBC's involvement in access or community initiatives.<sup>90</sup>

On 18 December 1972 Director-General Charles Curran approved the experimental series *Open Door* (BBC2 1973 -1986) start for April 1973. Programmes were scheduled as the final transmission of the Monday night schedule (the slot previously occupied by an edition of *Late Night Line-Up*), which enabled flexibility about duration and minimised the risk of offending large primetime audiences. Each would be at least 40 minutes long and feature up to four different contributions. Every fourth programme was envisaged as a response slot, where both studio and remote audiences could respond to what had been transmitted and previous participants could reflect on their own or other contributions. The editorial code was approved, and contributors signed a contract in which they agreed 'not to produce content that was gratuitously sensational, offensive or in infringement of any law'. Programmes of an obscene nature; those made for financial or political gain; that advocated racialism, incited riots or unlawful behaviour; that contained personal attacks; or infringed any broadcasting laws were prohibited. An additional proviso insisted that groups submitted 'sufficient information about their intention and would be subject to the final decision of the BBC, the ultimate sanction was the forfeiture of airtime'.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Board of Management Meeting, 14 December 1972.

<sup>91</sup> *Open Door* Application Form. Access Programmes R78/2,540/1.

### *Open Door*

By February 1973 more than 50 groups had applied, and Ayers submitted a list of enough proposed content for six programmes.<sup>92</sup> The applications were reviewed by a committee comprised of Attenborough, Bonner and Scott and, if needed, a relevant advisory group member. Groups who progressed through the application process pitched a more detailed proposal to the staff team of the CPU, including the secretaries, who all voted on the ideas that made the final selection. The successful groups were then assigned a producer with whom they discussed their aims and concerns, and the format, style and length of the item would be decided (Dovey, 1993). The first series consisted of 17 items and represented 15 groups and one individual, mainly in single-issue programmes.<sup>93</sup> The first episode (BBC2, 1975) was described in *Radio Times* as '[a] live weekly programme in which people and groups are given a chance to have their say in their own way.'<sup>94</sup>

Despite the discussion about experimental techniques and 'new methods from the underground' (Attenborough, 1972, p.4), all but one programme of the first *Open Door* series were live studio discussions, in which the group's introduction was followed with their aims or hypothesis. *Open Door* offered groups the opportunity to represent their concerns in a live format normally reserved for experts, on a broadcast channel that conferred additional authority on what they were saying and, by extension, on themselves. Some of the single-issue programmes featured representatives with opposing views: The Responsible Society, who campaigned about the effects of permissive society on traditional family life was paired with Neville Schulman, the sole individual contributor, who advocated the 'liberation of lifestyle' (BBC2, 1973).<sup>95</sup> Other programmes were more unusual couplings of poets and private eyes (BBC2, 1973).<sup>96</sup>

It was no coincidence that the most frequently used production context was a studio discussion since groups had to pay for content made on film and, as

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<sup>92</sup> <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/people-nation-empire/R78-2807-1%20Open%20Door%20Memo%2027-02-1973.pdf>

<sup>93</sup> WAC, Access Programmes R78/2,540/1.

<sup>94</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/356c993926cf4b1aa96c34986093aaa0>

<sup>95</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/9b55f38f2dd4ff29fa95513cdd68440>

<sup>96</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/9b534f388f2bd14ff2fa95513cdd467>

outlined already, unions rejected portable video as a broadcast format except in the context of news production. This live studio production was advantageous for the broadcaster too; the newly formed unit had limited time before transmissions started, and a live discussion show was already an established and familiar format into which 'ordinary people' could be inserted and their contributions 'managed' through the order of the speakers and the cameras that they addressed. The transmission was a live mix of different visual and audio signals over which participants had no control. It might have been a nerve-wracking experience for the contributors but that could be managed through scripts and rehearsals. The first series of community programmes, then, deployed one of the more mundane, yet highly managed existing television formats. However, there were exceptions; the seventh programme of the first series was given over to the Basement Youth Project (BBC2, 1973),<sup>97</sup> a community youth project in Bethnal Green. The programme featured a screening of *Tunde's Story*, a film made by the group<sup>98</sup> followed by a studio discussion (Nigg and Wade, 1980, p.57).

These programmes were interspersed with feedback or response slots that encouraged people to participate in the structures of broadcasting in new ways. It became apparent that *Open Door*, while not attracting vast audiences, was seen as a success and it settled into its late-night Monday evening slot with two 13-week series per year, with weekend repeats at different times. The second series was described in the *Radio Times* listing as 'a weekly programme made by people who have something to say.'<sup>99</sup> Dovey suggests that '[S]uccessful ideas for programmes were almost always those submitted by groups involved in social action campaigns or cultural development' (Dovey, 1993, p.165). The success of *Open Door* programmes was in any case not measured purely in terms of audience size, but instead on the engagement of the audience. Mainstream programming generated a response from approximately one viewer out of every 100,000; *Open Door* programmes generated a response from, on average, one viewer out of every 5000.<sup>100</sup> This evidenced that the audience, however small, had engaged with broadcast content featuring members of the public in extended

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<sup>97</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/5edc2e85b2714b27a5963eb1cda35>

<sup>98</sup> funded by the BFI

<sup>99</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/9ab55b7701334987ae1f135dba842e58>

<sup>100</sup> Board of Management Meeting minutes, 6 December 1976; Community Programmes R103/241/1

speaking positions and chosen to comment, positively or negatively, on the content.

Most programmes remained 'single issue', produced or suggested by special interest or campaign groups and studio discussion remained the most frequently used programme format. The second series featured issues such as female ordination, adoption, trades unions and homeopathy. Some programmes continued to pair issues: sometimes sympathetically as with the London Trade Unions and the Old Age Pensioners Trust (BBC2, 1973)<sup>101</sup> and sometimes less so, with the Society for the Rescue of Destitute Animals and the British Association of Retired Persons (BBC2, 1974).<sup>102</sup> Two groups made programmes on location in the second series; The National Gipsy Council produced an item on film (BBC2, 1973),<sup>103</sup> and The National Association of Hospital Broadcasters made *Down Your Ward* (BBC2, 1973),<sup>104</sup> a parody of the popular radio series *Down Your Way*, which utilised 'film and other visual means' (Attenborough, 1972, p.2). The most controversial of these was the aforementioned London Trade Unions and the Old Age Pensioners Trust a programme described in the Board of Management meeting on 1 November 1973 'as very much under the communist influence'.<sup>105</sup> Some Conservative politicians suggested that the programme 'was an open door for every extremist, revolutionary and subversive clique to propagandise its views – a golden opportunity to get access to the mass media and to preach their dangerous gospels – an opportunity that they would never otherwise get' (Winsbury in Oakley, 1990, p.17). In this case the BBC granted the Conservative party an additional political broadcast to respond to the criticisms of government policy on pensions.

Rowan Ayers left the Corporation in 1973 and the CPU became the responsibility of Paul Bonner. Bonner was already involved in his role as Editor of News and Current Affairs, and Mike Fentiman became programme producer. David Attenborough, who had been tipped as the next Director-General, had decided that he wanted to return to full-time programme-making and resigned as Director of BBC Television. Robin Scott,

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<sup>101</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/43974c641d734fe1890c29b601fd3a24>

<sup>102</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/9ab55b7701334987ae1f135dba842e58>

<sup>103</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/20538e5831ba4e549288e5c597ea6903>

<sup>104</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/3a141a579f454d95915b0bda10a8340c>

<sup>105</sup> Board of Management Meeting 1/11/1973 WAC R78/2, 807/1 *Open Door*

who had replaced Attenborough as Controller of BBC 2, also left in 1974, to be replaced by Aubrey Singer (Oakley with Lee Wright, 2016).

By series three, more *Open Door* programmes were produced on location. The listing in *Radio Times* for a weekend screening of *Open Door* (BBC2, 1974) described the content in the following way:

Last summer LIBERATION FILMS helped a group of people in Balham use portable TV cameras to make their own community television show. *Starting to Happen* is a record of this experience. Try watching with a group of friends of neighbours.<sup>106</sup>

The programme was made on ENGs, electronic news-gathering kits, 'portable TV cameras that recorded on to broadcast quality tape that played through the studio-based U-matic machines' (Holland, 2000, p.36). Maggie Black and Lucy Willis made the poetic and eponymous documentary *Jericho* (BBC2, 1974),<sup>107</sup> about the district of Oxford where they lived. Similar to Denis Mitchell's *Morning in the Streets*, it featured longshots, observational close-ups and reverse zooms. Residents are interviewed and accompanied by an ambient soundtrack and post-synched narration in which one of the participants says that making the film 'gives us a chance to say our piece on the BBC', thus reiterating the programme's slogan.

As the series progressed, content was increasingly created on 'film or other visual means'; and it is worth identifying the strategies that were employed in the CPU. These strategies extended the opportunity for people to propose and plan their own programmes and participate in the pre-production, production and post-production stages of a broadcast item. Effectively, through a dialogic process, intent, function and meaning were fully discussed with the participants so that they could assume some editorial control, although as Dovey argues, '[i]n practice this is rarely possible and their power is exercised through their presence in the edit suite' (Dovey, 1993, p.165). A consideration here is that even in a context designed for participation, the unfamiliarity of the process may make the non-media professionals susceptible to the perceived wisdom, the internalised knowledge of conventions, aesthetics and dramatic potentials of the professional media producers. Some 'ordinary people', as the (unionised)

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<sup>106</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/c03b70020d7b418193f1f34118273d85>

<sup>107</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/0ab2a113480f47dd971d9f3c7683667c>

working class, did have high levels of media literacy, as demonstrated in the segment for *Late Night Line-up* that prompted the formation of the CPU (Corner, 1994, p.23). For some of the groups the motivation for appearing on the BBC might have been to occupy a position of authority, to become, through the transformatory power of television, the expert in their specialist subject. They did not necessarily want to employ experimental techniques; instead they wanted their segment to look like authoritative and professional BBC television content. For groups who did want to use experimental techniques such as video, there were now other options such as the BFI- and Arts Council-funded community film and video resources and workshops (Hartney, 1996).

The output of *Open Door* is far too extensive and varied to give more than a flavour here,<sup>108</sup> but in the main, the programmes were innocuous, relating to hobbies, national and local voluntary organisations and, if filmed, this was usually done in conventional ways. The campaign groups who applied to make programmes were representatives of 'the unheard, the rarely heard and the socially inarticulate' (Dovey, 1993, p.165). Successful applicants ranged from Hunt Saboteurs Association,<sup>109</sup> Recidivist Anonymous Fellowship Group a twelve-step group,<sup>110</sup> Chiswick Women's Aid,<sup>111</sup> the Transex Liberation Group,<sup>112</sup> the Bogside Community Group,<sup>113</sup> Black Workers' Rights,<sup>114</sup> and Asians in Britain.<sup>115</sup> Such subjects extended the range of representations in terms of regional, national, racial, sexual, gender and class identities, and while the people affected by the issues might have been those who could be described as ordinary in the class hierarchy, their experiences could not be framed in the sense of ordinary as 'common'. There were also examples of activist television aimed at highlighting an issue in order to prompt a solution or of voicing dissent, in the items on preventative dentistry and traffic congestion. These were two of the ideas that had been put identified before the project was officially approved.

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<sup>108</sup> For further details about the range of programmes, Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016.

<sup>109</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/3c3bfe66871a45c3b2fd44dd1d591f7a>

<sup>110</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/196eabc6639742129b71fe0c3e7df6ab>

<sup>111</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/4aeb9665fc4746f48fd41377ff475536>

<sup>112</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/ef47cfc1444145afb3a71ca7364ed570>

<sup>113</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/8ed19f548fb547c6b2b768ee31617e3b>

<sup>114</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/4c30f89ee5c54be5b40ee625353c9b2d>

<sup>115</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/006c67fc337b49848a99d41cc5400001>



By the time the Annan Committee was finally announced in March 1974 by Edward Heath's Conservative government (1970–1974),<sup>116</sup> over 100 groups who 'would not, under normal circumstances, have had the opportunity to have their interests represented on national television [had participated] in the first six series of *Open Door*' (Bonner, 1975). Within the content particular strands of practice developed; regional content was included in themed groups of programmes from the same city (such as Liverpool) or region (such as Ulster); studio discussion programmes featured in a strand called *The People's Television*. According to *Radio Times* '... the BBC's facilities are *handed over to ...*' [author's italics], suggesting unrestrained access rather than the planned output of a studio discussion. It went on to state that 'Open Door is *produced by the public* [author's italics]. Skilled help and advice is available'.<sup>117</sup> *People Make Television* was a strand that featured social campaigns, '*made by the public in co-operation* with the BBC's Community Programmes Unit' [author's italics].<sup>118</sup> This is notable for the language in which *Radio Times* described different strands within the series. Equally significant is the fact that participants at this point were not described as ordinary. In *Unheard Voices*, the more personal strand, 'groups of people – whose attitudes and ideas are not commonly given direct expression in the media – are invited to put forward their views on the state of the nation ... or anything else they care to talk about. In all *Open Door* programmes the *public decides the content*' [author's italics].<sup>119</sup>

The CPU had effectively managed the introduction of forms as the series developed beyond the confines of the studio, including some examples of content with high levels of participation. There had been no major controversies. If the scheduling of the series meant that audience figures were low, they continued to generate high rates of response from people who did see them.<sup>120</sup> The introduction of weekend repeats made them available to wider audiences, and the viewing public also engaged with the Forum, the feedback and response sessions that were incorporated into the series. The CPU also had enabled the BBC to be part of the discussions about misrepresentations and under-representations being levelled at broadcasters.

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<sup>116</sup> Who lost the general election the following month.

<sup>117</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/3c3bfe66871a45c3b2fd44dd1d591f7a>

<sup>118</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/53c68a6c3e5145fb83e271ef870c8ecf>

<sup>119</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/563ee779f71c4b669870ebf7d87d85d9>

<sup>120</sup> Board of Management Meeting minutes, 6 December 1976

## Access and accountability

A report by Paul Bonner produced for the Annan Committee, *The Subjective Dimension in Broadcasting – An analysis of the progress, pitfalls and potential safeguards for access broadcasting* in 1976 is the source for the information in this section. In it, Bonner suggested that the production context could be extended to the representation of minority groups, such as unemployed, sick and differently abled people and those from rural communities, rather than just minority interest groups. He used the phrase ‘the subjective dimension’ to propose that programmes should be made by the people for whom they had the most relevance. To demonstrate this, he cited an *Open Door* segment made by blind people as one of the most ‘socially useful’, as it educated the audience in ‘the ways that blind people would like assistance in carrying out everyday tasks’. Bonner recognised that this approach might be contentious if it was employed in relation to political issues such as Northern Ireland, immigration and trades unions but suggested that it could still be educational. The report stated that ‘many people’s prejudices for or against trades unions (or the bosses) are based in ignorance’ and that objective coverage that so often casts people in these situations in a conflict role can reinforce those prejudices.

The adoption of the subjective dimension in such cases could be seen as an effective safety valve, a function already identified in the paper ‘Community Programmes’ (Attenborough, 1972, p.1) and Bonner used a controversial item produced for *Open Door* by the Bradford-based British Campaign to Stop Immigration (BBC2, 1976)<sup>121</sup> to demonstrate this. The programme resulted from a build-up of pressure from ‘many English people in the Midlands and North’ who felt that there was ‘a conspiracy of silence’ in the media about the effects of immigration (Bonner, 1976, p.1). *Radio Times* carried a programme description written by the group, rather than the CPU or the BBC Press Office:

This programme is dedicated to the silent majority who until now, because of a sinister veil of censorship, have never had the opportunity to give their views to the British public. The freedom of speech should be granted to all.<sup>122</sup>

The Standing Conference of Pakistan Organisations in the UK and the Indian Workers Association brought injunction proceedings against the BBC, although the issue was

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<sup>121</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/32dfb50e12174905a6932ddc38438768>

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

resolved through the 'right to reply' mechanism that meant that when controversial opinions were expressed, an opposing perspective would be included within the same series. In respect of this example, Lord Pitt, Deputy Chairman of the Community Relations Commission, gave a personal response in a segment of a programme later in the series (BBC2, 1976).<sup>123</sup>

Bonner said that although he 'could not be certain that no harm had been done by the original broadcast' (Bonner, 1976, p.5) he argued that a positive outcome had been achieved because 'the coverage of the subject is now more open and thorough in current affairs programmes' (Bonner, 1976, p.5). The success of the 'safety-valve effect' in this example led Bonner to suggest that it might be 'possible that less contentious subjective broadcasting (including by unions) in a non-confrontational context might bring a similar release of tension' (Bonner, 1976, p.4). Safeguards were in place in the dialogic process to manage the output and protect the Corporation from legal action, as even in a live programme, the sound or transmission could be faded out. If, as Bonner contended, earlier 'fears that the public would abuse this opportunity by obscenity or sedition now seem ridiculous' (Bonner, 1976, p.4), programmes did not need to be obscene or seditious to receive complaints. One episode that 'received many protests'<sup>124</sup> paired the British Motorcycle Federation with two male flower arrangers (BBC2, 1976).<sup>125</sup>

The first six series of *Open Door* allowed groups to air their concerns and voice their opinions within the context of a particular campaign or situation. Frequent themes covered by the programme were housing, road safety, traffic, child welfare and education. Groups granted airtime ranged from national organisations (Women's Institute, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, National Council for Civil Liberties, League of Friends, the Vegetarian Society) to local housing associations such as Anchor. Other content came from 'minority groups' such as Gingerbread (a one-parent family association), unemployed black youth, hunt saboteurs, co-operative workers, boarding school girls, youth clubs, comprehensive girls, women's groups, vegans, scouts, community arts programmes, black workers, an 'ad hoc' group of North Devon

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<sup>123</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/22dfa156f60a4009b78f6053e3885ef9>

<sup>124</sup> Board of Management Meeting on 6 December 1976 Access Programmes R78/2,540/1.

<sup>125</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/ff355bde48bf49c2a5719e416b58915e>

farm workers, working-class mums, unemployment groups, Asian workers, the Claimants' Union, a school for 'slow learners', fellowship groups and a variety of voluntary groups and campaigns.<sup>126</sup> Many of these groups wanted to be represented seriously and to present their opinions in a context familiar to viewers. The traditional conventions of television, particularly the authoritative address, demonstrated the importance of their cause, and the validity of their claims.

Among those programmes that did bring controversy, that made by the Free Palestine group (BBC2, 1976) attracted the attention of the Leader of the Opposition, Margaret Thatcher who, when it came to the BBC, was like Mary Whitehouse, as Seaton put it: 'hawk-eyed for breaches of balance' (Seaton, 2015, p.20). Charles Curran, the Director-General, reassured Thatcher that the BBC took care 'not to allow the programmes to present a political party or to pursue an industrial dispute. *Open Door* allows for dissent and a generous interpretation of free speech' (Curran in Seaton, 2015, p.21). The content was duly 'balanced' by a programme made by the Anglo-Israeli Friendship League later in the series (BBC2, 1977).

#### From national to regional

Bonner had previously written another report for the Annan Committee, *Broadening Access – The Regional Potential of Access Television: An analysis of the progress, pitfalls and potential safeguards for access broadcasting* (1975),<sup>127</sup> which advocated the development of access television on a regional basis. Bonner suggested that one of the problems for *Open Door* was national transmission as 'local issues usually have a greater impact on people's lives than national ones' (Bonner, 1975, p.3). He proposed that a network of 20 to 25 Community Broadcast Officers should be established, who would operate as 'enablers' to 'channel' interested groups into one of four levels of access programming. The first level offered interested groups or individuals the opportunity to make a CCTV (closed circuit television), a narrowcast technology not designed not for broadcast, video that could be used for local campaigning purposes. The second level provided access via a local radio initiative, and the third via a regional radio or television project. The fourth level, presumably considered the highest form of access according to this hierarchy, was national

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<sup>126</sup> WAC, Access Programmes R78/2,540/1.

<sup>127</sup> WAC, Access Programmes R78/2,540/1.

television via the CPU, which would allow 'projects percolating up the chain from local involvement to national appeal' (Bonner, 1975, p.4).<sup>128</sup>

Regional BBC television stations made their first late-night live studio discussion programmes, from 1971 with *Twenty to the Dozen* (BBC North, 1971–1974). By 1974 every BBC regional television production centre offered this basic format to groups campaigning on mainly local issues (*BBC Yearbook*, 1975, p.46). It was not just in the BBC that efforts were being made to include 'ordinary people' in the broadcast agenda. The commercial franchises also responded to the calls for access programming and by 1975, every commercial franchise transmitted some form of participatory content that was often explicitly framed as access (*ITV Yearbook*, 1975, p.27).

In his report on the regional potential for access television, Bonner suggested that the

majority of groups (or individuals), who wish to use television to put forward their viewpoint want to deal with local issues, and, unless such issues have parallels up and down the country, or are in some other way of national relevance, it is not likely that they will get on the national network (Bonner, 1975, p 1).<sup>129</sup>

It might have been the case that *Open Door* was a format and production context far more suited to regional production; it also did not provide many interesting examples of what was possible. This was not necessarily due to lack of willingness but because there was no provision for film and most successful groups could not afford the costs of film, the processing and the editing. Additionally, there was still no agreement that allowed the use of video, which still did not meet broadcasting standards.

### Feedback and responses

The surprising outcome when topics of national relevance were identified was the response rate, which was discussed in the Board of Management Meeting on 6 December 1976. Even the most innocuous of programmes could generate a high rate of response but an item produced by *The U and I Club* (BBC2 1973)<sup>130</sup> of

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<sup>128</sup> WAC, Access Programmes R78/2,540/1.

<sup>129</sup> WAC, Access Programmes R78/2,540/1.

<sup>130</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/a66e097d7e2e424db1037847cc1306b7>

cystitis sufferers generated 12,000 responses from an audience figure of 396,000: one in 33 viewers.<sup>131</sup> To put this engagement in context, a 'usual response rate for a programme would amount to below 1 in 100,000'.<sup>132</sup> This response rate was not generated by the single broadcast: the item on cystitis was shown in its original transmission (November 1973) and then featured in a 'round-up edition' (May 1974) where it was discussed by the participants and the programme's host, *Financial Times* television critic Chris Dunkley. This edition was then repeated on Saturday 5 June 1974 in an early evening slot (7.15pm).<sup>133</sup>

In addition to the high level of audience engagement, positive and negative, with the content of the deliberately late-scheduled series, *Open Door* contributed to the debate in the print media about television and the fourth channel. To develop this form of audience participation, the CPU proposed a new series, *Write On* (BBC2, 1976) (Oakley and Lee Wright, 2016); to extend the opportunity to 'ordinary people' to express their viewpoint and opinions on issues of a national relevance in an earlier evening slot. Elsewhere in the BBC, new formats featuring 'ordinary people' appeared, most controversially in *The Family* (BBC1, 1974). This unfolding series featured the Wilkins, a working-class family from Reading, who were described by the BBC director Paul Watson as 'people with too little money'. The Wilkins however described themselves as "ordinary people", and the representation of their lives generated substantial coverage in the tabloid press as lives were revealed in their many complexities. Using a combination of direct cinema and cinéma vérité techniques, the production crew lived with the family in their already overcrowded flat for six months as they filmed the everyday interactions and conversations and engaged individual family members in interviews to camera.<sup>134</sup> As a snapshot of the everyday life of 'ordinary people', the narrative structure was provided within the editing. Individual episodes were shown to the family for approval before transmission, and later episodes in the series showed the family members as they came to terms with their new found celebrity and notoriety. Controversial issues highlighted in the series included illegitimacy, extra-marital and premarital sex and pornography, alongside poverty, overcrowding and low levels of literacy. Inevitably, the tabloid papers covered the

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<sup>131</sup> Board of Management Meeting minutes, 6 December 1976

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/7d122c9aaa434f0aa72da26113048b08>

<sup>134</sup> <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/tv/id/444743/index.html>

series in great gleeful detail as the morals of the family, and especially those of the mother, were questioned (Bruzzi, 2000; Corner, 2002; Biressi and Nunn, 2005; Brunt, 2017).

Transmissions started before filming was complete and, interestingly, media reaction to the programme and the subjects became incorporated into the programme as the televisual transformation from ordinary to celebrity took place, and subjects were recognised in the streets and appeared in the national press (Corner, 2002). Mary Whitehouse fronted the line of the complainants about this popular programme, and many of the traditional BBC audience found the candid nature of the conversations and the topics shocking. According to the BBC Survey, the most difficult thing for audiences to accept about the programme was the Wilkins' description of themselves as 'ordinary people' (BBC Viewers and Listeners Survey, 1975.)<sup>135</sup> Discussions took place in the tabloid media as to whether the Wilkins, who were criticised for their use of strong language, were 'ordinary people', as well as concerns as to whether the BBC should be making content like this. Coverage of the programme in the tabloid press propelled the candid and outspoken mother, Margaret, known as Ma Wilkins to celebrity status. Watson's use of the phrase 'ordinary people' was in the particular sense of the white working class, and its use in this context was furthered by the coverage the programme generated in the tabloid press. Alongside the unexpected election of Harold Wilson's Labour government in April 1974 that brought labour relations, union concerns and industrial action to the forefront, the programme reiterated the construction of 'ordinary people' as the working class.

However, elsewhere on the BBC the popular Sunday night format *That's Life* (BBC1, 1973–1994) featured consumer and charity campaigns, vox pops with market regulars in informal language and euphemistic content about mis-shaped vegetables, alongside recognition for 'ordinary people' who had done extraordinary things. Here 'ordinary people' were often explicitly constructed as consumers exercising their rights often around safety issues associated with particular products.

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<sup>135</sup> WAC, Access Programmes R78/2,540/.

The phrase 'ordinary people' was not applied internally to participants in *Open Door* programmes, instead they were referred to variously as: subjects, citizens, campaigners interested parties and, occasionally, accesses. The understanding was that the participants were those who were unrepresented on mainstream programmes; they often included the working class but the understanding of participants was wider than that. *Radio Times* most frequently described participants as members of the public or the audience or just groups of people. The groups selected did not necessarily represent the shared and common values associated with 'ordinary people' some such as the Transsexual Liberation Front and Recidivists Anonymous are unlikely to have been perceived by the BBC, the CPU, the NVLA or the audience as 'ordinary people'. *Open Door* allowed space for the opinions of the unheard and the rarely represented voices that raised issues that were not necessarily ordinary, in the term of common concerns. This output allowed the BBC to counter the claims that Attenborough identified in his paper *Community Programmes* that the only views it represented were those of white Oxbridge-educated men (Attenborough, 1972, p.1).

As Bonner noted in his paper *The Subjective Dimension* in 1976, *Open Door* established itself in a contentious broadcast climate and was 'a useful safety valve' and a way of introducing difficult topics into the realm of television current affairs (Bonner, 1976, p.2). However, the *It Ain't Half Racist, Mum* episode produced by the Campaign Against Racism in the Media (BBC2, 1979) explicitly accused the BBC and the personnel named in the closing titles of the programme that, far from being part of the solution in bringing difficult issues into the realm of public discussion, they were in fact part of the problem. One of those named, Alan Protheroe (Editor of Television News), saw the programme being transmitted was 'an abrogation of our [the BBC] responsibilities' [author's clarification in brackets] 1979).<sup>136</sup> BBC presenter Robin Day felt he had been traduced in the programme, and threatened legal action against the Corporation. He eventually settled for an apology before the broadcast of the episode of *Open Door* transmitted on 13 June 1979.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Weekly Television Programme Review*, 7 March 1979.

<sup>137</sup> WAC, Access Programmes R78/2,540/1; for more details on this programme, see Malik (2002) and Schaffer (2014).



The episode caused the BBC considerable embarrassment and reignited some of the animosity that had led to the CPU being referred to by some in the BBC as the Communist Party Unit and seen as ‘the enemy within’ (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016, p.216). The CPU was strongly criticised for making the programme, and for allowing what was considered a gross misrepresentation of the BBC and some of its staff. Nonetheless senior BBC management allowed the programme repeat to be aired (Hendy, 2018). Conservative party leader Margaret Thatcher cited the CARM<sup>138</sup> programme as another example of what she saw as the BBC’s poor editorial judgement. This theme gained some prominence during her tenure as Prime Minister, which began two months after the programme’s transmission.

Another *Open Door* episode later in 1979 from the Campaign for Demolition (BBC 2, 1979) led to the BBC being threatened with legal proceedings by Portsmouth City Council. This prompted a three-page letter to the Council’s solicitor from Ian Trethowan, then Director-General.<sup>139</sup> As Hendy points out, this acknowledged an understanding within the BBC that access programmes were going to be difficult, but ‘they should be included in the schedules whatever problems they might cause’ (Hendy, 2018, n.p.); ‘problems’ apparently included the BBC themselves feeling ‘grossly misrepresented’ in a programme on racism.

The CPU established a production context where the process of participation could be effectively managed for most groups and the series alike. *Open Door* had safely introduced access or community programmes, managed by the dialogic process, the schedule slot and the studio discussion (still a frequently used format) enabled ‘ordinary people’ to be positioned as, or substituted for, experts. The format avoided union antagonism to working with substandard, non-professional formats (16mm and video) and it ensured that the BBC did not get embroiled in any controversies relating to the editing of prerecorded footage (35mm film) that most participating campaign groups could not afford anyway.

The CPU had also identified the potential for audience members to engage with television in new ways where the programmes operated as a conduit between

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<sup>138</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/c9149ea87bbb4491ac9ca4b51d28408b>

<sup>139</sup> <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/people-nation-empire/R78-2807-1%20Letter%20from%20Ian%20Trethowan.pdf>

campaigning organisations and people affected by the particular issue. The high response rates to programmes, previously discussed in relation to *The U and I Club* transmission, continued as the Association of Self-Employed People edition generated 7000 letters.<sup>140</sup> These and others prompted initiatives like *Write On*, mentioned earlier, and a new series *Grapevine* (BBC2 1976–1982) described in an unattributed programme proposal<sup>141</sup> as:

The content of the programme will be very much dictated by the response from viewers suggestions that have already been made by community groups range from forming a tenants association, running a community festival, organising a food co-op, to ways of helping people with personal problems. We would welcome active participation in deciding the content of programme ideas.

Ideas about particular functions of broadcasting as a conduit for social usefulness were discussed at the various conferences attended by voluntary groups, campaign groups, as well as broadcasters working in access, community or educational television. The CPU was involved in a number of these conferences such as Voluntary Action in Television at the Royal Festival Hall in February 1976, from which the National Advisory Group (for Voluntary Action in Television) (NAG) was formed, which itself sought to influence the shape of the proposed fourth broadcast channel.

The work of the CPU extended beyond *Open Door*, which broadcast 243 programmes over its ten-year duration (Hendy, 2018). Of these, there were a handful of ‘controversial’ episodes, all resolved by the response or ‘right to reply’ mechanism within the series structure, although some caused embarrassment for the BBC. It is interesting to note that the occurrence of controversy in access programmes fell after the CARM programme that coincided with the election of Margaret Thatcher and the fractious relationship that developed with the BBC under Alasdair Milne’s Director Generalship (1982–1987). In part that may have been due to the fact that controversial programmes appeared in earlier evening current affairs slots on BBC1, perhaps because some of the issues raised by *Open Door* had percolated up the chain to mainstream time slots. The series certainly drew attention to issues ignored by other parts of the media, leading to wider debate and it also found new ways for non-media professionals to have more control over the means by which they and their point of view was represented. However, even though *Open Door* was a long-standing, regular

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<sup>140</sup> WAC, R78/2, 807/1 *Open Door*.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*

feature on the screen, it accounted for only a tiny percentage of the broadcast output, even in a three-channel television system so its impact was minimal. The vast majority of applicants were unsuccessful: an unattributed article, *CTV Report* claimed that the programme had 550 applicants on a waiting list, 'enough to keep the series supplied with material at its present rate of output until 1994'.<sup>142</sup> The programme itself only lasted until 1986 and presented alternative opinions that were rarely controversial.

In 1983 *Open Door* was replaced by *Open Space*, which created opportunities for individuals rather than campaigning groups to tell stories about their lives.<sup>143</sup> The *Open Space* series resulted in far more personal portraits of individuals who assumed they had something interesting to say about themselves or their sometimes unusual hobbies or interests (Oakley and Lee Wright, 2016). This move from the collective to the individual reflected impulses demonstrated in far more than broadcast output. The phrase 'ordinary people' lost its traction as a signifier of the traditional understanding of the white working class as the population became more ethnically diverse. Additionally, the unionised practices of industrial workplaces that contributed to the understanding of 'ordinary people' as working class dissipated under the policies of Thatcherism. The promotion of an aspirational individualism contributed to the decline in a traditional collective identity, at least for the working class.

Channel 4, the long-promised fourth television channel, finally arrived in 1982 as a national commercially funded, public service broadcaster. It was established on a broadcaster-as-publisher model, although with marked difference to the one developed by the CPU. Distinctions need to be made between the BBC as a body filtering and producing access programmes and Channel4 as a body which commissioned independent producers to make programmes. The new channel had remit responsibilities for the representation of minorities rather than the minority interests that were still the domain of BBC2.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the emergence of the CPU and its output, particularly *Open Door* content, and investigated a range of groups and participants who were

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<sup>142</sup> Unattributed paper *Open Door*. R78/2, 807/1

<sup>143</sup> For details of the more exceptional, controversial and interesting content produced through the duration of the series, see Oakley with Wright, 2016.

selected by the institution to appear. It has identified increasing issues with broadcast unions and their resistance to new technologies which threatened working practices and the closed shop environment of studio production. The introduction of 'ordinary people as 'non media professionals,' into some of the programme making processes was also problematic for the unions who objected to potential loss of professionalism in the output and reduced broadcast standards. Equally, it was the potential lowering of broadcast standards that saw concerns from inside the Corporation about content produced by the CPU, and questions of the broadcaster's accountability in the transmission of this content. The establishment of Channel 4 was undoubtedly an important occurrence in broadcasting. For this research though, the most relevant change in television's environment and working practices was probably the emergence of Hi-8, a domestic video technology that achieved union-defined broadcast quality, just at the point when union power in broadcasting, as elsewhere, was being dismantled by the policies of Thatcherism. These issues are discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 9 Video and Video Diaries

The Annan Committee had recommended the formation of the Open Broadcast Authority in 1977 to manage the fourth television channel. The election of the Conservative government in 1979 altered the shape of this to a commercially funded, national, public service broadcaster with responsibilities to introduce more independent production, and to represent under-represented communities and minorities (see Hobson, 2008; Crissell, 2002), itself an indication of the changes in understandings of nation and society. The 1981 Broadcasting Act led to the establishment of the Independent Broadcasting Authority which managed Channel 4 and its funding.<sup>144</sup> The 'broadcaster as publisher' model utilized by Channel 4 was different to the one in use in the CPU. Channel 4 commissioned independent productions to transmit, whereas in the CPU the model was used to filter and produce access programmes. However, it meant that all Channel 4 content (except its daily hour-long news programme) was produced by independent production companies. This model enabled the broadcaster to avoid the substantial investment required to establish its own production centres and studios. In the reallocation of the public service responsibilities, Channel 4 took on responsibility for the representation of ethnically diverse minorities. Jeremy Isaacs was appointed as Chief Executive of the new channel, and a new role of Channel Controller was created (unexpectedly) for Paul Bonner, the original Head of the CPU, who had 'impressed the Board so much that they wanted him to be in a major position at the channel' (Hobson, 2008, p.12).

Alongside the arrival of a fourth channel, broadcasting was adapting to technological advances, firstly in the launch of domestic VHS technology that enabled the audience to view content at a time of their choosing, and secondly, and most importantly for this research, the launch in 1984 of the Betacam SP. This semi-professional, above minimum broadcast standard camera meant video could become a broadcast production standard, rather than simply one of distribution. The introduction of video technology had been a concern of the unions for a number of years – issues relating to the broadcast of video content first emerged in 1972 with David Hall's work *10 TV Interruptions*. However, the launch of Channel 4 contributed to the demise of the power

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<sup>144</sup> An extensive and detailed account of the formation and economic structure of Channel 4 can be found in *Channel Four; Television With a Difference* (Lambert, 1982).

of the broadcast unions, the ABS and NATTKE united into BETA in 1984.<sup>145</sup> Long-standing fears expressed by the broadcast unions were no longer relevant as the production companies that made the new channel's content were not unionised. The fears about reduced image quality were redundant as Hi-8 reached the lowest standard required for broadcast (Holland 2001). Although the last years of the 1970s had seen a number of union disputes in broadcasting, the reliance of Channel 4 on independent production did much, according to Alan Fountain,<sup>146</sup> to hasten the decimation of the power of the broadcasting unions (in Holland, 2000).

Channel 4 replaced the Arts Council as the co-funder, with the BFI, of the Video Workshop Network. This was the basis for the broadcaster's Independent Film and Video Unit which under Fountain supported work that explored a range of controversial and contentious subjects in challenging ways. In some cases, film, video and community arts projects by groups such as Sankofa, Black Audio Collective and CEDDO were funded, providing television content for the new national broadcaster. The Camberwell-based London Lesbian and Gay Youth Project produced *Framed Youth: Revenge of the Teenage Perverts*, which won the 1984 Grierson Documentary Award. The project also produced content for *Network 21*,<sup>147</sup> a short-lived London pirate television station that ran for eight months in 1986, and broadcast a 30-minute programme on Friday nights within an eight-mile radius of the transmitter.

Programme content was shot on a Sony Video 8, a hand-held camera that utilised 8mm tape, edited on low-band U-Matic and broadcast on VHS. *Network 21* developed out of the scratch-video scene centred around the Fridge nightclub in Brixton, with the aim to 'see a similar approach to TV as has been afforded to radio, for the BBC and ITV to release their monopoly on frequencies and make some available to the community'.<sup>148</sup> It featured the cultural output of London's alternative/art communities, much of which was driven by the emergent identity politics of race, feminism and queer. The channel 'showed slices of London's

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<sup>145</sup> A short-lived union which joined forces with the ACCT in 1991 to become BECTU. <https://www.bectu.org.uk/about/bectu-history>

<sup>146</sup> Fountain managed *The Eleventh Hour* strand of community and arts video at Channel 4.

<sup>147</sup> So-called because it transmitted on channel 21 of the UHF band.

<sup>148</sup> <http://www.thecentreofattention.org/dgntw21.html>

artistic and underground life as well as slices of everyday life, something the normal television stations never showed.’<sup>149</sup>

Improvements in the image quality of lower-cost professional equipment (film cameras with VHS ‘backs’) and Hi8 camcorders meant the footage could be used in a range of emergent television forms (Dowmunt, 1997). The transformation of video into a production format in broadcasting ‘enabled a new flexibility of inputs to mainstream television production’ (Couldry, 2000, p.185). The technology furthered techniques of both direct cinema where the compactness of the camera allowed uncomfortably proximate ‘fly on the wall’ sequences; and of *cinéma vérité*, where the presence of the camera prompted the actions of the participant, often in a confessional style.

### Art and activist practices

The diminishing size of video cameras, decreased cost and substantial improvements in image quality opened up a range of locations, where content could easily be self-filmed and reviewed by the subject. This new functionality frequently resulted, particularly in the context of feminist, black and queer art/activist circles, in practices that emphasised the private as the counter-narrative to traditional representations of the social (Wyver, 1989). Self-representational techniques emerged in the workshop formats of community and feminist groups and were reflected in art contexts where personal monologues from the subject were delivered in direct address to camera from intimate, private and more proximate locations. Implicit in feminist video practice was the establishment of an intimate, one-to-one connection with the viewer. Such content often took the form of a self-filmed, confessional monologue delivered in a direct address to a hand-held camera. Content might come from an intimate domestic location, a bedroom or bathroom, in a whispered tone that emphasised the privacy of the discussion.

This self-representational technique is associated with the existing conventions of diary practice, a privileged moment of reflection in a private domestic environment (Elwes, 1996, p.263). Such confessional forms invited the viewer to reciprocate with an examination of personal experiences and to locate herself in

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<sup>149</sup> <http://www.thecentreofattention.org/dgntw21.html>

the complex social, political and economic realities of a patriarchal world (Elwes as above, 1996, p.278). It is worth noting here that the wider 'confessional' impulse has, at times, been used to frame women's cultural output as emotional rather than as artistic – a framing that 'automatically condemns the cultural text and perpetuates a false dichotomy between our lives and our art' (Chadwick, 2004, p.162). The 1960s feminist slogan 'the personal is the political' is perhaps most apparent in the 'video-diary' output of artists such as Jayne Parker, Tina Keane and Catherine Elwes. The format was not exclusively used by women but it played an important role in understandings that 'the personal was the political', the slogan of the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminism and in early iterations of queer identities.

Channel 4 transmitted *The Continuous Diary* (Channel 4, 1984), an audiovisual version of Ian Breakwell's book of the same name, which had originally featured in an episode of *Arena* (as discussed in Chapter 9). It was developed as a television 'series' of 21 short films (between three and 11 minutes) by Anna Ridley. The first series ran between April and May 1984 and resulted in the commission of a further series of eight short films entitled *The Christmas Diaries*. The films featured the author in explicit constructions of his domestic life juxtaposed with the author's personal musings and reflections on everyday events, and overheard conversations. The episode titled *1984 Review of the Year* (Channel 4, 1984), was transmitted at the same time on Christmas Day as the Queen's *Royal Message to the Nation*. In 'mocking the glib conventions of the annual round-up of notable events, Breakwell concentrates solely on the ups and downs of his own year' (Sperlinger, n.d.). Breakwell's work here reflects the spirit of Mass-Observation, not only in the fragmentary accounts of everyday life, but also in its 'hostility to rigid scales of value' (Sperlinger, n.d.). It offers a critique and a deconstruction of the authorial status and veracity suggested by the conventions of the direct address to camera and 'burlesques or parodies the performance of the monarch in their address to the nation' (Antin, 1986, p. 63). Breakwell was interested in critiquing the authoritative position of the broadcast direct address; an earlier work *The News* (Breakwell, 1980) 'has a television newsreader solemnly delivering absurdly trivial items fashioned in the style of the most provincial local newspaper' (Sperlinger, n.d.).



## Other broadcasting issues

The continuous, often delayed, cycle of broadcasting enquiries, committees, reports and parliamentary acts continued as the Thatcher government announced the next enquiry, the Peacock Committee in 1985. Issues to be discussed were the renewal of the Royal Charter for the BBC, the financing and efficiency of the BBC, particularly in relation to the license fee, and cable and satellite broadcasting. The report published on 29 May 1986 unexpectedly recommended the continuation of the licence fee as the funding mechanism for the Corporation, although the increase in the licence fee was not as generous as the Corporation had hoped for. Broadcasting hours were also extended and quotas for independent production were imposed on all broadcasters. In addition to these economic restraints, Born identifies that

[P]olitical criticism also escalated as the government and the Tory Party attacked certain programmes as biased or otherwise unacceptable. The attacks were repeatedly picked up and amplified by hostile coverage from the Tory Popular and broadsheet press (Born, 2004, p.49).

Elsewhere on television screens, content produced on video was increasingly used in mainstream production as an economic rather than an aesthetic decision. The CPU was now run by Jeremy Gibson, with Giles Oakley as series producer of *Open Space*, with a much greater focus on individual experience rather than group activities or campaign-based programmes of *Open Door*. While these programmes were largely uncontroversial, a 1984 episode *Taking Liberties* (BBC2, 1984) made with Sheffield Police Watch presented a very different perspective to that which had been represented in the news coverage. In his autobiography Director-General Milne admitted that the images shot from behind the picket lines 'provided a sharp contrast to the pictures already seen of the Orgreave confrontation (Milne, 1988, p.105; in Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2017). This and other controversial documentaries on BBC 1 forced Milne's departure in January 1987, just months after the arrival of Marmaduke Hussey as the Chairman of the Board of Governors. Milne's deputy, Michael Checkland, was promoted to the Director Generalship. Checkland unusually did not come from a programme-making background; instead, and in keeping with the efficiency drive needed to make more programmes on less money, he was an accountant. At around the same time Alan Yentob replaced Graeme McDonald as Controller of

BBC2 and his arrival allowed for a new wave of innovation in the CPU most notably in the *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* initiatives.

Oakley identifies some of the issues around the management of the participants, experienced especially by newer producers whose 'enthusiasm to hand over control to the accesses, sometimes meant they 'lost sight of the need to make the best programmes' within the constraints of the BBC guidelines (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016, p.216). The selection meetings, which had always included the unit's production and admin staff, had become unwieldy as officially appointed internal and external advisors such as the Head of Education attended, alongside Sean Day Lewis, television critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, and previous participants. (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016, p.218) The number of invitees who might attend rose to more than 100 (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016, p.218), and the panel of advisors was dropped in the early 1990s as the output of the unit became focused on the experience of selected individuals rather than on campaign issues.

The unit suffered at the hands of increasingly interventionist BBC2 Controllers; programme producer Peter Lee-Wright noted how the CPU found itself constrained by fears with the BBC of producing controversial content (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016, p.219). The access project lost its appeal within the BBC hierarchy as, according to Oakley, access became 'a word like socialism, one better left unspoken'. (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016, p.219). Another issue that the unit and the access project faced is identified by Holland in her introduction to Oakley and Lee-Wright's article, when she states that the 'use of docusoap diluted part of the original case for access, because "ordinary people" were not routinely excluded, now they are centre stage' (Holland in Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016).

### Amateur practices

The launch and adoption of the amateur camcorder that utilised half-inch VHS tape enabled content to be screened through domestic VCR machines, bringing production into the subject's domestic environment. It was often not possible to use the factual domestic environment of 'ordinary people' as a location because of room dimensions, size of equipment and poor lighting. The range of practices that emerged in this new amateur context mirrored in many ways the family album of still photography. The availability of affordable domestic camcorders and the production of footage on VHS

meant that the subjects could watch and rewatch events in their lives through the television set, as though they themselves were 'on the telly'. (Willett, in Buckingham and Willett 2009, p.17).

In 1990 Granada television took this impulse to a natural conclusion when they launched a three-programme pilot of a new series that incorporated this amateur video content into a successful television format, *You've Been Framed* (Granada 1990–2004, ITV Studios 2004–present). The programme was a recording of a screening of loosely themed 'home movie' clips shown to an audience comprised at least in part by the amateur video-makers and their subjects (Matthews, 2007). *You've Been Framed* launched as a regular 'prime-time' series in 1991, and by the following year its early Saturday evening family-viewing slot was attracting an audience of 18.7 million (Barker, 1992). The format provided a context in which the audible and sometimes visible responses from the live audience contributed to the programme being transmitted to the remote audience, as had the audiences at the 'live' radio variety shows presented in the 1930s (see Chapter 4).

### *Video Diaries*

The subjective impulse demonstrated in *Open Space* was taken a step further when the Head of the CPU in 1987, Tony Laryea, and supported by BBC 2 Controller Alan Yentob, developed the idea for *Video Diaries* (BBC2 1990–1998) after 'a 'group think' when people considered how to harness the opportunities created by the new cameras' (Oakley, 2017, p.226). The new strand introduced the video-diary form previously explored in the art and activist practices discussed above, as a first-person documentary format. The idea was taken up by Jeremy Gibson when he became Head of the CPU in the late 1980s and brought in Bob Long from Channel 4, as executive producer of the series.

The *Video Diaries* series took the personal framework already introduced in *Open Space* a stage further and gave individuals an opportunity to make extended or feature-length documentaries about themselves in conjunction with a dedicated producer-editor. The series offered unprecedented levels of participation in all stages of production, in distinction to the first two decades of CPU output where the editorial control of the participant was sometimes relegated to a position below editorial approval and, as Harvey (2000) suggests, characterised by quite powerful institutional

interventions. *Video Diaries* adopted the same gatekeeping processes as *Open Door* and *Open Space* but it placed 'the political emphasis on the individual rather than class' (Dovey, 1993, p.96) or campaigns. Applicants wrote in and, if identified by the CPU as having a 'compelling story to tell' (Dovey, 1993, p.167), were given the opportunity to make an extended first-person documentary about their experiences that ran counter to dominant ideologies. Participants were loaned a Hi-8 video camera and trained in its use by the CPU producer they had been assigned. The training covered the basic functions and capabilities of the camera, and particular techniques for filming, lighting and recording sound and suggested at least the 'provision of equitable access to the means and resources of directly determined communications (Williams 1988, p.191).

Professional techniques were thus effectively 'co-opted by the amateur, in an evident attempt to present individual stories, within, not against, the conventional rhetoric of television' (MacDonald, 1998, p.97). For example, emphasis was given to the need for participants to supply 'cutaway' shots from each location. The cutaway is a static shot focusing on objects or views; it is made to facilitate the editing-out of material that is deemed extraneous or irrelevant. The emphasis was necessary because 'amateurs do not film with the conventions of broadcast or narrative-driven editing in mind, they do not follow the establishing, long, mid, close-up pattern of shots in an unfolding narrative' (Sherman, 1998, p.258). Self-filming privatised the making of the representation and enabled a performance that was substantially less constrained by external constraints or influences. In principle, participants had completely free choice: they could experiment with their representation, they could review, rehearse and reperform. Increasingly they 'turned private narration into a form of public performance that mimicked professional style' (MacDonald, 1998, p.96).

### Editorial constructions

The participant recorded the content at their own convenience and then met with the producer/editor on a regular basis. Content developed within a narrative structure at least in part defined by the participant. The extended relationship between producer and participant enhanced the participant's reflexivity and established a production context for broadcast television where power-sharing, at least according to the CPU, '... rest[ed] on a truly different way of incorporating

the ordinary person into the programme – through admitting their technical proficiency’ (Bonner, F, 2003, p.57). However, with shooting ratios averaging 150:1 (Keighron, 1993, p.24) and sometimes reaching 200:1 (Dovey, 2000) technical proficiency appears not to have been achieved in the shooting. In the edit suite, the hours of footage were edited into a ‘compelling story’ (Dovey, 1993, p.168), apparently ‘in line with the wishes of the participant’ (Corner, 1996, p.185). However, the editing process in broadcasting arguably results in a generic narrative form that privileges coherence and cohesion, and the chronology assumed in the edit suite where ‘the “now” of post-production will prevail’ over historical “accuracy”’ (Rascaroli, 2009, p.129). In practice, the construction of the fragments into a broadcast form often flouted an essential characteristic of the diary genre, the ‘concomitant chronological succession of entries’ (Tamblyn, 1996, p.18). Personal and fragmentary accounts were constructed into linear narratives of ‘action’, punctuated by self-reflexive anticipations or accounts, a technique that has since come to inform much first-person and self-reflexive documentary output. One participant, Geoffrey Smith acknowledged that he sometimes found himself doing things for the camera’s sake, ‘rather than simply recording what I was doing’ (Keighron, 1993, p.34).<sup>150</sup>

The first programme *Pagan Belfast* (BBC2, 1990)<sup>151</sup> was an account of Robert Wilson, a young pagan returning to the city of his birth, and offered a representation of the province that moved beyond politically problematic sectarianism and the broadcasting restrictions that were in place. *Three Weeks in Calcutta* (BBC2 1990),<sup>152</sup> the second episode, documented the experiences of a woman volunteering in a family planning clinic in the Indian culture she was descended from but unfamiliar with. The third programme of the pilot, *My Demons* (BBC2 1990)<sup>153</sup> adopted a harsh cinéma vérité style, where the camera was used as a catalyst that forced and witnessed the subject’s father’s on-screen confession of the violence he had subjected his children to.<sup>154</sup> ‘It made a very

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<sup>150</sup> In *Searching for a Killer* (BBC2, 1992)

<https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/c60db793980c437ab8fccc8f8c9c5931>

<sup>151</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/9d979d2395c3429ebabc2040265e06fa>

<sup>152</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/8e3babf09f794d21b7fce2fa764257e4>

<sup>153</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/d0aa86f10199416eb941f0a1c61b6bb9>

<sup>154</sup> The programme generated so many calls to the Broadcasting Support Services that the participant Willa Woolston (née Carroll) established the Child Abuse Survivors Network, about which she made a second film for the strand *My Demons*, 1992.

powerful and disturbing diary, only made possible by the trust Willa felt towards CPU and the confidence which stemmed from her retaining editorial control' (Oakley with Lee-Wright 2017, p.225). It was nominated as the Best Single Documentary at the Royal Television Society for 1990 (Oakley with Lee-Wright).

*Spike and Clinton* (BBC2, 1990),<sup>155</sup> the fourth episode, documented two children in care as they reached the age where they would no longer be the responsibility of the system and their naïve excitement about what 'freedom' would entail. The final programme in the series was perhaps the most personal: *Just for the Record* (BBC2, 1990)<sup>156</sup> started with the intention of representing everyday life in a close-knit rural Welsh community. While making the film, the subject's grandmother died unexpectedly, and the film became a self-reflexive social documentary on the process and rituals of bereavement and community. It explored similar territory to some art-video practices, most notably perhaps in *Granny Is* (David Larcher, 1989), with a painful interrogation of family archives, personal memories and home-movie aesthetics.

The second series of *Video Diaries* aired between May and July 1991 with ten episodes, five of which were made by professional photographers or filmmakers. These included Jo Spence, a feminist photographic activist, who explored the use of personal photographs in the construction of the narrative of the self. In her programme *Surviving Memories* (BBC 2, 1991)<sup>157</sup> she explored the difficult relationship she had with her brother as she came to terms with a terminal illness. The inclusion of media professionals, those whose work is already informed by the principles, conventions and techniques of representation that traditional access projects aim to challenge and expose, moved the project further away from the access principles of the unit. Of the other programmes in this series, only one, *Promise You Won't Let Them Out on the Streets* (BBC2, 1991)<sup>158</sup> was made by a traditional access participant, disabled activist Steve Cribb.

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<sup>155</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/d8c1b36656be450f93b4de1c9c9902d1>

<sup>156</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/83fb67c205ad4a5ca7f99ab9983a0d58>

<sup>157</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/9fde6e575c424ebaa344845f0835d7bb>

<sup>158</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/596ec61afda44b50a886919489209e63>

In the successful applications to the programme there was an emphasis on 'selecting those who might make autobiographical statements' (Harvey, 2000, p.165). *The Man Behind the Gun* (BBC2, 1991)<sup>159</sup> was a first-person account of a reformed bank robber, a narrative of transformation and change. Another programme from people who had written in came in *Sweet SA*, (BBC2,1991),<sup>160</sup> an account of a mixed-race couple who had moved to the UK from South Africa and their experiences as they encountered different attitudes to their relationship. Other episodes utilised the unfolding narrative of which subjects have no control such as *On the March with Bobby's Army* (BBC2, 1991),<sup>161</sup> a football fan's travelogue as he travelled with a group of friends to the 1990 European Championships. The emphasis on autobiography can in part be explained as a necessity of the extended form: to fill an hour or more of television screen-time something needs to happen, and so the form lends itself to the narrative structures of equilibrium/disruption, particularly those of transformation. Equally, successful participants tended to be articulate, witty or otherwise engaging and with a story to tell. *Video Diaries* was not about the representation of people defined by the institution or themselves as ordinary, and importantly, neither did it claim to be. The participants were framed as members of the public or the audience, they were not necessarily representing marginalised communities, or ordinary experiences, and were often about lives not lived in the UK. This was a substantial move away from one of the CPU's founding intentions to represent the unrepresented and a move towards the existing documentary and current affairs agenda.

Even so, the strand produced 'some truly original broadcast content' (Dovey, 2000, p.148) and, through self-filming and the extended dialogic process, offered the highest levels of access possible in a regulated public broadcast service. It is however difficult to view *Video Diaries* as 'access television' as so few projects went ahead from the large number of applications that were received (Kilborn and Izod, 1997, p.82). The CPU received an average of 'eight applications a day from would-be diarists, [and] far more when the series was being transmitted' (Keighron, 1993, p.25), Yet, out of the 3000 who applied to take part in the first

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<sup>159</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/87ea8141f98f40e89b8b009036ca8a3a>

<sup>160</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/5f53cdb206064e49944f1108764253b4>

<sup>161</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/4b1c8817e316484885278aea14a670c9>

series of *Video Diaries*, only four people were successful (Humm, 1998, p.233). At the 1994 Edinburgh Television Festival session on 'DIY TV', Bob Long, the Executive Producer noted that, 'on average, just half of the available slots in any series were given to traditional access participants, that is those who had written in' (Long in Humm, 1998, p.233). The low levels of success for applicants was disappointing, particularly as Couldry reminds us, access slots 'occupy only a very small percentage of overall media output' (2000, p.186). While at first the CPU sought to 'change the view that the BBC only represented its invited guests' (Attenborough 1972, p.1), the gate-keeping processes of *Video Diaries* and the pressure on transmission slots meant that an increasing amount of the content was created by existing media professionals, as traditional access participants were rarely successful in the selection process.

### Accessing success

One of the strand's early successes was the result of a BBC audience member applying for airtime, *The Man who loves Gary Lineker* (BBC2, 1992) described in the *Radio Times* listing as:

Rural DP Dr Ylli Hasani risked imprisonment in totalitarian Albania by listening to BBC World Service to keep up to date with World events, especially English football. His film is the first programme to portray in depth the lives of ordinary Albanians as they live through massive social upheaval. Hasani tries to leave his country to work in the west, but his first visit to London is to supervise the completion of his film – and to try to meet some of his football idols, particularly Gary Lineker. <sup>162</sup>

The film won the 1993 Robert Flaherty award for documentary at the British Academy for Film and Television Arts Award (BAFTA). The following year the entire second series of *Video Diaries* was awarded a BAFTA for 'innovation'. This 'was the clearest indication that *Video Diaries* had moved out of the ghetto of worthiness in which access programming was invariably dumped and was now residing in the vicinity of documentary proper' (Keighron, 1993, p.24).

Programmes in later series reflected the more explicit identity practices of feminist and queer activist/artist output, displaying a refusal to be shamed for breaking societal restrictions on identity. This 'extends the *Video Diaries* format beyond the confessional form (which it quite often takes) to the point where it has an explicit therapeutic

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<sup>162</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/c78c8988ce8846db9df81cbfaee9fb0d>



function' (Kilborn and Izod, 1997, p.83). Sexual identities were explored in *Off The Rails* (BBC2, 1991),<sup>163</sup> a 'coming-out' video that a young gay Welshman made for his strictly religious parents to watch, and in *Not a Transvestite* (BBC2, 1992)<sup>164</sup> in which Mijka Scott articulated some of the emotional confusion and uncertainties of transgender identity.

According to Corner, the 'particular mix of vérité-style footage, intensely personal modes of address and often highly novel topics, themes and settings, engaged audiences in ways which surprised even the members of the Unit' (Corner, 1996, p.185). Ratings for *Video Diaries* showed that the audience for individual programmes increased during transmission, suggesting that 'people were sitting down, flicking through the channels and being "grabbed" by *Video Diaries*' and audience figures reached a million viewers for most programmes (Dovey, 1993, p.168). The strand's offspring *Teenage Video Diaries* (BBC2 achieved audiences of 1.5 million (Barker, 1992) and Chris Needham's account of a young wannabe rock star *In Bed With Chris Needham* (BBC2, 1992)<sup>165</sup> was watched by over two million viewers in two transmissions. Needham's diary documents the tribulations of a young heavy metal bassist, who has no bass and whose Mum wants him in bed before 9pm. The video, named after the recently released film *In Bed with Madonna – Truth or Dare* (Keshishian, 1991) ends with the acknowledgement that the process 'has been really helpful, but you can't make a video diary forever.'

For one producer and participant the production of a video diary for the strand had a lasting impact. Polly Steele, then a 25-year-old producer who had just completed a BBC Education series about West Africa, joined *Video Diaries* to work on the teenage strand. She recounted in interview with Simon Garfield for *The Guardian* that the series was looking for a good range of diarists for the series, and that it was 'understood that we'd get a better diary if the story was unfolding as it was being filmed, rather than someone relating something in retrospect' (Steele in Garfield, 2001). After substantial research Steele found an unusually bright and articulate young woman, Vonnie, a 16-year-old in the care

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<sup>163</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/1a1b43c839594ad583b537b7e57e3326>

<sup>164</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/7efb98f2a23349bcb6a51b99052b8664>

<sup>165</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/30a41daf529742a099dbf90112e181d2>

system who was both vulnerable and opinionated and would 'be perfect for a film' (Steele in Garfield, 2001, n.p.). While the producer was well aware that 'extreme cases make good stories' (Steele in Garfield, 2001), it was only in the making of the programme *Justice Sucks* (BBC2, 1992)<sup>166</sup> that the impact and extent of Vonnie's troubles became clear. The construction of someone's life experiences into a televisual narrative is always potentially problematic, particularly when the participant is a vulnerable minor. For the film, Vonnie was encouraged to make contact with her estranged grandmother; even though her producer knew that it might make Vonnie vulnerable, it 'would make a better film' (Steele in Garfield, 2001, n.p.). Her relationship with her foster parents broke down and her producer became her unofficial and somewhat unwilling guardian for three years, and whom Vonnie lived with on and off for a decade (Garfield, 2001, n.p.).

Oakley, as noted above, identified that the inexperience of some CPU producers might result in less successful programmes. More importantly, the inexperience of producers in maintaining the boundaries of the relationship led to producers becoming embroiled in the circumstances of the participants' lives. While Steele is reconciled with the circumstances she found herself in now, at the time she felt unsupported in this situation by both her Executive Producer and the BBC. That this situation arose demonstrates a substantial lack of judgement and a failure to consider the impact of the process on the participant who in this example felt that it was the BBC, rather than her producer (or Executive Producer or the CPU) who 'encourage(d) a child to talk directly about their experiences of paedophilia' (Garfield, 2001, n.p.). It is also not the only instance in which the question of the responsibility that broadcasters or documentary makers have towards their non-media professional subjects has been raised. Steele also identified that when working with the teenagers, '[i]t didn't take very much to persuade them to keep something in their film' (Garfield, 2001, n.p.); it is quite likely the case that it would not take much to persuade adults either.

The production costs of *Video Diaries* appeared minimal (no studio, no sets, no professional cast, no scripts, no location fees), involving only the provision of a camera and tape. Unusually for a something described as a series, each

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<sup>166</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/8f30fac9eb524a4383166b0154143323>

programme was built from scratch; there was no template to facilitate or expedite the filming process, as the narrative was constructed in post-production. An hour of *Video Diaries* cost £60,000 to £70,000 but could rarely be sold to other broadcasters, whereas a similar length Channel 4 documentary cost about a third more but could potentially generate income from international sales (Keighron, 1993, p.25). However, the intensity and extended duration of the participants' relationship with their producer/editor and the unpredictable post-production costs were difficult to anticipate as the high shooting ratios necessitated more time in the edit suite. This was one of the previously 'hidden' production costs that had to be taken into account in the internal market of the BBC in the 1990s which 'meant that BBC services must tender for their jobs and compete both with each other and with the independent sector' (Oakley with Lee Wright, 2017, p.226).

Even though *Video Diaries* was criticised for its selection of two professional photojournalists, Nick Danziger (*War Lies and Videotape*, BBC2, 1992)<sup>167</sup> and Chris Steele Perkins (*Dying for Publicity*, BBC2, 1993)<sup>168</sup> as participants in its third series (Dovey, 2000; Humm, 1998; Born, 2004), there was an economic advantage. It reduced editing time, easily the most expensive and least predictable element of the production. The inclusion of media professionals, whose work is already informed by the principles, conventions and techniques of representation allowed for cheaper content. It also moved the project even further away from access principles that sought to challenge and expose professionals' means of representation (Dovey, 2000). Additionally, this move reflected the decline in internally produced documentary and factual programming as independent companies pitched cheaper concepts, ideas and formats. Further, it demonstrates that the *Video Diaries* strand had 'passed' as a proper documentary format so successfully that it was considered within the wider department as a potential 'home' for programme ideas unlikely to get made elsewhere in the BBC at this point (Oakley and Lee Wright, 2016; Born 2004).

Further reductions in the slots available to traditional access participants happened at the same time as the CPU incorporated a new disabilities unit and

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<sup>167</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/96495610bc724a9b8516c4b1271d7d9c>

<sup>168</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/70aff894141d4b4d9b4bb397558d5382>

became the Community and Disability Programmes Unit (CDPU). The unit incorporated the training of staff with disabilities to make programmes about other people with disabilities or issues that concerned them, introducing the representative model of access that had until then been the main focus of some of Chanel 4's documentary participatory content. Oakley identified that commissioning another series of *Open Space* or *Video Diaries* was not going to make the name of a BBC2 Controller, even one as supportive as Alan Yentob (1987–1992; Oakley with Lee Wright, 2016).

The CPU continued producing content until 2002 (see Oakley and Lee Wright 2016 for more detail), *Open Space* was replaced by *Counterblast* (BBC 2, 1996–1999) and *Video Diaries* ended in 1997 (Oakley and Lee Wright, 2016). In its duration the initiative had created award-nominated and -winning content. *My Demons* was nominated by the BBC for the Royal Television Awards Best Single Documentary category in 1990, the entire second series won the BFI's Award for Innovation, *War Lies and Videotape* won the Prix Italia in 1993, and in the same year *The Man who loved Gary Lineker* was awarded the BAFTA (British Film and Television Awards) Flaherty Award. In 1994 *Major, Miners and Me* (BBC2, 1993)<sup>169</sup> won the Prix Nicki European TV Award and *Dying for Publicity* received the Premier Award at the One World Broadcast Trust. In 1995 *Mad, Bad and Sad* (BBC2, 1994)<sup>170</sup> was nominated by the Campaign for Racial Equality and the following year it won the Mental Health Media Award for best documentary. One of the last episodes of *Video Diaries*, *Child Slave Labour* (BBC2, 1997)<sup>171</sup> won the European Broadcasting Trust award for best documentary in 1997 (BBC Press release *Video Diaries*).<sup>172</sup> However, only one of the award-winning films (*Major, Miners and Me*) was made by an 'ordinary person', here in the context of non-media professional. It was also the only one that dealt with concerns of 'ordinary people' as the traditional working class in its discussion of the dismantling of the communities that once depended on the large-scale (unionised) industries. This demonstrates how the strand had quickly moved from the representation of traditional access participants and become used as a slot for more mainstream documentary output.

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<sup>169</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/ef6f11ee140c413abc6a044b01a18825>

<sup>170</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/6b1a4925b2c24da1a8cd71d47bb2201b>

<sup>171</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/60dcecbcc6bb4eb8aeb25657d27c30c8>

<sup>172</sup> T76/13/1 Video Nation

## Conclusion

The *Video Diaries* strand extended the contexts in which television content could be made, the video technology enabled self-filming which suggests at least authenticity in an address that is made from the privacy of the participants own home. The documentary length format however was perhaps too long to be sustained without some exceptional event to drive the narrative and so while the content may have been of interest to the UK terrestrial audience of 'ordinary people' the subjects were usually experiencing unusual, unfortunate or exceptional circumstances. The affordances of the technology for the participant meant that the participant could be loaned a camera and left to film what they chose, in the way they chose. Additionally, they could choose what they then showed to their producer, who in conjunction with the participant would construct the narrative in the edit suite, rather than as is standard practice in television production of filming to a shot sequence. The affordance of the technology for the participant in this example presented a significant time constraint on the producer that negated the economic advantage using 'ordinary people'. There were also problems related to the extended length of the relationship between producer and participant and at times there was perhaps not enough consideration on behalf of the media professionals as to the effect that being the subject of a first - person documentary might have, particularly if the subject was painful or distressing.

The chapter has also identified the role and motivations of particular individuals in the CPU, here in particular Bob Long, Jeremy Gibson and Alan Yentob who was promoted to Controller of BBC1 in 1993, Before he left BBC he approved a new CPU project, *Video Nation*. Its aim was to more accurately represent contemporary society in new formats and technologies. *Video Nation* is the subject of the remaining chapters of this research.

## Chapter 10 *Video Nation* Broadcast, 1994–2000

In 1992, at the point when *Video Diaries* was receiving its first wave of critical acclaim, Alan Yentob, Controller of BBC2, approved a proposal for a spin-off project from the *Video Diaries* Executive Producer Bob Long and Head of the CPU Jeremy Gibson. *Video Nation*, the proposed project, was ‘among the most exciting and socially valuable things to come out of the access philosophy’, according to incoming Head of the CPU Giles Oakley (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2017, p.228). The importance of the project was two-fold: firstly, in the new production context of broadcast content by members of the public in a new technologically enabled context; and secondly in the value of the content, which would be retained as a publicly available resource, at the BFI.

An undated proposal written by Gibson and Long entitled *Something’s Going On Out There*<sup>173</sup> laid out the proposed new initiative to reflect the experiences of ‘ordinary people’ throughout the 1990s. The project’s motivation was to produce innovative BBC television content with techniques that enabled the participation of non-media professionals, with ‘ordinary people’ constructed as amateurs. It positioned itself as a technologically enhanced version of the M-O project of the 1930s, and an extension of the BDM (both discussed in Chapter 4). Originally conceived as a project in conjunction with the camcorder and electronics manufacturer JVC, successful participants would be given a domestic camcorder for a year, trained in its use, regularly supplied with tape and supported in the production of broadcast content by the project producers. Although the collaboration with JVC did not transpire, *Video Nation* was commissioned by Yentob at a cost of ‘around half a million pounds, without knowing precisely what programmes might emerge’ (Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2017, p.228). Content would be produced by a wide cross-section of video correspondents from around the country and while the content had not been fully defined, there were clear ideas about formats in which the footage could be utilized: ‘*Video Nation* is flexible programming – tantalizing 10-minute chunks, longer thematic compilations, segments inside other programmes. It can be both narrative-based or more eclectic’ (Gibson and Long, n.d., p.5).

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<sup>173</sup> WAC: [Video Nation T76/6/1](#)

As Gibson and Long saw it, the 'video footage represents a unique kind of record, neither scripted documentary nor home movie, and will be of increasing interest in the coming years' (Gibson and Long, n.d., p.7). While the focus was on the ordinary, the domestic and the everyday, the more slapstick and often celebratory type of content of *You've Been Framed* would be avoided through the project training and briefs that would enable content to be packaged around recurring themes. According to the proposal, '[t]he *Video Nation* project aims to capture the high ground in camcorder television, exploiting the shift in television towards the subjective – from the inside looking out – whilst building a unique social record of Britain as we arrive at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century' (Gibson and Long, n.d.p.1). In fact, moving towards the subjective in broadcasting was something the CPU had employed as a means of making less contentious content that could be framed as a personal viewpoint, rather than particular concerns that might have a wider societal relevance. The move to the subjective had happened with the shift from *Open Door* to *Open Space*, and then in the *Personal View* series that aired when *Open Space* did not, and then in *Video Diaries*.

Bonner's identification of the regional or local relevance of access programmes (Bonner, 1975)<sup>174</sup> was mirrored in the *Video Nation* proposal, which suggested that the packaging of programmes 'can be extended across all types of areas – race (multi-cultural experience), regions (islands, north and south), locations (villages, suburbs and more' (Gibson and Long, n.d., p. 3)

A small project team would be led by Bob Long as Executive Producer and two project producers recruited to manage what was envisaged to be a network of 50 contributors around the country. When the project producers Chris Mohr and Mandy Rose were employed, they visited the M-O archive at the University of Sussex to research the themes explored and the way that the M-O participatory process had been managed.<sup>175</sup> According to Rose, the connection with the M-O movement was crucial as it 'provided a "model for investigating life in all its rich strangeness by focusing on areas in which people have a level of autonomy and control"' (Rose, 2000, p.175). The project aimed to recruit 50 participants to represent their lives and experiences for a year and although broadcast formats for the content had still not been defined, it was an 'unusual if not unique basis for a broadcast production' (Rose, 2000, p.174). The

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<sup>174</sup> WAC: Access Programmes R78/2/540/1

<sup>175</sup> M-O relaunched as an active data collection project on the occasion of the marriage of Prince Charles and Diana Spencer in 1984.

aim of the project was 'to establish a group who would collectively reflect the diversity of Britain today and key themes in society now' (Rose, 1994/95, p.10).

*Video Nation* was promoted on local radio and television to recruit participants. Additional (and substantial) efforts were made to attract under-represented groups that had not been reached by mainstream promotion, through a grassroots campaign that included:

leafletting estates, posting ads in local shops, addressing community groups/schools etc. Talking to people in pubs and playgrounds, using gatekeepers to access individuals, reading and placing ads/interviews in local and ethnic press etc (Mohr in Carpentier, 2003b, p25).

Through the 'mainstream' and 'grassroots' elements of the campaign, the project generated between 3000 (Rose, 2000, p.175) and 4000 (Dovey, 2000, p.129) responses from which 57 people were selected so that the project was 'broadly representative' (Rose, 1994/95, p.24). This was less than 2 per cent of applicants, whichever figure was correct. Applicants underwent a selection process by phone, face-to-face contact and filmed interviews and, if successful, undertook to submit 90 minutes of footage per fortnight, for a nominal sum that was paid out over the year of their participation.

The aim was to provide a sample that would '... broadly speaking, mirror the country in terms of income range, regional spread and political opinion, [although] we were clear that we couldn't represent the country' (Rose, 1994, p.24). Instead, a sample of contemporary society was used to extend the range of represented individuals and experiences and reflect contemporary Britain by 'mapping everyday life and attitudes to the 90s' (Rose, 2000, p.175). According to *Video Nation* Newsletter 1<sup>176</sup> the original group of 57 participants was comprised of 43 based (though not necessarily born) in England, seven from Scotland, three from Wales and three from Northern Ireland. One participant dropped out. Successful participants included an unemployed black youth from Birmingham, a peer of the realm (a member of the aristocracy), a merchant banker, an ME sufferer (myalgic encephalomyelitis, a debilitating viral syndrome), a soldier, a house husband, a vicar, a single mother, a nun, a refugee and a new age traveller or 'hippy'. At least ten of the original participants were from non-British ethnicities; 30 were

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<sup>176</sup> T76/13/1 Video Nation



women and 11 were over 60 years old. The youngest participant, a 12-year old girl from Doncaster, was the daughter of the *Video Diaries* contributor Brenda Nixon who made the award-winning *Major, Miners and Me* discussed in the previous chapter. The oldest was a 73-year-old retired army officer from Devon. The group profile demonstrates the project's commitment to be broadly representative in terms of race, age and gender; however, it also exposed statistical stereotypes. For example, the only black youth was one of five unemployed participants.

These aims fulfilled the first of what Corner identifies as central to access principles, namely 'the articulation of diversity of directly stated views from different sections of the public' but the reflection, 'again "directly", of the real diversity of cultural social and economic circumstances, particularly those which require attention and action' (Corner, 1994, p.23) was less clear. Even so, it should not be ignored that the project was so carefully managed by gatekeeping processes, instructions, themes and briefs, and generic professional techniques used to construct televisual narrative, that the intention first articulated in the CPU by the *Open Door* slogan 'have your say, in your own way' had lost its traction. Participants were free to record any content they chose in any way that they chose to, and they were shown. 'any material we wanted to transmit in context (and were) able to say no if, for any reason, they weren't happy with it (Rose, 1994/95, p.12). Equally, there was no obligation on the BBC to transmit any of the content participants submitted although there was far more chance of content being selected if it covered one of the themes selected by the project, which were chosen with particular ideas for formats already in mind. 'Once the material is gathered in, it is harvested. The role of the production team is to represent this material fairly, carefully compiling the contributions into packages' (Gibson and Long, n.d.). The compilation into packages was another level of mediation in the representation process, as one of the ways that the broadcast system regulates 'the relationship with a potential audience, organising the way in which material is likely to be watched' (Corner, 1994, p.33)

By establishing the format as a BBC2 'project', *Video Nation* was less constrained by internal marketplace commissioning, which was affecting CPU output (see Oakley with Lee-Wright, 2016 and Born, 2000) but would still have to pitch for transmission slots. The original proposal suggested formats that might be 90 seconds to 90 minutes in

duration, might be single-contributor programmes or compilations based on particular themes and the 'intention was that the material would have a stylistic coherence' so that the compilation programmes would share an aesthetic. Participants were asked to follow 'common styles, pieces to camera, establishing shots outside the house close-ups and profiles of the family, tours of the domestic environment and the all-important static shots and cutaways' (Gibson and Long, n.d.).

This production context of *Video Nation* has been described as a maximalist participatory project (Carpentier, 2011) but the participation as well as the selection process was carefully managed, and to a greater extent shaped or even defined by the institution. Often, but not always, participants created the raw content as a response to a request from the broadcaster, who then selected, edited and compiled it into programmes where a diversity of opinions and experiences could be expressed on a universal theme suggested by the project. Instead of the dialogic process associated with the CPU, the emphasis in *Video Nation* is on teaching non-media professionals to use the same tropes of representation as media professionals might, although perhaps not to the same standard. It occupies an interesting position as an access project as it reflects the concerns of the institution to which participants can respond rather than the more traditional notion of access where particular manifestations that impact on participants' lives can be brought into a limited arena of the public sphere. The participants may have pressed 'record', but the agenda for the content was frequently set by the project, from a unit that, however radical it aspired to be at different stages in its existence, was always also positioned firmly within the BBC. As Corner points out: 'So, the emergence of domestic video technology, whilst it radically alters the production potential for access is still dependent on the institutional system of broadcast television for its public status' (Corner, 1994, p.33).

Once the 50 participants had been recruited, the project team had concerns about how to engage with them so that they had 'enough support and feedback to feel motivated' (Rose, 2000, p.175). The original project proposal had identified training days, telephone contact, personal visits and written guidelines as the means by 'which the video footage will be 'produced' by the team' (Gibson and Long, n.d.). The establishment of a project newsletter and residential workshop weekends fostered a sense of group identity and camaraderie. The workshop programme focused on the capabilities of the technology and the enthusiasm within the CPU for the video diary

and the video short as a broadcast form (Long in Carpentier, 2003; Rose in interview, 2010). The project assumed that contributors were to some extent media-literate, and familiar with the grammar of television (Rose, 2000, p.178) and that in 'training them we aim to clarify how they can use elements of that grammar to communicate what they want and to maximize the possibility of their material working in a broadcast context' (Rose, 2000, p.179).

The focus was on using the new representational strategies enabled by the size and simplicity of the technology, and the use of '...certain templates or certain structures like the piece to camera, where you speak to the camera, or when you're talking from behind the camera as you're showing something' (Rose in interview, 2010). *Video Nation* participants were also given exercises that 'taught them to film subjectively' (Rose, 1994, p.10).<sup>177</sup> This technique was recommended in the filming skills sections that appeared in the first single-sided project newsletter where participants were encouraged to '... treat your camera like a close friend – take it out from time to time, tell it your innermost feelings and whatever happens, don't neglect it' (*Video Nation* Newsletter 1 n.d.). This was one way that the project ensured that participants steered clear of the type of content familiar from home movies and programmes like *You've Been Framed*.

Events with a natural narrative or dramatic potential were favoured as one way that participants could 'record significant moments as they occurred'. One such technique is the opening of an anticipated letter (Rose, 2000, p.175), a frequently adopted strategy that can be seen in numerous shorts that reveal exam results and offers of employment, or other life-changing events such as pregnancy tests or HIV tests. The project included an envelope-opening exercise in its fortnightly briefing, which suggested that participants should set up the camera and place themselves in front of it while recording before opening the envelope so they would give a spontaneous response on the requested theme. Another frequently used strategy was to contain the monologue or action within universal everyday routine tasks such as ironing, eating breakfast, washing up or other housework. This helps to naturalise the pro-filmic moment of video diary and locates the

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<sup>177</sup> This is a technique that Pat Jackson developed in his wartime short *Builders* (discussed in Chapter 4), where the subject addressed the camera as a familiar face (Jackson, 1999).

viewer firmly in the participant's home, and also provides a familiar framework for viewers to identify with. As Turner points out, participatory media projects

have developed production techniques which help to ensure that "reality" is satisfactorily performed by the ordinary citizen even when their ordinariness – given the processes of selection through which they have had to progress – is at least debatable (Turner, 2010, p.19).

The irregular newsletters consistently reminded participants 'to film at least two details (cutaways) of every sequence that includes a piece to camera'.<sup>178</sup> It encouraged them to provide still and moving images of elements that related to themselves or their location, such as the view from the window, a framed photograph or an object on the mantelpiece. Cutaways provide additional and contextual visual footage that could be used to disguise edits in the audio-visual recording, perhaps where the participant lost lucidity, focus or coherence; alternatively, they could be used to add visual interest or pacing to a text. A cutaway signified a rupture in the original audiovisual recording that problematised the veracity of the representation, in what Winston described as the 'immorality' of the cutaway.<sup>179</sup>

The first batch of material submitted by participants was, according to Rose, 'a revelation' (Rose, 2000, p.176), even though much of it was generated in response to institutionally suggested 'universal' themes such as money, family, women, men, aging and Christmas: '[t]he recordings revealed the people themselves to be surprising; multi-faceted, sometimes contradictory. They refuse to conform to preconceptions' (Rose, 2000, p.176). The duration of a year enabled participants to develop a relationship with their producer and, although this was not as intense as occurred in *Video Diaries*, it enabled producers to make sympathetic choices in the editing suite when the participant was not present. It also enabled participants to produce multiple shorts, and to develop a range of media production competencies.

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<sup>178</sup> T76/13/1 *Video Nation* Newsletter 3 (n.d.).

<sup>179</sup> 'Truth and other Naivities' Nick Burton Memorial Lecture at Canterbury Christ Church University, 11 February 2008.

## Project output

Ideas for potential programmes and formats emerged as ways that the material could be compiled into packages and the first transmission slot was given to *Money, Money, Money* (BBC2, 1994), a 50-minute documentary compiled from participant responses. To promote the programme, Michael Jackson, who became controller of BBC2 in 1993 (when Alan Yentob was promoted to Controller of BBC1), asked the project to produce a series of short video 'trailers' to promote the project generally and the first compilation programme the week before transmission. The short-form was a relatively new innovation in BBC2, having been used in a slot before *Newsnight* the previous year with the transmission of the series *Sarajevo – A Street Under Siege* (Rose, 2000). The first *Video Nation* shorts were transmitted in this slot between factual programming and were not just a trail for the programme itself, but also a means of familiarising the audience with what was a strikingly different aesthetic for television.

The project made ten shorts 'out of some of the most arresting moments' (Rose, 2000, p.176) of the footage they had received and proudly announced in the project newsletter 1 that some 'very short, appetite-whetting programmes' offering 'a cameo picture of some of the contributors' would start on Monday 7 March 1994 on BBC2 although the transmission times will vary and the shorts may not be billed.' The fact that the individual shorts were not billed has meant that it has not been possible to include transmission information in this study. However, the use of the short form mirrored the intention David Hall envisaged for *10 TV Interruptions* in 1972 (discussed in Chapter 8), where the content and aesthetic of a short video piece had the potential to disrupt Raymond Williams' concept of the 'flow' of television (Williams, 1983). By providing a contrast to all that surrounded it, the seemingly natural video material would potentially have the effect of highlighting the constructed nature of the television text (Dovey, 2000, p.122).

As the launch approached, Mandy Rose became concerned that the project should define and adopt an editorial standpoint because it 'felt like an abdication of responsibility as a producer to transmit views without context or comment' (Rose, 2000, p.177). In discussion with Editorial Policy at the BBC, it was

decided that the shorts would be prefaced 'with a presentation announcement explaining that the programmes represented personal views' (Rose, 2000, p.177) to guard against claims of impartiality. The project also undertook to ensure balance by countering 'a piece contain[ing] an explicitly political argument' with an 'alternative position at a later date' (Rose, 2000, p.177). The presentation announcement also functioned as a continuation of the practice of distinguishing amateur content by a disclaimer or tag, which was identified earlier in relation to documentary film, radio and television news content.

### The first short

The first short to be transmitted, *Mirror* was made by Colonel Gordon Hencher<sup>180</sup>, the project's oldest participant, in response to a project suggestion of 'Your Least Favourite Thing'. It is a 1.14-minute short that opened with three cutaway shots of mirrors before cutting to a real-time armchair monologue, about the subject's relationship with his reflection, delivered in direct address to a static camera. Once the Colonel has finished saying his piece, his performance to camera, he leans forward and turns the camera – and us, the viewers – off. The performance of a fluid, seemingly unscripted monologue engaged the viewer as though they were in the subject's home. The 'armchair' monologue of Colonel Hencher adopted a conversational tone, and 'the viewer is addressed as an equal participant in a dialogic process' (Dovey, 2000, p.126), at least until they are shut out by being turned off.

The Colonel was articulate, engaging and concise. He made his point succinctly without stumbling over his words or repeating himself, demonstrating a competency in expressing his thoughts and a confidence in his 'spontaneous' presentation. The performance suggested that the monologue had been considered, and possibly rehearsed, before it was delivered. However, Mandy Rose remembered the transmitted short was the only take that appeared on the tape, preceded by the cutaways of mirrors in a bathroom. It was transmitted in its raw form, topped and tailed by the *Video Nation* logo (Rose in interview, 2010) and preceded by the presentation announcement or disclaimer that this was a personal opinion. The inclusion of the cutaway shots at the start of the tape

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<sup>180</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/london\\_mirror.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/london_mirror.shtml)

suggested that the Colonel was not necessarily anticipating that the monologue would be transmitted as a continuous, real-time performance. The competence of his delivery runs counter to the long-standing concerns within the BBC about the ability of non-media professionals to make 'effective' broadcasting. It may also be true that in some cases the very presence of a media professional inhibits the competency of a non-media professional.

The real-time monologue of this short suggested a shared temporality, in which a direct and immediate address appeared through the medium of television in the privacy of the domestic environment. That the first transmitted short included the 'viewer' being 'switched off' suggests that the highest level of control had been extended to the participant and emphasises the 'access' roots of the project. The arms-length proximity of the subject to the lens reflected early feminist art practice, as does the inclusion of cutaways featuring mirrors in the private domestic spaces of bathrooms and bedrooms. According to Rose, the footage submitted by participants was 'usually made in the intimate space of the home, [and] opened up private worlds of thought and feeling' (Rose, 2000, p.176). The implicit invitation suggested by proximity, the intimate mode of address and the factual domestic environment exposed viewers to a mediated construction of a face-to-face encounter, and even with a static mounted camera 'the entire *mise-en-scène* is more casual, less formal, more fluid than even the handheld 16mm camera' (Dovey, 2000, p.126).

### Contexts of 'ordinariness' and 'ordinary people'

While the *Video Nation* project became associated with the term 'ordinary people', the phrase was not used within the archival documents that relate to the project launch. Neither was it used within the project itself where participants were referred to as correspondents, contributors or just participants, even though Rose acknowledged that 'all of these terms were unwieldy and too institutional' (Rose in interview, 2010). However, an undated press release written by the project's press officer, Jo Petherbridge just before the first content was transmitted, entitled 'BBC launches unique project to map life in the 1990s'<sup>181</sup> includes this sentence: 'The success of *Video Diaries* has shown that the

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<sup>181</sup> T76/13/1 Video Nation press release n.d.

autobiographies of “ordinary” people can bring a completely new dimension to television’.<sup>182</sup> This is despite the fact that so few of the *Video Diaries* contributors had been ordinary (as discussed in Chapter 9) and that the phrase or word had not been used in relation to the *Video Diaries* strand, perhaps because of negative and pejorative associations. Its use in the press release was picked up by the media, perhaps in part due to the legacy of M-O but also in relation to the popularity of emerging ‘reality tv’ formats that featured ‘ordinary people’.

In response to this press release and the first transmission of content, Alison Pearson of the *Independent on Sunday* wrote an article entitled ‘Life is Cheap at the BBC’ (1994), which accused project participants of ‘being losers and wannabes’ exploited by the BBC keen to make cheap content. This prompted a response from Bob Long the following week, reiterating that there was no economic imperative in using non-media professionals since, as he identified, the production context of *Video Nation* cost the same as a conventional documentary. While this may have been true in relation to *Video Diaries*, it is difficult to compare the *Video Nation* production context with that of a conventional documentary due to the ongoing nature of the relationship between project and participant, and its duration. Far from being the ‘losers and wannabes’, of Pearson’s description, Long explained that people had taken part because they thought it was a worthwhile project, and ‘because they thought of themselves as ‘ordinary people’ whom television rarely featured’ (Long, 1994). It might have been a phrase or term used in the selection process, the interviews and discussions and it might also have been a phrase used by participants to describe themselves in these contexts, but this is the first time that *Video Nation* explicitly and publicly described participants as ‘ordinary people’.

Despite the scathing criticism of Pearson, the novelty of the self-filmed video short as a broadcast form of a trailer generated a largely positive response in the press. However, the form was not one that ‘the audience was easy with at first’ (Rose, 2000, p.176). The aesthetics, the mode of address and the content of the shorts led some viewers express ‘confusion and irritation with the form and the content’ in complaints registered in the BBC duty log (Rose, 2000, p.176). One

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid



short in which three women discussed a female condom generated the response from one viewer that 'it sounded vulgar and smelt fishy; but what was the point?' (unnamed viewer in Rose, 2000, p.177). In the main though, the video diary fragment demonstrated a new form of participation that viewers found engaging; according to the *Video Nation* newsletter 2 '... more than a million people watch the shorts each night and comments that we have received suggest that viewers are frequently moved, amused or occasionally horrified by them'.<sup>183</sup>

However, the positive response of the press and media professionals contributed to the commissioning of regular content for the slot before *Newsnight* (Rose, 2000, p.176). Shorts were transmitted five nights per week for 40 weeks of the year within an established current affairs section in the schedule. The positioning of 'ordinary people' after the news and before *Newsnight* encouraged viewers to make connections between the public and the private, and to have societal concerns framed from the perspective of individual experience, although the content of the shorts was rarely topical. 'The BBC needed to find new ways of reflecting the wide range of views, attitudes and lifestyles that were out there and the *Video Nation* project was one way of doing that' (Rose, 2000, p.177). The establishment of the short as the regular format, an extended vox pop rather than the auto/biographical form of *Video Diaries*, had implications for the project and for the training of the participants. As Yptreberg points out, participation became governed by 'the process of formatting, that is, as a preparing of the participant for the format's requirements that runs from the first contact to the performance itself' (Yptreberg, 2004, p.682).

This is an instance where *Video Nation* needs to be considered differently to other participatory broadcast projects. Individual participants were recruited to the *Video Nation* project, which might or might not result in content being broadcast. The likelihood of broadcast was largely dependent on the depth, duration and effectiveness of the one-to-one relationship between participant and producer, the participant's commitment to the project and their ability to follow instructions and respond to project suggestions of content within the range of acceptable shots and techniques. This was a very different premise to the mode of participation originally extended by the CPU to groups of individuals with a

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<sup>183</sup> T76/13/1 *Video Nation* Newsletter 2 (n.d.).

defined topic that they wanted to make a programme about. In *Video Nation*, participants responded to subjects or techniques suggested by the project, with spoken monologues being delivered while the participant undertook an everyday task. This combined everyday domestic routines with the vérité techniques that accompany pro-filmic moments. Another project directive suggested that the participants record events where the narrative unfolds quickly. Jean Lee's short *Wishing and Hoping*<sup>184</sup> is a striking example of this, documenting her emotions as she waits for the (negative) result of a home pregnancy test. More frequently it was contained within the 'envelope-opening' events of (positive) exam results and job offers, as mentioned earlier. One participant, Dinousha Malina, recalled in the interview with her how she took a different approach in her short *Adopted*<sup>185</sup> as she recorded herself opening the cards she had received on her birthday, before emotionally revealing that the card she most wanted was one that she had never received from her birth mother (Malina in interview, 2010).

Not all everyday routines were considered acceptable for broadcast. Dinousha Malina, a participant from 1995–1998, recalled in interview that for one of the training events at a project workshop weekend, she performed a monologue to camera while urinating on the toilet. There was, she recounts, '... no great intention to shock on my part. It was just that we were given a few minutes to go off and record something and I was desperate to go to the toilet.' She said that it was made very clear that this was not a 'suitable' everyday task for broadcast. (Malina in interview, 2010). While not suitable for broadcast, this example reflects some of the techniques being used at that time in both feminist and queer art practice. The convention of direct address to an arms-length camera position, often filmed in the 'intimate' space of a bathroom or bedroom, was increasingly being used to signify the authentic and the truthful in the emerging genre of reality tv.

Clearly not all content or subject matter was appropriate for broadcast although the maximalist participatory model of *Video Nation* led producers to suggest that it might be reshot in a different way. One participant, who will remain anonymous undertook five reshoots in response to the producer's comments before getting a

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<sup>184</sup>[http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/s/southern\\_wishing.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/s/southern_wishing.shtml).

<sup>185</sup> No source available

take that they were both happy with. These five reshoots involved the participant filming themselves while driving considerably over the speed limit, a passion that the was the subject of the short. The participant was unable to remember whether the implications of this were discussed, or whether the dangers of broadcasting illegal behavior were fully made clear.

In the early days of the broadcast phase, editing was kept to a minimum, the frequently requested cutaways were used sparingly, and usually as establishing shots. When edits did occur, they were far more likely to be dissolves or fades within the address to camera. The discussion or dialogic process about the submitted material enabled the project producer to articulate concerns about whether the footage 'worked' as a broadcast short and, perhaps more importantly, to make suggestions about how the material and the individual shots might be framed more effectively.

#### The television interface

The frequency of transmission of the shorts helped ensure that they became the project's best-known and most popular format; within the first year, the shorts were attracting audiences of between 1.1 million and 1.9 million viewers.<sup>186</sup> All of the output was branded and used the same title graphic as its broadcast interface, which displayed a 49-frame grid featuring the *Video Nation* title in the middle surrounded by miniaturized 'talking heads' of 28 of the participants (Dovey, 2000, p.127). The graphic might be seen to demonstrate the plurality of late modernity, where 'a national identity that is predicated upon difference and equality' (Dovey, 2000, p.126) was represented in a taxonomy of 'ordinary people'. According to Dovey, the project's television interface offered a sense 'of the contemporary, up-to-date, 'cutting-edge' nation as well as the sense of video as medium of identity and authenticity' (Dovey, 2000, p.127).

However, the explicit framing of the shorts as amateur through the presentation announcement, the fragmentary nature, the limited duration and the emphasis on personal opinion had the capacity to occlude some of the more contested issues and divisions of a multi-cultural society. According to Morrison, '[r]acism,

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<sup>186</sup> T76/13/1 *Video Nation* Newsletter 4 (n.d.).

xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, snobbery – the things that divide us – do not feature in this version of British society’ (Morrison in Rose, 2000, p.50). There were exceptions: for example, Dovey discussed a short made by the victim of a racist attack (Dovey, 2000, p.129) making clear the distinctions between the phenomenon and the actor.<sup>187</sup> More frequently, shorts refused to accept the negative connotations at the root of these opinions and challenge and offer counter-representations. For example, Gerard McDermott’s *Pride*<sup>188</sup> offered an explicit celebration of gay male identity recorded during a Manchester Pride event. In this hand-held, self-filmed monologue, a young man addressed the viewer in extreme close-up, to recount just how fantastic sex with men was and how glad he was to be gay, reflecting the refusal to be shamed characteristic of identity politics.

More subtle interventions that challenged traditional broadcast output were also represented. In the short *Daffodils*,<sup>189</sup> Connie Marks, a recently separated, older black woman recited verses of poetry that she was taught as a school child in Jamaica. ‘[A]s a viewer you experience Connie’s enthusiasm for the poem at the same time as learning about the cultural imperialism that she describes with equanimity’ (Rose, 2000, p.181). The mellifluousness of Connie’s accent momentarily suggested that the recitation was continuing. With ‘bewilderment in her voice’ (Carpentier, 2003, p.22), she recounted that she had never seen a daffodil when she was taught this poem. An unsympathetic edit, most likely caused by the participant’s unfamiliarity with the need to record a few seconds of audio before starting to speak, diluted the poignancy with which Connie related the impact of cultural imperialism on her personal experience.

As had been anticipated in the original project proposal *Something’s Going On Out There* (Gibson and Long n.d., p.4) some project participants developed a facility with technology and were enthused by the project and became ‘star’ participants, whereas others quickly lost interest. This might have been due to the nature of the training and the relationship established between the producer

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<sup>187</sup> The *White* season (BBC2 2008) discussed later in this chapter was supported by *Video Nation* accounts of the experiences of the traditional white working class in areas.

<sup>188</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/m/manchester\\_pride.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/m/manchester_pride.shtml)

<sup>189</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/l/london\\_daffodils.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/l/london_daffodils.shtml)

and the participant, as much as to the individual's own interests or competencies. As the first year of the project progressed, some participants did not submit any material; some did not have any material broadcast; some dropped out after one broadcast; and others were producing shorts that were consistently broadcast.

### Compilation programmes

However, shorts were not the only output: in the first year the project produced a series of seven themed compilation programmes around 'universalities' that served as an institutional and ideological framework for content. The initial topics suggested to the participants were the 'universal' themes of money, family, women, men, evening, morning and Christmas. *Money Money Money* (BBC1, 1994) was the programme that the trailers were made for. According to the project newsletter, the third programme on the subject of women achieved audience figures of 0.5 million, the highest ratings for the early compilation formats.<sup>190</sup> By the end of 1995 the project was producing six and a half hours of broadcast content per year, about the same amount of content as the *Video Diaries* series, but representing a substantially larger selection and more diverse range of people, albeit in significantly shorter time slots.

The level of participant control suggested by the use of real-time footage is negated by the compilation format wherein parts of performances, made in response to an institutionally defined theme, were selected and arranged by the broadcaster. Although some of the excerpts might have been 'uncut', they were unlikely to cover the complete performance. Such formats were highly mediated: they offered a selection of commissioned, thematically produced material, edited in line with concerns over the running order of the submissions, the length of the clip, the relevance or effectiveness of the content, and the range of positions that were being represented.

*Video Nation Uncut* (BBC 2 1994–1998) developed as a means of utilising the effective real-time performances of more confident participants, which were too long for the short form but would lose too much of their essence if edited. The privileging of 'real-time' in the shorts produced by ongoing diarists, where the

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<sup>190</sup> T76/13/1 *Video Nation* Newsletter 4 (n.d.).

recorded temporality is imposed over the real-time present of the viewer, was a strategy widely explored by video artists working within gallery exhibition forms (Dovey, 2000, p.122) and theorised in Krauss's notion of video's ability to 'bracket' time, just as Sontag and others ascribed to photography the ability to freeze the moment (Krauss, 1986). With participants who wanted to make a more substantial point, or those who were less succinct, their footage might be used in the *Video Nation Uncut* programmes, which were produced by Rose. The authority of the participant was enacted in their choices of what and when to film on a subject they elect to speak on or to respond to. It was a highly staged and self-facilitated event; participants choose when and what to film: 'They have decided that this scene is worth recording and have set the camera up and turned it on' (Rose, 2000, p.179) and in so doing, decisions were made, consciously or unconsciously about content, *mise-en-scène*, self-(re)presentation and audience.

One ambiguity of the video diary text that Matthews (2007) identified in the award-winning documentary *Capturing the Friedmans* (Jarecki, 2003) is where the subject, dressed in his underwear in the seemingly neutral location of a hotel room, says that, unless we-the-audience are him, we 'really shouldn't be watching'. While conventions like these suggested and signified intimacy and authenticity, they also suggested familiarity through the proximity, content and context but whatever the ambiguities of the video-diary text, the direct address to camera was always pro-filmic – made for the camera – although in *Video Nation* the domestic and everyday routine served to naturalise the moment. Rose offered a reminder that what the viewers see was not what happened *despite* the fact that the camera was there but, in true *vérité* style, what happened *because* the camera was there (Rose, 2000, p.179). As this implies, the video-diary mimics a first-hand encounter between subject and viewer, without regard for performances of deference and demeanour embedded in real-world interactions. The use of real time emphasised the sense of immediacy (and the absence of mediation) because it was not edited and offered a representation of an uninterrupted and complete performance. In such contexts in particular, *Video Nation* 'contributors are all too aware that they are being given a chance to "speak to the nation"' (Dovey, 2000, p.129), to occupy the irrefutable authorial position extended to the monarch in the *Royal Message to the Nation*, and

already parodied in Ian Breakwell's *Alternative Message to the Nation* (Channel 4, 1982).<sup>191</sup>

Some long-standing participants became 'expert practitioners', who passed on their knowledge to new participants in sessions within the workshops and also in making training shorts, on lighting, recording sound, cutaways and so on that were distributed on VHS to potential participants. One of these expert practitioners, Ian McKinnon, presented the *Video Nation Review of the Year* (1994). The programme was highlighted by *Radio Times*<sup>192</sup> for its non-professional aesthetic, and as 'a bumper collection of the best entries'. The programme opened with a sequence of clips that displayed 'engagingly amateur incompetence' (Humm, 1998); this response undermined some of the project's attempts to distance itself from the aesthetic of *You've Been Framed*. One participant and her son took part in a session on DIY TV with Executive Producer Bob Long at the Edinburgh Television Festival in 1996<sup>193</sup> and others were invited to participate in internal conferences or to make representations to the Board of Governors (Born, 2004) or dinner with the Director General.<sup>194</sup>

### Rapid expansion

As the project developed, *Video Nation* extended the range of production contexts available for participants in ways that did not reflect the workshop-based training or support offered to the ongoing diarists. The extent of experimental forms being explored by the project is demonstrated in the increase in the number of staff from the original three-person team to seven in 1994, then to 25 in 1995. Many of these were producers on short-term secondments to the project for particular initiatives, such as *Glastonbury Shorts* from the annual music festival. Under the guidance of Brenda Kelly, ex-producer of Channel 4 strand *Snub TV*, the production context of the shorts was extended to train new television staff. It is somewhat ironic that the production contexts for non-media professionals became colonised by media professionals at exactly the same time

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<sup>191</sup> Breakwell's previously mentioned work *The Continuous Diary* had been the subject of a 1977 edition of *Arena*, produced by Alan Yentob.

<sup>192</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/cf2d2ae732a044d0b77cf09039a595f7>

<sup>193</sup> Danousia Malina in interview, 2010

<sup>194</sup> Denise Lester in interview, 2009

as mainstream media formats were introducing 'ordinary people' into formats that incorporated access techniques.

One such programme was Channel 4's *The Real Holiday Show* (Channel 4, 1994–2004) that employed the participant training model within a focus on high days and holidays. In the *Caribbean Shorts* (1998) produced by *Video Nation* to support the Windrush series (BBC2, 1998) British people of Afro-Caribbean descent often poignantly encountered an unfamiliar past framed within the promise of a Caribbean holiday. While there were growing concerns that normal programming was co-opting the techniques of access television (Born, 2004; Oakley, 2017), the *Video Diaries* series was at the same time co-opting techniques of mainstream programming. When comedian Steve Coogan was commissioned in 1994 to make an episode for his fictional characters Paul and Pauline Calf, it was a co-option of mockumentary. This blurring of contexts between 'ordinary people' and the conventions of access television continued when Bob Long announced in the project's fifth newsletter the intention to extend the video short to 'powerful people'.<sup>195</sup> Although this idea was not developed, that it was even discussed suggests that the project had moved away from the principles of access television and of the representation of 'ordinary people' whose views and concerns were rarely or under-represented.

### Corrective interruptions

The juxtaposition of personal responses to factual programming that had defined the scheduling of the shorts between two current affairs programmes was demonstrated again. It featured on BBC1 when dairy farmer Anne Tonkinson made a specially commissioned short at the height of the BSE crisis that presented a very personal response to the disease and was transmitted immediately after a *Horizon* investigation (BBC2, 1996). The project also produced shorts to offer personal opinions on the broadcaster's output, particularly in relation to current affairs in the BBC1 audience feedback format *Biteback* (BBC1, 1991–1997). This updated the pieces to camera that were a feature of the 'video box', a mobile video studio that appeared early on in Channel 4's *Right to Reply* series (Channel 4, 1982–2001).

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<sup>195</sup> T76/13/1 *Video Nation* Newsletter 5 (n.d.).



From the project newsletters it was clear that *Video Nation* content was increasingly being commissioned or compiled into particular, often geographically defined, themes. This again can be considered as the corrective function of access television, as identified by John Corner (1994, p. 24), to represent both under-represented regions of the country within a national broadcast agenda. Mandy Rose developed *Picture Wales*, a documentary compilation of reflections of life on a single day, mirroring the methodology of the M-O Survey Days. The Scottish elections were covered in *Video Nation Goes to the Polls*, a series of programmes that according to Oakley, then Head of the CPU, 'will put some flesh and blood on the old abstraction "public opinion" as it takes shape at a critical moment in the nation's history' (Oakley in *Video Nation Newsletter* 8).<sup>196</sup>

By 1999, the project's fifth birthday, *Video Nation* had produced more than 60 hours of broadcast television and launched another series of geographically linked shorts in the half-hour programmes including *One Day in Scotland* (1999) and *No Entry* (1999), a multi-perspectival account of events in Portadown, Northern Ireland on 12 July. As described by Matthews, these campaigns moved away from the initial intention of the project 'to give voice to marginalized groups without obliging them to somehow "represent" their community or respond to narrowly political notions of social problems linked to "their" community in more conventional media representations' (Matthews, 2007, p.445). This output was in addition to the project shorts that continued to represent the ordinary, the everyday and the mundane in two-minute bursts on weeknights. The appeal of the shorts had seen the wider broadcast sector respond firstly, as mentioned earlier, by adopting the techniques of the video diary; and secondly, and more worryingly for the CPU and *Video Nation*, by co-opting 'ordinary people' into television's new participatory forms. It was not the techniques of representation that were at stake, but the representation of 'ordinary people'; and this issue was brought into sharp focus by a BBC programme that was at the vanguard of the new genre of 'reality TV', *Driving School* (BBC1, 1997). The programme, about a middle-aged woman learning to drive, was commissioned by Alan Yentob,

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<sup>196</sup> T76/13/1 *Video Nation*

original *Video Nation* commissioner and subsequently Controller of BBC1. It turned its subject, Maureen Rees, into a celebrity.

With growing opportunities for 'ordinary people' to participate in mainstream broadcast output, and Channel 4's fulfillment of public service broadcast requirements, it was deemed unnecessary for the Community Programmes Unit to continue as a standalone unit and it was absorbed into the Factual Department at the BBC in 1998 as part of the cuts made to launch BBC24, the rolling news service (Born, 2004; Oakley, 2017). Incoming BBC2 Controller Jane Root was charged with ensuring 'that the "junction points" in the schedule are used to hold viewers' (McCann, 1999). The short form of *Video Nation* posed problems for the BBC because the programmes surrounding them 'come in pre-ordered time lengths and modern scheduling cannot cope with a two-minute programme' (McCann, 1999). Commercial broadcasting had of course developed around the incorporation into the schedule of the two-minute programme in the form of advertisement breaks, whose very existence alters the narrative structure of programmes. It appeared however that the lower production values and the amateur aesthetic that had so engaged the audience when it had first appeared in *Video Diaries* (Dovey, 1993), had become a turn-off (or at least a turn-over) in relation to the *Video Nation* short form.

Even so, for the project participants, it was a surprise when the May 2000 newsletter announced the closure of *Video Nation* with the following statement:

After a long period of uncertainty, the Controller of BBC2 has finally decided not to re-commission *Video Nation* for the future. While remaining extremely proud of the project she is keen to explore and develop a new venture to take its place.

Although the project is being wound up as far as BBC2 is concerned, we are hoping to maintain some level of activity for other outlets such as BBC digital channels and in-house conferences.

As for the archive this will remain at the BBC for the time being while we look for a permanent future home. We want to ensure proper public access to the materials and continuing safeguards for contributors regarding the use of their material. Thank you once again for the invaluable contribution that you have made to television history (*Video Nation* Newsletter, May 2000).<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> T76/13/1 *Video Nation* Newsletter, May 2000

## Conclusion

In six years, *Video Nation* had recorded over 10,000 hours of footage and broadcast more than 1300 shorts and 18 hours of other content. It offered a wide range of subject matter that was surprising, intimate, revelatory, disclosing, exposing, shocking, poignant, funny, sad and sometimes mundane. The ability for participants to self-film was perhaps the greatest affordances of digital video technology, and the structure of the broadcast project allowed participants to discover and develop their own competencies. As has already been suggested, the techniques used to capture this type of content, the domestic *mise-en-scène*, the lower-quality image and the self-filmed direct address to camera were also now familiar from the avalanche of reality tv featuring 'ordinary people'. This seemed to render *Video Nation* and the wider access or community television project superfluous. The video diary itself had lost its novelty as a broadcast format and its claim for authenticity was challenged through its use in mockumentary formats.

The cessation of the broadcast iteration of the *Video Nation* project reflected wider shifts in broadcasting and in the BBC in particular, as mainstream 'reality' formats that placed 'ordinary people' centre-stage became prime-time entertainment, but only in increasingly explicitly constructed trivial situations. As 'ordinary people' became legitimate subjects for mainstream entertainment formats, space on the margins of television was no longer reserved for them and they were relegated to the online environment where, counter-intuitively, they were subject to higher levels of institutional intervention. The production context of the web project imposed more constraints on the participation of 'ordinary people' than the broadcast project even though substantially fewer people were likely to see it. To some extent, this finding undermined the rhetoric of audience-generated content being espoused by the institution. It also raised questions about the levels of participation offered by traditional media platforms that usefully informed and countered some of the wider claims about the democratisation of the media. However, as indicated in earlier chapters of this thesis, similar claims have been made about media technologies since the emergence of the telegraph. History suggests that the effusiveness of such

claims tends to diminish once a dominant mode of practice emerges and a regulatory context is established.



Illustration 1, *Video Nation* broadcast closing ident<sup>198</sup>

## **Chapter 11 *Video Nation Online, 2001–11***

Maintaining the focus on the production context of *Video Nation*, this chapter documents the project's transition from broadcast to internet and cross-platform distribution. This transition needs to be seen within the wider context of the BBC and especially in relation to the development of reliable and authoritative services in preparation for the digital switchover in 2012. As the BBC's first online participatory project, *Video Nation* offers a prism through which to understand some of the concerns of the BBC, particularly in relation to the preservation of its authority in the environment of the internet, a technology that 'flattens differences in authority and tests both truth and trust' (Born, 2004, p.514). The chapter examines the project's production contexts, working practices and institutional imperatives in the online environment. Further, it identifies particular affordances and constraints of the practices enabled by the project's online phase.

The empirical research for the thesis, (interviews and participant observation) was undertaken between 2005 and 2008, amid the growing hyperbole about the democratisation of the media afforded by Web 2.0 mechanisms of distribution (Keen, 2008, p.15). Within a month of starting this research, YouTube, the first of the Web 2.0 projects launched (November 2005) and 'ordinary people' were reframed as potential creators of 'audience' or 'user'-generated content' produced for an institutional platform.

### **User-generated content**

When *Video Nation* relaunched as an online initiative in 2001, home computers were becoming more widely adopted, although still dependent on dial-up connections. Media institutions framed online services in relation to communication, home shopping and local and hyper-local information. Email service providers quickly experimented with 'value-added' content that encroached on the immediacy offered by rolling news channels, such as the recently launched BBC24. For many early adopters, the web, like the mobile phone, was promoted as a means of staying in touch with the workplace, rather than a means of distribution of amateur and domestic media content, or leisure technology (Poppo and Thornham, 2014). The shared distribution platforms of MySpace (2003) and Flickr (2004) contributed to a flurry of excitement about

user-generated content and the democratising potential of new communications technologies (Keen, 2008). The latter is a claim that has been made about all new technologies since the invention of the telegraph (Postman, 1987).

Some users, such as producers, subjects or consumers of amateur pornography, exploited the affordances offered by discrete digital production and distribution (Pini in Buckingham, Willett and Pini 2011). US college student Jennifer Ringley had established the 'Jennicam' website (1996–2003), which allowed remote viewers to observe her in her private domestic space (Calvert, 2000). Elsewhere, early adopters established themselves as commentators or bloggers, setting up sites where they offered written accounts of their thoughts and feelings in response to experiences or opinions, or in some cases sought to vent their spleen. The emergence of webcams saw this practice develop into vlogging, where the author could make their representation in direct address to a camera mounted on the computer screen. The most successful bloggers and vloggers achieved large enough audiences to make their websites advertising vehicles for new technology products in particular, but also other high-end goods. These groups were also the most likely to possess skills of media literacy and forms of cultural and social capital that were involved at least initially in setting up and maintaining a blog-site and (as Turner suggests) are partly responsible for 'the exorbitance and indeed the self-interestedness of some of the claims that have been made for the cultural and political benefits of the digital revolution' (Turner, 2010, p.9).

A proliferation of forms of 'citizen journalism' also emerged the debates around which are more fully explored in Buckingham and Willett (2009, where media organisations encouraged their audiences to contribute; the BBC also regularly requested content although it was still rarely used. This practice relied, as it always had, on a happenstance opportunity to record a newsworthy event, before the arrival of the media professionals. Prior to its use, an amateur disclaimer was inserted on footage that was framed and packaged into forms familiar to existing audiences (Buckingham, in Buckingham and Willett, 2009, p.97). 'New media' companies, unencumbered by tradition, reputation or regulation offered new configurations of practice for user-generated content that did not need to follow existing media aesthetics or, even, conventions of veracity.

In *The Future Funding of the BBC* (1999), Chairman Gavyn Davies identified that nearly ten per cent of the then annual £104 television licence fee was already being spent on the digital services that were only available to early adopters and the more affluent viewers. New forms of participation were encouraged as BBC sought the submission of 'audience-generated content'; this most frequently involved submitting images to regional television to illustrate the weather or a local landscape. The BBC had an additional imperative to provide reliable and relevant non-commercial online services to provide digital content that fulfilled public service responsibilities for the regions and nations of the UK.

### Online practices

In 2001 BBC Online announced that *Video Nation* was to be relaunched as the first of the Corporation's online projects, once again putting the project and the BBC at the forefront of adapting new technologies for broadcast content. BBC Online recognised that the shorts 'provided a unique source of (relatively) cheap and copyright-free video-content' (Mohr in Carpentier, 2003, p.428) that would be ideal to demonstrate the potential of digital content. *Video Nation* content was ideal because the shorts were 'already cut into hundreds of segments whose duration and personal nature were perfect for the web' (Mohr in Carpentier, 2003, p.429).

The archival intentions of the broadcast project were continued in the content management system of the website, which was initially populated by 250 of the existing two-minute broadcast shorts. Chris Mohr, one of the producers of the broadcast project, was seconded to the web project to ensure that the permissions required for online narrowcast could be attained from participants. It was hoped that audience familiarity might encourage broadcast audiences to engage with content via digital delivery. However, the early adopters who had access to the internet were unlikely to search for 2-minute shorts made by 'ordinary people'. Mohr trained radio journalists in the production techniques of the project to create new content that she edited for the website. Mohr left the BBC in 2001 to work at the *Video Nation* archive at the BFI, which is an area that is itself worthy of a thesis or research project but is beyond the scope of the one presented here.

As BBC Online developed, *Video Nation* was assigned to the newly established New Media Central department and subsequently expanded to include the production of new shorts, to develop 'an online community and archive' (Carpentier, 2003, p.17). Carole Gilligan came in as project producer of *Video Nation* (2001–2005) and was joined by Outi Vellacott, as assistant producer (2001–2005). Vellacott worked with the web-coder, the designer and programmer to translate the project for web delivery with the intention that the *Video Nation* site would be 'innovative with the new technology and use a whole load of content that was already there.' Alongside many other responsibilities, Vellacott was responsible for 'maintaining the home-page, keeping it fresh, and adding new shorts', chosen from those already existing to present a diversity of gender, age and ethnicity and 'give a kind of snapshot of British society and life in the 1990s' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). The aim was to get 'some of the best shorts from the *Video Nation* series online and accessible to people so that they were not just sitting on a shelf somewhere in a TV archive' (Vellacott in interview, 2005).

There was an opportunity for the project to relaunch itself and move away from traditional negative associations of 'ordinary people' as 'common' white working-class people, now frequently included in reality tv formats (Holland, 2000 and Holland in Oakley with Lee Wright, 2016). It could perhaps have relaunched with a far more explicit focus on the representation of diversity and moved away from the constrictions of broadcast agenda, while still fulfilling the corrective function of access television. Instead, populating the online archive necessitated the privileging of the existing universal themes, defined by the broadcast project. These had been established as the categories of the content management system into which new content had to be uploaded. This was an opportunity for *Video Nation* online to reflect life in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Britain, when important questions about 'the nation' were being raised in the rhetoric of multi-culturalism and the devolution of the national regions. The content management system offered online visitors an entry route into a variety of a shorts, they could choose to watch, however it is not clear how the visitor was directed to the *Video Nation* site unless they had been sent the link direct from the participant. One of the strengths of the broadcast project the duration of the short form, was ideal for the



web, particularly as content was only available in lower quality narrow band technology. Early viewers may have been watching on public computers, in internet cafes or dependent on a dial-up connection – certainly the concept of idly browsing the web was not established as it is now. The interruption and immediacy of the project was diminished by the delivery mechanism and the constraints of the archival system, in which the search for the shorts, diminished their ability to surprise, and they become ‘more of a lean-forward than a lean-backward medium’ (Carpentier a, 2003, p.431). Even though the shorts no longer appeared as part of a flow, but instead as discrete and complete texts within themselves, many of the techniques that were introduced in the shorts became a regular feature of mainstream reality programmes. Content still had the capacity to shock or entertain the viewer, even if the element of surprise had been removed by the negotiation needed to access the shorts, initially over a dial-up connection. The website content management system that enabled the audience to access a wide range of content, also, like any archive, repeated and increased institutional interventions (Steedman, 2001, p.37).

Broadcast participants were asked to extend their permission for web distribution and their shorts were titled and placed into a category and accompanied by a short description written by the project team (Vellacott in interview 2005).. The shorts were then stranded, ‘topped and tailed’ with a new *Video Nation* logo and each featured the participant’s name and occupation in text in the establishing shot. In the online environment, expectations of image quality and professionalism were lower and amateur content was expected, so the traditional disclaimer was unnecessary. The shorts were organised into categories from the project suggestions and each short was titled, but not necessarily by the participant. Titles were changed where necessary to avoid repetition or to fit more easily into the archival categories or content management system of the site, thereby offering coherent pathways. Shorts were also cross-referenced through the title and surname of the participant, and the region (Vellacott in interview 2005). According to Carpentier (2003, a), by the middle of 2003, 750 of the broadcast shorts had been uploaded; however, by November 2005, this number had been reduced to 672 of the 1169 broadcast shorts being available online (Vellacott in interview 2005). While this is a substantial number, most participants in the broadcast phase had produced multiple shorts. Danousia Malina, for

example, withdrew permission for her 15 shorts to appear on the web because she felt that they no longer represented the person she had become. She was concerned about her digital history as she sought to build a new online identity. The broadcast shorts appeared alongside 73 online shorts, and nine training videos made by and for participants of the broadcast phase but never broadcast.

Within New Media Central, a pilot project was established between *Video Nation* and *Where I Live* websites to explore local possibilities for online production. Initially four sites, Humber, Leicester, Liverpool and London, worked with *Video Nation* to develop a new production context for online producers, who would recruit participants to share their views and experiences with the community. (Vellacott in interview 2005). Exactly what was meant by 'community' in this context was not specified by the project (Carpentier, 2003), although this framework has been explored by Nancy Thumin (1999, 2006).

Jane Root's commitment at the closure of the broadcast phase that the BBC would continue to use the production context as an internal training project staff led to inexperienced content producers cutting their teeth on 'ordinary people' while they acquired technical and production skills. The new *Video Nation* project used its accrued 'knowledge of working with contributors' to train cross-platform content producers in digital media production, so that they 'could start producing content locally for their websites that could appear on the *Video Nation* site as well ...' (Vellacott in interview, 2005).



Illustration 2, *Video Nation* Online Interface<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/shropshire/videonation/take\\_part.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/shropshire/videonation/take_part.shtml)

## Production practices

The BBC expanded its own online provision through a network of producers across the hyper-local *Where I Live* sites, a model that reflected and extended Paul Bonner's suggestion (discussed in Chapter 6) that 'access or participatory practices might be best served on a local basis and serviced by 25 community programme "officers" to cover the country' (Bonner, 1976, p5). Content shown on a *Where I Live* site did not necessarily feature on the main *Video Nation* website; this resulted in the production of 'local' content that could reflect the specificity of the location as a counterpoint or correction to the national focus of the wider media agenda. The duration of the shorts, the personal viewpoint and the manner in which viewers could access them distanced or removed the framework within which issues raised could be attached to wider societal concerns.

*Video Nation* functioned as a national website in its own right while the *Where I Live* sites were used to deliver training to radio and website personnel to produce local and vernacular content. The allocation of *Video Nation* staff to local production hubs, where cross-platform content was produced for online, television and radio content also shifted the focus from the unspecified nation(s) of the project title to the concerns of a more local or regional community. Online production necessitated the need for a realignment of roles in order for production employees to produce cross-platform content to appear, as the strapline had it, 'on television, on radio, on digital and online' (Vellacott in interview 2005). In the production context of *Video Nation*, Outi Vellacott's role expanded to training radio and web producers 'to the point where they're media savvy and skilled up in cross platform production' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). This role, which necessitated having the skills 'to write, film, edit content for multiple uses', was referred to internally as a pr/editor, a somewhat unfortunate contraction of producer and editor.

The 'training the trainers' model constituted a completely different production process to the broadcast initiative and encouraged far greater mediation by the (comparatively inexperienced) media professionals. The project moved away from empowering 'ordinary people' to providing low-cost training to enable BBC

radio and web producers to become cross-platform content producers. Early content produced by the online project retained a non-professional aesthetic, even when entirely produced by the inexperienced professional producers. The emphasis was on establishing media competencies and proficiencies among lower level production staff rather than among participants. The positioning of the production context as an internal staff-training provider substantially reduced the terms within which participants had agency. For example, content was now rarely self-filmed or self-representational and more frequently made within conventions of local television news.

The broadcast project had offered a partnership between the production team and participants, though one possibly still too institutionally directed to be classified as the 'maximalist' mode of participation suggested by Carpentier (2009). Some participants developed media competencies and found ways to represent themselves in ways that were relevant to them but the extent to which this was possible was often related to other attributes. The social and cultural capital of the participating individual and the relationship they were able to establish with the producer affected the opportunities for individuals to represent themselves in situations that were relevant to them. By contrast, in the new production context, participants were recruited to speak on issues defined by the *Video Nation* project, in extended 'vox pops', or as a 'soft' item for local news, a far more minimalist mode of participation. Participants were not extended the level of control that had been possible in the broadcast phase of the project. As Turner notes of participatory media in general, 'while the participation of the 'ordinary people' is continually claimed as the benefit to be realized from each new development, their actual participation becomes less' (Turner, 2010, p.5).

### Working Practices

The project training was extended to those offered placements and secondments through the BBC apprenticeship scheme. The full-time producers and some of the trainees were based at the project headquarters and managed the output for the national site and cross-platform usage. Project producers might also make shorts for areas that were not connected to a *Where I Live* website or to project campaigns. Occasionally a concerted effort was made to produce a selection of shorts from the same geographical area to ensure that the region was

represented by the project. The *Video Nation* online project involved a variety of production contexts, dependent initially on how jobs were funded. Some *Where I Live* producers had a percentage of their contract (less than 0.5 salary) funded by *Video Nation*, whereas other producers were fully funded by the *Where I Live* sites (Vellacott in interview 2005). Still others were local radio producers and presenters, who accessed training through the project but had substantial other demands on their time, so their input to *Video Nation* might be restricted or sporadic and dependent on their other responsibilities (Vellacott in interview 2005). In addition to restrictions defined by the production context or producer time, the project expected certain targets to be met, of one or two shorts per month, depending on the funding arrangement. These targets were in addition to the obvious pressure from Richards to produce content for the BBC-wide campaigns to maintain the project's profile and relevance within the Corporation.

The centrally based producer Outi Vellacott trained the apprenticeship scheme project producers and made shorts for the project, particularly when an English region was without a *Video Nation* producer for a sustained period of time. It was an option for her to 'step in', which enabled her to keep developing her own style and remain in touch with the production process and participants. When interviewed for this thesis, Vellacott had just returned from the Isle of Man where she had shot 13 *Video Nation* shorts in a fortnight. These were envisaged to form the basis of a *Where I Live* site for an unrepresented community, alluding to more traditional notions of access television as a means to address a lack. Vellacott, who was unfamiliar with the area, arrived with some ideas (coast, island life, TT races, currency) and set about 'trying to find a nice diverse group of subjects as well as people' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). The resulting shorts were the outcome of 'assisted shoots', as training 13 participants with the camera and 'giving them those storytelling skills in that short space of time was really difficult' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). The focus of these shorts was on the cultural history and heritage of the island, and a 'continuation of the island's oral tradition anchored by the images and enhanced by the possibility of display' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). These videos were not assigned to a *Where I Live* site, but instead to the regional archival category on the website where they supported the BBC *Coast* initiative (BBC1 and BBC2 2005–2008).

Vellacott acknowledged that this production content was less participatory but asserted that 'a lot of people don't realise how time-consuming it is to get a so-called true video, even a short' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). For her, the production of a 'true' video depended on a relationship of trust between the participant and the producer: the participant trusts that they can film what they like, that the footage will be edited by someone who knows what they are doing, and that the short will not be uploaded or broadcast without their approval. Vellacott herself was aware that the production context of the assisted shoots from the Isle of Man did not reflect the conventions of a 'true video' – but instead those of a 'soft' item for local television.

In addition, different sites offered particular production contexts; for example, the Cumbria *Where I Live* site used a production bus to travel to the more isolated communities and BBC Three Counties Radio offered a mentoring scheme where non-media professional volunteers were trained and supported to make *Video Nation* shorts with other non-media professionals. Each different production context affected the level of participation that could be claimed by the participant; some still allowed for fuller forms of access – dependent on the relationship between the participant and the producer, and how participation in the project had been formatted by the producer. As Ytreberg suggests, 'participants' understanding of what participation is gets shaped through personal relationships with the production team' (Ytreberg, 2004, p.688). It was also dependent on the experience of the producer and their relationship with the project. In other shorts, particularly those made explicitly for the *Where I Live* sites, participation was sometimes minimal or even nominal. There was a marked distinction in the practices of producers within the *Where I Live* sites and those for *Video Nation*, with the former viewing their involvement as part of their basic training, and the latter being motivated by more genuine concerns of representing the unrepresented. It was apparent at the regional training day that those producing content for *Where I Live* sites worked to a different set of guidelines to the national project.

### Participant recruitment

In discussions with each of the four long-standing producers who agreed to be informally and anonymously interviewed for this research it became clear that

potential participants were identified through a number of mechanisms. Most of which involved prior contact with the BBC, either as a phone-in participant, competition-winner, specialist local interviewee, regular contributor or provider of audience-generated content. Long-standing *Video Nation* producers drew on the range of contacts they had established, in some cases, over a number of years; they might also be a radio presenter, who was familiar in that role to the participant. Some producers spoke of having particular people in mind for campaign shorts or, conversely, using a wider campaign as a framework in which they could engage a particular individual they had identified as a potential participant. None of the four long-standing producers interviewed had made shorts motivated by a participant's unprompted request to take part, unless the participant had been passed on to them after they had contacted the central *Video Nation* site rather than the local *Where I Live* site. In these examples, the centrally based project producers forwarded requests and contact details to the locally based producer. This had the effect of potentially already framing the subject and the proposed theme. Once contact had been made between the local producer and participant, the producer felt compelled by the central project to ensure that a short was delivered.

It was clear that producers interviewed used different strategies to manage the process of participation and the participants themselves. High on their criteria were: the ease with which a potential short fitted with project priorities; likely demands on producer time; the 'originality' or 'hook' of the content; knowledge of the participant and their competencies. Two of my interviewees were radio presenters, who had weekend late-night specialist music shows and were known to the participants in this role. Some of the participants they worked with were already engaged with them, through record requests, comments to the show or phone conversations. In these cases, there was an added concern and consideration was also given as to whether the participants were likely to be 'star struck' or assume a more personal interaction. Other concerns were sometimes evident too; one producer spoke of finding himself in a situation in a participant's house where he felt vulnerable and susceptible to harm. Even though his fears proved unfounded, it changed the grounds on which he worked with participants; subsequently he ensured that all meetings were in public places which in turn removed the domestic focus of the subject's ordinariness.

Another important factor in recruitment was the choice that the participant was offered: to either film themselves, with a minimal amount of training, or to take part in an assisted shoot where the producer does the filming. Short-term producers and those on apprenticeship or secondment schemes for *Where I Live* sites only offered the assisted shoot model because their role was to increase their own production, not participants' media competencies. Additionally, these shoots required less contact time with the participant and therefore less opportunity for discussions about content and form to take place. Footage was shot by the producer with the editing process in mind, particularly with those expected to edit content on their phones and upload it to the web remotely.

Producers who were funded from the national project still preferred to extend higher levels of participation reminiscent of the broadcast project but attempted to avoid some of the hazards of self-filming such as poor lighting, fast pans or zooms, additional objects in the frame, absence or misuse of a tripod and muffled sound. Even though this took more of their time they felt that the process was more meaningful to all concerned when the producer had supported the participant to make their own short and equipped them with the competencies to avoid the home-movie aesthetic. However, in order for the participant to self-film, the producer had to develop and sustain a relationship with them and ensure that they had the ability to produce footage fit for purpose within the constraints of the format.

According to the producers interviewed, it was rare that participants had a clear idea of how different elements might work together (or not), or how the text might be constructed through the sequence of shots. Occasionally a participant would have a very clear idea of what they wanted to say and would have written and rehearsed the monologue but would have paid little attention to the visual dimension. The greater the amount of time that the participant had with the camera and the more footage they generated, the greater the possible development of competencies in media literacy and storytelling. As Vellacott put it, 'the process can be quite enjoyable for people, they're learning new skills they're learning to use a camera, learning how to tell a story, and I think that gives people confidence to be themselves' (Vellacott in interview, 2005).



According to Vellacott, the project just did not 'have the resources to leave cameras with participants for six months and wait for those nuggets to come through'; further, producers were increasingly involved in commissioning participants for time-sensitive BBC-wide campaigns (Vellacott in interview, 2005). The interviewees, all long-standing *Video Nation* producers, raised concerns about the authenticity of assisted shoots; they felt that a short filmed by a media professional from the BBC was likely to radically alter the content as well as the style of the text that was produced. In the assisted shoot the participant was performing to the person in the room as well as the presumed subsequent audience. The producer became the witness in this model, and the participant might be motivated by what they thought was expected of them in this particular setting. For other participants, an assisted shoot was the only way that they would be willing or able to engage with the project in a timely way.

For vulnerable participants the presence of a producer might protect someone from exposing too much of themselves, but it often resulted in the production of a formulaic short compiled from a series of performances given by the participant, reducing the authenticity of the final piece. Long-standing producers expressed a fear that the potential for experimentation was removed; as one said, 'what was lost was the self-made element, it's home-made even if it's technically a bit wobbly round the edges'. Vellacott also expressed that, for her, the most successful shorts were those where 'someone's just looking at the camera, talking, and that moves you; it's not about the beauty of filming although those things obviously play a part' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). This video diary aesthetic was familiar from the broadcast *Video Nation* shorts, and their predecessor *Video Diaries*, but it was not regularly present in the online phase.

The production of each short was thus already part of a complex system of variables that included but were not limited to: the working practices and experience of the producer; the particular demands of both the project and the producer's other roles within the BBC; the individual competencies displayed by producer and participant; the relationship that subsequently developed; and the relevance of the short to the project priorities. These variables were in addition to the motivations and intentions of particular participants, and their expectations of

participation. Vellacott highlighted a number of ways in which production might be commonly perceived; firstly, as a learning process; secondly, as having a therapeutic effect (as discussed in Matthews, 2007; Dovey, 2000; and, in relation to *Video Diaries*, Dinsmore, 1995); and thirdly, as an expression, rather than a performance, of intimate social communication. There were participants who developed skills and techniques for future professional practice; and there was a need for the project to be clear that the purpose of the strand was not to turn people into media producers. Some participants wanted to go on to make mini-documentaries and go into presenting mode, which had to some extent been encouraged by the broadcast phase and its development of 'star participants' who could present the project at BBC events or in other formats. For the web project, Vellacott insisted that this was 'outside our area and we have to deal with that quite sensitively, but professionally and firmly as well. That's not what we do and we have to keep it in the realm of the format' (Vellacott in interview, 2005).

Despite these growing constraints, the rhetoric of media democratisation, of 'handing over control' to the participant, continued to be promoted on the website (Henderson, 2009). According to Vellacott, the web phase of the project was a response to '... the success of *Video Nation* which showed that people love getting their voices heard' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). The project's ethos was to 'give people a platform to tell their story to enable them to share an experience, a story or an opinion that they have, and enabling that to be shown' (Vellacott in interview, 2005). This reduction of individual experience into story-based media content was clearly one of the motivations of much audience-generated content, such as in the curation of photographic narratives on Flickr.

### Campaign shorts

Increasingly, shorts were produced for BBC-wide campaigns, such as *Coast* mentioned above, but the production context is problematic from a participatory perspective because the participants are already 'framed' by the institution, the needs of the format, the producer, the project and the wider BBC context. These considerations explicitly shape the terms on which individuals are allowed to speak. The concerns of *Video Nation* producers about assisted shoots were amplified because the time-sensitive nature of the campaign largely necessitated

this mode of working, which also offered the *potential* for local and regional and national television broadcast slots.

Despite the broadcast potential, there was a strong sense that this type of production moved the project further away from its original access principles and that the opportunities for letting people 'speak for themselves' were reduced. There was pressure on the producers to recruit participants to speak on an institutionally defined agenda and a tight production deadline. Producers were under more pressure to produce shorts within this context in order for *Video Nation* to have any national broadcast output. For newer, younger and invariably less experienced producers attached to *Where I Live* sites, these shorts were seen as an opportunity to 'cut their teeth' in television production. At the training day where participant observation was undertaken, three recently recruited producers referred to a campaign short as 'my report', reflecting their roles as online journalists.

The *Abolition* season launched in October 2006, so predictably as part of Black History Month that it is difficult to view it as anything less than a tokenistic attempt to address a shortfall or a recognised absence in the Corporation's public service provision, the corrective function of access television. The 23 shorts for the campaign showed a distinct focus on individuals such as Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Foxwell Buxton; on the people and communities of particular port cities such as Bristol, Ipswich, Liverpool, Newcastle and Southampton; and on the Methodist embargo on sugar and other goods produced by colonial plantations. However, and importantly, ten of the shorts focused on the participant's realisation that they were descended from slaves and offered a distinct counterpoint to the celebration of the abolition of the trade. Unfortunately, as the shorts did not reach the minimum time needed to be recognised as content in their own right rather than as trailer for an extended and forthcoming programme, it is not possible to identify if any or how many of these were broadcast.

During the time the empirical research was undertaken the project was involved in three BBC-wide campaigns, which were often the subject of discussion at the training days, Rosemary Richards was keen to ensure that *Video Nation* still had

a presence on television and stressed when she introduced the campaigns at the training days that producers should try to submit content for these themes, Long standing producers, on different contracts to newer recruits, and with a more substantial amount of their time allocated to *Video Nation* were to make these shorts a priority.

### *Family Wanted*

*Family Wanted* (BBC-wide, 2007) was an adoption and foster care campaign, had been developed in consultation with key organisations in the field including the Department for Education and Skills. In this initiative, the connections between social and voluntary services were reminiscent of some of the aims of the campaigning groups in the 1970s that supported forms of social or voluntary action television. As well as producing content, an aim of this campaign was to provide support, training and equipment for looked-after children/young people and to equip more than 100 social workers with basic skills in video production in order to enhance their ability to support the work of looked-after children in creative projects. The provision of training for social workers would largely be fulfilled by the full-time producers and could be seen as a return to the project roots of a digital storytelling model, albeit in the context of training the trainers rather than training the actual participants.

Information given to *Video Nation* producers about this campaign made clear how project shorts might be shaped to reflect and complement the wider broadcast agenda. The 12-week campaign featured a special episode of *Who Do You Think You Are* (BBC2, 2004–2006, BBC1 2006–present); BBC presenter Nicky Campbell spoke of his experiences of being adopted (BBC1, 2007). Other content envisioned was a five-part series of ‘real life’ stories and TV Appeals on BBC1 and 2. The popular hospital drama series *Casualty* (BBC1, 1986–present) ran an adoption storyline to tie in with the campaign and BBC2 proposed a series of ‘interstitials’: ‘short celebrity messages from famous faces who were adopted, have adopted, or have links with fostering, asking you to consider if you have what it takes’ (*Family Wanted*, Internal BBC document 2006).

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**Family Wanted**

**family wanted**  
BBC

What is adoption and foster care like in the UK today? Young Video Nation contributors share their personal experiences in these short films made for the BBC's **Family Wanted** campaign.







 <p><b>01 July 2007</b> <b>ELFIE</b> Sarah 3.02 mins Sarah came into foster care four years ago, after the death of her father. She's found that being fostered is not how she expected it to be.</p> <p><b>WATCH THIS VIDEO</b> <a href="#">Find out more</a></p>	 <p><b>01 July 2007</b> <b>A NEW HOME</b> Marvin 2.15 mins Being fostered has changed Marvin's life for the better. He does not want to leave his new family home.</p> <p><b>WATCH THIS VIDEO</b> <a href="#">Find out more</a></p>
 <p><b>01 July 2007</b> <b>MOVING ON</b> James 2.02 mins James is preparing to leave foster care and go to college to study performing arts.</p> <p><b>WATCH THIS VIDEO</b> <a href="#">Find out more</a></p>	 <p><b>01 July 2007</b> <b>DIFFERENT</b> Amy 3.49 mins Amy was adopted at the age of five. When she became a teenager, she began to wonder who she really was.</p> <p><b>WATCH THIS VIDEO</b> <a href="#">Find out more</a></p>
 <p><b>01 July 2007</b> <b>FOSTER SISTER</b> Hannah &amp; Thomas 2.18 mins Hannah and her brother Thomas have a foster sister. They think it's a really good idea to welcome cared-for children into their home.</p> <p><b>WATCH THIS VIDEO</b> <a href="#">Find out more</a></p>	 <p><b>01 July 2007</b> <b>FOSTER CARE</b> Anthony 3.16 mins Anthony had a difficult time since he suddenly found himself in foster care.</p> <p><b>WATCH THIS VIDEO</b> <a href="#">Find out more</a></p>

Illustration 3, *Family Wanted* campaign homepage on *Video Nation* website<sup>200</sup>

National radio content included three specially commissioned dramas and two documentaries about adoption on Radio 4, discussions about adoption and fostering on Radio 2 talk shows as well as special storylines in dramas on the Asian Network. This season offered an explicit example of synergies made possible through cross-platform use and a range of 'off-air' activities was lined up to support the season. These included a phone-line, text service and information pack, and a dedicated website with a self-assessment tool for the public to assess their potential as adoptive or foster parents, and a searchable database of children's profiles. *Video Nation* producers were asked to support the social workers and train them with the skills to create the children's profiles in the form

<sup>200</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/feature/familywanted/>

of short video portraits. One horrified producer feared that they would end up 'advertising' a child 'as though it was a stray dog'.

### *No Home*

Another BBC-wide campaign *No Home* (originally called *Come Home*) was launched to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the BBC2 'drama-documentary' *Cathy Come Home* (discussed in Chapter 5). At the ICA screening day in 2006 discussed earlier, the campaign was introduced by Rosemary Richards as a pre-Christmas feature on 'hidden homelessness', which would run on BBC1 and BBC2 in November and December 2006. The project hoped to produce 15 films, all suitable for web use and the majority of broadcast quality. The intention was that the films 'will be of a standard that could be broadcast on national television so you should all work particularly hard with the contributors and/or their social workers/agency staff to pass on suitable filming skills' (Richards, 2006).<sup>201</sup> In this example, the speaker acknowledged that the training was not even necessarily going to be passed on to the participants, and that the personal experiences of the contributor would be framed through their relationship with their care worker. No matter how sympathetic the relationship, this is removed from the lived experience of the represented individual.

An internal information sheet for *No Home* offered insights into the structure of the project and the different expectations on centrally and locally funded sites. It was assumed that all funded sites would contribute to the project, and that some *Where I Live* sites that did not receive any funding from *Video Nation* 'may also wish to contribute to this project'. It was anticipated 'that this project will take much more of your time than a standard *Video Nation* assisted shoot' even though producers were assured that 'this would be taken into account with the general targets for the numbers of films each month, where we know that you are investing time in this production' (Richards in presentation, 2006). It was assumed that the campaign would take longer because it might be difficult to find reliable participants. This was explained as being due to the fact that these participants were less likely to have a secure place to keep the technology and there was a risk that equipment might be stolen or sold. However, 'where

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<sup>201</sup> Richards Project Day Media Tank, 2006.

possible and appropriate we will aim to give some contributors access to a video camera for several months to record the progress of their lives' (Richards in presentation, 2006). Producers were expected to 'source contacts through local homeless support organisations or through other local knowledge' (Richards in presentation, 2006) rather than making a direct approach to a homeless person unless that person was already known to them. According to the project information, the parameters of the campaign were that all 'films will be made by and with people for whom homelessness is a first-hand experience' The intention was that the campaign would concentrate on the 'hidden homeless' – 'the numerous individuals who have some sort of a roof over their head but none that could be called home.'

Examples of possible contributors were given as 'a family in temporary B&B accommodation' and 'a sixteen-year-old in a homeless shelter for young people'. The shorts were to be in a 'video diary style, filmed on camcorder by the contributors talking to camera (or possibly one or two filmed with the support of homelessness support staff)' (Richards in presentation, 2006). Clearly, 'supervised' access to the technology does not lend itself to the production of a 'private' video-diary, but intimacy in the representation could still be suggested: for example, one mechanism would be to show the spot where the person slept. Producers were reminded to 'encourage the contributors to show us a slice of their life – and encourage them to record the emotional moments of their life as well as telling you first-hand stories about how they live' (Richards in presentation, 2006). It was envisaged that one or two of the films might be made by homeless support staff, or that some examples might feature a previous *Video Nation* participant who now has a home base 'but who for many years was homeless' (Richards in presentation, 2006).

Of the 28 films included in the *No Home* feature, three were not completed until February and June 2007, despite being dated on the feature homepage as November 2006. This suggests either that these films overran the deadline considerably or that they were made outside the parameters of the feature but have been archived as part of it. The framing of the participants as 'hidden homeless' is problematic as all but three of the shorts were made by participants who were housed, at least in the most basic sense of having a roof over their

heads, by social services in hostels or were newly rehoused after a long period of hostel living. Their stories or testimonies (as the project refers to them) are constructed as narratives of transformation or at least of improvement. Though the descriptions cite that the shorts were made by people of all ages, types and backgrounds, the majority of contributors were white males between 30 and 40 years of age who either had a substance addiction or had been in the armed forces and in some cases both. Two of the participants were refugees who had been refused asylum; three lived in makeshift shelters; two in tents; and one in a car. Two of the shorts were made by housing support workers assigned to the participant.

Some of these shorts were selected to be intercut in *Moving On* (BBC4, 2006),<sup>202</sup> which was described on the website as follows:

Forty years on from the groundbreaking film *Cathy Come Home*, *Video Nation* had produced a series of video diaries portraying homelessness today. These films are powerful personal portraits from people of all ages, types and backgrounds who have recently experienced life with no home. We turned these testimonies into a half-hour documentary called *Moving On*, which won Best Documentary 2007 at the Royal Television Society Midland Centre Awards.<sup>203</sup>

The documentary later achieved an audience of 40,000 on its BBC4 (2007) screening, which made it eligible for the Royal Television Awards. This was despite it having been previously nominated in the 'not for broadcast' documentary category of the New York Film Festival in 2006. This raises issues of traditional distinctions within media practice in a context of cross-platform production or usage, where previously stable delivery platforms are challenged as new and originally unanticipated uses and synergies are explored. However, external awards were important to the project as a vehicle to demonstrate their work, as well as to enhance the project's reputation within the BBC.

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<sup>202</sup> <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/8229a7fb2ed242be912809a6aa30ae0a>

<sup>203</sup> <https://rts.org.uk/award/midland-centre-awards-winners-2007>



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## No Home



Forty Years on from the groundbreaking film 'Cathy Come Home', Video Nation has produced a series of video diaries portraying homelessness today.

These films are powerful personal portraits from people of all ages, types and backgrounds who have recently experienced life with no home.

We turned these testimonies in to a half hour documentary called Moving On, which won Best Documentary 2007 at the Royal Television Society Midland Centre Awards.

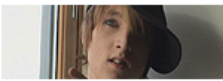





	<p><b>18 Nov 2006</b> <b>BEING HOMELESS</b> <b>Stephen Hawman</b> 2.59 mins Stephen lived on the streets of Newcastle for six months and says he would have died except for the kindness of other homeless people.</p>		<p><b>18 Nov 2006</b> <b>MOGADISHU TO MANCHESTER</b> <b>Mahamed Ismail</b> 3.51 mins Mahamed Ismail has been granted asylum in the UK for five years. For him Manchester is a better place to be homeless than Mogadishu.</p>
	<p><b>18 Nov 2006</b> <b>MANAGING THE HOMELESS</b> <b>Robert Robinson</b> 4.13 mins Robert manages a homeless hostel in Brighton and his working life is hectic.</p>		<p><b>18 Nov 2006</b> <b>MY OWN FRONT DOOR</b> <b>Maggie Gardner</b> 6.41 mins Maggie shows us where she lived on the beach and streets of Brighton and takes us back to her hostel room late at night.</p>
	<p><b>18 Nov 2006</b> <b>CAR MAN</b> <b>Steve Dowle</b> 2.00 mins Steve has lived in a car for two years in a lay-by near Leicester.</p>		<p><b>18 Nov 2006</b> <b>MY HOME</b> <b>Glyn Ridgley</b> 3.10 mins Glyn Ridgley was homeless for several years. Now happily settled in Devon, he's turned his life around.</p>

Illustration 4, *No Home* campaign on *Video Nation* website<sup>204</sup>

### Cross-platform Initiatives

During the participant observation at the training days the project's connections with broadcasting were also stressed with Richards' assertion that 'Video Nation continues to play an active part in television', through the completion of 'short films' to complement or supplement programmes such as *How to Have a Good Death* (BBC2, 2006) and the series *Restoration Village* (BBC2, 2006). This practice of using Video Nation shorts to support other programming started during the television phase of the project, in creating content on particular themes such as anti-tobacco campaign *Kick the Habit*. Other uses for the shorts included content that the World Service used in content that supported listeners in learning

<sup>204</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/feature/nohome/>

English <sup>205</sup> were discussed as to how the hyper-local *Where I Live* (rather than *Video Nation*) producers could get involved. It was hoped that the output of the *Where I Live* sites would supplement the national campaign and allow for individual voices to offer reflections of personal and located experiences and histories; in one sense a return to the corrective function of access principles identified by Corner (1994, p29). The footage appeared on the web pages under the brand of the *Where I Live* sites in England and for specific web campaigns in Wales and Scotland. Even though project producers were encouraged to create shorts for broadcast slots, this content was not featured on the *Video Nation* website.

The BBC-wide seasons and campaigns allowed the Corporation to provide representations of a diverse range of experiences that complemented and supplemented a broadly multicultural ideology that was still substantially under-represented in broadcast output. The campaign texts are the most obvious key to the ideological value of *Video Nation* output, whether delivered under the *Where I Live* strand for online delivery or by *Video Nation* for broadcast. These campaigns did allow for some expression of individual experience but were already defined within the broadcast framework, which favoured the exceptional and unusual rather than the mundane and ordinary. They were also an addition or supplement to represent what was still excluded by the mainstream agenda. This was not exclusive to the web phase of the project; it was also present in television seasons such as *Hong Kong Shorts* (BBC2 1997) and *Caribbean Shorts* (BBC2 1998). The representation of particular groups or themes in specialist campaigns made some contribution to the representation of diversity and multicultural experience and, in some ways, it was in these seasons that the corrective function originally attributed to access television was fulfilled. Conversely, this may have also contributed to a continued under- or misrepresentation of these themes and groups in mainstream programmes.

The use of *Video Nation* shorts in broadcast output too often seemed to represent a nostalgic version of the UK rather than to reflect and represent the

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<sup>205</sup>[https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/youmeus/videonation/video\\_nation\\_index.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/youmeus/videonation/video_nation_index.shtml)

experiences, interests and concerns of the diverse 21<sup>st</sup>-century audience. This is perhaps no better demonstrated than by the *White* season (BBC2, 2008), a strand that explored issues facing Britain's white working-class people. The original 'ordinary people' now also needed a corrective public service intervention

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**White**

Is white working class Britain becoming invisible?

To accompany **BBC TWO's White season**, Video Nation explores what it means to be white and working class today.

These films provide powerful personal portraits of a changing social landscape, where stories of both hope and frustration find expression.

**03 Mar 2008**  
**THE OLD DEN**  
Nick Hart  
3.29 mins  
Life long Millwall supporter Nick reflects on what his team means to him and others.

**03 Mar 2008**  
**SHADOWS OF A COMMUNITY**  
Dean Hammonds  
3.00 mins  
Hip hop is a way of life for Dean, but his interests make him feel like an outsider in his old mining community.

**03 Mar 2008**  
**CRYING SHAME**  
Linda Holl  
1.59 mins  
Linda believes that traditional working class values have completely broken down.

**03 Mar 2008**  
**GRAFT**  
Louis Parry  
2.32 mins  
With competition for work increasing in Brighton, plasterer Louis shares his views on the benefits of hard graft.

**03 Mar 2008**  
**ACTING TOGETHER**  
Jane Wooton and Hellen Brannan  
2.33 mins  
Once an area gets a reputation, it's hard to shrug it off, say Nellie and Jane.

**03 Mar 2008**  
**THE BOXER**  
Karl Barnes  
3.09 mins  
Boxing has offered Karl an escape from some of the harsher realities of life on his estate in London.

Illustration 5 BBC2 *White* season on *Video Nation* website.<sup>206</sup>

in their representation to counteract the trivial and often negative and pejorative representations of people like themselves in mainstream popular reality tv formats where, according to Holland, they now took centre-stage (Holland in Oakley and Lee Wright, 2016).

### *Your Stories*

Some shorts made by Video Nation appeared on the *Your Stories* strand on the Community Channel, a monthly, themed compilation of four videos. This was

<sup>206</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/feature/white/>

initially only available through FreeSat on Sky until the launch of Freeview for digital broadcast delivery. Simon Fox was a Television Production Specialist (TPS) on a six-month placement to *Video Nation* to compile and edit *Your Stories* programmes. He recounted in interview that he had initially been disappointed by this placement because he was accustomed to working on content that was much more 'glossy'. After a couple of months, he found the shorts fascinating but felt that they were not always filmed or edited in the most sympathetic ways. His role was to transfer content from a web to a broadcast format, resizing, retitling and inserting credits, logos and stings for the *Your Stories* monthly package. At the time of his interview he was compiling the November 2006 edition of the strand, which was shaped around the theme of remembrance. This particular edition comprised of three *Video Nation* shorts and a *Capture Wales* item.

The *Video Nation* output for this programme included *Emptiness*, a short made by a Gulf War veteran as part of the *Conflict in Iraq* feature in 2003. In it, the subject recounted in direct address to camera a considered real-time monologue of his thoughts and emotions during and after the Gulf War. The footage was then edited into three (almost) real-time segments that used some cross-fades to disguise the edit in the audio track. Another of the shorts, *The Brandesburton Project*, was compiled from footage from a non-assisted shoot in which the participant had documented a visit to a cemetery when a coachload of German people arrived to pay their respects to a German pilot who had been shot down during the Second World War. Although the footage displays many of the conventions of amateur production, such as continual use of the long shot; unsteady, hand-held camera and even the use of the zoom, the text is well-paced and has been sympathetically edited with a range of dissolves and relevant cutaways. The final *Video Nation* short in this strand was *University of Life*, made by a young woman about to leave home for university, who was worried about the effect that her leaving would have on her younger sister, as the family had suffered three bereavements in the previous year.

Other shorts were made in conjunction with BBCi Music and BBCi News (Carpentier, 2003, p.17) and local news programmes sometimes used them to demonstrate one view of a contentious issue or featured them as an upbeat item with which to end the bulletin. BBC World Service used shorts for a

demonstration of conversational English on their website, and the BBC World Service Trust,<sup>207</sup> the BBC's international charity, used the training model of the production context pioneered in *Video Nation*. Shorts were sometimes used as stand-alone radio features on Saturday morning programmes such as *Home Truths* (BBC Radio 4, 1998–2006). Project content was also used at 'in-house' events and presentations to broadcasting committees to promote, in a rather self-congratulatory fashion, the BBC's efforts towards diversity and inclusivity.

## Participant Training

While the project's emphasis had shifted to offering training provision for BBC staff, the website did not acknowledge the change in production contexts. It was still possible for participants to film their own footage with limited support from the project, and some producers encouraged this and the standard production was, as has been identified, the assisted shoot. Participants were given a quick demonstration of equipment that they could borrow for a short time and directed to the nine instructional shorts made by 'expert practitioners', the long-standing broadcast participants, which were available on the website and on VHS to potential participants without web access (Mohr in Carpentier, 2003, p.20). These instructional shorts, made for the broadcast project in the mid to late 1990s, offered very basic tips, such as 'don't walk backwards whilst filming yourself' or 'turn the light on for interior shots'. They did not reflect the technological advances incorporated into the DV cameras available to web participants. Neither did such simplistic advice replace the training in both filming and storytelling delivered in a workshop format, however helpful it may have been. By their nature, these videos are concerned with the aesthetics and the technology rather than the content, and reiterate the tips that appeared in project newsletters, including:

- 'It's your story – get yourself on camera!'
- 'Static shots are best'
- 'Hold each shot for at least 5 seconds'
- 'Don't use the zoom'
- 'A separate microphone gives much better sound'
- 'Record cutaways'

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<sup>207</sup> Renamed in 2011, as BBC Media Action (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/>)

The emphasis on static shots suggested the use of a tripod and countered the use of panning shots, which are too fast for a viewer unfamiliar with the objects on display to register or indeed for relatively low-quality mini DV cameras to record. The suggestion of holding shots for five seconds facilitated editing and allowed for a wider range of transitions, such as cross-fades, to be used. One of the most recognisable amateur aesthetics, the use of the zoom lens, was actively discouraged, while the use of a properly positioned separate microphone was suggested in order to provide a cleaner audio track by reducing the ambient sound picked up by the in-camera microphone.

### Website interface

The institutional discourse of the *Video Nation* website interface was interrogated to consider its account of the project's history and the archival practices – the use of titles, categories and descriptions of the content. On the homepage, *Video Nation* made a number of claims that reinforced the suggestion that participants were extended ultimate control. The editorial veto was constructed as the ultimate form of participant control, and the site encouraged participants to 'shoot first' rather than necessarily considering the structure of the story they wanted to tell or indeed the way they might want to tell it. The rhetoric was about 'having your say', 'expressing your views and experiences online', even though due to working practices considered earlier in this thesis, the production of a particular short was often motivated by the wider broadcast agenda of the institution. The broadcast project had experimented with the extended vox pops in particular initiatives such as *A Nation Goes to the Polls*, and a practice closer to a vox pop than a digital story ultimately became the main output of the web project and (as already demonstrated) was frequently used to supplement broadcast content. However, the change in production contexts necessitated as the project shifted to online was not referenced, even though it resulted in substantially lower levels of participation within tighter constraints than the broadcast phase. The distinction between web production and the broadcast phase was not clearly articulated on the site, which resulted in a misrepresentation of the project and its aims and intentions.

Participation was encouraged across the website, although the 'video nation' now only included England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland were devolved

from *Video Nation* and the network of *Where I Live* because the absence of sizeable towns and cities where radio and television stations might be based negated the need for *Where I Live* sites as hubs. These national regions developed other initiatives, particularly mobile recording services that extended audience interaction and media literacy skills. Wales was involved in both *Video Nation* and *Where I Live* but also developed digital storytelling projects such as *Capture Wales*. In effect, this restricted participation in the 'video nation' to English and Welsh contributors; interested parties from Scotland and Northern Ireland had to contact the national team to be put in touch with other projects. For people from areas where a *Where I Live* website had not launched, a producer from the *Video Nation* might be dispatched. However, this only happened if the area became a project priority or if there were a number of interested parties in the same area, such as when Vellacott went to the Isle of Man.

The 'faq' page of the website announced the aims of *Video Nation* as twofold: 'to enable you to produce a short video for the web', and to allow the viewer 'to watch highlights to see what other people have filmed' and see the 'rich diversity' of 'everyday life across the UK'. It is made clear that it is not necessary for participants to have any technical knowledge of camcorders as a 'local production team will provide all the training and advice you need to film successfully'. The website also made it clear that they edit the material; while it suggested that '*Video Nation* hands over control to you', this control was in fact only extended as an editorial veto, which is significantly less than editorial control. This model of production, according to the site, allowed the participant to 'shoot first, decide later'. However, the decisions were made in the edit and the participant had only the right to approve or veto the edit.

One of the history pages on the website reiterated the connection between *Video Nation* and the M-O Movement (outlined in Chapter 5 and discussed in Chapter 9 in relation to the broadcast phase) and the intention to create what Tom Harrisson of M-O identified as an 'anthropology of ourselves'.<sup>208</sup> *Video Nation* did this by 'studying the everyday lives of 'ordinary people' in Britain'. While this webpage referenced the dissemination of the M-O data and the archive held at

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<sup>208</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/history/>

the University of Sussex, there was no mention of the original intention for the BFI to maintain the *Video Nation* archive. Instead, the website promoted itself as an 'online community and archive'.

Another page recounted the birth of *Video Nation* and the history of the short on television <sup>209</sup> but failed to mention the other programmes that used content produced by the project, such as the themed compilation programmes or annual review. This page was illustrated by a still of the broadcast interface, the grid of portraits that signified the containment of difference within an institutional framework. The accompanying text stated that over 10,000 tapes were shot, of which 1300 had been edited into broadcast shorts, and claimed that by 2005 approximately half of the broadcast shorts had been uploaded to the website. According to this page, the broadcast shorts for *Video Nation* achieved an audience of one to nine million people, but as the shorts themselves were too short to qualify as measurable content for the Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB), this is difficult to verify. Additionally, this claim was not supported by the information in the project newsletters discussed in the previous chapter, where it was claimed that the week-night current affairs audience for *Video Nation* regularly achieved one million viewers and some of the themed compilation programmes achieved audience ratings of four million.

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<sup>209</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/history/birth.shtml>



BBC Homepage

- VIDEO NATION
- FEATURES
- FILM ARCHIVE
- HISTORY

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### The Birth of Video Nation

As video cameras became smaller and easier to use during the Eighties and Nineties, Video Diaries became a popular format to take a look at people's lives.

In 1993 Chris Mohr and Mandy Rose of the Community Programmes Unit started Video Nation, using a series of cameras distributed across the UK. The contributors were given their Hi-8 camera for one year, during which time they filmed their everyday lives. The response to Video Nation was immediate:

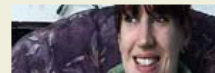
"A television gem of immense value"  
*Polly Toynbee*

"The immediacy of these programmes is entirely different to anything shot by a crew. There seems to be nothing between you, not even the glass..."  
*The Guardian*

### TIMELINE

- MASS OBSERVATION
- THE BIRTH OF VIDEO NATION
- VIDEO NATION TODAY

### NEW VIDEOS



A HAPPIER HANNAH



A HARMLESS LIFE



AT PEACE

Illustration 6 History page of *Video Nation* website<sup>210</sup>

The two press quotes used on the website promoted the importance of the broadcast project ('A television gem of immense value', Polly Toynbee, *The Guardian*, undated) and the immediacy and transparency of the format, suggesting the highest levels of transparency ('The immediacy of these programmes is entirely different to anything shot by a crew. There seems to be nothing between you, not even glass ...' unattributed author, *The Guardian*, undated).<sup>211</sup>

<sup>210</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/history/birth.shtml>

<sup>211</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/feature/nohome/>

15 October 2014

**VIDEO NATION** HISTORY  
YOUR VIEWS & EXPERIENCES ON CAMERA & ONLINE


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VIDEO NATION  
FEATURES  
FILM ARCHIVE  
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**HISTORY**



**Video Nation Today**

Now in its second decade the home of Video Nation is within BBC England. The national Video Nation website showcases both archive and newly produced films from around the country on a range of thought provoking subjects.

We continue to work with many people across the UK through our network of local producers. To-date, Video Nation operates in 33 regional centres throughout England including Wales. As television and new media converge, Video Nation continues to experiment with new film forms and technologies such as iTV, HD and online social networking.

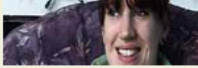
Video Nation continues to play an active part in television, completing a series of short films for the BBC Television programmes **How to Have a Good Death**, **Restoration Village** and **No Home**.

In November 2006 BBC Four broadcast the Video Nation No Home documentary - **Moving On**. Presented by Ray Gosling, Moving On examined how modern homelessness has changed over the past thirty years.


**TIMELINE**

- MASS OBSERVATION
- THE BIRTH OF VIDEO NATION
- VIDEO NATION TODAY


**NEWVIDEOS**



A HAPPIER HANNAH



A HARMLESS LIFE



AT PEACE

Illustration 7, *Video Nation Today* page of *Video Nation* website<sup>212</sup>

The *Video Nation Today* section of the website proudly proclaimed that the project was in its second decade, that it was based within BBC England (part of the Nations and Regions department) and that it showcased both archive and newly produced films ‘on a range of thought-provoking subjects’. When this webpage was written, the project was operating in ‘33 regional centres through England including Wales’: *Where I Live* sites were identified on the project map that reflected this re-visioning of the nation. It was made clear that participants from outside the areas could apply to be involved, and producers would offer their support, which frequently meant filming the content. The project’s involvement with new technology is stressed, as it had been at the start of the

<sup>212</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/history/today.shtml>

broadcast phase, this time centred on the distribution technologies of 'iTV, HD and online social networking'.

### Archival practices

In addition to the institutional constraints or suggestions applied to production contexts, content was also framed by the archival practices and content management system. To restate, once a short was uploaded to the site, the web manager wrote the short description of the content that appeared alongside a still on the web interface. The web producer defined the archival categories that the short was to be placed in, and sometimes retitled the short, either because of duplication of the title or because the working title was inappropriate or no longer reflected the content or the archival category. This standardised practice but also meant that descriptions were written by BBC staff with no knowledge of the participant beyond their name and what was shown in the text. The descriptions worked against the potential of the video short, by eliminating the possibility of revelation. The website description forewarned the viewer about what to expect, and often in such bland and descriptive terms as to make it unappealing.

Some of the shorts produced for the BBC-wide campaigns appeared to have only very tenuous links with the topic of the campaign, and some of the titles and descriptions bore little resemblance to what was being represented in the text. For example, Nica Prichard's short *Come Fly with Me* was described as follows: 'Fly fishing gets an all new cast as Nica Prichard teaches fishing courses to ethnic minority women from Swansea'. In promoting a multicultural agenda, this description occludes the main focus of the short, which was actually about British imperialism in Wales. This short has also been retitled, although the original title *Gone Fishing* appears in the web address, which may have resulted in viewers being unable to find it unless they had been sent the actual link. Unusually, *Come Fly with Me* appeared in only one of the 42 archival categories of the content management system – sport, which again did not reflect the content accurately. The archival categories or tags were generic and the majority of shorts were categorised under three categories. For example, the categories of Identity, Sadness and Memories might be used to tag videos made for the *Abolition* season or about the experience of being a football supporter.

The categories under which shorts were placed could therefore be subject to the vagaries of the project, of institutional imperatives, or of the producer putting the shorts into the content management system. In one instance, *Making Trash*, a short about an amateur dramatic production about recycling, was categorised under Art and Media where the focus became about the production rather than the content. Although there may have been an element of participant choice, without being able to adopt a three-way approach of text, producer and participant, the exact circumstances of each production was not ascertained.

The web archive was divided into 42 categories, which included the 672 broadcast shorts that appeared on the site in 2007, a minimal increase from the 663 shorts that were uploaded to the national site by 2003 (Carpentier, b, 2003, 19). Some participants requested the removal of their shorts, including one interviewed for this research. Her concern was that the shorts she had made for broadcast 15 years earlier had the potential to compromise the web presence of the person she had become. She felt they gave people with whom she came into contact the opportunity to know more about her than she would have chosen to disclose at that time in their acquaintance (Malina in interview 2010). A specific concern was that people she was talking to on an internet dating site could find information that, as she said, 'wasn't a secret, but it's probably not the first thing you would want a potential partner to see.'

### Participant experiences

Since this element of the research does not play as central a role as originally intended, the following investigations into three of the participants interviewed for a previous article (Henderson, 2009) is not intended to be representative of the project as a whole. The experiences recounted here were in semi structured interviews with the participants, prior to the meeting, themes had been identified from the texts and their archival description. In fact, it serves to demonstrate the opposite: that each text was a unique manifestation enabled by the relationship between the participant and the producer and the skills, competencies and attitudes that each brought to the encounter. In the case of assisted shoots, the performance the participant was making might not be for the subjective camera, or indeed the unknown future audience, but for the eyes of the institution. The range of production contexts within which a text might be produced added further

layers of complexities, from the job roles of the producers, the percentage of the time that was allocated to the project, and their own engagement with the project. Additionally, in *Video Nation*, the producers represented the BBC, a national institution with a reputation and authority which the participants were aware of, to a greater or lesser degree. These issues have been the focus of what has been explored up until this point in this chapter. However, this offers an incomplete account that the following section seeks to redress, prompted by the assertion by Mandy Rose (project producer broadcast phase, 1992–2000) that ‘with the media touching more and more people’s lives as participants we need a more adequate account of what that interaction involves’ (Rose, 2000, p.182).

Over the course of 2009/2010, three *Video Nation* participants were interviewed for this research, of whom two, Denise Lester and Danousia Malina were involved with the broadcast phase. Lester made eight shorts for the broadcast project and went on to make 15 for the online phase, including two training shorts. Danousia Malina made 15 shorts for the broadcast phase and originally gave consent for these to be transferred to the web, although they were subsequently taken down at her request. Bicknell made one short for the web project. The following discussion is intended to illuminate some of the variables that may have been at play in the making of content, to understand the specific examples of the interaction between the individual and the institution. It is not intended to suggest practices representative of the project as a whole; while an original intention, this was unable to be pursued, as discussed in the methodology. The interviews with Lester and Bicknell took place after prior contact with them, so were within the framework of a formal interview; in the case of Malina, it was a chance encounter in a café and she was happy to have an informal conversation rather than an interview.

Malina was involved with the broadcast project from 1994 to 1998, during which time she made (she thought) 15 shorts, although she could only remember the names of two (*Speeding* and *Adopted*), both of which have been referred to earlier in this chapter. At the time she was a participant, Malina was an academic working in organisational studies and a single parent of three young children. She became involved in the project through a mutual friend of project producer Chris Mohr, who put them in touch and Malina agreed to attend a training weekend to

find out more. Part of the appeal, she admitted, was a weekend in a plush country house hotel, but she did want to 'try it out', although she was unsure about giving permission for broadcast. However, she found that she enjoyed making content and worked very well with Chris Mohr, who 'helped her understand how to film things in a different way'. She also appeared, with her son (name withheld), on a panel at the 1998 Edinburgh Television Festival with the *Video Nation* executive producer Bob Long.

Her short *Adopted* has already been referred to here as a striking example of the 'envelope-opening' technique frequently utilised in the project, where in filming herself opening all of her birthday cards, Malina speaks of the envelope that isn't there for her to open: the one holding a card from her birth mother. Content that she made was motivated by her 'need to create a space for herself, a place where I could see myself'; at the time she was a single parent with a demanding job and a long commute, and the short came out of that. '*Video Nation* was really important to me at that time, and I'm glad I did it, but it doesn't seem like me now', which was why Malina refused give consent for the shorts to appear on the website.

### Denise Lester

Denise was in her mid 40s when she got involved with the project, having applied to appear on a dating show for Carlton Television. Although unsuccessful at this audition, she spoke to the producer and said how much she wanted to be involved in something 'on telly' and passed on her card. Denise was a family lawyer and so when she got a message to call a name and number she didn't recognise, she assumed it was regarding one of her cases. Chris Mohr had been given her number and asked if she wanted to participate in *Video Nation*, or at least meet to discuss it. Denise was thrilled; she knew the shorts and thought they were 'just super' and was really excited to be involved, because it was media and because it was an archive. She was flattered to be approached but would not have put herself forward because she wasn't 'pushy' like that. Denise is a confident advocate, a partner in an advocacy-based law practice and well accustomed to representing others, but she said, 'that's for them, for my clients, not for me.'

Although Denise had an 11-year relationship with the project, she did not attend any training sessions. Instead she got the kit and at first, 'just shot everything and sent it to the producer'. Due to the length of her relationship with the project, Denise worked with eight different producers and relied on their feedback on her footage to develop her filming skills. She had a positive relationship with the project and relished her role as a contributor. She was proud of her involvement in the project, which had enabled her to meet Sir Christopher Bland when he was Chairman of the BBC Board of Governors (1996–2001); and she was happy to represent the project at a number of internal BBC conferences and panels. Of her 21 shorts, eight were for the broadcast project and two were the training shorts *Lighting Yourself* and *Filming Your Surroundings* on the filming skills section of the website, and the training video sent to potential participants. The remaining 11 were made for the online project and the most recent (at the time of the interview), was a campaign by victims' families for a public enquiry into the London 7/7 bombings that she was involved with in her professional life.

Denise's first short *Transplant* was broadcast in 1996 and categorised in the project archive under belief, health and values. The web description is as follows:

Denise is in hospital where she is about to become a bone marrow donor. It is a slightly risky operation, but afterwards she feels it was worth it. Helping to save a life is the finest thing you can do as a Jew.<sup>213</sup>

Fifteen edits occur in the one minute, 44-second short. The opening and closing five-second silent shots are of the *Video Nation* logo, the standard topping and tailing of content within the BBC. The visual edits are easy to distinguish, but it is not always so simple to pinpoint the exact cuts in audio, although the use of cutaways signifies this, as the visual distraction of the cutaway disguises an edit in the audio.

For Denise, the process of filming herself in preparation for and recovery from the operation created a space or bracket for her anxiety about the medical procedure itself. For Denise the experience was

... like I was using myself as a human instrument, if you like, to film something that was quite frightening for myself, the video was a self-protective mechanism. Because if you're filming, you're actualising, you're actually filming an event as it happens, it's like you are one step removed.

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<sup>213</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_transplant.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_transplant.shtml)

Denise explicitly performs her Jewishness in three shorts *Transplant* (1996), *Day of Atonement* (2003)<sup>214</sup> and *Shoah* (1997),<sup>215</sup> and it is implicit in a third, dependent on the viewer's own cultural experience, in her support of Tottenham Hotspur football club. She had approved her short *Day of Atonement* (2003), but it had either been incorrectly archived, never put up or removed without her knowledge. Denise wondered whether the cultural narrative promoted by the project was only able to contain representations of Jewishness in relation to the Holocaust:

It is as though my Judaism is defined by Auschwitz and my relation with Auschwitz but not in relation to a festival that's meaningful. I hope that the BBC are not, in the current climate, engaged in some form of self-censorship and balancing act.

However, the BBC was under no obligation to maintain hosting of content, just as in the project's earlier phase they had no obligation to broadcast material, as is demonstrated in the following example. *Edgware* (1997)<sup>216</sup> was made at a demonstration about the closure of the hospital where Denise was born. It was scheduled for transmission but postponed because of a by-election in the north of England that was being contested on the issue of hospital closures; the BBC was concerned about political balance and impartiality. Denise and her producer were 'livid and upset' about the cancellation of this screening, which Denise also saw as censorship by the BBC. However, rather than a demonstration of the way *Video Nation* was regulated by the BBC, this is an example of the way that the BBC was regulated in regard to parliamentary matters.

*Office Workers* (1998)<sup>217</sup> is about the Notting Hill Carnival and in it Denise defines her identity as a London-based attendee at the event before it became marketed as a 'tourist attraction', representing herself as an authentic Londoner who will guide the viewer round the event. Drawing on her experience as a regular attendee, she mocks a group she identified as 'office workers', people who were not really part of the event, or not in the same way that she was. The title 'office workers' came from a line in the short but has little relevance to the content and

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<sup>214</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_dayofatonement.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_dayofatonement.shtml)

<sup>215</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_shoah.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_shoah.shtml)

<sup>216</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_edgware.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_edgware.shtml)

<sup>217</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_officeworkers.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_officeworkers.shtml)



does not demonstrate any of Denise's enthusiasm for an event she had been going to for many years.

Denise was an unusual contributor because none of her shorts were made in her domestic environment. Denise made shorts in hospital (*Transplant*); on holiday (*Pool*, 2005;<sup>218</sup> *Away From It All*, 2003;<sup>219</sup> *Coping and Hoping*, 2004<sup>220</sup>); at holocaust memorial sites (*Shoah*, 1997; *Auschwitz*, 2004); at London cultural events (*Marathon Man*, 2005;<sup>221</sup> *Chelsea Flower Show*, 2003;<sup>222</sup> and *Office Workers*, 1998); at demonstrations (*Edgware*, 1997); and at her office (*Desktop Distractions*, 2004;<sup>223</sup> and *Cynical Love*,<sup>224</sup> 2003). In fact, apart from her two training videos for the project, only one of her shorts (*Sweet Sixteen*, 1998<sup>225</sup>) was entirely based in a domestic environment, and this was the kitchen at her workplace rather than at her home. This short follows a digital storytelling practice in the use of still photographs and a first-person narration over them. The viewer is introduced to Denise as a 16-year-old through her school photograph. A piece to camera shows an animated and vivacious Denise talking about the ambitions and aspirations that she had at 16. It then cuts to two photo-booth pictures in an album, before cutting to an address to camera in high-angle, extreme close-up of Denise discussing how her ambitions to become a barrister and to have met someone to settle down with have not yet been fulfilled. This cuts back to the photo-booth pictures as the album is closed and the viewer is returned to the high-angle close-up, direct-to-camera piece. This is shot in a kitchen, but the context is only apparent in the first piece to camera: the proximity of the close-up occludes more than it reveals.

Denise acknowledged that there was a desire to act civic-mindedly in all of her shorts. She identified that while this was most apparent in her first short, *Transplant*, she found that the process of filming the procedure helped her manage her own anxiety as well. She mentioned that she had viewed this short

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<sup>218</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_pool.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_pool.shtml)

<sup>219</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_awayfromitall.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_awayfromitall.shtml)

<sup>220</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_copingandhoping.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_copingandhoping.shtml)

<sup>221</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_marathonman.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_marathonman.shtml)

<sup>222</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_chelseafloowershow.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_chelseafloowershow.shtml)

<sup>223</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_desktopdistractions.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_desktopdistractions.shtml)

<sup>224</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_cynicallove.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_cynicallove.shtml)

<sup>225</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london\\_sweetsixteen.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles//london_sweetsixteen.shtml)

the most, because it reminded her of her act of goodness. She also hoped that it helped raise awareness of the need for bone marrow donors and reassured potential donors.

Denise was an ideal participant: an articulate, committed legal professional who could represent the project to wider parts of the Corporation. This authority came from her professional experience and her status as a long-term, star participant. Denise said she was still committed to the project but did not want to work in the context of the assisted shoot, and she was aware that the producers only wanted content on specific themes. At the time of our interview (2009), she still wanted to make content shorts but bemoaned the fact that producers were only interested in shorts related to the 2012 Olympics, an event that was still three years away.

### Hamish Bicknell

Hamish Bicknell was contacted directly after I saw his short on a compilation that demonstrated what the project identified as good examples of *Video Nation* content and was given to potential participants and BBC personnel. Nine of the ten shorts featured were broadcast content; Hamish's short *Kilts*<sup>226</sup> was produced in the online phase. His response to the email request for an interview was: 'Oh yes! The *Video Nation* extravaganza! I'll not go into a lot of detail here but it is not at all as I planned it to be, and I am not proud of it' (email to author, 11 May 2007).

Hamish was in his early 70s, and a member of an amateur dramatic society. He had worked in radio drama, including a short stint at the BBC in the 1960s but 'settled on a career in men's fragrance'. He acted as compère at events, 'whenever I am asked', and did 'bits and pieces for radio and voice-overs' including for BBC Southern Counties radio, where 'they get me in to read the weather or make short announcements' (Bicknell in interview). The *Video Nation* producer at the station introduced himself and asked if he would like to make a documentary about an unusual aspect of himself. Hamish described himself as a professional kilt-wearer and realised that this was obviously unusual in West Sussex but felt flattered and entertained notions of it being expanded. He

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<sup>226</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/threecounties\\_kilts.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/articles/threecounties_kilts.shtml)

imagined ‘an hour-long documentary presented by Alan Yentob on BBC2’ where he discussed his long-standing interest in the etiquette of kilt-wearing that derived from his youthful proficiency at Scottish dancing.

He wanted his short to explain the etiquette of kilt-wearing and to demonstrate that kilts were the ideal garments for men to wear for any occasion, from something as ‘informal as a football match to going to a banquet at Buckingham Palace.’ His intention was to model a range of kilts and accessories and explain the contexts where it would be appropriate to wear these outfits:

I’d thought it through and thought about wearing a selection of kilts which I could show in quick succession walking past a static camera, and back again in a different outfit (Bicknell in interview).

He decided to self-film his short but when a producer turned up to drop off the camera, she explained that the short would have to be filmed immediately. Hamish felt that there was a suggestion that if it was not filmed then, it would take quite a time to reschedule. Once Hamish had agreed, ‘the producer decided that she was going to take over, film it and direct it’. He found it unnerving having someone behind the camera in his house, although he said that ‘it wasn’t that there was another person present – it was that she was such a strong character and took it over’ (Bicknell in interview).

Hamish was taken by surprise at the turn of events, and at the producer’s insistence about including particular types of shots. For example, he remembers that she was particularly keen to get a shot of him swinging his legs into the car, and made decisions about the number and the actual outfits that he should wear:

The end result is something of a travesty but maybe for all the wrong reasons, it has generated a lot of interest (Bicknell in interview).

His short was one of the first made-for-online shorts to be uploaded (in January 2003), although Hamish had not even seen it before it was uploaded and had not signed a consent form or given consent. He tried to operate his editorial veto get it removed and was told that ‘no, that they couldn’t do that because it was getting more responses and feedback than almost anything else the project had done’ (Bicknell in interview). When he contacted the main *Video Nation* project, he was referred back to his producer at Southern Counties.

On the website the short was archived under the categories of happiness, home and values, and appeared alongside the following description:

### *Kilts*

A few years ago, Hamish from West Sussex made an unusual decision. He decided to start wearing kilts and skirts instead of trousers. He's had to put up with a certain amount of ridicule, but he argues that they are the most comfortable thing a man can wear – and you don't have to be Scottish.

Hamish directly addressed the camera in a relaxed and competent manner. His speech was animated, and he had a slight Scottish brogue. Throughout the three pieces direct to camera Hamish was standing and his hands gesticulated calmly. It is almost as though Alastair Sim were playing a Morningside lady, and he slipped into a 'how to be a good hostess' style of representation when showing 'the type of thing you can do to get away from the traditional tartan ...'. The wire from Hamish's microphone trailed down to the floor and, without the slow tilts and the section filmed outside of his house, it would have been possible to believe that this short had been self-filmed.

The screenshot shows the BBC Video Nation Archive website. At the top, there is a red banner with the date '15 October 2014', the 'VIDEO NATION ARCHIVE' logo, and the tagline 'YOUR VIEWS & EXPERIENCES ON CAMERA & ONLINE'. A 'make this my homepage' link is also present. Below the banner, the page is divided into several sections. On the left, there is a 'BBC Homepage' link and a 'VIDEO NATION' sidebar with options for 'FEATURES', 'FILM ARCHIVE', and 'HISTORY', along with a 'Contact Us' link. The main content area features a video player titled 'VIDEOARCHIVE' showing a man in a kilt. Below the video player is a 'WATCH THIS VIDEO' button and a note: 'To view the video you will need REALPLAYER'. To the right of the video player is a 'THIS VIDEO' section with the following details: Title: KILTS; Contributor: Hamish Bicknell; Length: 2.05 mins; Date: 18 Jan 2003; Source: Video Nation Southern Counties; Country: England - South; Location: West Sussex; Categories: Happiness, Home, Values. Below this is a 'NEWVIDEOS' section with three video thumbnails: 'A HAPPIER HANNAH', 'A HARMLESS LIFE', and 'AT PEACE'. At the bottom of the main content area, there is a 'Links' section with a link to 'kiltmen.com Dressed to kilt' and a disclaimer: 'The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites'.

Illustration 8, *Kilts* by Hamish Bicknell. *Video Nation* website

*Kilts* was an unusual style for *Video Nation's* web practice; and it would have made a far more effective broadcast short with the interruption by the unexpected reveal shot in the first section, a downward tilt to demonstrate that Hamish was wearing a kilt. As a web short, the surprise of the reveal had already been disclosed in the archival or content management system by the title and description, negating its effectiveness. *Kilts* was a simple two-settings piece shot in his domestic interior replete with cutaways. These two interior sections were bridged by exterior footage – a long-shot of Hamish putting boxes into his car. Its structure was a standard practice to embed a sense of narrative and movement within an everyday routine, but in this example the sum of the parts exceeded the whole. This contradiction between different elements of both his personality and his identity denied the possibility for closure and created confusion for the viewer.

In long-shot and profile, Hamish put a box into the boot of his car and got into the driving seat, which suggested a journey into public space is about to be undertaken. As it returned to a direct address, Hamish suggested that a lot of 'chaps' do now wear skirts and that 'there's nothing sinister about that, there's nothing untoward about it, it's perfectly natural and straightforward' (Bicknell in interview). The next dissolve led to a shot of Hamish wearing a black leather kilt and shiny top. Hamish made no reference to his sexuality in the short, but his presentation of himself as a gay man was made explicit through a combination of signs including the leather kilt and tight shiny black top. Most notably there was a 'camp-ness' in his presentation, as he recounted wearing the leather kilt to the theatre a couple of weeks ago, 'not with this top, mind' (Bicknell in interview).

Part of the appeal of Hamish's short was that it appeared to offer a knowing performance while pushing the boundaries, suggesting a playfulness and wit. The reality, however, was that Hamish felt traduced and misrepresented, and that the project and the BBC refused to grant his editorial veto, or even respond to his emails. Hamish had to get the video edited down before he could show it to his parents as he felt that, far from coming across as an expert in Scottish cultural tradition of kilt-wearing, he was positioned as the eccentric 'man in a frock' character familiar from English humour, or worse. However, in some senses Hamish also offered a false representation because despite his Scottish lilt, his

name, his kilt-wearing and his fondness for Scottish dancing, his cultural identity is itself a performance. His only connection to Scotland was his maternal grandfather, whom he was named after, but Hamish had never visited Scotland until he retired.

Decisions made by the producer in the edit suite would be informed at least in part by the persona that the participant had displayed to the producer. The participant necessarily adopted a role or persona that they presented to the BBC producer through the initial approach (regardless of who had motivated it). This persona might be influenced by the individual's perception both of the BBC and of the project, and in some cases of the producer, who might be a minor local celebrity. Each *Video Nation* participant was motivated by different factors, desires, wishes, needs and intentions. All those interviewed displayed a willingness to contribute and all had different experiences of the meaning they made for themselves from the process, and the representation of each of them that was presented to the viewer. As I have argued, the experience of the participants was, in part at least, driven by their motivations, wishes, intentions and expectations. It was also to a greater or lesser degree shaped by those of the producer, the project and, in a not insubstantial way, the concerns of the BBC.

Such complexities were effectively disguised by the simplicity and the conventions of the video diary, which were designed to 'suspend disbelief' and mimic the experience of a first-hand encounter. Yet unlike in a first-hand encounter, no matter how engaged the viewer is, they cannot influence the sequence or content of the discussion. This effect was emphasised in the continuous performance of real-time representations. Once the short was complete, the participant would have a different relationship to the self or persona expressed or constructed by the producer. Different views might have emerged through the making of the short, and these might no longer coincide with those originally expressed in it.

## Conclusion

The BBC's response to the potential flattening of trust and authority in the age of online media was that in its first online project it had reinstilled authority through

greater control of the text and linked the content to other output of the institution. For *Video Nation*, a project that had placed an amateur aesthetic on a level with that of professional broadcasters, the web project did the reverse. In imposing a professionalism on an alternative distribution mechanism, it removed the unexpected and, in broadcasting, unusual aesthetic and first-person address that had been one of the project's unique selling points. The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies that allowed people to create and upload self-representational content meant the appeal of the online phase was further reduced as the broadcaster was no longer necessary. The closure of the project as an online initiative has resulted in the website not being maintained (since 15 October 2014) and the obsolescence of the format of the shorts negates the notion of an online archive.

The impositions of the archival system (titles and descriptions) removed the possibility for the shorts to surprise or interrupt the viewer. This research suggests that the working practices and outputs of the web phase of *Video Nation* were further removed from notions of access and participation than the broadcast project, perhaps paradoxically in light of popular claims about the democratisation of the media, citizen journalism and audience- or user-generated content. The attempt to relaunch the project as a Web 2.0 initiative with accompanying social media presence at the end of 2009 showed the redundancy of the project. 'ordinary people' now had access to the means of production and distribution of content that reflected their own lives and concerns rather than being constructed within an institutional agenda. The Web 2.0 site was neither appealing to a wider audience nor did it sustain or even motivate the engagement of the participants. By the time of the project's closure in March 2011, it had received a mere 234 postings on its Facebook page. The vast majority of these were uploaded by project staff.

In offering extended participation (if never quite access) to under- or misrepresented people, *Video Nation* continued some of the aims of CPU, which were incorporated into a frame of ordinariness used as a social leveller. This allowed the project to be, at least broadly, representative of the nation. In this way, *Video Nation* contributed to the dissemination of an ideology of

multiculturalism and tolerance, but it also constrained the framework within which individuals could represent themselves by an insistence on their ordinariness rather than their difference. The CPU's concern about mainstream television co-opting its techniques was perhaps misplaced: it was rather their subjects, the 'ordinary people' who were claimed by popular formats in more explicit ways. There is an irony in that the earliest forms of reality tv were developed at BBC2 under the guidance of Alan Yentob who also commissioned the *Video Nation* project.

As the opportunity to for 'ordinary people' to represent themselves on social media, the affordances *Video Nation* once offered were reduced, and the institutional framing of the online project ran counter to the narrative that online output was a democratisation of the media. From a project which had once extended considerable levels of autonomy to its participants in its broadcast phase, the practices it adopted after its switch to online, including the change in the production context, saw interest in participating disappear.

However, the closure of *Video Nation* is just one indication of more recent ideological changes in the broadcast sphere and in the BBC in particular, many of which can be attached to wider neo-liberalism trends in society, and a related theme, the fragmentation of broadcasting and competition for audiences. This research is about *Video Nation* the last example of a project where the BBC has facilitated maximalist participation, it placed itself in a central role as a facilitator in providing access for/participation of 'ordinary people, allowing them to represent themselves and in doing so produced important television formats that at the time had the potential to create wider debate. Of course, the BBC controlled the process, and the levels of control and the access extended or retracted. It also depended on the interests and motivations individuals such as David Attenborough, Rowan Ayers, Paul Bonner, Jeremy Gibson, Giles Oakley, Mandy Rose and Chris Mohr was central to the access impulse in the BBC.



## Chapter 12 Conclusion

How has the BBC imposed its cultural authority in relation to the representation of 'ordinary people'?

What were the affordances and constraints of emerging technologies and working practices on their representation?

What was the extent of participation offered in the various iterations of the *Video Nation* project, and how did this impact on the representation of 'ordinary people'?

The thesis responded to these research questions above by identifying the authoritative practices of the mainstream broadcaster in the representation of people it determined as 'ordinary'. The first seven chapters use a historiographic approach to traces an original and particular pathway using the work of the BBC historians and other recognised theorists as secondary sources, to investigate the ways in which the cultural authority of the BBC shaped and formatted the participation of 'ordinary people' throughout the first 50 years of the Corporation. The focus onto the CPU necessitated a change in approach as the unit is not substantially considered, so primary archival sources and were identified to supplement the limited material available some of which has been recently published. The remaining chapters are compiled through primary, secondary and empirical sources to present a chronological history of an important BBC participatory project, contextualised within the Unit in which it emerged, and the institution that was housed in.

Chapter One – The focus of the literature review– authority and participation in the representation of ordinary people in the BBC, draws on the established historical accounts of the BBC to extrapolate a narrative and examples that illustrate the themes for the first 50 years of the historiography which is based entirely on secondary sources. For the primary research, the central argument that emerged from the literature review was in Corners work *Mediating Access*, which this research builds upon to create a more complete narrative of the work of the CPU. For the empirical work, literature by Carpentier and Ytreberg informed the understanding of the phenomena under observation.

Chapter Two – The methodology identifies the range of techniques that were used to present this substantially contextualised case study of the *Video Nation project*, in the combination of primary, secondary and empirical work. Two major issue affected the defined methodology, firstly, the duration of the research, during which time the project relaunched and closed, and the difficulties in gaining access to participants, which has had the unfortunate effect of having the views of ‘ordinary people’ less present that was hoped for. Whilst the duration of the research has been identified above in a negative capacity, there were also strengths, the ability to examine the project in its entirety and to reflect upon the inevitable loss of public service principles as broadcasting has become increasingly competitive and the BBC has a diminished influence and has suffered self-inflicted damage to its reputation.

Chapter Three - The first two historiographic chapters covers the period 1922 -1938 and discussed the establishment and regulation of the BBC, and the development of a national radio service that aimed to present the ‘best of everything said and done in the world’. It identifies some of the ways in which the BBC instilled itself as a cultural and moral authority despite considerable opposition; and how John Reith positioned the technology of broadcasting and the BBC service as ‘extraordinary’. Arguably at the expense of the needs and concerns of ‘ordinary people’ who were less well served, and substantially under-represented by the BBC

Chapter Four covers the same time period as the previous chapter, this chapter Identified the ways and mechanisms by which ‘ordinary people’ were represented, in non-broadcast media, and the introduction of a regional broadcast service that extended the range of representations. The emergence of a particular production context for documentary film introduced ‘ordinary people’ to the screen and came to influence the work of documentary makers working in the BBC North West features department, as the radio service extended to include mobile technologies that enhanced the regionally produced output, likely to address more of the concerns or interests of ‘ordinary people’.

Chapter Five - This chapter covers the period 1939 – 1950 and explores the changing use of the phrase ‘ordinary people’ during war time and the changed function of the BBC as it fulfilled a different function under the control of the Mol. It identifies the

introduction of new positions extended to 'ordinary people' such as the subjective camera and the representation of people at leisure. Issues faced by the post-war, post-Reithian BBC included some of those recommended by the Beveridge Committee in 1950 such as access and accountability, and trade union recognition, and others that were not, such as commercial television.

Chapter Six -discussed the arrival and structure of the network of franchise holders that provided the commercial television service. Within this it identified issues that were brought about by the unionisation of broadcasting and the tensions that were prompted by the introduction mobile film recording and ENG techniques which greatly extended the range of subjects and locations that could be featured. These new technologies afforded new possibilities although often their potential was constrained by the working practices of the union which is a recurring theme for the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter Seven takes as its focus The Pilkington Committee and subsequent report that led the way for the formation of the BBC's second television channel with specific public service responsibilities for the representation of minority interests, not the representation of minorities. BBC2 was established to develop content and use techniques of a more experimental nature, such as those used in direct cinema and cinéma vérité that were incorporated in episodes in the popular drama anthology series and in flagship current affairs series. The arrival of David Attenborough as Channel Controller at BBC2 and the producer Rowan Ayres saw the transformation of an early evening preview programme, transformed into a late-night experimental series that developed into the CPU.

Chapter 8 - In this chapter, marks the start of the primary research and the focus tightens sharply onto the CPU, builds on the work of John Corner to construct a more complete narrative of the unit enhanced by archival documents and recent work on the Unit by Hendy (2018) and Oakley with Lee Wright (2017) It identified animosity within the BBC towards the unit and the social realist docudramas, and some of the programmes that created controversy for the Corporation and raised issues of accountability. The CPU was the BBC's response to create new styles of content, and the establishment of a specific unit allowed some union restrictions to be bypassed in order for the BBC to meet its remit responsibilities to develop experimental content and exploit the affordances of new technologies without the usual union constraint.

Chapter 9 looks at the affordances and constraints of non-broadcast quality video and illuminates the new techniques that were adopted by artists, activists and amateurs as they sought to represent their own experiences. The ability to self-film in small enclosed and private spaces, was widely adopted in feminist and queer work, and led to associations with the diary form in which intimate and personal experiences were foregrounded. It discusses the launch of the extended first-person documentary series *Video Diaries* that introduced these techniques to the broadcast sphere and issues that arose from the production context, such as the extended duration of the relationship between producer and participant in which lines could become blurred. It also acknowledges the critical acclaim that the series generated, and the adoption of the phrase 'ordinary people' to signify their status as non-media professionals.

Chapter 10 uses a combination of primary and empirical research and secondary sources to provide an account of the broadcast phase of *Video Nation* a significant participatory project that developed the short form diary fragment as a television format. It draws on existing work to present an overview of the output and production practices of this stage of the project and discusses the press response to the project and their framing of the participants as 'ordinary people'. The main focus of attention is on the best-known output of the 2-minute short, but consideration is also given to the structure of the project as a content stream to supplement other programming, and the compilation programmes that allowed people to respond to a prescribed theme.

Chapter 11 discussed the relaunch of *Video Nation* as the first of the BBC's online project which developed a new production context that substantially reduced the level of possible participation, as shorts were made in the context of training for (often) inexperienced web content creators and radio journalists. It draws on the empirical work undertaken for the project – participant observation, interviews to investigate the higher levels of institutional intervention and the distinctions in practice of the two phases.

A number of significant factors emerged in the duration of the research that contributed to or changed its shape. The inability to gain the negotiated access to

project participants and producers meant that a far greater emphasis was placed on the institutional interventions than on the anticipated holistic case study. It necessitated a reliance on secondary and archival sources rather than the more qualitative methods explored at the outset. While such methods may be traditionally associated with the case study, the framework also lends itself to a more narrative descriptive style that supports the historiography. The extended duration of the research itself has been both a disadvantage and an advantage. It has allowed for a greater consideration into the decline in public service intention in the Corporation, as the ideological position of society has shifted towards the market which is an important contemporary issue worthy of further research.

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## Radio

*£.s.d.* (BBC Northwest Features, 1934).  
*Any Questions* (BBC Home Service 1948–1967 Radio 4 1968 – present).  
*Canal Journey* (BBC National Programme, 1939).  
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*Go To It* (BBC Home Service, 1939–1945).  
*Down Your Way* (BBC Home Service 1946–1968, Radio 4, 1968–1992).  
*Hancock's Half Hour* (BBC Light Programme 1954–1956).  
*Harry Hopeful* (BBC Northwest Features, 1935/6).  
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*Home Truths* (BBC Radio 4, 1998–2006).  
*In Britain Now* (BBC Home Service, 1948–1965).  
*Feedback* (BBC Radio 4, 1979–present).  
*Making the Most of a Wartime Larder* (BBC Home Service, 1940–1945).  
*Man Time* (BBC National Programme, 1934).  
*Men Talking* (BBC National Programme, 1935).  
*Market Prices for Farmers* (BBC National Programme 1923).  
*Motoring* (National Programme, 1923–?).  
*Music and the Ordinary Listener* (National Programme, 1924–?).  
*Music While You Work* (Home Service, 1941–1968).  
*Opportunity Knocks* (BBC Light Programme 1949; Radio Luxembourg, 1950–1955).  
*Our Gracie's Working Party* (BBC Light Programme, 1947–1950; Radio Luxembourg, 1950–1955).  
*People Talking* (BBC Light Programme, 1955).  
*Postscript* (BBC Home Service, 1940–1942).  
*Royal Address to the Nation* (BBC National, 1932–1939, BBC Home Service, 1939–1956).  
*Sincerely Yours* (Forces Programme, 1941–1945).  
*Steel* (Northwest Features, 1934).  
*Take Your Pick* (BBC National Programme, 1941–1947).  
*The Kitchen Front* (1940–1945).  
*The Shipping Forecast* (BBC National Programme 1923–present BBC Radio 4).  
*The / Children's Hour* (National Programme, 1922–1939; Home Service, 1939–??).  
*Those You Have Loved* (Forces Programme, 1940–1946).  
*Time to Spare* (National Programme, 1934).  
*We Speak for Ourselves* (Home Service, 1940–1943).  
*Women's Hour* (National Programme, 1922–27;  
*Worker's Playtime* (1941–1963).

## Television Series/ Episodes

*10 TV Interruptions* (David Hall, STV, 1972).

*199 Park Lane* (BBC1 1965).

*A Street Under Siege* (BBC2, 1992).

*A House in Harlow for its Ideal Family* (BBC Television, 28 August 1957, 7.30pm).

*A Tale of Two Cities* (BBC Television, 1965).

*About Anglia* (ITV, 1974).

*Access* (Tyne Tees, 1974).

*All Our Own Work* (BBC2, 3 August 1972, 10.55pm).

*Alternative Message to the Nation* (C4 1984) Channel 4, 25 December 1983, 3.00pm.

*Appointment with Drama* (BBC Television, 1955).

*Arena*:

*The Video Art Show* (BBC2, 1975).

*The Continuous Diary* (BBC2, 1977).

*Armchair Theatre* (ABC, 1956–1974).

*Biteback* (BBC1, 1991–1997).

*Blue Peter* (BBC Television, 1958–1964; BBC1, 1965–2012; now online).

*Changing Rooms* (BBC2, 1996; BBC1, 1998–2004).

*Citizen 63* (John Boorman, BBC1, 1963).

*Citizen's Rights* (ATV, 1975).

*Civilisation* (BBC2, 1969).

*Coast* (BBC1 and BBC2, 2005/2008).

*Come and Be Televised* (BBC Television, 1936–1939, 1946–1952).

*Coronation Street* (Granada 1960–ongoing).

*Counterblast* (BBC2 1996–1999).

*Crackerjack* (BBC Television, 1955–1964; BBC1, 1964–1983).

*Disco 2000* (BBC2, 1972).

*Double Your Money* (A-R, 1955–1968).

*Driving School* (BBC2, 1997–1999).

*Face to Face* (BBC1, 1959–1962; BBC2, 1989–1998).

*Forty Minutes* (BBC2, 1981–1994).

*Grandstand* (BBC Television, 1958–1964; BBC1, 1965–2007).

*Gardener's World* BBC2 1968–present).

*Hancock's Half Hour* (BBC television, 1957–1960).

*Harry Hopeful's Party*. (1936). BBC, 15 December 1936. 8pm.

*Horizon* (BBC2, 1964–ongoing)

*How to have a Good Death* (BBC2, 2006)

*I Was a Stranger* (BBC, 1957). 6 September 1957, 9.00pm.

*It's Ours Whatever They Say* (BBC2). 5 April 1972, 8.10pm.

*Juke Box Jury* (BBC Television 1959–1964, BBC2 1964–1967).

*Junior Points of View* (BBC2 1965–1971).

*Late Night Line-Up* (BBC2 1964–1972).  
*Line-Up* (BBC2 1964).  
*Living on the Front Line* (Channel 4, 1987).

*Man Alive* (BBC2, 1965–1981).  
*Mid-Week Mail* (Anglia Television, 1972).  
*Morning in the Streets* (BBC Television). 25 March 1959, 9.25pm.  
*Moving On* (2006). (BBC4) 27 November 2006, 12.20pm.  
*Nationwide* (BBC1, 1969–1983).  
*Newsnight* (BBC2, 1980–ongoing).  
*News Review for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing* (BBC2, 1964–1966) continued as  
*News Review* (BBC2, 1966–1972).

*On the Spot* (Granada, 1974).

*Open Door* (BBC2 1973–1986).

The Responsible Society and Neville Schulman (1973). BBC2, 9 April, 11.30pm.

Basement Youth Project (1973). BBC2, 15 April, 11.30pm.

Poets and Private Eyes (1973). BBC2, 11 June, 11.30pm.

London Trade Unions and the Old Age Pensioners Trust. (1973). BBC2, 22 October, 11.35pm.

The U and I Club. (1973). BBC2, 17 November, 10.45pm; (also featured in a 'round-up edition' (1974). BBC2, 29 May, 10.45pm.

The National Gypsy Council. (1973). BBC2, 9 December, 4.40pm.

It's Starting to Happen – Liberation Films. (1974). BBC2, 20 January, 4.35pm.

The National Association of Hospital Broadcasters: *Down Your Ward*. (1974). BBC2, 3 March, 11.40pm.

Jericho. (1974). BBC2, 1 April, 11.15pm.

Society for the Rescue of Destitute Animals and the British Association of Retired Persons. (1974). BBC2, 7 April, 11.20pm.

British Campaign to Stop Immigration. (1976). BBC2, 28 February, 10.30pm.

Lord Pitt, Deputy Chairman of Community Relations Commissions (personal response to earlier broadcast British Campaign to Stop Immigration programme). (1976). BBC2, 15 May, 10.35pm.

British Motorcycle Federation and two male flower arrangers. (1976). BBC2, 22 October, 11.20pm.

Free Palestine. (1976). BBC2, 26 November, 11.15pm.

Anglo-Israeli Friendship League. (1977). BBC2, 7 March, 11.25pm.

Campaign for Demolition. (1979). BBC 2, 12 December, 11.15pm.

Campaign Against Racism in the Media, 'It Ain't Half Racist Mum' (1979). BBC2 1 March, 11.25pm.

Taking Liberties (1984). BBC1, 8 November, 6.50pm.

*Open Space* (BBC2, 1983–1996).

*Opportunity Knocks* (ITV, 1956–1978; BBC1, 1987–1990).

*Panorama* (BBC1, 1953–present).

Can We Afford to Fill Up? (2008). BBC1, 28 July, 8.30pm.



*People in Trouble* (BBC Television, 1956).  
*Picture Page* (1936–1939; 1946–1952).  
*Play for Today* (BBC1, 1970–1984).  
*Points of View* (BBC1, 1961–1971, 1979–present).  
*Pot Black* (BBC2, 1969–1986).

*Question Time* (BBC1, 1979–present).

*Right to Reply* (Channel 4, 1982–2001).  
*Restoration Village* (BBC2, 2006)  
*Rock Bottom* (BBC, 1957) 15 October, 8.02pm.  
*Roving Reporter* (Granada, 1957–1964).  
*Royal Address to the Nation* (BBC Television, 1947–1963; BBC1, 1964–1967, 1969–present).

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