THE FRANKENBITE: ETHICS AND REALITY IN THE POST-PRODUCTION OF FACTUAL PROGRAMMING

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION & CULTURE
YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

DECEMBER 2017

Abstract

Many scholars question the lack of formal appropriateness, transparency, and ethical consideration of reality television, as it applies techniques that compromise a truthful representation of real events for entertainment purpose. Editing, or the craft of rearranging video and audio to create new meaning, is one of those techniques. What makes the subgenre of reality television different from the traditional documentary form in the public's perception is that the former is solely intended to entertain, while the latter is expected to be guided by the motivation to inform and enlighten. For this dissertation, I mobilized scholarly and artistic lines of investigation in tandem, choosing a topic that emerged from my own practice as a documentary maker and editor. Working on documentaries is what led me to consider this field a valuable subject for academic research. I began to think about the characteristics of the profession and the implications of a changing television industry. In my work, I moved beyond that dualism that either views the practices of editors as being entirely ruled by market forces or elevates the creative autonomy of the artist. I tried to build an inventory of editors' experiences and opinions instead: the ethical dilemmas they experience in the editorial decisions they make, the context in which this happens, their sense of narrative coherence as a guide to storytelling, and their opinions about their responsibilities and loyalties. By examining the production experiences of editors, my aim is to show the interplay and uneasy interaction between economics and culture. I argue that increasingly both forms, reality and documentary television, have more in common with the dramatic genre, in that their rhetoric is a narrative rhetoric.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the 50+ editors who opened their doors, schedules, minds and sometimes, their hearts, to speak with me about their profession. It is also for my colleagues in the edit room who throughout their careers have endured indifference and ignorance from well-meaning producers who "need an Avid operator," "by yesterday;" directors asking whether "you *technicians* don't have a union;" critics who wonder "what took so long to complete the movie, it looks so easy;" media scholars who think of editors as button pushers; friends and families who after decades of careful explaining remain clueless as to what their "relative who works in the movies" does for a living; and finally, reality show producers who gladly take an editor's writing and dramaturgical skills, without pay or credit. Let it be said that editors in factual programs are directors in their own right.

Acknowledgments

About ten years ago, I submitted a one-paragraph contribution to the Canadian documentary magazine *POV* on the blurring of genres and the industry's need to revisit those boundaries. Rejected for its perceived lack of relevancy, I took this response as an encouragement to dig a little deeper. This dissertation is the result. With hindsight, thank you, Mark.

For their endless patience and encouragement, I thank my supervisor Wade Rowland who went way beyond the call of scholarly guidance by cleaning my first draft from the many liberties I took in grammar, syntax and spelling, and to Blake to Fitzpatrick whose "big questions" offered a much-warranted aerial perspective. My deepest gratitude to you both.

And fondly for my wife Sue, who over the years has put up with my workaholic hours and anxious doubts.

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Chapter One: Why This Thesis?

Ethics is concerned with every facet of human interaction, including the application of general moral principles within professional practice. Ethical standards allow members of professional groups to counter pressure to act against their own principles, as well as provide a framework for accountability of their work. Reality and documentary television picture editors, however, do not possess such a code of ethics. This may lead them to make rash, opportunistic, or situational decisions in the cutting room that can have a detrimental impact on the featured subjects, the integrity of the genre of programs, the audience's trust in such programs, and the medium of television itself. This thesis examines what editors of factual television—in both reality and documentary television—consider to be ethical challenges while practicing their craft, in the absence of a generally agreed upon language of ethics or commonly recognized and shared principles in their professional field. In the core chapters of this thesis, I discuss a principle research question—how do editors address ethical challenges? I examine this question in the context of media ethics, a critique of current factual television, and a critical examination of the dominance of "story" within that genre. I continue with a critical analysis of propositions that have been advanced by the scholarly community on how to address the ethical challenges factual program practitioners face. The thesis closes with the conclusion that editors as practitioners in both reality and documentary television do not possess the independence necessary to execute moral agency and therefore, their professional ethics are compromised by the economic system they operate within. Instead of unrealistically burdening practitioners who work on the lower scale of the production chain, this thesis proposes a shift of focus from media creators back to their audiences, suggesting that the focus be on informed viewers instead of obtaining informed consent from program participants to address the crisis of ethics and integrity in the creation of

factual programs. This thesis also examines other voices in the scholarly discourse regarding media literacy, as well as format and genre distinctions that emerge out of that suggested shift.

The traditional documentary lays a distinct claim to honesty and truth by following the dictum of a "discourse of sobriety" (Nichols, 1991, p. 3) to speak to the human condition. While its makers do not suggest journalistic objectivity and balance—they recognize that all expression is constructed and that no simple mirror of reality exists—in the past the form had been defined by its claim to depict an event or portray a person that is real. Program makers' ethical judgments, made either implicitly or explicitly, centered around this crucial feature of the form (Aufderheide, 2007). Long held values of objectivity, truthfulness, and reliability meant that ethics was largely excluded from a critical examination of the documentary, as the form stood beyond dispute, its goal being to enlighten audiences through enlightened practices.

Reality television, in comparison, is generally thought to be motivated by the sole purpose of delivering entertainment, and its creators are believed to manipulate the video and audio material to serve that single goal. One of the common ways editors alter sound material is called "frankenbiting," which is the practice of splicing together several unrelated elements of a recorded interview or multiple interviews into a single statement to create narrative coherence (Dovey, 2000). A frankenbite allows the editor to construct a story by mining the relevant elements of an interview to combine them into a bold, ostensibly revealing statement or argument (Arnovit, 2004). While scholars (Curnutt, 2008; Holmes, 2007) have highlighted the lack of debate on this term in academic discourse, in popular media the frankenbite has become a symbol of the unethical ways in which editors manipulate audio-visual material, and the depiction of the people featured in it.

Although in discussions of the subject, the practice of frankenbiting has been exclusively attributed to the editing of reality television (Poniewozik, 2006), in this thesis I establish, based on my research, that despite their guiding principle to enlighten rather than just entertain audiences, editors in documentary television also perform extensive manipulation of image and sound, including frankenbiting. They do this to impose a "story" on the audio-visual material, to add drama, or to build "mini-crisis structures" (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 127) where none exist in the reality captured by the camera. In my research, then, I questioned whether editors of documentary television perceived the manipulation of audio-visual material as an ethical challenge in a different way from their colleagues in reality television. Additionally, I inquired if members of either professional group felt obliged to provide to their viewers a generally truthful depiction of events as captured by the camera. And, in either genre, by what means did they justify or support their beliefs and actions? In this context, this thesis will discuss the paradigm that is held in common by both genres—truth claims and the representation of reality—and how those are fulfilled. I will examine how the construction of story has become the great unifier of both forms and then critically examine the challenge that the dominance of "story" poses for television or entertainment, but also increasingly for society as a whole.

Inciting Incident

I first came to consider this field as a pertinent subject for academic research while working in traditional documentary production. During that time, I began to reflect on the characteristics of the profession and the implications of a changing television industry. It was a personal experience that served as the "inciting incident" and motivated me to examine my own participation in the documentary television industry, which ultimately inspired me to embark on this academic inquiry. It took a while to ignite. In the mid-1990s, I was the picture editor for a

documentary for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) entitled *Gerrie & Louise* (1996). At its center were two lovers caught in the turmoil of post-apartheid South Africa. Gerrie Hugo, an elite Afrikaner soldier, had witnessed the abduction, torture, and murder of African National Congress (ANC) activists, but never admitted his own participation. His fiancée, Louise Flanagan, a liberal journalist, had risked her life exposing soldiers like Gerrie. In the dying days of the apartheid regime, while trying to find their place in a new South Africa, the two fell in love with each other.

During the pivotal final scene in the documentary in which Louise interrogates Gerrie about his direct involvement in committing crimes against humanity, she asks him if he would consider confessions made by tortured prisoners trustworthy. "Yes," Gerrie replies, with his eyes to the ground, "because you don't lie when your life depends on it." He then adds, "but I have changed." At that moment, Gerrie briefly looks up, with his gaze just past the camera lens. Viewers of the documentary interpret that look as if Gerrie realizes he has just implicated himself directly in committing those crimes. As a consequence of that look, most viewers doubt his affirmation that he has "changed" and dismiss him as an untrustworthy character. What in fact happened was that the editor—myself—had removed the diegetic sound of a doorbell from the sound track that rang at the moment Gerrie looked up. He was simply responding to that sound. By removing those few frames, I, as the editor, had taken away Gerrie's motivation to turn his gaze. With that single edit, I had erased our efforts as documentary makers in 70 minutes of screen time, and years of pre- and production, to create a fair and balanced portrait of a man who had participated in committing crimes against humanity but was attempting to make amends.

I have presented that scene to film and media students many times in the following years to illustrate the power of editing in eliciting an emotional response from the audience. In discussing the editing of that scene with students, I usually rationalize my decision by arguing that the sound of the doorbell was getting in the way of "the story," maintaining that leaving in the sound would have broken the intimacy of the moment between Louise and Gerrie and distracted the audience. Despite my intention to be a conscientious, responsible editor, treating the documentary's subjects with care, that single sound edit had just as profound an impact on the viewer as the ones that are used to manipulate audiences in dismissing or embracing a participant on reality programs such as *Survivor* or *Big Brother*. Even decades later, I am still uneasy about having altering that moment in time. I believe that my editing compromised documentary values of honesty, truthfulness, and reliability, and violated the contract with the audience that says that events unfolding on the screen have an indexical relationship to what took place in reality as captured by the camera.

In the National Film Board of Canada's (NFB) *Capturing Reality*, documentary writer and director Barry Stevens, who was present in the cutting room during much of the editing process of *Gerrie & Louise* as its co-writer, reflects on the creation of documentaries, specifically on the relationship between truth and representation:

> There is a contract with the audience. An agreement that you are referencing or giv[ing] an account of evidence-based reality. That you are saying this is the way the world [is] as I see it. . . . And yes, let the facts get in the way of a good story, and out of which emerges a true story. (Ferrari, 2008)

Later in the same interview, Stevens describes the motives behind another editorial decision we made in *Gerrie & Louise*: the insertion of an interview clip of Louise just before the pivotal closing scene described earlier. In that section, Louise confesses that she would not have married Gerrie if she had found out something about his past that she hadn't already known. That

statement creates a strong dramatic tension, anticipating the scene that follows in which he indicates his direct involvement in torturing abducted activists. Yet we had placed Louise's statement in the documentary out of chronology, as that particular clip came from an interview with Louise that had taken place several days *after* the pivotal scene had played itself out. Stevens justifies our editorial choice with: "We altered chronology for the sake of the deeper meaning. We didn't let the facts get in the way of a good story. But I don't think it was a distortion of the truth. The authentic moment was less dramatic" (Ferrari, 2008).

Within these two quoted statements, Stevens shifts positions several times: he (a) changes from "letting facts get in the way of a good story" to justifying the opposite, (b) cites "evidence-based reality" as a principle to follow, but then qualifies it by saying that reality is "the way as I see it," implying a high degree of subjectivity, (c) justifies, for the "sake of the deeper meaning," abandoning the "authentic moment for being less dramatic," and, at the same times (d) determines, seemingly at random, what constitutes a "distortion of the truth" and what does not. These inconsistencies and subjective judgments, in addition to the contradictions between my own edit decisions and subsequent justifications, serve to illustrate the volatility, subjectivity and interchangeability of the terms of "truth," "fairness," and "reality," as well as the dominance of "story" in shaping a television program. In the process, as practitioners in the retelling of events from the cutting room of *Gerrie & Louise*, Stevens and I created our own narrative to "give order to human experience" (Fisher, 1987, p. 63) and to justify our editorial interventions in the way events had actually unfolded in front of the camera. Fisher's (1987) *Human Communication* is a useful starting point for examining the rhetoric of practitioners of factual television's narrative. Fisher proposes that people receive or reject narratives based on a test: do they pass or fail structural, material, and characterological coherence and narrative fidelity. Successful narratives

that pass become guides "to thought and action in the world" (p. 90). For Fisher, this process of creation and evaluation of stories constitutes a form of rationality and reasoning that is innate in human beings and transcends other learned forms of rationality such as formal logic or argumentation — Fisher deems *engaging stories* as more convincing than facts or logic.

Motivated by my experience editing *Gerrie & Louise*, I began to research whether colleagues faced similar decisions in the edit room. Had they also made changes that resulted in a degree of inaccuracy or manipulation, and, if so, did they reflect on the consequences of those decisions? Many documentarians justify their actions by elevating "the truth" to a higher conceptual level, that of "a higher truth" (Aufderheide, 2007), or as Werner Herzog, a legend of the contemporary documentary world, declared it, an "ecstatic truth" (Zalewski, 2006). Others make distinctions between "overall truths" that validate "distortions" (Aufderheide, Janzi, & Chandra, 2009, p. 16). The terms "higher" or "ecstatic" truth unconsciously invoke documentary pioneer John Grierson's description of documentary as a "creative treatment of actuality" (Grierson, quoted in Winston, 1995, p. 14). Grierson expands on this notion:

> A desire to make a drama from the ordinary set against the prevailing drama of the extraordinary: a desire to bring the citizen's eye in from the ends of the earth to the story, his own story, of what was happening under his nose. From this comes our insistence of the drama on the doorstep. (quoted in Ellis, 2000, p. 132)

Grierson developed this flexible term of truth, including his position that it is the organization of images and sounds with dramatic effect that move a non-fiction film from a simple description of reality to a creatively shaped interpretation of it (in Winston, 1995). Grierson argued that the deliberate order and reading of images and sounds was "the only reality which counts in the end" (quoted in Winston, 1995, p. 20). To this filmmaker and historian Paul Rotha added, "documentary's essence lies in the dramatization of actual material" (quoted in Jacobs, 1939, p. 12). As pointed out by Aufderheide et al. (2009), this has warranted a wide range of actions and

approaches that range from re-enactments to manipulative storytelling in documentary. For editors of factual programs of both reality and documentary television, the differentiation between "the" truth and "higher" truths offers them possibilities to reach for varied choices about narrative and purpose in the execution of their work. It also warrants the overall goal of communicating key thematic or intended meanings within a necessarily entertaining framework, permitting the distortions to fit within that framework, as well as the flexibility to deal with other production demands. The problem that emerges when sanctioning the freedom to rearrange facts is that it permits practitioners to make ethical choices without reflection or to justify an escape into inconsistency and compromise.

It is the community of reality and documentary television practitioners "that reflects and sustains the genre's traditions and innovation. An examination of changes . . . requires consideration of the views and experience of the program-making profession" (Dover, 2001, p. 259). The results of my research reach beyond surveying a professional field. They are relevant to society as a whole. In my research, I explored whether reality and documentary editors were aware of the larger impact that could arise from their work, as the programs they create contribute to a mass media industrial complex that is instrumental in shaping a viewer's perspective of the world, and therefore have an influence how those viewers act as citizens in society.

The practitioner's dilemma has been an aspect of the documentary form since its beginning. Ever since Grierson first used the term in 1926, scholars, audiences, and practitioners have struggled to define the parameters of the documentary form's relationship to truth. If such categories as "factual" or "fiction" once offered a means to create order out of division, the current age of cross-pollination between genres necessitates reassessing what is at stake, as

television programs labeled “documentary” have taken on increasingly variable forms. Observers of current trends in broadcasting agree that the traditional documentary aim of “enlightening” is steadily being eroded and replaced by forms of entertainment-oriented factual programs. That change has also fundamentally altered the working conditions of practitioners, like the editors interviewed for this thesis, who work in both reality and documentary television.

As described, traditional documentary, reality television’s precursor, makes distinct assertions about representing honesty and truth in its claim to say something truthful about what took place in front of the camera, and a practitioner’s ethics focus on this essential feature of the documentary form (Aufderheide, 2007). While documentary makers acknowledge that all mediated communication is to some extent crafted and there is no such thing in media as a neutral mirror of reality, they nevertheless believe they can deliver transparency and reflexivity. Recently, factual programs’ reliance on fictional techniques has resulted in a shift from them being considered factual, objective, serious, and truth-telling, to being perceived as dramatic and playful. The rapid and ongoing changes in the broadcast landscape indicate the demise of the “claim on the real” that defined the traditional documentary until now. Today factual television seems to operate in a sphere that is neither entirely fictional nor fully factual (Dovey, 2000). Absent from current documentary television analysis is the acknowledgment that new approaches of examining media production are required so as to correctly understand and critique its implications. Research into post-production practices has revealed that factual television represent a lasting break from the discourse of traditional documentary, but the necessary debate over the nature of these practices in the medium of television and their effect on practitioners has yet to take place. Missing is a description of the on-the-ground production

practices as everyday work and the meaning practitioners make of these practices. This thesis attempts to start filling that gap.

Goals of Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to provide an account of the main issues surrounding media ethics in context of the traditional documentary form‘s transition into factual television. Additionally, and most importantly, this thesis attempts to offer a view from the inside in terms of the considerations, attitudes, and experiences of picture editors working in both reality and documentary television. Practitioners should not be conceived of simply as artists or, alternatively, as components within an industry, but as individuals who practice within a set of particular conventions, circumstances, and compromises.

There have been several serious attempts at debating reality television that accept the form as a complex media construction, concerned with a number of social, economic, and political changes that implies that the form has an impact on cultural aspects of contemporary society. This scholarly research counters the limited and adverse perspective that dominates public discourse as it offers empirical grounds to question the emotionally charged populist claims. Reality shows present practitioners, participants, and viewers with ethical dilemmas. Mast (2016) argues that in the ethical debate about reality television, which centers on the potentially harmful consequences of human actions and decisions that shape the format, practitioners find themselves caught between two similarly unproductive poles: on one hand, isolated criticisms concerning individual incidents or extreme cases of moral wrongdoing, on the other, generalizing positions that ignore specific circumstances. Although useful for sketching the wider perspective of features grounded in political-economic structures and socio-cultural tendencies, both overlook subtle differences in the field and miss out on the possibility of

empirically supporting the assumptions in their argument, especially by examining the post-production of reality television by inquiring of those working in it. The aim of this thesis is to provide that perspective within an account of the main ethical issues emerging in the execution of the form, one that grounds the current literature on the traditional documentary, factual television, and media ethics in empirical evidence gleaned from practitioners.

Butchart (2006) observes that the idea of truth should be central in the debate about documentary ethics. For Butchart, ethics is a debate that arises when a deadlock between entertainment and responsibilities, the marketplace and care, is reached over the privileges and duties of the stakeholders (practitioners, viewers, and subjects). Sanders (2010), however, contends that, aside from Butchart's contribution, the contemporary discourse on factual programs and ethics does not involve any overriding deontological or utilitarian principles or issues of virtue ethics. Instead, the scholarly debate tends to focus on specific situations that raise moral concerns. Scholars debate the practice of traditional documentary ethics, concentrating on the responsibility of the practitioner to (a) the program's participants, with a focus of caring for them, and (b) the viewers, with an emphasis on truth telling.

I propose that scholars have not sufficiently taken into consideration the production realities facing practitioners; in fact, the gap between the scholarly discourse and production practices is a theme that re-emerges throughout this thesis. Any assumptions and ideas about potential ethical conflicts should be tested in the context of empirical everyday practice, which is one way to advance the debate on television program production and ethics. This thesis emphasizes the need for a balanced critical approach grounded in concerns about both factual programs and issues relating to the creation rather than the consumption of these programs.

Thus, the central survey that forms the base line for this thesis consisted of roughly 50

open-ended questions directed at 50 picture editors of factual programs in Canada and the US. Its focus was to examine how editors of factual television create narratives that constitute a convincing reality while maintaining claims to a truthful presentation of reality. This focus is based on the public perception that reality television presents, at the very least, a version of reality. It identifies how editors make narrative choices in the construction of programs, how they justify those choices, and what some of the phenomenon's larger cultural implications are.

From my own experience of working in traditional documentary, I am familiar with the feelings of chaos that can be experienced in the midst of post-production and, indeed, in the industry itself. Taking a position of an outside researcher, it is possible for me to identify patterns in the various experiences of practitioners. The latter does not invalidate the former, as practitioners' own perceptions of the process are integral to deepen an understanding of the field. Occupying both an insider and outsider position puts me in a privileged position.

Chapter Overview

The roots of reality television and merging with the documentary form into factual programs in the scholarly context cannot be easily located as academics do not agree when and where the form originated. In Chapter Two, I define key terms that are referred to throughout this thesis and also elaborate on the term "reality television." Due to the rapid expansion of the broadcasting industry, there is no solid definition that encompasses the variable formats of factual television. The forms of hybridized shows blur together and the shows slip between established forms, making it difficult to demarcate their boundaries between real and constructed narratives. In order to contextualize the uncertainty inherent in its field of inquiry, in the second chapter I further discuss various definitions of both reality and documentary television.

Chapter Three documents the historical development of the reality genre by tracking its

evolution through television history, which is largely based on economic contingencies, and framing the working conditions under which editors as practitioners operate. The dominant discourse emphasizes an US perspective, to the detriment of innovative programs from other countries. In this thesis, special consideration will be given to the broadcast industry in Canada as the country's contribution to the development of both reality and documentary television has been neglected, and because Canada's television industry has been my workplace for more than 30 years.

Chapter Four consists of a survey of the existing literature related to my field of research. I look at publications about the genres of both reality and documentary television, including historical studies that examine the traditional documentary form and professional identity in cultural production. It includes observations on the constructed nature of factual programs and the predicted merger of fact and fiction. Currently, most texts on the ethical concerns for practitioners in the field concentrate on a single issue or case study. Few of these works are based on extensive data collection about practices in the field, and they are mainly created by outside observers rather than by the practitioners themselves. To my knowledge, no academic study has proposed a comprehensive approach to ethical issues or the creation of an ethical code for reality and documentary editors, although many generic solutions for some aspects of production have been put forward (Sanders, 2010).

Chapter Five tracks how the incremental and pragmatic nature of my research has made it difficult to position it within a single school of thought or single scholarly discipline. This thesis straddles several disciplines including Media Studies, Economics, and Culture and Communications. There has been a long history of Documentary Studies in North America and Europe, but only since the 1980s has it become more distinctly scholarly in its discourse and

analysis. While the evolution of this thesis is shaped directly by my participation in Cultural Studies, my approach to research questions stems from my professional expertise in television production. This chapter will explore the influence of industry conventions, technological advances, and resulting changes in practitioners' views and actions. The latter section of this chapter sets out my research methodology and approach to studying the ethics of editors of factual programs. Given my privileged access to industry practitioners, many of them familiar colleagues, I determined that in-depth, open-ended, qualitative interviews would yield the most useful data. I shaped the questions based on my research aims and objectives, and I also added context to the collected data of verbatim quotations by evaluating individual participants' overall narratives. An auto-ethnographic component completes a triangular approach to this analysis, as I draw on instances of my own work as an editor of documentary television.

Chapter Six arrives at the core of the thesis: ethics in the post-production of factual programs. This chapter contextualizes professional ethics of picture editors practicing what ironically has been coined in the public discourse as "the art of the invisible," since the goal of editors commonly is to have their contribution remain unrecognized by audiences. In addition, the craft in general remains on the margin of scholarly activity, despite the key creative participation of the editor in shaping programs. Survey participants discussed how and why they chose a profession in which the main goal was to be invisible and how they described their work to others. Grierson argued that a careful ordering and interpretation of the material in the editing phase is "the only reality which counts in the end" (quoted in Winston, 1995, p. 20). This chapter offers a perspective on editing that goes beyond the medium itself, describing how the process of filtering out information and images is central and necessary to the human experience. The chapter closes with a discussion of the frankenbite that gives this thesis its title.

Chapter Seven, "Documentary Critique and the Problem with Story," describes the reciprocal relationship of reality and documentary television from a content and formal perspective and examines how each has influenced the other. Reality television's historical roots in the documentary form have caused many academics to critique it for its professed lack of formality and its perceived breaking faith with viewers in applying conventions of traditional documentary solely for entertainment purposes. In addition to discussing some of the formal strategies used by editors of reality television to mimic the documentary form in order to gain credibility with audiences, this chapter pays attention to efforts by scholars to incorporate reality television's formal features into the documentary discourse. It also includes a critical examination of the current stage of documentary television itself and questions whether a partial abandonment of its distinctive claims to honesty and truth needs to be viewed in the context of the increased influence of the reality television form. The chapter also includes an overview of the responses received from the editors on the question of their interpretation of notions of truth and reality. Framing the survey results required a brief return to the discussion of the tension between truth and its representation, from the early years of cinema.

In Chapter Eight, "Where to Go from Here?", I ask how storytelling and the tension in constructing reality and documentary television will shape future directions. After reviewing the survey results from the editors in both reality and documentary television, I propose that the shared experiences of their everyday practice can offer a distinctly different perspective to inform the scholarly discourse on documentary ethics. Editors consider themselves professionals and espouse the ethos of "getting done what is required to complete the task." Still, concern about the wellbeing of their subjects, the truth, and a respect for privacy and care do play a substantial role in their day-to-day professional decisions. Furthermore, in this chapter, I discuss

various concrete steps that had been suggested by scholars previously on how to approach ethical challenges. These methods include best practices, informed consent, an active involvement of participants during the editing process, a defined, binding code of ethics, and a professional forum to discuss ethical questions, among others. It is my intention that this thesis addresses the gap that exists between the academic discourse and the actual working practice in the edit room. In the concluding Chapter Nine, I reiterate the main takeaway of the thesis research, identify the limitations of the project, and offer suggestions for future research. I close this thesis with the supposition that editors deal with a high number of variables beyond their control, resulting in a lack of agency to affect meaningful change in ethical practices. Consequently, I suggest two shifts are needed to approach the ethical dilemma: the first is to renew the focus on educating audiences in media literacy, empowering them to receive and process media knowledgably. Secondly, I propose a re-evaluation of the established genre categories of "fiction," "documentary," "reality programs," etc. in light of the cross-pollination in form and content that has diminished the effectiveness of those genre distinctions, and consider the abandonment of these established genres categories, in favour of an ongoing and fluent process of evaluation instead of rigid replacement categories.

Chapter Two: A Question of Definition

Acknowledging Clifford Geertz's (1973) assertion that definitions provide a valuable coordination of thought and serve as an efficient path to develop and control a line of inquiry, in this chapter I define key terms that are referred to throughout this thesis and elaborate on the term "reality television" by tracking its evolution and merger with the documentary form through television history.

Ethics versus Morals: Locating and holding onto precise definitions of "ethics" and "morals" is a difficult task, as in much of the popular, and even scholarly discourse, the terms are used interchangeably. In the context of reality and documentary television, however, ethics should not be understood to be synonymous with morals, just as some generalized idea about the truth does not necessarily restrict creative agency in a specific context. For the purposes of this thesis I will distinguish "ethics" from "morals" and examine ethical practice on the basis of a constructive rather than definitive, or transcendent, idea of truth. "Ethics" has traditionally been defined as the reasoned consideration of responses provoked by the innate moral impulse. In other words, ethics involve the subsequent rationalization of an innate moral impulse to behave in a particular way. *Normative* ethics are thus associated with abstract ideas about how people should conduct themselves in life, and *virtue* ethics with the kinds of behavior they should aspire to be "good" people.

In comparison, *applied* or *situational* ethics are associated with ethical reasoning applied to practical moral issues, for example, how to behave in defined situations or circumstances such as those encountered in the workplace. This is sometimes reduced to following rules of professional codes of conduct. In these cases, ethical behavior is reduced to *compliance* with rules that might more accurately be defined as prudential behavior. For purposes of this thesis, I

follow the definition of ethics as a set of principles that mirrors human moral responses and that helps to determine, and subsequently rationalize, people's decisions about the right thing to do. By comparison, morals can be defined as the generally established norms and values of a society. Morals in the making of factual programs concern norms and values based on what practitioners decide about right and wrong and their responsibility to others and themselves. Morals also demand a comprehension of how individual behavior has an effect on those around us as much as it affects ourselves (Kettner, 2002, p. 410). Sanders (2012) argues that the current discourse on the ethics of factual programs does not, in effect, establish a debate about ethics but a discourse on a broader moral context and theoretical ways to approach those issues or prevent improper conduct in the future, which she deems "inefficient." It is important to state that my approach in this thesis concerns the ethics of creating factual programs in the context of both professional practices and industry conventions, and is not solely based on the individual editor's work experiences. It is important to state that the ethics of creating factual programs concern reflections on the practice itself, not on the ethical or moral status of the individual creator. I do not intend to evaluate actions by individuals or establish what is the right thing to do in any specific situation. I am concerned, instead, with how media practitioners determine what the right thing to do is in a given circumstance. A synopsis of the classical moral philosophy is included in Appendix A.

In the literature on the subject, Gross, Katz, and Ruby (1988) have acknowledged the practitioner's obligations toward the participant, the progress of their project, and the viewer. Combined, they become an ethical position (p. 310). The position of the practitioner and his or her various responsibilities in this web of duties and relationships then become a key component of ethics.

Editor and Editing: Even though there are various parallels, the established professional profile of the picture editor has little relation to story, text, or photo editing, but is defined in terms of the art and craft of film editing as the both the creative and technological part of the post-production practice. The term "cutter" originated during the traditional process of physically splicing celluloid film. On its most basic level, "picture editing," as the term is used in the industry, is the craft and practice of constructing images and sounds into a coherent sequence. But the occupation of an editor is not simply to mechanically put pieces of audio-visual material together, for example, by removing the "bad bits" or assembling dialogue scenes according to a predetermined script. A picture editor works with layers of images, dialogue, and real and virtual reality, to construct a coherent whole. Editing means the assembly of related shots to create a linear sequence and the combination of several associated sequences to build the entire documentary or drama. With the arrival of nonlinear technology and increased pressure to combine responsibilities, picture editors and their assistants are now made responsible for other post-production areas that previously were the expertise of other professionals. It is now common for editors to add music, create visual effects, and lay in sound effects, additional dialogue or narration, and increasingly, write the latter.

When the material is nonfiction, editing can redefine socio-historical reality. A director begins by digitally capturing a concrete portion of the real world. That raw footage takes on a changed meaning the moment it is placed within a timeline as part of a flow of images and sounds. In a traditional documentary, "every edit or cut is a step forward in an argument" (Nichols, 1991, p. 21). In factual television, the argument is replaced with entertainment. With the absence of dedicated writers, picture editors in reality television, in particular, have assumed

un-credited writing roles. To this day, production companies of reality television maintain they do not engage writers. Instead, they pay story editors that guide picture editors in building narratives. By defining the labor in this way, producers can avoid having to deal with the writer's union. In addition, when writers are hired for story planning and structuring, they are labeled as mere consultants to avoid applying standard employee treatments: "The reality shows are not so much written as edited. They want to maintain the illusion that it is reality, that stuff just happens. It is important that people think it's real" (Booth, in Washington Post, 2004). Not only because of the larger responsibility that has been placed upon them, but also for the sake of reducing verbiage, I will from now refer to them as "editors," omitting the term "picture."

Narrative and Story: The use of "narrative" as text has now been extended to refer to any research data in the form of natural discourse or utterances. Generally, the term is used to refer to "any spoken or written presentation, but it is primarily used in a more narrow sense to mean a form or genre of presentation organized in story form" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 201). As the terms are used here, "story" and "narrative" have distinct meanings. Story refers to writing that depicts a sequence of events and actions with a beginning, middle, and end—a plot arranged in temporal order. Narrative in this study is applied to indicate a certain kind of data. Thus an interview has specifically been devised to elicit narrative data, for example, an editor's description of a specific decision they made in the cutting room and the circumstances motivating that decision. In a generic interpretation of the term, narrative is equivalent to the main linguistic vocabulary that qualitative research projects (see Chapter Five, on research methodology) consist of. The term is used in connection with the data drawn from the transcriptions of the original interviews. For the purpose of the survey I used for this thesis, the term "narrative" was applied to everyday verbal expressions, as well as brief phrases or abstracted accounts if they occurred. Since the telling and

sharing of stories have essential social functions, the shared narratives provided me as the principal researcher with particularly valuable insights into the organization of personal experience.

Misrepresentation of Reality: The term is used here to define the depiction of a distorted, inaccurate, partial, misleading, or otherwise unfaithful picture of an actual "true" state of affairs, and is thereby linked with the ethical principle of "truth" and other associated ideals of authenticity and honesty. Christians and Cooper (in Wilkins and Christians, 2009) declared that "truth is central to communication practice. . .. The general concept of truth is an un-wavering imperative" (p. 62). Additionally, and central to this thesis, is the issue of misrepresentation that pertains to the discursive, typical organization of images and sounds, including rearrangements and the addition of voice-over commentary to condense and, at times, substantially reshape the initial recorded material. Qualified omissions and emphasis of story in ordering material carry an ethical burden, as they unavoidably affect the perceptions of balance and bias of the program.

Pursuing dramatic or comic story potential and high-intensity revelatory or sensational events takes precedence in reality television. An interventionist editing style can distort social constructs and may perpetuate widely held stereotypes and misrepresentation. For example, to create a character type like the "hollow and detached female contestant" in a program that follows characters for all waking hours, the editor may choose to cut together the images of a female participant doing her make-up, which requires her looking at a mirror. In real time, she only does so twice a day, but with ten shooting days the editor has the ability to assemble twenty events, which, cut together in quick succession, create a vain and self-centered character:

> You can make someone look like a sympathetic person or like a big asshole. It is very simple to do so. You have the power to determine who's sympathetic and who's unsympathetic. That tells a lot about how it works. (in Mast, 2016, p. 20).

Frankenbite: The online magazine *Radar* (2005) was the first source to use the term for creative dialogue cutting when it interviewed five disgruntled story editors in the industry. The term refers to the practice of splicing together several unrelated elements of a recorded interview or multiple interviews into a single statement to create the illusion of a continuous statement from the fragments of disconnected bits of dialogue that guide many reality television shows (Dovey, 2000; Escoffery, 2006; Kilborn 2003; Murray & Ouellette, 2009). The term has yet to be properly debated in the academic discourse (Curnutt, 2008; Holmes, 2007). But in popular media discourse, the frankenbite has become symbolic of a particularly egregious and unethical way in which editors manipulate audio-visual material and with it, the appearance of the people in it.

Media Literacy: As defined by Hill (2005), this is the viewer's ability to analyze and respond to media with a critical distance and degree of reflectivity about what is perceived. Audiences apply Fisher's (1987) paradigm of narrative coherence (see Chapter Five on methodology) and consider how reliable the material is, whether it is factual of fictional, and if it is presented in a realistic way. How viewers respond to and interpret experiences received via mass media makes them part of a larger whole—society—shaped by those experiences. Hill's (2005) audience research reveals that viewers approach factual programs from a critical "default" position and are more media literate than previously assumed, evidenced by their judgment of factual entertainment by the level of truth claims. Hill's claim can be contested by the popularity of lowbrow factual shows like *The Kardashians*. Media texts might be indexed, but viewers are not necessarily equipped to read those signs and might ignore a text's signature or misappropriate it. In addition, it is questionable if viewers recognize the extent to which editing as a tool has the inherent ability to be manipulative, even without intending to do so. A healthy dose of

skepticism is not only essential when viewing any form of non-fiction, but is, in the context of this thesis, a starting point to address the ethical dilemma of editors.

Factual Programs–Reality and Documentary Television: It is necessary for my discussion on ethics to outline an extremely minimal definition of factual programs that includes both traditional documentary and reality television. The traditional documentary form as a genre or form with an excess of colloquial, industrial, historical, and scholarly meanings, is contested. It has been diversely defined through the decades as "a dramatized presentation of man's relation to his institutional life," as "film with a message," as "the communication, not of imagined things, but of real things only," and as a form "which gives up control of the events being taped" (all in Eitzen, 1995, pp. 81). It has also been demarcated as an idealized notion:

> Documentaries are all methods of recording on celluloid any aspect of reality interpreted either by sincere and justifiable reconstruction, so as to appeal either to reason or emotion, for the purpose of stimulating the desire for and the widening of human knowledge and understanding, and of truthfully posing problems and their solutions in the spheres of economics, culture, and human relations. (World Union of Documentary declaration 1948, quoted in Leon, 1999, p. 63)

The most referred-to definition of documentary remains Grierson's original from 1928: the "creative treatment of actuality" (quoted in Winston, 1995, p. 14). Two years prior, Grierson had written of Robert Flaherty's film *Moana* (1926) that it had "documentary value" (quoted in Curthoys & Lake, 2004, p. 151). It signaled the element of creativity of the documentary enterprise and agency of the documentarian to determine what had value, and what did not. Eitzen (1995) describes the most difficult task within the framework of Grierson's creative treatment of actuality as being that of defining what, in fact, represents "actuality." Eitzen contends that every depiction of reality is an artificial construct, like any fiction, "a highly contrived and selective view of the world, produced for some purpose and therefore unavoidably

reflecting a given subjectivity or point of view" (p. 82). One's perception of the social world is inevitably influenced by personal beliefs and traditions, argues Eitzen. Even if one accepts the existence of a concrete, material reality upon which our being depends, we can only absorb it through the process of mental representations that is a socially created, mediated semblance of that reality.

From the mid-1990's onwards, Nichols' (1995) classification of documentary as a "discourse of sobriety" has framed the current conversation on documentary:

> Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare—these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself; they can effect action and entail consequences. Their discourse has an air of sobriety. (p. 47)

Acknowledging the changes in the factual television landscape with the hybridization and commercialization that occurred around the time of his pronouncement, Nichols himself eventually withdrew this characterization, as he found it no longer adequate. Dancyger (2010) put forward a practical alternative designation: "Documentary makers tend to adhere to their definition of a documentary: a film of real people in real situations doing what they usually do" (p. 300). I contend that after mining the results of the survey conducted for this thesis, Dancyer's definition, too, with its emphasis on real people and situations, is no longer adequate in describing current trends in factual television.

Still, audiences are expected to assume that a visual text labeled as a documentary will contain a truth claim, making it more reliable than a fictional story that is based on real events, and certainly a more a truthful representation of a specific concrete reality than a narrative drama. Plantinga takes aims at the misconception that documentaries are a proclamation that promises truth:

> I do not assume that nonfiction films necessarily assert or imply truths; they assert and imply truth claims. A defining characteristic of nonfiction discourse is that it makes direct assertions about the actual world, not that it makes true assertions. (quoted in Bordwell & Carroll, 1996, p. 321)

Nevertheless, Carroll (1996) and Plantinga (1997) contend that there is agreement among audiences about when the label "documentary" applies and when a media text should be labeled as fiction. Richard Leacock, a pioneer of the purest form of documentary, direct cinema, recognized that "many documentarists are not really interested in presenting un-manipulated reality, but rather in manipulating that reality to make a polemical point through editing or narration" (quoted in Allen & Gomery 1993, p. 219).

In general, an idealistic understanding of the impact of audio-visual media has come under increased scrutiny, most explicitly manifested in the critical discussion surrounding documentary. Nichols (1993) calls documentary an "already suspect tradition" (p. 45). The documentary filmmaker and author Trinh Minh-ha (1990) goes so far as to proclaim that:

> there is no such thing as documentary—whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques. This assertion—as old and as fundamental as the antagonism between names and reality—needs incessantly to be restated despite the very visible existence of a documentary tradition. . . . The link between the name [documentary] and what is named is conventional, not phenomenal. (p. 76)

With that circularity and an occasional genre confusion relating to the documentary form as outlined above, it is not surprising that the perceived offspring of the documentary form, reality television, too, cannot be defined in a more precise way. During its first decade, most of the scholarly community avoided taking the form seriously: "Using a set of analytical tools derived from critical history of documentary to think about factual entertainment feels like using surgical instruments to eat birthday cake" (Dovey, 2000, p. 136). Recognizing the widespread appearance of the reality television phenomenon in the last decades only requires comparing rating statistics,

but defining it is, even today, another problem. Programs tend to include such diverse array of subjects, formal approaches, and concepts that it is challenging to identify their defining characteristics.

The etymological examination of the term "reality program" reveals it to be a construction, not a factual reflection of the real, but a "show" built primarily around entertainment values, designed to be perceived as real. As well, there is an inherent paradox in the idea of tuning into a reality-based television program to escape everyday life. But the fact that reality television is an artificial account of lived reality makes the notion seem less irrational. Starting with the form's popularity, in contrast to, say, traditional documentary, Gitlin (2008) reports that the "most popular shows are those that succeed in speaking simultaneously to audiences that diverge in social class, race, gender, region, and ideology . . . appealing to a multiplicity of social types at once in order to comply with demands of the marketplace" (p. 248). Fiske and Hartley (1978) emphasize that the more "realistic a program *is thought to be*, the more trusted, enjoyable and therefore the more popular it becomes" (p. 160, italics added). Therefore, its diverse viewership and the portrayal of apparently realistic events have resulted in an enduring popularity of the form.

As other television forms shift and change, the characteristics of reality programs change with them. The presentation of reality television as a bastardized form of documentary provides evidence of wider changes in the television industry. Though most scholars and critics differ on how they specifically define the connection between reality television and documentary, the majority of them approach reality programs through a documentary lens (e.g., Corner, 2000, 2008; Goode, 2000; Hird, 2001). Roscoe and Hight (2001) label reality television a "hybrid documentary form" (p. 38). Similarly, Hird (2005) evaluates reality television's ability to inform

and edify traditional documentary values and concludes that some reality programs can be "watched simply for entertainment, but [that] they also inform us, challenge us to think differently, and take us to places we may not have been" (p. 5). Even popular media and funding agencies (see the Canadian Media Fund categories in Appendix B) consider reality television as inherently related to documentary. The supposition carries the irony that reality television as a form of documentary is in the process of destroying its "parent" documentary by blurring the line between information and entertainment.

It is not surprising that even now there is still no universally agreed upon international definition as to which elements comprise a reality television program. That lack of definition leaves it up to scholars, critics, and audiences to assign meaning to the form and its subgeneric offshoots, and often with limited approval. Kilborn (1995) notes its tenuousness, pointing out how "one moment [the term 'reality television'] is being used to refer to slice-of-life observational modes of documentary making, the next it is being used to describe types of fictional drama rooted in real-life situations" (p. 423). Still, Kilborn (1994) did come up with his own definition:

> Reality Television involves (a) the recording, on the wing, and frequently with the help of lightweight video equipment, of events in the lives of individuals or [a] group, (b) the attempt to simulate such real life events through various forms of dramatized reconstruction and (c) the incorporation of this material, in suitably edited form, into an attractively packaged television program which can be promoted on the strength of its "reality" credentials. (pp. 423–4)

Murray and Ouellette's (2009) more recent definition takes the previous variations into account: "We define reality TV as an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real" (p. 3). This elaboration intersects with the central issue of this research as it defines reality television not just as morally offensive at times, but *defined* by its lack of an

ethical position. Nichols (1994) contends that reality television "includes all those shows that present dangerous events, unusual situations, or actual police cases, often re-enacting aspects of them and sometimes enlisting our assistance in apprehending criminals still at large" (p. 45). That definition includes tabloid news programs, infotainment, and soap operas as influential genres of reality television. In recognizing that diversity, Nichols (1991) also points to an unsettling aspect of reality television in its ability to cross those borderlines and to blur delineations between previously distinct genres. It is also one of the key inquiries of the survey that informed this thesis.

Barnfield (2002) maintains that any complete definition would have so many facets it would be too inclusive to be helpful (p. 49). The defining landscape seems to have become impossible to navigate. The cross pollination of subgeneric formats has further complicated the task faced by scholars in categorizing shows to permit fruitful research studies (Hall, 2003; Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003). Features of one subgenre merge with such swiftness that the moment scholars have classified one subgenre, another has suddenly appeared at its side. In a psychological study on viewer perception of reality shows, Nabi et al. (2003) found that factual entertainment has yet to merge into a defined genre for audiences; using statistical analysis of how viewers sort and categorize programs, they determined that "reality-based programming, such as it is, clearly includes a more diverse selection of programs than do established genres" (p. 310).

A notable fact is that among various definitions, the term "unscripted" is included on a regular basis (Godlewski & Perse, 2010; Mast, 2016; Pekora, 2002; Whitlock, 2013, among others). This is contradicted by statements I collected from participating editors who provided evidence that reality television is very much scripted in advance. There is a self-serving intention

behind broadcasters and producers holding on to the term “unscripted”: it doesn’t require them to employ and pay writers who might be unionized. The expectation is that picture editors “build the story in the editing bay” (Elisburg, 2008) as the editor in reality television “might be relied upon to write narration” (WGC, 2015).

Aside from the difficulty of agreeing upon a definition of the format, the continuous cross-pollination between reality and documentary television and fictional shows raises another problem. Although many reality television programs borrow aesthetically from the documentary tradition, one cannot make the claim that their practices follow the basic documentary spirit of keeping the faith with viewers who are or are not equipped to distinguish between informational content and entertainment value (Getz, 1994). While the visual look these programs borrow often signal viewers to read them as serious information or inquiry with the ethos of objectivity in the same way they would documentaries, reality programs’ primary function is to entertain. Filming for entertainment appears to mean leaving behind most of the ethical and social constraints associated with documentary in favor of commercial interests, giving audiences, and with that, advertisers, what they want.

Corner (2000) resolves the dilemma of the continuous expansion in defining reality television by creating a whole new environment that he has termed as “post-documentary culture.” Corner warns that the academic community has speculated on the impact of the category without the research or evidence to ground these speculations. He suggests that reality television, in all its various appearances, has expanded the envelope of the factual-program genre, which in turn has widened the definition of documentary. Corner proposes that “thinking outside and beyond the documentary category” can help us to understand the “realities in factual and fictional television” (p. 155).

After reviewing the many definitions above, I have concluded that the term "reality television" is just as uncertain and contradictory as its supposed roots in the documentary. For the purposes of this thesis, and acknowledging their commonalities in the marketplace, I have decided to use the term "factual program" for both formats, or if a distinction is required, "documentary television" and "reality television." In fact, almost any entertainment program about actual people falls into the category of factual television. The editors who participated in the survey will offer their own positions on this question in Chapter Four. In the following chapter, I offer a rudimentary history of the reality television phenomenon as a foundation for this thesis.

Chapter Three: Reality Roots

To better comprehend the reality television phenomena, I consider it essential to provide a historical context for reality television as it has evolved within the broadcast industry. The form is not new or unique in offering a glimpse into the stories and lives of others. Depictions of everyday people in their lived experience have evolved into many modalities and genres throughout history. Autobiographical accounts and daily journals in print have brought the personal past of historical and contemporary figures to life for present readers in literature, and the traditional documentary presented the precursor of the reality television form. The roots of reality television as discussed in a scholarly context are not easily situated as the views of academics on when and where the genre found its beginning differ. Early television programs, such as *Queen for a Day* (NBC, 1945–2004), which could be considered one of the original "makeover" reality shows, positioned real people in dramatic situations. In Holmes and Jermyn's (2004) *Understanding Reality Television*, Bradley Clissold (2004) traces the onset of reality television to 1948 with *Candid Camera*. This view is seconded by Rupert and Puckett (2010) as well as Hill (2007) and McCarthy (2007), the latter declaring the show's creator Allen Funt as "reality television's creative ancestor" (p. 20). Other media historians trace the phenomenon back to the 1972 PBS documentary series *An American Family* that recorded seven months of the lives of members of the Loud family. In fact, it was a Canadian production, *A Married Life* by Alan King (1968) that was the first to follow a family over a long period of time with a camera, preceding the PBS documentary by several years in subject matter and style. This precedent of a Canadian origin in the creation of a new documentary format was not, however, the first in documentary history. The cinéma vérité or observational cinema, in which the documentary camera aims to unveil hidden truth of reality, is universally credited to Jean

Rouch's 1961 film *Chronique d'une été.* However, in actuality, in February 1958, three young film technicians—Michel Brault, Gilles Groulx, and Marcel Carrière—from the National Film Board of Canada went to Sherbrooke, Quebec for a weekend to capture a newsreel short about a snow-shoeing convention that resulted in *Les Raquetteurs*, and gave birth to a genre—the unmediated "observation cinema."

However, it was anthropologist Margaret Mead's (1973) review in the *TV Guide* that declared *An American Family* to be "a new kind of art form," an innovation "as significant as the invention of drama or the novel" (p. A61) that declared the US television series as new form of television landscape programming. Craig Gilbert, the series creator, wrote after completing *An American Family* that documentary television of the future would have to entertain: "I believe strongly that the television documentary, if it to have a future, must go into this direction" (quoted in Rupert & Puckett, 2010, p. 95).

The dispute among scholars about the birth of reality television continues. Kilborn (1995) moved the origin of the genre up to 1987 with the NBC program *Unsolved Mysteries*. Murray and Ouellette (2009) situate reality TV's emergence even later by adding programs of the late 1980s and early 1990s like *Geraldo Rivera* and *The Jerry Springer Show* as daytime talk shows that opened the door for current reality forms in showcasing the inherent drama and rawness in real people's lives. The fact that participants were put through a rigorous casting process, and the program was edited for maximum emotional impact, went unnoticed by audiences. The first network to expand on the reality television format was Fox network with *America's Most Wanted* (1988) and *Cops* (1989). While both centered on crime, the former offered dramatic recreations only. As a newly formed network, Fox had struggled since its launch in 1986 to gain momentum in competition with its rivals NBC, ABC, and CBS and

needed an identity. Abelman (1998) notes that Fox network was "most successful in establishing itself in this highly competitive industry by pushing actualism—drama presented realistically—to its limits of realism" (p. 419). *Cops* did offer innovation (a camera was placed inside a police cruiser to record authentic offenders and detentions), becoming the very first reality program to adapt production techniques from fictional television to depict real-life events, situating them within a narrative thread (Abelman, 1998). When in 1991 *The Real World* premiered on MTV, the foundations for new narratives and societal clashes, which have become the signature of the reality format, were firmly established. *The Real World* claimed to show "what happens when people stop being polite and start to get real" (TRW opening narration, 1992 ff.), and it became "the landmark cinéma vérité series . . . as the first reality television program" (Murray & Ouellette, 2004, p. 3). *The Real World* combined elements of nonfiction and fiction to produce "dramatic story structure[s]" that turned "the tales of ordinary real people into extraordinary television programming and filmed entertainment" (Murray & Ouellette, 2009, p. 4). Other programs, like *America's Funniest Home Videos,* which went on air soon after *The Real World,* featured amateur talent and everyday activities. It also added a subgenre of game show that would play a significant part in the rise of reality television. The increase in television channels available to viewers and the simultaneous surge in commercial competition within the broadcasting market further drove the production of programs that catered to the mainstream or repeated popular formats and subjects with an emphasis on entertainment (Barnett & Seymour, 1999; Bourdieu, 1996; Gitlin, 1994; Groombridge & Hay, 1995; Pilger, 1998). At the same time, the inflated demands by key acting talent, especially for US-based broadcasters, increased operational costs substantially. Ogdon (2000) argues that the cost of producing established fiction-based entertainment rose to such an

extent that by "1986, producers were losing up to 100,000 US dollars per half-hour episode and 200–300,000 dollars on hour dramas" (p. 6). The outbreak of a labor dispute offered broadcasters the opportunity to get out of the financial quandary. In hindsight, the 1988 writers union' strike that lasted 5 and a half months and threatened the launch of that year's fall broadcast season, was critical to the ultimate rise of reality programming since the few reality shows that already existed did not rely on writers for continued output.

The Economics of Creating Factual Television

According to Ogdon (2000), a reality television program's "production costs are so low that it is capable to recoup its makers' investments from network license fees alone. It earns back production costs with the first US network showing; further syndication represents pure profits" (p. 7). The production and business model of reality programming offer drastically lower budgets, reducing required labor time and associated costs. Margins are routinely as high as 60% over the cost of production. For production company and network executives, using the genre's non-union status as a threat also keeps the union-contracted fiction workforce under control (Dayen, 2014). In the last decade, the cost of producing one hour of reality television was less than one million US dollars (Murray & Ouellette, 2009, p. 147), and on average, the cost of an hour of a factual programming remains less than half the cost of a scripted drama. However, advertising revenue equaled that of drama production. As the price for an advertising spot is determined by the audience share of a particular program, *American Idol* became the most expensive of any program in the US market. Fox, *American Idol's* broadcaster, collected roughly $19 million US in ad revenue for every hour the program went on air (Whitlock, 2012, pp. 59–60). The cost of a single 30-second spot on *Survivor* was $900,000 US. Whitlock (2012) describes how in the early- to mid-2000s, more innovative formats that featured talent

competition and/or elimination became immensely popular.

An added economic factor in favor of reality programs over traditional programs has been the increased consolidation and globalization of the media (Fuersich, 2003; Kilborn, 2003; Ogdon, 2000). Reality shows are built on concepts or situations that can be easily and cheaply reproduced and re-edited to adapt to any language or market. The financial details are attractive: since any reality program produced in the US earns back its production costs with its first domestic airing, every additional sale, whether domestically or as syndication translates into pure profit (Raphael, 1997, pp. 106–7). To add to the no-fail scenario, the scope of distribution venues has expanded into the global market. To respond to a television market that covers most of the world, reality programs are designed primarily for an international audience and then adapted for individual domestic markets. International licensing led to the growth of a wide assortment of shows across an equally wide subject range that advanced reality television's audience reach and popularity. In the US and the UK, the genre's popularity lead to the formation of three stations that are exclusively devoted to the format: Fox Reality, Reality Central, and Reality TV. Furthermore, boundary-pushing content began to dominate television schedules as cable stations spearheaded a further shift towards outrageous content in order to keep or expand audiences.

For several years, the format's rise in popularity appeared unstoppable. Kilborn's (1994) observation that some producers felt that "a virtual saturation point [had] been reached" (p. 426), turned out to be incorrect. Despite further regular projections that the reality television phenomenon had reached its peak, the form has undoubtedly strengthened its position in the mainstream media. Among the over 1400 different television shows that aired on cable and network TV in 2014, 57% were reality shows. Among these reality shows, over 55% were brand new, rather than subsequent seasons of established series, as tabulated by Wei (2016) from the

online television industry digest Cynopsis, which lists daily television show premieres.

As the format's rise in the broadcast schedule continues, the two frequently cited factors used to explain its rapid development and proliferation are economics and technology. Recording technology had produced a wide availability of "both cheap, lightweight recording equipment capable of producing images of broadcast quality" and "go-anywhere" cameras that could be "concealed discreetly in clothing, accompanying luggage or in a traveling or stationary vehicle" (Kilborn, 1994, p. 427). I argue, though, that it was less the technology than the greatly reduced expense of talent: professional actors receiving union wages were replaced with willing and often naïve volunteers, making the reality show concept tremendously attractive to producers.

These factors, however, only explain the historical conditions that made the reality TV phenomenon possible. Sparks (2007) argues that during this time "neoliberal ideology increasingly favoured competition and markets as against the combination of political and cultural paternalism that had dominated the main national broadcasting organizations" (p. 134). Sparks also relates how throughout the 1980s and 1990s there was increased competition for media markets along with rising audience fragmentation, while neoliberal legislators rolled back regulations, effectively dismantled public broadcasting, and permitting the introduction of satellite and multi-channel television cable. By the end of the century, the 500-channel universe had become a reality, bringing with it much greater choice and much tougher competition within the industry. Hearn (2010) reiterates that the rise of reality television was instigated by a set of cost-cutting measures in response to the economic difficulties that confronted the broadcast industry leading to a casualization of the industry workforce.

Today, reality television has undoubtedly evolved into a cultural phenomenon of significant consequences, and not just in the US. No longer limited to broadcasters like Fox,

NBC, CBS, or ABC and cable stations like MTV, reality programming is currently carried on a broad range of television stations and networks which now include broadcasters such as PBS and National Geographic. Digital distribution is a significant new trend that reaches further than the television monitor to laptops, tablets, and smartphones: "New [digital] technology [has] added more than 50% to the consumer's entertainment and information budget" (Bogart, 1995, p. 267). As an example of the impact of this development in consumer culture, the market research group "Trendrr" reported that reality television shows, aside from sports, are the subjects of half of all online conversations about TV (Landau, 2013). In established broadcast markets, digital technologies led to competitiveness that decreed that established ways of financing television were no longer adequate. Revenue from advertising, licensing, and subscription services that feed broadcasters in the television world is now divided among an ever-increasing number of content providers. As well, advertising now is abandoning cable television in favor of the Internet where Google and Facebook have become the dominant industry players and revenue earners. This has increased the economic pressure on traditional programs to survive and increased competition for a fragmented audience—the old business models are no longer working (see e.g., Esser, 2010; Magder, 2004).

Reality Television in Canada

In Canada, reality television's growth was especially symptomatic of the increasing need for public broadcasters to operate according to the logic of private channels, as competition for audiences and funding mounted (Raphael, 1997, p. 106–7). Scanning the Canadian television schedule, factual entertainment programs now occupy broadcast windows and funding options that were previously occupied by traditional documentaries. For example, since 2006–2007, traditional documentary content in English language television decreased by 15%, with

independent and affiliate production dropping by 13%, and feature-length documentary productions declining by 21% (DOC, 2011). Furthermore, both public and private broadcasters in Canada increasingly schedule shows like *Battle of the Blades* and *Top Chef Canada* that boost ratings and advertising revenue, while unclear language in the country's regulating body, the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC), allows the producers of those programs to receive the "documentary" classification. Many reality show productions have received funding through the documentary envelope of the Canadian Media Fund (CMF) thanks to its contradictory definition of the documentary form that sets out these criteria:

> A non-fiction representation of reality that contains, informs and engages in critical analysis of a specific topic or point of view; provides an in-depth treatment of the subject; is meditative and reflective; is primarily designed to inform but may also entertain; has an original narrative and visual construction and enduring appeal and, therefore, a long shelf life. (in DOC, 2011)

The CMF then goes on to state:

> This definition excludes current affairs, public affairs, human interest or lifestyle productions, "how-to" productions, reality television, instructional television, formal or curriculum-based educational programming, magazine productions, talk shows, reporting and current events, religious programming, promotional productions, travelogues and interstitials. (in DOC, 2011)

In actual practice, however, funding programs that are explicitly excluded in its own definition above, constitute a denigration of the traditional documentary form by accommodating competition programs such as *Canadian Idol.* The practice has allowed broadcasters to use reality shows to fulfill what is called priority programming obligations as prescribed by the CRTC, even though they are more accurately categorized as entertainment magazine, reality, or variety programs. Just as for US production companies and broadcasters, these kinds of programs assure a profit for their Canadian counterparts, as they are cheap to produce and are basically guaranteed a large audience share. The W Network's *Buying and Selling* house hunting

show costs $230,000 CAN per episode and draws 2.8 million viewers (Landau, 2013). The average hour of scripted television, meanwhile, costs roughly six times as much—or more. The Canadian co-produced renaissance drama *The Borgias,* with a budget of about $5 million per episode, had 22 times the price tag of *Buying and Selling*, with only one sixth of the viewership (Landau, 2013).

Pressures in the Edit Room

Responding to the pressures of the marketplace, broadcasters have taken economic actions aimed at practitioners, which has resulted in the casualization of the industry. The changes in the broadcast environment have affected the concrete conditions of workers in the independent television arena. That shift in the marketplace had an impact on editors as their overall working conditions have changed accordingly. The work force in factual entertainment comprises two-thirds freelancers and one-third company employees (WGA, 2007). Overall, freelancers find work in production and post-production areas of a project, with the latter including post-production supervisors, story- and picture editors, and assistants. Freelancers are only contracted for a predetermined length of time. According to a report by the Canadian Media Guild (Gunning, K., Mendoza, N., & Wirsig, K., 2015), the length of a contract can vary anywhere from several days to a better part of a year. Today's post-production schedules are often reduced from months to only weeks. Forty-four percent of industry professionals work over 40 hours a week, and 24% over 60 hours a week. But roughly one-third of professionals at any given time are not working, providing producers with a pool of ready labor. Eighty-two percent of those employed do not receive any benefits when they are not working. Two-thirds do not belong to a professional organization, even if most have been working in the industry for more than 10 years. Frequently, freelancers receive no health or retirement benefits, nor any sick days.

If the production shuts down for a time, editors do not receive compensation. Editors are forced to fill out timesheets that specify 11-hour days in advance for a flat fee, depriving them of pay for extra hours or overtime. The CMG (2015) reports further that unlike the scripted-TV industry, only a small proportion of skilled and creative workers in factual television are currently covered by a collective agreement. In a Writer's Guild of America study (WGA, 2007), 85% of respondents were not paid overtime, and 50% reported that their time cards reported less than their actual work hours. Editors in factual television are now overworked, underpaid, and not properly equipped. Yet they are still expected to deliver product in a high-pressure workplace with its constant appetite for highly rated programs (Dovey, 2000; Hill, 2005, 2007).

In the uncompromising competition that defines the television environment, there is always a different company eager to create product for less cost with fewer staff being paid lower wages. This pressure puts individual practitioners in a challenging environment involving both ethical and economic considerations. Producers are hard-pressed to treat practitioners and participants fairly. Thus, the changed status of media workers took place under the demands of an evolving professional culture, but also as a result of a lack of opportunity to develop skills.

The survey design and parameters will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five, but since it is relevant to the topic under discussion, the following discussion is a preview. I wanted to know if the change in the workplace was reflected in the responses from the editors who participated in the survey. When asked about their education and what institution or individual had fundamentally shaped their career, only six out of 50 respondents indicated they had not attended a university or college program (half of these respondents exclusively edit documentary television). Of the 44 remaining editors who received a postsecondary education, fewer than one in ten credited any of their university teachers as instrumental in their education. Slightly more

than half of the editors pointed to a mentor who was instrumental in them honing their craft. Eleven interviewees overall credited an editor they had assisted as influential in the development of their skills. It is significant that almost all of those who responded positively to the question of a mentor had at least 15 years of experience in the field, indicating that the changing work environment is no longer conductive to nurturing the mentor-mentee relationship.

Because of the changing economic conditions, having a mentor has now become a rarity. Of those with five or less year work experience as an editor, no respondents named a mentor. As one respondent said: "I am self-taught all the way. Film school gave me the vocabulary to 'fake it' so could land my first jobs, but everything else I've taught myself or picked up from co-workers along the way." The transformed production environment has had a negative effect on training and the flourishing of creativity in the industry. This economic framework directly impacts content post-production, as editors no longer have the support or time to create stories that grow organically out of actual material, but instead need to manufacture tension and conflict by combining disparate audio-visual material, for example, cutting to a facial expression of someone as a response to an event, even though the look was captured at a different time and under different circumstances, and applying more interventionist cutting techniques, like the frankenbite.

Change in Creativity

Combined with a lack of commitment to training new talent, there are now fewer opportunities for practitioners to develop post-production and skills. Advancements in technology have created further specialization and fragmentation in the post-production process. In the past, editors and assistants spent time together in the same room, now they tend to perform their work at different times and in different locations. In the past, editors mastered their skills in

the edit room over many years of accrued experience in a work environment in which the notion of the "assistant apprenticeship" had been firmly established (Tunstall, 1993). Now, in a cost-cutting, commercially driven climate, newcomers are often required to work for free, as an intern, sometimes for years at a time, or are billed for their own job training, which can become an expensive preposition in an ever-evolving and specialized digital media world. The long-established model of editor and editing assistant, where the latter learns the craft from the former, no longer exists. The editing workflow is now so fast paced and fragmented that many entry-level trainees or assistants do not have the opportunity to spend time with senior editors learning through observation. For the majority of inexperienced editing freelancers, it is now more important to promote themselves "as a commodity in the television labour market" (Ursell, 2003, p. 36). Trainee editors are not taught on the job how to meet basic production and editorial standards that, significantly, include navigating ethical dilemmas in the practice of their craft.

Editors of reality television are no longer asked to cut entire programs but are solely utilized for cutting single acts or even just sequences within an act, like the "intros" and "extros" (short montage sequences that either immediately precede or follow a commercial break). This increased fragmentation leads editors to involve themselves less in the program itself and subsequently, to care less about the subjects that are featured in it. Shorter deadlines and faster turnaround times for delivery reduce the editor's ability to construct a cohesive story. Further compromising their skill to build story from actual events, most reality television producers either cannot or do not hire enough support to log and transcribe the many hours of recorded footage, or they lay off staff in post-production to save money and maximize profits. To get a sense of the taped material, without assistants, an editor is required to speed view tapes to construct the narrative "on the fly" while "praying to God we can make something resembling a

story stick" (Seagal, 1993). This situation constitutes a lack of duty of care on the part of the production company for the freelance practitioner, not to mention the subjects. Editors are now compromised by cutting corners to reach post-production deadlines. Traditional values about craft, quality, and public service are being replaced by new values that have become dominant, associated with the rise of an enterprise culture, individualization, and self-promotion (Keat & Abercrombie, 1991). Dovey (2000), Poniewozik (2006), and Brenton and Cohen (2003) acknowledge the perpetual pressure practitioners are now subjected to in order to keep up with the demand of creating high-rating reality television programs for the market.

The changed status of television practitioners is a result of the pressures in a changing work culture and the consequence of a lack of opportunity to develop skills. A far-reaching change has ensued in the professional standards television practitioners associate with their work. The diminishing level of craftsmanship has coincided with the loss of the traditional moral base of a lasting workplace identity that is now replaced by a temporary work status (Sennett, 1998). Self-employed workers' production values and skills associated with their creative work has retreated into self-exploitation, associated with extended working hours, increased stress, job insecurity, and a lack of benefits like pension and health care (Sparks, 1994). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) found that increased competition became subjectively difficult for cultural industry workers. Their respondents in UK media industries displayed significant nervousness, anxiety, and even panic in relation to their insecure and uncertain careers. In a new economic environment, discursive attitudes towards creative labor favors enterprise, a commercial attitude, competition, 24/7 availability, and an individualistic attitude. Creative labor endorsing self-commodification rests uncomfortably alongside traditional values of creative agency, cooperation, and mentorship. The effect on the production of television has been intense:

"There is a question mark about the ability of television workers to produce 'quality' output where training and time are under increasing pressure" (Ursell, 2003, p. 40). Despite the laudatory rhetoric of the creative industries, the altered work environment has had a negative effect on skills and on the potential for creative expression within the broadcasting world. In addition, the freelance environment of television work means that laborers are forced to devote more of their time and energy to maintaining continuous work through strategic networking and targeted socializing.

This has also resulted in fewer opportunities for collaboration and has led workers to retain creative ideas instead of sharing them (Born, 2004, p. 191). Lee (2014) argues that the current debate about creativity associated with a new understanding of labor has established a link between the values of creativity and economic growth. The apparent difference in how to define creativity is a reflection of broader ambiguities and the meaning and purpose of the practitioner's creativity. General audiences tend to have a romantic understanding of the predominance of the talents of a single individual. That belief promotes the idea of the singular creative vision that portrays individual creativity being challenged by "institutional, bureaucratic and economic monoliths" (Negus & Pickering, 2004, p. 58). But this limited assessment does not take into consideration the sociological aspect of creativity, described by Negus and Pickering (2004) as the "asymmetries of power and resources" (p. 58). They note that different practitioners working in the cultural industries are able to reproduce specific definitions of what is generally considered as creative. The tension between values and quality are felt by individual practitioners and finds expression in public discussions about quality and "dumbing down" within the broadcasting culture. The dominant sentiment is in agreement with the current neo-liberalization of culture, in which creative industries have evolved through a process of flexible

specialization. Just as independent producers depend on their broadcaster to receive their next commission, so are freelance practitioners dependent on the production houses for their continued employment, resulting in a negative impact on creativity (Born, 2004).

The independent sector within the television industry has evolved by a process of consolidation that has had a substantial impact on production values. Traditional standards considered for quality television, such as traditional documentaries produced to inform and enlighten, have come under threat from commercial interests, leading creators of television to concede to a steady decline in standards. Broadcasters no longer hide good, challenging and important programs of public interest in their schedule between populist and market-driven content. Now, *every* program needs to be popular or dramatic and include a personal "hook" (see Chapter Seven, section "Turning Reality into Story"). This is the case across the schedule, whether news, fiction, or factual programs. All are narrowing the gap between themselves and reality television; they are responding to the market.

Altered Self-Definition

In this exceedingly profit-oriented climate, the professional status of editors has changed and with it a new skill sets expected of them by broadcasters. In television production, skill sets that are rooted in experience have lost value over time in favor of interchangeable production staff. This situation relates to a wider shift, moving further from the principles of craftsmanship and a work ethic of "getting something right, even though it may get you nothing" (Sennett, 2006, p. 195). The commitment of the craftsperson "to do something well for its own sake" (p. 104) is no longer in demand. "Craftsmanship sits uneasily in the institution of flexible capitalism. Institutions based on short-term transactions and constantly shifting tasks, do not breed that depth" (p. 105). New talent is not taught on the job how to meet basic production and editorial

standards, which includes navigating ethical dilemmas in practicing their work. Practitioners are losing professional status as craft skills are marginalized in the pursuit of audiences and successful formats. To borrow from Corner's phrase, in the "post-documentary" era, they have become "post-professionals." The next chapter will provide a literature review of the current scholarly discourse on ethics, traditional documentary, and current factual programming.

Chapter Four: Literature Review

As any thoughtful research is influenced by previous contributions to the scholarly canon, it is essential to review the theoretical and methodological approaches of other scholars' findings. Since its inception, the documentary form has involved a creative process whereby practitioners present a narrative or argument by deliberately arranging recorded images and sounds for a depiction of the real world. It shares with other nonfiction forms an uneasy connection to an ambiguous "reality," and its disputed distinction from fiction raises persistent questions essential to most of the literature (Carroll, 1996; Guynn, 1990; Nichols, 1991, 1994; Plantinga, 1997; Rabinowitz, 1994; Renov, 1993), or is at least recognized or discussed in other works (Comer, 1996, 2000; Kilborn & Izod, 1997; Rosenthal, 2005; Winston, 1995). While this thesis shares a concern with many aspects of such studies, the examination of the discursive aspects of cultural production, professional identity, and applied ethics revealed a gap in the available literature. The complicated connections between the practitioner's ideals and actual experiences, the reality of working practices—an editor's autonomy and the ways it may be constrained—are issues that I explore in this thesis.

Because of the extended development time of scholarly literature, there are currently only a limited number of published studies available that directly address my inquiry into the genre of factual television (see Corner, 2000, 2002, 2008; Dovey, 2000; Kilborn, 2006), which I discuss later in this chapter. The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the scholarly field in which I situate my research and to gather other authors' insights into the general themes I discuss, to verify their relevance, and to highlight the important contributions of scholars. My aim is to discover the weight and significance of the themes in my empirical research as they are reflected in the literature that concentrates on cultural practitioners and their

work, such as models of professional identity, the frame of a practitioner community, ethics, the impact of genres and professional behaviors, as well as the processes through which change is initiated and responded to within cultural production.

Documentary Studies

Interpretations of documentary traditions offered by other studies concentrate mainly upon the program text itself, but exclude in-depth consideration of the documentary profession, or production systems. The literature on the classic documentary of the last 30 years distinguishes itself by offering wide-ranging theoretical models for the genre (Comer, 1996; Minh-ha, 1991; Nichols, 1991, 1994; Plantinga, 1997; Renov, 1993). As most of the literature dedicated to documentary texts discusses cinema and television simultaneously, often with an emphasis on the former (the exceptions being Corner, 1996, 2000; Kilborn & Izod, 1997), production studies are mainly concerned with specific television programs (Bullert, 1997; Dornfeld, 1998; Gilbert, 1988; Silverstone, 1999). This division is rooted in the development of different theoretical approaches within Film and Media Studies, with the latter covering television. For Corner (2000), the separation of the two fields is an appropriate recognition that television is a distinct field of inquiry within the scholarly discourse on documentary media, separate from the supremacy of a "film studies model" (p. 683). Nichols' (2001) conceptual scheme of the documentary form, originally developed and outlined to distinguish particular traits and conventions (the poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, and performative mode) are not fixed, and, as *Blurred Boundaries*, his book title reveals, the boundaries of the documentary form are indeed blurred, with "considerable latitude [that] remains possible" (Nichols, 1994, p. 159). Nichols believes that the factual genre's composition can change over time as practitioners stretch existing boundaries, and that creators expand

generic frameworks. MacDougall (1995) argues similarly in *Beyond Observational Cinema* that documentary modes are not strictly controlled within a system of genres, and challenges the idea of a strict adherence to a singular documentary mode.

At the center of Bruzzi's (2006) *New Documentary,* the definition of the documentary form is marked by a tension within the idea that a pure association between the image and where it originated—reality—is attainable, as anytime a factual text is constructed the acceptance of some form of mediation is unavoidable. Bruzzi integrates new factual forms by suggesting a solid relationship between traditional documentary of the observational mode and reality programs, and sees the latter as the successor of the former. While I disagree with Bruzzi's conclusion that reality programs are *natural* successors of the documentary (see previous chapter on the genre's definition), I concur that both forms have a constructed nature, a contested relation to an uncertain "reality," and a questionable distinction from fiction. The ethical challenge in the representation of a documentary's subject raises recurrent questions central to much of the documentary literature (Comer, 1996; Nichols, 1991, 1994; Platinga, 1997; Renov, 1993; Rosenthal, 2005; Winston, 1995).

Documentary Ethics

There was little discussion of documentary ethics prior to the 1976 issue of *Journal of the University Film Association in America*. From that date onwards, documentary scholars started to debate the ethics of documentary production (Pryluck, 1976; Nichols, 1991; Winston, 2000; Rosenthal, 2005), mostly as part of the broader theoretical documentary discussion. At times ethics were considered explicitly (Gross, Katz, & Ruby, 1988, 2003) in order to suggest judgment on the practice of media making. Gross et al. (1988) elaborated on the triangular challenge between the intention and commitment of the practitioners, their responsibility to

uphold professional standards, an obligation to the program producers, and finally, the concerns for their subjects that might conflict with any of the previous responsibilities.

The discourse on documentary ethics usually did not involve theoretical ethical paradigms, but mainly offered pragmatic approaches. Although practitioners discuss moral issues that come up while practicing their craft, there is limited empirical data of their actual views or experiences (except Gilbert [1988], on the making of *An American Family,* Sanders' [2010] and Aufderheide's [2012] surveys of documentary practitioners). For example, the debate over what constitutes informed consent and how is it applied in practice reveals the gap between theory and practice (Sanders, 2010). Sanders also questioned practitioners about their involvement in the industry, possible ways of cooperation, and ongoing communication among each other, as well as a range of other approaches. In Chapter Six, I explore how scholarly definitions and the suggested application for an informed consent by participants are challenged through their practical application in the field.

The two discrete fields in the discussion of ethics of particular interest for this thesis are firstly, addressing questions of truth and reality, which focuses on the practitioner-viewer relationship, and secondly, issues of representation and consequences, centering on the creator-participant relationship. Advocating empirical research into ethics, Doris and Stich (2005) admit that "it is not possible to step far into the ethics literature without stubbing one's toe on empirical claims" (p. 115). This is certainly the case in documentary ethics as much is presumed about the consequences for participants, the consequences of representation, and attitudes of practitioners. In this connection, Pryluck (1976), during the height of the direct cinema movement, proposed that "if one is serious about using direct cinema to make valid statements about people, then collaboration should be welcome" (p. 27).

Pryluck (1976) lists various ways in which practitioners may abuse the willingness of subjects to participate. Making factual programs with human beings unavoidably includes "conning and manipulation" (p. 22); crew and recording gear can be intimidating and participants are almost always kept out of the creative process, certainly during post-production. Pryluck suggests making ethical standards explicit, arguing that "collaboration fulfills the basic ethical requirement for control of one's own personality" (p. 28). In Pryluck's collaborative approach, practitioners share control over the text with those participating in it. The author also promotes the concept of obtaining provisional consent prior to viewing of a rough cut and final consent. The possibility of participants viewing the selected edited footage and specifying what they want edited out is a more established alternative brought up by Winston (1995) and Rosenthal (2005) This scenario, too, will be further discussed in Chapter Eight. Gilbert (1988), the creator of *An American Family*, considered by some to have launched the reality television phenomenon, early on addressed the obligation to be truthful, but also confessed that being transparent about the practice of creating a documentary might result in a withdrawal of consent by potential participants.

Likely the most fervent voice, Winston (2000) argues in *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries* for the free expression of opinion, but demands a serious duty to an ethical conduct by voluntarily implementing principles. He contends that misguided conduct ought to be exposed and made an example of: "by all means, castigate film makers," "sting broadcasters," or "boycott the products" (p. 165). Winston concludes "unethical film-making should most certainly be exposed and the creator should suffer the consequences of that exposure—the public destruction of their credibility" (p. 165). Winston critiques practitioners for executing projects in ways that contravene their own expectations of what constitutes responsible behavior. According

to Winston, freelancers are torn between good behavior and the need to sell their labor. A claim to being an artist with artistic freedom may not be valid, Winston argues, in cases where "we have confused media responsibilities to the audience with the ethical duties owed participants as if the outcomes of taking part were the same as spectating" (p. 181). Winston also suggests a complete "renegotiation of the traditional balance of power between filmmaker and participant" (p. 162). The documentarian must give up his or her dominating stance and take a position of being their subjects' advocate or enabler. But Winston recognizes that in a media industry set up to exploit those with little agency to begin with, his radical reorientation is reduced to a thought-provoking suggestion. Winston challenges the assertion that "the camera never lies" and reflects that nevertheless, "it seems to me many people still believe it. The limitations of the relationship that any photographic image has to the reality it reflects are beyond everyday experience" (p. 182). The debate surrounding what constitutes documentary work and how to credit its practitioner in the scholarly and artistic community reaches further than television as a visual medium. The photographer Walker Evans declared in a 1971 interview for the magazine *Art in America*: "The term should be documentary style. . . . Therefore, art is never a document, though it can certainly adopt that style. I'm sometimes called a 'documentary photographer,' but that supposes quite a subtle knowledge of the distinction I've just made" (quoted in Katz, 1971, p. 87).

All the arguments above, combined with the viewer's anticipation about the truth content of documentary images, appears to make *any* form of sincere and justified denotation of factual programs impossible to achieve. Rosenthal's first anthology, *New Challenges for Documentary* (1988), contains articles focusing on documentary ethics, but almost all of them concentrate on a single issue or case study. Contributor Nichols addresses the question of power imbalance

between creators and subjects in documentary (Chapter V, *Sticking to Reality: Rhetoric and What Exceeds It*). Nichols (1991) argues that while the documentary maker has the "responsibility to make his or her argument as accurate and convincingly as possible" (p. 17), the connection between practitioner and participant remains the key relationship for the issue of ethical conduct. For program creators who question ideas of fact and impartiality, and attempt collaborative forms of production, this association presents further complexities (Williams, 1998). Some practitioners who understand that their duties to their subjects often collide with other professional responsibilities, for example, confidentiality and the mission to entertain, increasingly question the use of subjects as a form of exploitation.

The central matter to consider in the relationship between practitioner and participant is agency. For Nash (2010) that relationship needs to be entirely understood in relation to an imbalance in power. Power is usually held by the practitioner because of their privileged access to media and means of production, their perceived social status, their control of the image, and a conscious awareness of both the process and the participant (Maccarone, 2010). Thus, the practitioner holds the balance of power over the participant, leading back to the potentially exploitive association that Winston (1995) pointed out, which has its roots in the Griersonian tradition and which he considers prevalent in today's television production. Winston writes off the Griersonian didactic tradition as patronizing and claims that it inevitably leads to violation of ethical codes.

In general, the academic discourse suggests addressing any moral quandaries from a normative perspective that is based on assumed rights of both participants and audiences. However, those pragmatic solutions do not necessarily link ethical issues with broader moral

theories. And at times, scholars have judged the behavior of program makers without including the practitioner's justifications for their actions. My research should help in changing that.

The Practitioners

There are only a few production accounts offered directly by documentary practitioners themselves (Drew, 1988; Gardner, 1996; Gilbert, 1988). Dornfeld's (1998) study sheds light on the influence of industry imperatives on practitioners despite their perceived sense of freedom to produce innovative programs (p. 44). The author points out that interrogating the decision-making process that arises during production is even more difficult as factual program practitioners, like others involved in creative industries, often lack the ability to articulate the motives for choices they make. When asked, they revert to vague accounts like "it works" or "it looked good to me" (p. 67). In several published studies, television practitioners' descriptions of their working day amounted to "instinctual" or "chaotic," (Dover, 2001, p. 43). They often denied the constrained or compromised nature of the documentary practice the researchers witnessed. That was not the experience of the survey participants in this thesis, as the majority of editors responded with precision and eloquence.

Kilborn and Izod's (1997) *An Introduction to Television Documentary* contributed to the analysis of the production of factual programming in the context of professional identity, the community of practitioners, the significance of traditions, and processes of innovation. Their work offers, even 20 years after its publication, a number of useful insights, especially in Chapter Six, "Making a Drama out of a Crisis." They ground the everyday work of factual program practitioners in the academic discourse. The rules and conventions that guide contemporary program makers' working circumstances are, according to Kilborn and Izod, the "generic verisimilitude" that practitioners have "in mind when they give their material its shape" and are

formed by tradition that goes beyond the present-day exigencies of individual institutions (pp. 34–35).

Kilborn and Izod's (1997) perspective on television practitioners raises questions about their collective and professional identity and boundaries of genre that are relevant to my inquiry. Central to this are relations between producers and the commissioning networks that, in effect, control the producers through their economic dominance and by dictating the nature of commissions according to their predicted ability to deliver audiences. Kilborn and Izod assert that the interests of the broadcaster are not the same as those of practitioners: "There is a growing feeling amongst program makers that the contemporary ecology of broadcasting has made it increasingly difficult to uphold some of the principle aims of documentary as they have traditionally been conceived" (p. 171). The growing concern among practitioners concerning the decline in their creative autonomy was also reflected in the interviews I conducted for this thesis. Other scholars have joined Kilborn and Izod in predicting an outcome in which there is an inescapable amalgamation of fiction and nonfiction, a prediction I will elaborate on in the final chapters.

In his classic study *Men and Their Work*, sociologist Everett Hughes (1958) argued that a person's work "is one of the things by which he is judged, and certainly one of the more significant things by which he judges himself" (p. 42). "Dirty work," a reference to work roles and tasks that are frequently perceived as shameful, disgusting, or degrading due to physical, social, or moral taint, is one of Hughes' key concepts. Wei (2012) contends that because the reality television genre is commonly criticized for being exploitative and fake, by extension, reality TV workers, too, are morally tainted and viewed as "dirty workers" of questionable character. Practitioners develop strategies for protecting their identities against the shame and

degradation of performing stigmatized work. Given the societal stigma and criticisms the genre faces, despite its popularity, Wei examined how practitioners justified their morally questionable production decisions and claimed identities acceptable to others, in order to arrive at a self-understanding that they could live with. Through his ethnographic fieldwork he found that production workers dispel the taint by "distancing themselves from their actions," and/or "tweaking their standards of quality in their everyday work" (p. iv). The survey results for this study confirm many of Wei's findings.

In their comprehensive survey of US-based documentary makers, Aufderheide et al. (2009) also actively searched out the views and practices of practitioners on a number of ethical questions, including their relationship with viewers and their duties to their participants. Their data illuminated the effects of a changing production environment on ethical conduct. Aufderheide et al.'s study emphasized that practitioners lacked a forum in which they were able to reveal and receive feedback on the ethics of their craft. According to the authors, practitioners tend to make decisions on an ad hoc basis, applying situational ethics. But at the same time, those interviewed claimed to share general but "unarticulated" (p. 6) principles. Aufderheide et al.'s research sheds light on how a situational, rather than a deontological, approach to ethics is implemented, and draws a picture of practitioners struggling with questions of accountability, loyalty, and what truth to tell when their own interests and those of their subjects conflict. A close reading of Aufderheide et al.'s report confirms the importance of inquiring about the experiences and opinions of practitioners as necessary to an understanding of the ethics that influence their work and the principles that motivate their decisions to do the right thing.

Ethics of Editing

Shifting attention towards the edit room, and more directly to the context for this thesis, it should be noted that an important shift in duties takes place from production to post-production. During research and taping, the director is focused on the subjects, ensuring their cooperation and wellbeing. However, during the editing process, the subjects fade into the background and become "editing material" because constructing the actual factual program becomes the central activity. The editor does not meet the participants except in unusual circumstances, even though they watch and work with those subjects as material on the screen for weeks or months. This unconventional relationship leads at times to unexpected emotional responses on the part of the practitioners as I will point out later in the thesis.

The art and craft of editing remains on the sidelines of contemporary media scholarship, especially when it comes to practitioners themselves writing in a scholarly way. Notable exceptions are British editor and author Dai Vaughn (1999) and Hollywood editor Walter Murch (2001), whose seminal *In the Blink of an Eye* offers a relevant conceptual interpretation of picture- and sound editing in the creative field. Almost no studies exist in which data collection about practices in the cutting room is undertaken, other than through case studies, which are often reported on by third parties rather than the practicing editors themselves. As well, no scholars have proposed a comprehensive approach to ethical issues and/or the creation of an explicit ethical code for editors, although various solutions for aspects of the production process have been put forward (Sanders, 2010, pp. 539–41). Even if scholars were to produce such an ethical code, the question remains whether practitioners would abide by it in the application of their practice.

The working reality of post-production is one of constant judgments as to what events and subjects are to be concentrated on, which footage is to be discarded and which is to be kept for the final cut. The events that are captured by the camera are part of the real world, and not a creation of a fiction writer brought to life by performers. Documentary editing is assumed by many in the general public to deal with material that was captured from real life, unlike fictional work. Silverstone (1988) concludes that there is, "a certain arbitrariness—a serendipity—at the heart of documentary practice" (p. 164), a presumption that is strongly contradicted by the participating editors of my research. They consider their task to be to get past the often-chaotic nature of material recorded in real-life images and sounds as a deliberate craft—to shape that real life as a story.

The Editor as Manipulator

Economically based workplace pressures aside, the editing process itself exposes a tension and furthers a contradiction. Changing the raw material by elevating its original meaning to a specific purpose when placing it in a larger sequence reveals the incongruities between the "production reality" as experienced on location and the "program's reality" within the completed documentary. These differences are enhanced by editing techniques like the glance-object edit, the cut-away, and match-action cuts (Dancyger, 2010). In factual programs, and in the absence of a predetermined script, the footage offers an insight into a subject's life or an event. The process of editing the elements inescapably leads to some distortion of the facts and these accumulate in a misrepresentation of the characters, intentionally or not, and a possible sacrificing of their integrity. In juxtaposing realities that are distinct temporally, visually, and audibly, new patterns of space and time are shaped. For Grierson it was the organization of images and sounds with dramatic effect that moved a nonfiction film from a simple description

of reality to a creatively shaped interpretation of it (Grierson in Winston, 1995). As previously noted, Grierson argued that the deliberate order and reading of images and sounds was "the only reality which counts in the end" (quoted in Winston, 1995, p. 20). The program maker "creates dramatic effect from the accumulations of its single observations" (Grierson, 1947, p. 150). While in the production phase the relationship between creators and created is the most present and the most fragile, the rhythm of creative forces is most clearly achieved in the editing process. At no time is editing a neutral conveyor of meaning. Factual television applies the program's structure as both a tool for reportage and a means of persuasion. The editor guides the significance of the sequences in their order, even if they are finally decoded or interpreted by the spectator (Dancyger, 2010). In ideal circumstances, the editing process is managed with attention to fidelity and honesty, with the editor being the crucial mediator between the director or producer, who was present on location during taping, and the captured images that will be presented to the viewer. The editor and author Vaughan (1991) described this multilayered process:

> Throughout the process, the editor is engaged in a curious mental exercise: to attempt, from the rushes [unedited raw material] and from the testimony of those present, to form an intuitive impression of the event as if it were firsthand experience (granted that all such experience is itself partial and selective); and then, in settling upon the presumptive happening "behind" the material, to use that material to say it. (p. 71)

The fundamental principle of the editing craft raises a relevant query. Reality or documentary television presents specific events in a deliberate structure in accordance with the conventions of classical storytelling (Plantinga, 1997). However, reordering the authentic chronology of events for the sake of building drama raises questions of honesty, especially where the sequential manipulation wrongfully suggests an underlying connection between several actions that took place in different times and places but leave the impression of a singular event (Bousé, 2000).

Theoretically, any composites can be created from any recorded images or sound as long as the appearance of a unity of space and time is sustainable. An example is the insertion of the image of a person's reaction that was taken separately and which may wrongfully add emotional response to some event, or the discreet combination of sound bites from separate interviews, hidden from view by cutaways, leading to the frankenbite, which gives this thesis its title. It is in the fluent interlacing of both modes of representation, inter-cutting between observational sequences and talking heads, that this pastiche of essentially disparate elements becomes especially relevant. The resulting fragmentation, however elegant, disrupts the stability of observation and destroys any possibility of the viewer comprehending the wholeness of the actual event.

As the process of editing invariably leads to distortion or misrepresentation, the question becomes what kind of guidelines do practitioners recognize and endorse, and how are these ethical standards and practices applied, or at least considered, when cutting material. Practitioners' responsibilities to their subjects naturally come into conflict with different obligations, for example, to the audience or broadcaster, but scholars have also increasingly called into question of the use of subjects. Concentrating on the creator-participant relationship highlights the power disparity and "remains the besetting ethical problem of the practitioner/ participant relationship even in the most casual, normal and un-deviant of circumstances" (Winston, 2000, p. 147). The editor might enter the post-production process with the intention to remain conscious of the content of the original footage and to remain true to the participants without prejudice or fabrication (Oldham, 2003), but the shadow between the production reality and the show reality tends to be deep.

The question remains where to situate the dividing line between a practitioner's "assertive stance" (Plantinga, 1997, p. 30) that belongs within the limits of artistic license or creative freedom, on one hand, and the techniques of discursive demonstration that knowingly produce a false, dishonest impression of the real referent in the interest of an engaging story, on the other. Among the possible pitfalls are deceiving or misleading the subject by intentionally omitting essential information, presenting elements in a more or less favorable light than they occurred in, or just plain lying (see also Chapter Six, The Editor Working with Blurred Boundaries). These deceptions remain hidden from public view and although their eventual revelation might evoke a moderated sense of betrayal on the part of the audience, it does not lessen the potential harm to the participant's public reputation (Nichols, 2001, 2008). Reality television's balancing act between its factual basis and a characteristic emphasis on the kind of creative latitude employed in fictional works, is at the least troubled, but at worst highly problematic.

The discursive organization of material in editing is based on omission and condensation, necessitated by the structural constraints of television frames of a one-hour or 30-minute window (Mittell, 2007; Plantinga, 1997). In their case study, Shufeldt and Gale (2007) emphasize the importance of editing in structuring the unpredictable nature of reality programs. Because of the partly scripted nature of the form, the construction of a "preferred reality" lends itself to dramatic conflict. Practitioners may or may not consider an emphasis on tension and antagonism, the intentional exaggeration of a person's character imperfections, or a distortion through the deliberate exclusion of context or information that is essential to correctly comprehend a situation to be only a matter of aesthetics and not ethics. The impact of characterizing and stereotyping participants or entire groups by emphasizing certain traits at the expense of a

more authentic or complex depiction of a participant certainly is an ethical issue. Building on this understanding, reality shows solicit and/or construct "authentic" performances by editing them to fit within the confines of socially familiar roles. As Elsaesser (2002) writes in relation to realist aesthetics in cinema more generally, "it is not reality that makes things appear real on the screen, but a rhetoric" (p. 47).

Creativity

As my research progressed and I realized that the existing literature did not address the same problems as I had set for myself, I expanded my literature review to include cultural production beyond television. Negus's (1992) study of the popular music business does not critique the system of music production as a regulated industry based solely on economic grounds, nor does he portray individuals working in that industry as having the agency needed to make limitless choices (p. vii). Instead, Negus draws attention to the day-to-day work of practitioners in order to comprehend the entertainment industry as "a web of working practices, dialogues and articulated relationships" (p. 154). Negus argues that the products of creative industries do not emerge from an exclusively mechanical operation, nor are they conceived in moments of inspirational discovery by talented individuals. Instead, Negus argues, they are the product of a continual interplay between industry, market conventions, the practitioner's editorial perspective, and other situational circumstances. Other literature as outlined in the bibliography has contributed to my general theoretical and methodological position and arguments, although most is either narrowly generic or else tangential to my central interests.

Finally, I should acknowledge that I did not absorb the scholarly works reviewed here in their entirety before outlining my ideas or beginning the process of data collection. This approach had the unintended advantage of allowing my thesis space to evolve out of my

experience of speaking with editors, without being inhibited by any key scholarly work or body of theory. I would characterize the process of combining the theoretical perspectives, different academic case studies, and my own fieldwork as synergetic. The placement of my own conclusions within the existing body of literature will recur throughout this thesis as I contrast the results of my empirical survey with the theoretical works I consulted.

Creators manage the apparent contradictions of being an imaginative collaborator within a commoditized industry by building their own narrative about why and how they make decisions. By examining the process of creating such narratives within the production experiences of editors, my aim is to show the uneasy interplay between economics and culture. The next chapter will define the theoretical and methodological framework in which my thesis is situated.

Chapter Five: Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

Media products are the outcome of a wide-ranging and consistent creative process that unfolds within a "television industrial complex" (Gitlin, 2008, p. 113). The production apparatus that lies behind the final product usually remains largely hidden from the viewer. To get a sense of the ethics of factual program-making requires knowledge of and insight into its creative process. The recent expansion of practice-oriented scholarly studies in the creative field provided a framework for the inquiry into the ethics in factual programs that I undertake in this thesis. This chapter will situate the edit room as a workplace in the post-production of reality and documentary television in a larger context of documentary theory.

For the theoretical framework, I have applied Fisher's (1987) narrative paradigm. Fisher is one of several rhetoricians and social scientists to have examined narrative and the role it plays in communication and in human life as a whole. In his main work, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value and Action,* he argues for a narrative paradigm for understanding all human communication. Fisher contends "that all forms of human communication need to be seen fundamentally as stories—symbolic interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history" (p. xiii). Before exploring the narrative paradigm in detail, I need to describe the current state of scholarly debate about documentary studies.

Documentary Studies and the Political Economy

Implied in Grierson's seemingly contradictory classification of the genre as "the creative treatment of actuality" is the supposition that documentary, as the genre has evolved in today's broadcast environment, is never what it claims—an accurate and objective reflection of the experienced world. Postmodernism is the context in which documentary's capacity to perform its

two most elementary functions have been questioned: to speak the truth and to depict reality. Corner (2002) discusses the twinning of fiction and nonfiction formats and places them in a "post-documentary culture," arguing that reality television is not about genre but the treatment of "realities" in the "border crossing" between the factual and fictitious (p. 156). One of the main unexplored factors is the perspective of media creators themselves, Corner argues. It is precisely in the creative space of post-production where this thesis is situated. While its progress was certainly influenced by my own professional experience in television production, my engagement with the scholarly community influenced my research questions. Post-production labor, with its connotations of market and ownership, is an area that attracts specific attention from scholars concerned with societal economic and power structures.

In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) posit political economy as a conflict of "autonomous art against the repetitive and unchallenging cultural product as commodity" (p. 73). Furthering an idealistic ethos and aesthetic that appears in academic documentary history, I content that these philosophers oversimplify the production process and fail to adequately acknowledge the expansive and abstract nature of creativity, a subject area requiring further examination within television and genre studies. Within the field of post-production in factual programming, I have taken a similar position to Negus (2004) in his study of music production by neither embracing the approach adapted within documentary histories that conceive of editors as creative artists, nor the television-as-economic-structure approach that considers individual practitioners as largely irrelevant. Instead, I position myself on middle ground, appreciating the complexity of the workplace dynamics, with its diverse connections and implications.

A Narrative Paradigm

Scholars and critics have taken to task reality television's observational style and historical roots in the documentary form, criticizing the medium for its supposed lack of appropriateness and the way it appropriates documentary conventions for the sole purpose of entertainment or sensationalism. Reid (2005), among others, argues that reality television is positioned closer to the scripted narrative dramas than to the documentary genre: reality television's rhetoric is a narrative rhetoric. Whereas in the past, the traditional documentary applied the rhetorical argument as its main mode, now factual programs, including reality and documentary television, function within a narrative or story-telling mode. Through the editing process, reality programs apply narrative structure to tell stories about presumed "real" people.

In his theory of narrative rationality, Fisher (1987) proposes that all meaningful communication can be defined as a form of storytelling. This is in part grounded in narratology, also known as narrative theory, and developed by Vladimir Propp and other Soviet scholars in the 1920s. Since then, narrative theory has been applied in literary criticism across various genres and disciplines. Narrative inquiry served as a valuable tool in Media Studies to recognize the cultural implications of television. Narrative studies are performed on a number of television formats, like soap operas (Allen, 1985), current affairs programs (Baym, 2000), and fiction (Cummins-Gauthier, 1999; Deming, 1985; Kackman, 1998). Kozloff (1992) states that a narrative structure of television programs is the "portal or grid through which non-narrative television must pass" (p. 69).

Fisher's (1987) paradigm of narrative rationality provides a series of tests for analyzing stories, which he claims reflect "the mental moves that will be made by auditors or readers in interpreting a work" (p. 161). The first series of tests evaluates the structural, material, and

characterological coherence of a story, roughly, how it "hangs together." The second test assesses the fidelity of a story—does it "ring true"? Fisher proposes that fidelity "is assessed by applying . . . 'the logic of good reasons'" (p. 47). Logic, for Fisher, is more than a formal system and cannot account for values, emotions or aesthetic responses. Instead, "logic [means] a systematic set of concepts, procedures, and criteria for determining the degree of truthfulness or certainty in human discourse" (p. 27). In other words, although fidelity is partially retrospective, in that both practitioners and viewers use previously held experiences and values to evaluate narratives, it is also prospective in that they consider how those values play out in the narrative and whether the resolution of the conflict between values aligns with the best life they can conceive for themselves. Because transcendental values have the potential to be interpreted in so many ways, narratives provide situational contexts for practitioners to reconsider those interpretations and their future actions based on those values.

The primary focus of this thesis is an inquiry that concentrates on the creation of factual programs as seen from the perspective of its key creators, the editors (even though it turns towards audiences and reception towards the end). How do editors of reality and documentary television build the structural, material, and characterological coherence of a story based on their assessment of how it "hangs together" satisfactorily, assess its fidelity, and determine whether it rings true? Fisher's (1987) approach, and the fact that it accounts for the rhetorical function of narrative structure, as "ideas that cannot be verified or proved in any absolute way" (p. 19), provides a necessary framework for answering questions about how editors successfully construct "reality" and then validate their work through narrative for themselves and others including their producers and directors. These *validation* narratives reveal larger cultural implications: Fisher's (1987) larger argument is that human beings, as storytellers, use stories to

"give order to human experience" and "to establish ways of living in common, in intellectual and spiritual communities in which there is confirmation for the story that constitutes one's life" (p. 63). Similar to Fisher, psychologist Polkinghorne (1988) contends that narrative is "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (p. 1) and by which we order and understand all of our experiences. Polkinghorne confirms the idea that we inherently use stories to order experience and reality, going so far as to say that what we call experience is "a consequence of the action of our organizing schemes [or stories] on the components of our involvement in the world" (p. 13).

This view of narrative is key to recognizing why narrative coherence is essential in making and justifying decisions in any social sphere, like the workplace, and specifically in the context of this dissertation, the edit rooms of factual programs. This framing, I argue, can also provide an account of the working method by which factual program editors construct a story out of many hours of raw audio-visual material, carving out beginnings, middles, and endings and story arcs with protagonists, antagonists, desires, and obstacles. More than simply relating a chronological sequence of events, the editor as storyteller "structures those events into a shape that creates meaningful, unified relationships between a sequence of events—through both the causality between those events and the motivation of the characters driving them—and that points outward to our lived experience" (Reid, 2005, p. 27). In other words, the editors apply the narrative paradigm to tell the story in the program and then employ a similar narrative paradigm to validate why they made the editorial decisions they did.

Applying Fisher's tests of coherence and fidelity to workplace stories does not only offer clues to understanding what makes them comprehensible, but also how ethics and attitudes affect the editor as storyteller. Narrative fidelity may mean that questions of fact and validity must be

assessed using elements of formal logic or argumentative proof, but it does so in a narrative context that includes personal experiences, knowledge, and values.

My inquiry into the editor's everyday practice provided a reality check of that presumption. The aesthetic response to a television program by audiences tends to be emotional and intuitive. For practitioners, however, it is a more calculated, reasoned, and rational understanding of the values and message of the narrative**.** Practitioners create factual programs with internal coherence based on their own values, and in the process create felt beliefs about the program that may become powerful aesthetic validations for their way of seeing the world. These experiences have the potential to confirm previously held beliefs, but may also alter them. Fisher (1987) claims that since people's lives are already shaped by narrative structure, reality television's seemingly direct connection to unmediated reality may make its narrative structures that much more persuasive. This thesis examines the kind of reality narratives editors-as-practitioners tell in order to consider the larger implications of the reality program phenomenon.

In the television production industry, with its ever-changing freelance labor pool, those narratives are central in holding a structure together. After determining the narrative rationality paradigm as the main theoretical framework, the question I asked next was what research methodology would be most appropriate to use for my study.

Methodology

As the key methodology, I settled on the basic qualitative interpretive approach as the core of my research, as it is both inductive, relating to the process of new theory emerging from the data, and descriptive, serving mainly to label, describe, or classify (Merriam, 2002). One of the reasons for conducting my research was to increase knowledge about and insight into practitioners' practice. I began with an inventory of the experiences and opinions of survey

respondents: the ethical issues they encountered, the decisions they made based on these issues, their context, and their sentiments about responsibilities and loyalties in general. By integrating a theoretical perspective with the empirical findings of my fieldwork, I am responding to both general and specific changes in the ethical debate in a way that will shed light on an under-examined area. While scholars acknowledge that cultural production is saturated with moral dilemmas and have charged cultural industry workers with moral transgressions, little attention has been paid to how practitioners manage ethical considerations in their everyday work and how those ethical considerations shape practitioner's selves and identities. Existing literature has failed to pay enough attention to the specific approaches practitioners use to carry on with professional integrity when the dictates of a marketplace demand that they create work that does not reflect their values and professional or ethical standards. In addition, current research does not address the strategies practitioners of different statuses use to resolve such conflicts. My goal was to investigate several facets of the problematic under study, moving beyond what can be simply gathered from what is on the television screen, to the context of the off-screen realities in post-production. It is in the context of the practices and pressures generated by the exigencies of factual television that concerns over television ethics have been renewed (Aufderheide et al., 2009, Kilborn, 2003). Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to better focus on the discovery of elements or insights rather than verifying existing theories (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 71). In order to better comprehend the rhetorical situation within which reality television operates, I chose long-form interviews with editors in the factual television industry.

The Survey

I gathered the core data through long-form interviews that were conducted in person whenever possible. I drew on a wide field of practitioners through personal contacts and by accessing

member databases of three professional organizations: Canadian Cinema Editors (CCE), the editing department of the Director's Guild of Canada (DGC), and the Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC). I depended on the snowball method in that individuals who participated in this survey were also identified through personal contacts or were recommended by others already interviewed. A first draft of the questionnaire, based on ethical issues, strategies to deal with them, and contextual aspects derived from the literature, was tested and revised over several trial interviews and finalized after comments by students, practitioners, and colleagues.

I determined that in-depth, open-ended, qualitative interviews would yield the most useful results. By qualitative interview I am referring to a comprehensive, loosely structured question-and-answer session that encourages an interviewee to talk freely about the issues at hand. Open-ended questions invite deep responses about a practitioner's experiences, their perceptions, opinions, and feelings. When needed, I have added sufficient context to the collected data of verbatim quotations by recording and evaluating the participants' individual narratives. For example, I bore in mind the political and economic contexts of the practitioners and a consideration of crucial changes in the television industry, such as the introduction of new technology and broadcast market structures.

Over the summer of 2015, I approached 52 picture editors working on factual programs, both reality and documentary television, in Canada and the US. These were men and women, all of them freelancers, whose work experience ranged between two and 40 years. Guaranteed anonymity was important to several interviewees, especially to those currently working directly for large companies. I predicted prior to my fieldwork that the legally binding confidentiality agreements under which many worked, and the sense of competitiveness and precariousness of employment in this small community, would lead to editors declining to participate. In fact, just

one editor I approached did so. A second individual did not sign a release after the interview, for fear of "being identified," despite my assurance that anonymity would be guaranteed. That reduced the number of usable interviews to 50.

All interviewees signed a consent form approved by York University's Ethics Review Board (see Appendix C). A total of 38 open-ended questions were asked, either in face-to-face conversation, by telephone, or by Skype. Five participants preferred to respond in writing. One submitted a recorded voice audio file. The overall inquiry was guided by my own experiences in the cutting rooms of documentary television, which led me to question whether editors of reality television were in fact the ruthless manipulators of reality depicted by some critics and scholars.

The Questions

Are editors cognizant of any ethical dilemmas that occur in executing their craft? Do they struggle to negotiate the moral implications of their work? Do editors of reality and documentary television employ situational ethics that are determined case-by-case? Do they subscribe to shared, yet unarticulated, general beliefs? How, if at all, do practitioners apply manipulation, including but not limited to frankenbiting and the manipulation of audio in the construction of false story and drama, in their day-to-day practice of editing factual programs? Do they believe that the process of condensing their representation should not harm the participants, or does it leave them worse off than before the program they are featured in? Furthermore, do factual program editors believe that they are obligated to provide a generally truthful narrative to the viewers? Or is it permissible to involve misrepresentation, manipulation, or elision for the sake of a good story? Do editors accept significant manipulation of the situation in post-production, without regarding it as a potential betrayal of the audience? Are they cognizant that their choices in editing are subjective, and do they justify their decisions by referencing the concept of "the

truth"? What kinds of normative concerns are discussed within the post-production community, if any, and what else is considered in this context? What kinds of issues and questions are brought up in relation to ethics? How much do their own processes align with existing professional codes, for example, for journalists? (See Appendix D for the complete list of questions.)

The Respondents

The answers received to my questions are documented throughout the remainder of this thesis as the discussion of a specific theme or problematic calls up specific data. Of the 50 usable interviews, eight came from respondents who exclusively edit documentary, 22 who exclusively cut reality television, and the remaining 20 who work in both formats. I validated their self-description by looking at the interviewee's filmographies or by referring to the Independent Movie Database (IMDb) to see what programs they have been involved in.

Responding to the question about why they worked on factual programs, almost all editors with more than 15 years of experience said they had started off in the traditional documentary format or journalism, but then migrated to reality television because of the shift in the marketplace. Others listed "docu-drama," "drama," "lifestyle," "gaming TV," "current affairs," "factual, TV" or "infomercials" as other media forms with which they had been involved. When it came to defining genres, subgenres, and formats, the dividing line within the factual program genre between reality and documentary television as seen by practitioners proved to be quite fluid. Two respondents referred to their current workplace, *Ice Road Truckers*, as a "documentary series" while the IMDb lists the series as reality television. Another respondent who described his current job as a documentary production was in fact working on *Big Brother*, a long-running reality show that specializes in artificially inciting animosity among

the occupants of a house and enhancing/creating conflicts through editing. The fact that several editors could not correctly position themselves within their industry is an expression of the fact that the broadcasting world is in flux. For some editors, reality shows brought to the fore a lack of self-awareness (Lindley, 2003), with editors successfully deceiving audiences not just because of editing techniques but because they have convinced themselves that as documentary editors they are in fact cutting documentaries. As the recorded events did take place, with real people, doing real things in seemingly real situations, even practitioners may start to think of reality television as a legitimate documentary form (Achtner, 2002).

Known Unknowns

I asked survey editors open-ended questions such as "Tell me about . . ." or "Can you describe . . ." to encourage them to construct narratives around particular experiences, reflect on details, and evaluate the experience. As the principle researcher, I was aware that despite their potential to elicit unique insights into individual experiences from interviewees, narrative research methods cannot provide transparent access to the past nor empirical evidence that can be tested or proven (Patterson, 2008). A narrative study offers a perspective on the respondents' experiences from their personal perspective and a trajectory along which the storyteller wants the described event to be interpreted.

As I wanted respondents to express their thoughts and experiences of being a practitioner as freely as possible, I asked them open-ended questions that could be answered in a few words or by way of an anecdote or lengthy reflection. While the interviews were relatively informal and conversational, my questions steered the subjects towards certain themes and included follow-up questions that allowed participants to clarify and elaborate on their answers.

As different responses inspired slightly different follow-up questions, the common issues

allowed for not just a comparison between respondents, but also space for the exploration of each subject's own particular circumstances. Audio recordings of almost all interviews made it possible for me to quote informants accurately but also to return to the unedited data, listening for the speaker's emphases and pauses. Conveying emotion is a difficult task but attempts to do so in quotations can add richness to the investigator's understanding of the speaker's words and also add depth to the argument of the researcher or theorist.

Mining the Results

The discourse about documentary and reality television tends to employ a rhetoric that imposes simplistic oppositions: creativity versus commerce, quality versus popularity, and investigation versus entertainment. A desire to break down the rigid dialectic remained a guide as I conducted my research and mined the results of my fieldwork. I tried to move beyond the binary model that views the practices of editors as being entirely regulated by the mechanisms of the marketplace or else overemphasizes the creative autonomy of the editor-as-artist. By examining the production experiences of editors, "the interplay and uneasy interaction between economics and culture became apparent" (Negus, 2000, p. 3). Following Sanders (2012), I avoided the polarity of "good" versus "bad" conduct and focused instead on an inventory of practitioners' experiences and their views and concerns about their responsibilities, loyalties, and ethics. In a similar way, I approached the question of how economic changes influence program makers in their work not just from a simplistic perspective that neoliberalism produces trash culture, but in an attempt to comprehend how cultural products that evolve out of this economic regimen are implicated in the manufacture of a certain "regime of truth" (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 14).

I undertook my research with the belief that knowledge of shared problems and shared approaches would provide current and future scholars a baseline from which to consider whether and how to articulate ethical standards publicly. The question then became how to evaluate the data as the participants' descriptions devolved into their own narratives, presenting their own stories on how and why they made ethical choices in the edit room, and discussions of the determining circumstances that made them arrive at those decisions. A sufficiently reflexive interviewer can navigate the potential pitfalls of misunderstanding by seeking elaboration of answers and by posing his/her questions in a number of different ways. Moreover, in research of this nature, the object is not to determine whether the statements made by the informants are true or false, but as Salaman (1986) points out, "to examine the relationship between beliefs and experience, convictions and interests" (p. 84). My central concerns were the ethical implications and responsibilities emerging from editing, situated against the backdrop of the popularization and hybridization of the broadcasting landscape.

Aim of Survey

One of the survey's goals was to determine if editors are bound conceptually by common aims, interests, working practices and traditions, and if so, if they can be considered as a distinct group. It revealed that as a group, the respondents are not as amorphous as, say, television audiences, but neither are they a cohesive group in the sense of having a community they feel they belong to. Domfeld (1998) sees documentary television as a "constructive act of social communication and cultural production" (p. 19) and emphasizes the fact that television practitioners, while operating within institutional constraints, are nonetheless grounded in the same type of interpretive world as their audiences. In reality and documentary television, professionals often work in both fields, as almost half of the respondents to this survey do. In

fact, I came across many members of the Documentary Association of Canada (DOC), an organization whose mandate and mission is to preserve and foster the culture of the traditional documentary form (see Appendix E), who now make a living working in reality television.

Further into the survey, reality and documentary television editors were given the opportunity to describe how they dealt with issues of ethics and representation of show participants that surfaced in their work. As the researcher, I asked editors working in both genres to focus on their concrete experiences in the edit room rather than generalizing from the field. I asked them to recall what they would consider a challenge or conflict involving ethics in their work, and allowed their narratives to define what they, as makers, understood ethical issues to be. I did not provide interpretations or definitions of ethics. My intention was to probe the circumstances of the incidents that come to each interviewee's mind in order to obtain as full a description as possible of the specific case and the rationale for the editorial decisions taken. The data I collected consists of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to both interpret and yield in-depth responses from the practitioners' experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. The questionnaire was designed to obtain a portrait of field conditions and methods of managing them, not to provide ethical analysis or guidance.

Professional Identities

The editors interviewed in this survey exhibited a sense of pride and commitment to their profession. The majority of respondents started to edit pictures and sound long before it became their professional activity. Several trained as high school students in linear tape-to-tape editing. Only four editors among the sample felt that they had "slipped into" the profession; all other 46 interviewees said they deliberately chose to become editors. Editors with more than 15 years of experience had almost all started off working with traditional documentaries or journalism but

then migrated to reality television because of the shift in the marketplace making reality television "where the money is and where the jobs are." All reality television editors in the sample described their work choices as having been made, not out of personal preference, but economic necessity. One-third of those working in reality television expressed the wish to work more in documentary television: "I'd rather not work in reality, but I have little choice" or "I started in docs, but as a single mother need to make a living." The dominant narrative from survey participants was that reality television was not their workplace of choice. Editors, like other cultural workers, are confronted with the colliding forces of creativity and commerce that arise in everyday contexts. They want the products of their labor to reflect their identities, yet are unable to create the products they desire because of pragmatic or genre constraints.

The survey respondents were also asked to describe what divided reality television from documentary television, and how they defined the format. Fifteen of the 50 editors classified virtually all elements of reality television as artificial, including the setup, the scripted situations, the outcome of competitions, even participants' dialogue. Several documentary television editors challenged the distinction between reality and documentary television. As one editor said, "reality TV does cross the line by scripting scenes and situations, like drama. But I acknowledge that in documentary we do a lot of similar stuff to make a coherent story. So much in docs is really fiction." Another editor was remarkably reflective in his/her response:

> Reality TV is more scripted, more constructed. It is very formulaic. Most often, it's pure entertainment. A lot of Reality TV is fiction, done in a documentary style. This overlap of one form of doc into another, this shading has been a fact of documentary from the very beginning, like Flaherty's *Nanook* or *Moana*. These films purported to depict "reality." They were, in fact, constructed. Some of it was "real," some of it was fiction. So you can't talk about a dividing line between the two. Can you?

Others offered concrete examples of how a character would be portrayed in either form, as one respondent expressed:

> In a documentary I can sometimes edit to protect a character from themselves. It's a judgment call. There was a schizophrenic in a doc that we "clipped" [heavily edited] so he would come across as more of a person to be taken seriously. A reality show would not preserve that dignity but go for "the kill."

Other editors believed the borderline between the forms should remain strictly drawn, pointing to the commercial purpose and constructed nature of reality television: "I like saying reality TV is to reality what pro-wrestling is to Greco-Roman wrestling. Most of the audience is in on the joke, and the spectacle is what the audience want[s]." "Reality TV doesn't search. It already knows the answer." "Reality doesn't offer broader perspective, doesn't ask bigger questions as docs do. Docs allow people to immerse themselves in the world while reality imposes itself." "Docs allow people into the world, while reality television imposes itself onto people's lives." And finally:

> Documentary's primary objective is to enlighten the audience. Its practitioners adhere to a stricter if not mutually agreed code of ethics, for example in the treatment of participants, and upholding a sort of agreement with the audience that what appears on screen has a strong relation to what actually happened. Reality show practitioners also have less concern towards the show's participants, and do not worry too much about representing what their program label claims to represent—reality.

Several who were cutting exclusively or predominantly documentary television questioned the validity of any attempt to elevate documentaries to a higher level than reality television: "Television in general is there to distract audiences while they are being exposed to advertisements. Documentary itself has no other purpose. I don't know what else it is for." "Related to this, in my opinion, there's this false attempt by either docs or reality television at educating audiences." Several documentary television editors questioned the usefulness of genre distinctions altogether:

> A five-minute short fiction piece or serial TV—for me its all about storytelling and relationships. You eliminate the bad stuff and play up the good. Their story arc with a beginning-middle-end, conflict, and emotional value are the same. In reality TV people play themselves, even though they are not professional actors. It's not 100% truthful, and people suspend your disbelief. So ultimately what is the difference?
>
> Even if the documentary is more cinéma vérité in style, there is still some fabrication in how the subject is presented. With biographies, how-to-shows, or new-style documentary there is still a lot of writing and very deliberate presentation of reality, just as in reality TV. Reality TV is only "reality" in name. There is still a tremendous amount of staging and story editing occurring. So I see a very fine line between the two.
>
> That genre line is increasingly blurred, and might disappear altogether. While reality shows tend to sacrifice of what actually happened on the altar of commercial interest, documentaries increasingly sacrifice that truth for a story.

In contrast, most reality program editors held a more idealized view of the documentary as a more pure form, as articulated by one respondent: "Docs aren't watched by many people, and is therefore less gratifying. But good that it has meaning, and a higher purpose instead of just providing something to veg out on." Only a couple of reality television editors expressed what could be interpreted as defensiveness about the form they were working in:

> In reality television, the job is essentially being able to sift out the moments that can be "torqued" up and construct an arc of those heightened moments. In most documentary projects, the essence is still on the creative teams to find the emotionally engaging moments and present them in a compelling fashion.
>
> Reality TV is exactly that—television. It's pre-planned, shot to a formula, and designed to air in a specific hour or half-hour block. It's really scripted television with nonprofessional actors. Every bit is as predetermined as a script. Reality is a factory. Documentary can be almost anything, but it tends to originate as an exploration of a specific story.

Asked how they understood their profession in the larger context of society, the majority of editors were reflective about where they situated their profession in a societal context, even though most did not consider their own role as a particularly problematic one.

> Twelve of the 50 editors responded using terms like "education" and "enlightenment."

Among those 12 were three of the eight documentary television editors who referred to those terms, but with a sense of disillusionment: “I don’t know how to save the planet. Maybe I can create something beautiful, but helping societal woes? Never. Can documentaries actually change anything? I don’t think so.” “Reality shows are making TV worse. But in so-called ‘meaningful’ documentaries you just shout into the abyss, nobody will change their mind because of it.” “Docs are in such a niche. People watch them just want to be confirmed in what they already know, but not be challenged.”

Twelve editors who all cut reality programs described themselves as being tied into a commercial medium with little agency to change either process or product. One described: “I don’t want to be cynical. It’s a job and pays people even though you basically just sell toilet paper in the process. There are opportunities to challenge audiences but people don’t want to be challenged.” One third of respondents spoke with some pride of their role in providing entertainment and giving the audience some relief from the chores of their daily lives. One put it this way: “I am an entertainer. It’s not Shakespeare, but that’s okay. I provide entertainment to the masses. It isn’t any more profound than that.” Others expressed regret or a desire to change their employment, as articulated by one: “On a couple of shows that I worked on I asked myself how does that benefit society? Does it make the world a better place? I try to be more selective of the work I take.” One respondent felt torn about the work:

> I know what I edit isn’t all that relevant. I know this because I would never want to show it to my parents. They would never watch the shows I work on and yet I would never have wanted to make my career based on that. It’s a shame really, and I struggle with the knowledge that I can work regularly, get paid well and be able to afford a small home in an expensive city, or I could work a lot less regularly and try and tough it out in the documentary world, but have a better conscience.

One documentary television editor had not considered the question until asked: “I have never given [it] a thought. I am tired of all that caring about what I work on, as I neglected other responsibilities, for example towards partners or friends. I keep at the job because I don’t know what else to do.” One respondent rejected the notion of attaching a moral value to their work: “I am a hired gun and my primary goal in life is to support my family. It is not my job to educate people about the media. Period.” Questioned about how much of their daily lives is occupied by their work, half of the editors reported that their work followed them home. Most were not concerned by that, but accepted the high degree of engagement as part of the profession, as expressed by one editor: “Life and work aren’t that different for me. They are the same.” None of the eight documentary television editors felt that at the end of the day they were able to leave their work challenges in the cutting room. Only six of 50 editors responded that they could separate work and home life, and said that they felt liberated to be able to walk away. Several editors from both reality and documentary made their answer dependent on the format, as one mentioned: “I am less invested in reality television as you follow a template. Docs have no formula and require more thinking.” Several editors reported having regular nightmares. Several editors reported that they could not sleep at all while in the crucial editing phase of a project.

Individual Characters

A recurring issue throughout this thesis is the possibility of comparing and generalizing from case studies. The following is a series of brief portraits of some of the editors interviewed. Identifying details have been removed to protect their identity and random initials have been assigned to identify them. My goal was to document the personal narratives of some of the respondents, not to pass judgment. In placing value on understanding the experiences of individuals, I do not intend to present a collection of ethnographies that analyze the personalities

of the informants. Rather, my intention is to produce a "thick description" of the commonalities that bind practitioners together, in spite of their differences. What became apparent in the survey were the contradictions in the narratives of editors as they laid out their beliefs and work practices.

LL comes from an art background and would prefer editing traditional documentaries for a living, but now exclusively cuts reality TV because bills have to be paid. LL has changed position on the frankenbite and its moral implications, since the industry is not about truth and "the job is to serve the story." LL also does not want to mislead the audience or be mean to participants, and will not work on anything that involves the vulnerable, like children. LL also stays away from exploitative shows. LL cannot and will not show anything to a show's participants before the broadcast because of contractual obligations. LL wishes there would be a forum for editors to discuss ethical issues but says "the nature of the industry stands against that."

JP used to make decisions in the edit room on how much to alter reality by asking: "Whatever I construct in the edit, could it have happened in real life? Would the participants recognize themselves as something I made them say?" But JP never screens for any participants, and even if doing so would not change anything according to their wishes because you "can't take things for face value. People are biased. That's why there has to be that unspoken contract between audience and program makers that everybody is in it for the same reason." JP committed his/her most severe deceit while editing a traditional documentary.

DM works in both the US and Canada. DM does not want to compromise on ethics and has not returned to shows where he had to do so: "I do create truths but I don't want to manipulate." DM thinks mainly about the story but does not worry too much about the

participants as “they know what they [are] getting themselves into,” nor would he make any changes to an edit if a participant requested it.

SZ feels it is okay to make people look silly in reality television because it is considered harmless. SZ’s main loyalty is to the audience, but she feels ultimately that “people shouldn’t watch this stuff anyhow.” SZ has left shows after their contract ended because some edits which were requested of them were beyond what SZ considers “morally acceptable.”

CM believes that any successful show must have the enthusiasm and trust of the participant, but at the same time would not want to screen anything for them before completion because “they’d realize what editing does to them and would require changes I can’t do.”

KA does not have a predetermined idea about professional ethics, but decides in specific situations. When completely broke, KA will edit any show and is very aware of a closely knit industry: “It is good to be a professional who doesn’t talk too much.”

PH has seen producers give out alcohol to reality program participants on set, “to get them going,” and takes 5HTP serotonin enhancers himself to “have an edge” over other editors competing for jobs.

KD stood up to the producers because of their request to change a character’s behavior which “felt like a wrong thing to do.” As a result, KD was taken off the episode but not fired from the show.

MB says they have never worked on a reality show but their IMDb page reveals credits for half a dozen of them. At one point during the interview MB asked, “What is reality TV, anyhow?”

RR believes that in documentary you try to be truthful to story and character. But after the first cut “you get way more selective in representing the truth.” When putting something

together, RR wants the participants to recognize themselves when they watch the final program. But on the other hand, once people sign on to a show, anything that they do on camera is "fair game. As long as it is true."

NT works half the time on documentary television and half on reality television but wishes there would be more of the former. NT believes in manipulating the facts to achieve a greater truth and has no problem using clips the participant requested not be used in the show, as long they are "truthful to the character." They will not work on "train wreck shows that are exploitative." NT's currently edits *Big Brother*.

BM has been cutting almost exclusively reality television and says that the first goal as editor is to tell a truthful story. But BM also knows where "your bread is buttered. You don't want to lose the job so you do what's needed." However, they have challenged producers about an editing decision that violated BM's sense of ethics, and asked to be moved off an episode of a reality program because of that.

CL cannot understand "how colleagues could even consider work in reality TV." CL's published filmography, however, lists *Cold Water Cowboys* and *Ice Road Truckers*, both classified as reality programs, giving evidence of either genre confusion or a deliberate reclassification of the programs to elevate their value.

Judged by standards of rationality and reason, the above contradictions in editors' narratives are "unreasonable." But I still consider them useful, and have highlighted these and other testimonies in the following chapters. I do so in the context of Fisher's (1987) narrative theory in which he describes humans as story-telling beings, suggesting that engaging stories are more convincing than facts or logic. Fisher adds that "all instances of human communication are imbued with [both] logos and mythos, are constitutive of truth and knowledge, and are rational"

(p. 20). For Fisher, narrative rationality is the most basic form of reasoning and evaluation by which humans assess communication and action. He proposes that individuated forms of discourse should be considered as "good reasons—values or value-laden warrants for believing or acting in certain ways" (p. xiii).

Auto-Ethnography

In evaluating the results of my fieldwork, I used a triangular approach, applying both narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography as combined research methodologies. This approach commonly refers to writing that aims to combine both an ethnographic look outward beyond one's own perspective and an autobiographical gaze inward with self-intention as the narrative. Auto-ethnography is "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" by offering a model of "poly-phonic interactive work, which calls on readers to see potential problems for themselves" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 35). The focus is on the "self as negotiated through a variety of narrative texts. Furthermore, the auto-ethnographic moment encourages the social researcher to engage in narratives of the self, as well as narratives of the 'other'" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. xxxix). According to Bruner (1991), any formal or informal autobiography needs to be considered as a procedure for "life making": "We become the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives" (p. 11). Auto-ethnography is intended to illustrate rather than to state or make a claim; the author of such a text aims to invite readers into the text to relive the experience rather than to interpret or analyze what the author is saying (Schwandt, 2001, p. 16).

Throughout this thesis, I refer to my own knowledge of post-production, which has been gained from my own work experience, the literature cited, and teaching documentary production and editing to undergraduate and graduate students in several universities and

colleges. My teaching approach in the classroom includes a critical discussion of my own experiences in the documentary world, for example, the editing of *Gerrie & Louise*. Student responses resulted in the beginning of my own process of self-reflexivity, which has continued in this research and become essential in my understanding of the survey respondents' testimonies.

Evaluation of Fieldwork

As the researcher, it was my responsibility to make sense of the data collected in both auto-ethnography and open-ended interviews with others. To arrive at the stage of "sense making," required three analytical components: Listening repeatedly to the audio recordings, examining the transcripts, and looking for narrative threads that linked the interviewees' stories to understand how they were "endowed with meaning" (Wiklund-Gustin, 2010, p. 35).

To determine how individual editors make decisions in the edit room, and if or how they reflect on them afterwards, I applied Bruner's (1991) "landscape of action" (what the respondents said they *did* in a given situation) and his "landscape of consciousness" (what the respondents revealed of what they *felt* and thought about their actions, during and afterwards). With the former, I attempted to understand and interpret the practitioners' actions. The second component of the analysis focused more clearly on the participating editors' landscapes of consciousness. I reflected on their narratives in light of theoretical considerations to both breathe life into the theory and question it. This practice of close reading entailed the exploration of the transcripts for themes, patterns, metaphors, and other meaningful elements (Inglis, 2005; Stokes & Maltby, 2001). A part of my strategy was to include excerpts from the interviews within the text of this thesis to allow the participating editors' voices to be heard as clearly as possible, a practice that is consistent with the aims of narrative inquiry. What emerged in the participants' accounts was their professional self-understanding. As I listened to their stories about how they

made decisions, I identified guiding themes as they surfaced, as subjects were driven by recurring circumstances that shaped their decisions.

In the analysis of narratives, multiple stories are analyzed in the search for themes and taxonomies that will be meaningful across the given group of narratives. By attending to the characteristics of these narratives—plots, settings, and characters—I constructed a story in which the data were integrated rather than separated. Since my research has an auto-ethnographic component and the potential to create a number of narratives, it could be defined as a storied analysis "that returns a story to the teller that is both hers and not hers; that contains herself in good company" (Grumet, 1991, p. 70). I, as researcher, set the stage, determined the time frame, and structured the stories, opinions, and shared experience to create a sense of meaning that was both functional and significant. Like the editor in the cutting room, I reorganized individual and shared stories and themes by putting them into the context of story lines that became apparent across all interviews. Through this process of emplotment, a model emerged for looking at the relationship that connected practitioners, ethics, and notions of representation of reality to formulate meaning.

Potential and Real Limitations

Are the ethical conflicts of a factual program editor's embattled identity able to be widely shared or even publicly discussed? Even if it turned out that the participants did not seem to be constrained by non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), some expressed concern that openly debating or questioning ethical matters meant risking censure or endangering their future employment. As well, factual entertainment editors may find themselves working within established standards and practices that are exclusive to the companies for which they are working but do not reflect the terms appropriate to their craft. In the end, I was surprised by the frankness with which editors

spoke of their thoughts and feelings, without any detectable self-censorship, even though I as principle investigator was also an industry insider.

A significant disjuncture can occur between the views of those studied and the observations of those doing the studying. As a practitioner myself, I tried to address that disjuncture by being transparent. It was my aim to maintain an awareness of the complex relationship between practitioner beliefs and experiences, between professional identity and the reality of working practices, and between the editor's creative autonomy and professional constraint.

There was another more serious concern that occupied me during the process of mining the data. Even though I transcribed the interviews, not word-for-word, but paraphrased thought-by-thought as they were expressed in *the editors'* words, the tendency to narrativize my data interpretation in *my* own words was apparent. However, the influence of the researcher on the responses given must be accepted and recognized, for as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) point out, "it is misleading to regard [this influence] simply as a source of bias that must be removed" (p. 102). The interview remains a valid source of data as "linguistic signs derive their meaning from relations with other signs . . . [which do] not strip them of their referential function" (Atkinson, 1990, p. 176). There are no rigid protocols that purport to mine values from narratives: "There is a growing richness of such approaches, and researchers must keep a conviction that there is no one best method of narrative analysis. Rather than striving for a rigorous narrative analysis or for purity of a genre, reading and writing of narratives will remain a creative activity" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 9). It remained tempting to draw parallels between experiential narrative research and factual program post-production. Research narratives, like documentary texts, emerge from the interactions between practitioner/researcher and

participant/subject. In both cases, claims to unmediated access to a reality "out there" raise epistemic questions. This finding does not need to be grounds for abandoning narrative research anymore than abandoning factual production (Bruzzi, 2006). However, like the factual program practitioner, the narrative researcher must acknowledge the role they play in constructing the objects observed, which posed its own ethical challenges to me as the researcher.

The baseline data collected in the survey was instrumental in furthering my inquiry into ethical principles in the industry today and to build a framework of representation, as the professional field of reality or documentary television does not have clearly articulated ethical standards to guide an editor's work. The evaluation of the mined data might demonstrate a need for a more public and focused conversation between practitioners and audiences about ethics and issues of representation and interpretation in factual programs. It was my task to establish the precise criteria that governed my study in order for the narratives to be credible. If we are to better understand how editors determine their ethics, scholars must understand the importance of the narratives that are developed in the cutting room. In the lead up to the survey, I speculated whether those narratives would supersede any prescribed ethics. The next chapter on the actual survey results will place reported stories above further speculation. It includes how practitioners confront a self-understanding of their professional activity as "dirty work" (Hughes, 1958) because they engage in ethically questionable action, and how they uphold positive self-identities despite being engaged in practices that perpetuates the genre's negative reputation.

Chapter Six: Ethics in Factual Television

This chapter addresses the principle research question of whether editors of factual programs experience ethical challenges in executing their work, and if so, how they address or reflect on them. There are numerous theories on ethical or moral precepts and their origins and codification, since ethics affect every facet of human existence as individuals consider the right and wrong ways to be in this world:

> We cannot avoid involvement in ethics, for what we do—and what we don't do—is always a possible subject of ethical evaluation. Anyone who thinks about what he or she ought to do is, consciously or unconsciously, involved in ethics. (Singer, 1995, p. v)

Work takes up a substantial part of our being in this world. Media makers, being entrusted as a profession with the representation of other human beings for the world to see in the mass media, add an entirely new layer of ethical challenges. In the past, most editors of the traditional documentary form self-identified as creative artists and craftspeople who saw ethical behavior as being at the core of their creative ventures. At a time when television is becoming ever more commercial, forcing practitioners, functioning as content providers, to reduce costs and still increase productivity, editors routinely are faced with the dilemma of balancing moral considerations against pragmatic considerations. This chapter will explore the central issue that invariably emerges in the discussion of factual programs, and which is also central to this thesis—the deliberation and implementation of ethical considerations by editors in the cutting room.

The Reality Television Workplace

The reality television phenomenon has relocated documentary codes and conventions within the sphere of popular entertainment and its connected economic exigencies and viewer's connotations. Reality television ethics are problematic in the creation, substance, and

consumption of the genre, as scholars and critics frequently critique the form's lack of ethical consideration. The discourse around ethics in factual program production and post-production exposes the contested status of the subject with its multiple arguments about the nature of ethics itself. This is further complicated by the array of perspectives about what the factual enterprise itself involves (see Chapter Two on defining the term "factual program"). In recent years, a growing number of scholars have examined factual programs by applying empirical research methods and practice-led investigations, which in turn I have relied on to gain a better comprehension of the nature of the ethical challenges for practitioners. My research has also highlighted the need to make factual program ethics richer and more relevant to the practices of the creative process by tapping into the numerous untold stories of practitioners about coping with the ethical ambiguity of their craft. It is hoped that this research will inform future policy in the field.

A concern with maintaining a level of fairness and responsibility in post-production is part of a wider debate about the ethics of the broadcast industry in general, including matters like fair-mindedness, discretion, dignity, and other issues central to regulatory discussions (Winston, 2000). Two general areas are distinguishable in the discussion of ethics within the practice of factual programs, including both the traditional documentary form and reality television. The first deals with questions of responsibly in depicting truth and reality, as well as focusing on the practitioner-audience relationship. The second addresses questions of ethical conduct by practitioners in their relationships with participants. In the context of the production phase, the current scholarly discourse on factual programs and ethics mainly focuses on the practitioner-participant relationship. Editors, who usually do not enter the process until the post-production phase, rarely encounter program participants as real persons. During the editing phase, they

engage with subjects as material on the screen to be shaped into story and character arcs. For this reason, the usual scholarly focus is of limited relevance to the ethical issues encountered in post-production. The discourse to date fails to discuss ethical theories and how they might inform the post-production practitioners' opinions about the right thing to do is. This chapter will address some of those inadequacies by reporting on the survey findings that are intended to address that gap. It is useful, however, as in other academic inquiries, to start by giving an overview of the subject in question, and consider the key contributors within the academic discourse.

The Ethical Debate in Documentary so Far

As a central scholar who has influenced the debate on the problematic, Winston (1985) writes with indignation of a tradition of the victim in factual programs, especially in journalistic reportage. He argues that a liberal interpretation of Grierson's definition of the "creative treatment of actuality" permitted a broad array of formal techniques, ranging from re-enactment to various story-telling strategies that affect depictions of what took place, and to whom. Winston observes that pioneers of the genre like Flaherty and Grierson were not sensitive to the ethical consequences of filming people: "Ethics in general were not on the agenda" (p. 24). The absence of morality in the documentary discourse continued, he argues, because the idea of the practitioner-as-artist had elevated documentary above journalism, justifying ethical abuses in the name of art: "The documentarist is selective and thus creative, creative and thus artistic, and artistic and thus to a certain extent, absolved from the everyday norms of moral and ethical behavior" (p. 24). He continues: "The time has come to liberate documentary from this false position and admit it as a species of editorializing in its essence" (p. 255).

From the 1970s onward (during the period of direct cinema but prior to the reality television phenomenon), the changing landscape of nonfiction production moved ethical

considerations further into the foreground. Winston (1999) maintains that innovative technologies like lightweight recording equipment might have changed production practices, but did not influence fundamental ethical or moral demands. However, I argue that with the development of smaller recording devices entirely new issues arose. For example, uninvolved bystanders might not even realize that they have become subjects. Similarly, advances in digital, nonlinear editing with more intricate ways to manipulate recorded images and sounds allow for wide-ranging possibilities to remove the "real" from what was originally captured. It is safe to argue that technological change brought with it a myriad of issues, dilemmas, conflicts, and concerns, some of which could possibly be managed by clear codes of conduct or other workplace rules, while others require deeper ethical inquiry.

Nichols (1993) focuses his ethical reflections on what happens when people record others. He positions documentary as a representation with consequences for those represented. His main inquiry into documentary ethics is the question of "what to do with people, how to represent another person when any representation threatens diminution, fabrication, and distortion" (2001, p. 231). Nichols agrees with Winston in declaring that practitioners have a duty to minimize harm arising out of representation, and he emphasizes that duty by rephrasing his original question: "What responsibility do filmmakers have for the effects of their acts on the lives of those filmed?" (p. 48). Subjects in a reality program play themselves, but they are surrounded by a crew and recording devices like cameras and microphones, constrained by program narratives that are controlled by the interests of the producer, and further contextualized in the editing process, all ultimately designed in accord with the requirements of the broadcaster.

Accepting those compulsory structures, Nichols (2016) goes on to argue that the ethics of documentary production are more complicated than those of fiction making, because participants

appear as themselves and make themselves personally vulnerable to audience reactions and judgments. Even more problematic is what aspects of a participant's life might be revealed through intricate editing. What pressures will be applied to modify a participant's conduct, with what consequences? Nichols (1991) situates ethics in an axiographic space—between the camera and the subject, between "the observer and the observed," because of an "indexical bond" between the image itself and the production values that produced it (p. 76). In other words, the components that make up the image are present in the representation of that image, including both the argument that is being put forward in the actual factual piece and the ethics of the practitioner: "The image provides evidence not only on behalf of an argument but also gives evidence of the politics and ethics of its maker" (p. 77). Nichols situates evidence of the ethics in authorial devices such as camera movement, framing and shot size, use of subtitles, sound effects, and the addition of music or narration. Surprisingly, he does not explore or even mention the editing process as a potential site of harmful manipulation and violation of ethical standards in the dialectical juxtapositioning of images to build a rhetoric or story.

In response to that omission, I argue that while different modes, from fiction to factual, from the traditional documentary to a reality program, raise distinct ethical questions, they ultimately flow together in the edit room. In my survey, I inquired how editors positioned themselves vis-à-vis authorial control over the post-production that rests with their producers, and whether they acknowledged the stakes for subjects. I also probed the question of trust, as it is an underrepresented facet of research into factual production. The next section will provide a foundation for the focus and location of this thesis—the edit room of factual programs—as it is the location where believable fiction is produced from nonfictional content, jeopardizing the integrity of participants and the authenticity of recorded events.

Picture Editing in the Scholarly Discourse

Despite playing a key creative role, editors remain on the margins of scholarly authorship research and current media scholarship. Even though there has been progress in the study of collaborative arts, the director or producer is still considered to be the solitary creative source that determines the success of a program. This is at least partly because a well-established continuity-editing aesthetic in advancing the linear development of the narrative in both cinema and fiction television renders the editing an invisible art. An editor's basic aim is to have their work be unnoticed; editors hide their creativity, even though in the process of post-production their role is greatly expanded. With the advent of digital editing, they have become responsible for many areas of post-production that earlier belonged to other crafts. For example, in the past, picture editors only cut images. Diegetic sound, music, and visual effects specialists covered other aspects of the editing process. It is now common, and not just on lower budget television productions, for the picture editor to integrate music, create visual effects, and lay in sound effects or other non-diegetic sounds. In factual television, the editor's burden is to harness the untidiness of ordinary life. Unedited footage—the medium's purest form—on its own is problematic enough, but with the editing process of interpreting the footage shot by shot, the ethical challenges grow exponentially. All that was recorded in the production phase is examined for its nuances. It is then combined with additional non-diegetic audio-visual material, giving what was recorded a new context and bringing forward meanings that the actual footage may have concealed, or even fabricating constructed realities. In reality and documentary television, the editor's responsibilities reach into the creative task of writing and structural dramaturgy. Disjointed events add up to cohesive stories. Isolated statements are developed into patterns. The coincidental turns into destiny.

Historically, the documentary form made claims to both journalism and art, and while the former involves certain ethical duties of journalistic integrity, the latter permits "a measure of artistic 'amorality'" (Winston, 2000, p. 132). Winston sees this notion of artistic license as the key issue between practitioner and participant, since the consequences of representation are experienced most directly by those in front of the camera. That obliges the editor as practitioner to reduce any possible harm to subjects. The core questions remain: how much mediation or manipulation can the practitioner ethically bring to the storytelling process while remaining ethical and loyal to the truth? (Winston, 2000). How does a practitioner lay claim to a sincere presentation of factual audio-visual if that practitioner considers himself or herself to be an artist? It is this tension that continues to fuel the discourse within the scholarly community, and it became one of the grounding questions in the survey used for this dissertation.

Art or Craft?

Winston (1995) contends that an identity problem for practitioners of factual programs existed prior to the rise of reality television, when there was only the traditional documentary: "From the beginning documentarists have rewarded themselves for their success in the struggle against 'shapeless reproduction,' with the title 'artists'" (p. 17). When asked about their professional self-image, 20% of editors who answered the survey self-identified as "artist," or pointed to the artistic element in the craft of editing. Editors of traditional documentary claimed the term "artist" more frequently than reality television editors. Ten percent in the sample explicitly recognized that the term "artist" did not apply as they were not made to take full responsibility for their work; anything they did had to be approved by their superiors in the production chain. "I don't see myself as an artist but a craftsperson as I am not accountable to my art but my producer," one editor said. Forty-five percent of all surveyed identified as crafts-

persons practicing a skill. Twelve editors worked in both formats, and as one said, they felt they were "a bit of both." Noteworthy in these results is that several editors still insisted on their creative agency even though the reality of their workplace with its hierarchical and commercial structure strongly suggested otherwise. Documentary television editors value the form's associations with reality, and many are critical of their colleagues who take a more liberal attitude to the facts. But at the same time, they do not deny their role as authors with creative agency.

On the surface, Winston (1995) seems right in pointing to a paradox. But the editors surveyed, when asked if Winston's assertion of the practitioner-as-artist model in factual programs posed a contradiction for them, were almost unanimous in rejecting the notion. One expressed:

> I believe you can be an artist as you do your craft of editing. The very nature of editing is already altering reality. Every factual program or doc or show has a point of view. Once you cut you are creating a point of view so there are always choices to be made.

Other respondents questioned the validity of the question itself: "Films are never 'reality,' only a subjective slice of someone's conception of reality. The subjectivity is where the artistry comes from." "Reality TV is not reality. We need art to sculpt moments into a whole. I like the term 'unscripted' [in defining reality television] as it means it is planned but not a safe choice." One documentary television editor challenged the question's language and replaced both terms "craft" and "art" with "I am a truth teller." In fact, the challenge to the form's truth claims has become part of the viewing experience, as reality television's prominence in the cultural landscape obliges an analysis of its relationship to truth and "the real."

Where is the Real in Reality?

Rather than logically translate witnessed realities and communicate them objectively, the traditional documentary created spatio-temporal patterns out of logically inconsistent realities captured by the camera. Like metaphor, these juxtapositions defy (or transcend) logic, inciting in the audience an emotional response appropriate to the lived experience of the people in the captured realities. In constructing the narrative treatment of their subject matter, documentarians convey an inherently subjective, experiential truth. In this, documentaries have a kinship with fiction as both are constructs dictated by the practitioner's subjectivity. Although documentary television may portray real people in real situations, the question of whether this portrayal is "more real" than a fiction film remains.

I questioned the editors who participated in the survey about their understanding of the concept of reality, and inquired whether factual programs, either reality or documentary television, in their view, should only represent reality as it was captured. Some questioned that term as too vague, so I defined "reality" as "what actually took place in front of the camera." Several editors, working in either format, challenged that definition as well, arguing that what took place in front of the camera was not reality either: "Every reality requires treatment." "All is interpretation: as early as *Nanook of the North* factual documentaries contained re-enactments. So bollocks to that!" One editor told me: "If we were to show 'just reality' you might as well kill our entire industry as it is based on deception." Several others suggested that it was, in fact, their bias that gave meaning to captured reality, as articulated by one respondent:

> "Reality" itself seems limiting. So many stories are about something that hasn't been expressed or shown—how would we tell those stories? How do you make the invisible visible? Reality is always open to interpretation: police investigators find witness statements full of contradictions and it's their job to sort out the truth as they see it. Perhaps documentaries have the same intention. Unless you make a

> film with a bias, why even bother? It's the bias that is interesting, and unavoidable. It's all a lie. It's your lie instead of someone else's.

Overall, the respondents who worked as documentary television editors were skeptical of the idea of showing "reality itself." The responses from those that exclusively or partly worked in reality television were not significantly different. One respondent shifted the responsibilities to the viewer:

> Networks would show grass growing if it drew a measurable audience. The whole business side of the industry is chasing fickle eyeballs. The audience is a significant part of the equation, as they're the ultimate arbiters. So, if you're a reality show producer and the audience thinks your show is journalistically confirmed fact, whose fault is that?

Still, most editors valued "real" over "not manipulated" factual television. But the meaning of "real" was not fully consistent or precisely defined in their responses. What they considered real or authentic shifted from situation to situation. The responses by the editors need to be seen in the context of production practices of documentary, the procedures of reducing real time to screen time in shaping a program. That process includes both elimination and modification of recorded reality to match the broadcaster's format, and requires consideration in an ethical framework.

Truth in Factual Programming

As confirmed in the survey, in the current production environment, editors face increasing pressures to modify reality in order to dramatize the narrative by manufacturing thrill and conflict for viewers. They are also encouraged to accept budget-driven concessions in representing the "real." Consequently, editors apply a notion of truthfulness that remains flexible according to the requirements of the program's narrative. In justifying their choices, program makers fluctuate between conflicting paradigms: entertainment values such as narrative coherence and the concept of "the truth." When facing a demand for inaccuracy or manipulation

while cutting scenes, editors either refer to the pragmatic needs of the production or elevate the constructed reality to a loftier, abstract level of a "higher truth" as justifications for changing the recorded material. This is a hint here of Picasso's appreciation of art as "the lie that makes us realize the truth" (quoted in Aufderheide, 2012, p. 377).

Asked how they actually define "the truth," the editors' answers were as varied as the number of editors responding: "everyone has their truth," "it is about an emotional experience," "[it] reveals a human condition," "[it must] be close to what actually happened," "[it must be able] to capture the spirit of the show," "being able to follow events," "the goal of the show," "is elusive," "[it] show[s] what happened," "an accurate portrayal," "when the audience believes it," "perspective," "crafted," "to manipulate facts," "some-thing greater—the story," "impossibly subjective," "more than facts," "there is no such thing," "nothing absolute," "a bogus term for reality," "all interpretation," "a social construct," "just really an aspiration," "only that of the director or producer," and "I just gave up on defining it." Only a few respondents mentioned a program's participants in connection to their understanding of "truth:" "Truth is to be honest to the characters," "honors the subjects," and "is integrity towards participants."

Several editors drew a distinction between ideas of truth in reality and documentary television respectively, as one put it that "truth depends on the genre." Another editor stated:

> In docs you try to be truthful to the events and character. But after the first cut you are highly selective in representing the truth. As soon as you do one edit you no longer tell the truth-truth. There's truth in the material and truth for the producer. The truth is somewhere in the middle. But not in reality TV. It's fabricated. It's scripted . . . a bogus term. Only thing is that these people are real.

One respondent was unapologetic in determining for the audience what the truth was and what it was not:

> I have spent 20 years negotiating the truth. How much do we compromise? As an editor I decide what truths go out there. That's what every artist does all the time.

> We are crafting truth. Truth is in the hands of the arbiter, the editor. It is dangerous to make claims for the truth. Just don't tell people that you do that. Commit to the messiness—that's where the truth lies. Maybe we shouldn't trust anything.

One editor gave a reflective response that echoed many of his colleague's individual observations:

> Truth in the sense of being true to reality, to complexity, to ambiguity, to how things actually are always mediated. It is a social construct. We are complicated creatures. We have complicated inner lives. We have complicated relationships with people. And we have a complicated relationship with the universe. Because there is faith, belief, revelation, insight, dogma, opinion, assumption, habit, instinct. There is another order of truth, essential truths, about death, desire, memory, evil, violence, greed, and so on. These are not just about facts but they are about experience, understanding, intuition, feeling, wonder. They reach into the unconscious, into myth and poetry and revelation.
>
> The filmmaker can use image, sound, music and words to create a scene that can make for a profound understanding. This is not factual truth but insight into the nature of our being. This is where the art comes in.

Overall, there was no qualitative difference between documentary television editors and those that edit reality shows in the degree of reflexivity and thoughtfulness in responding to the question of how to define the "truth." However, fewer documentary television editors than I expected considered the "truth" to be a baseline as a measure of their professionalism. The detailed and nuanced responses certainly contradict Dornfeldt's (1998) concern that documentary practitioners lack the ability to articulate the motives for choices they make and, when asked, revert to nebulous accounts like "it works" or "it looked good to me" (p. 67). Embracing the apparent contradictions in executing their work, the editors in my survey confirmed Fisher's (1987) suggestion that practitioners, just like audiences, assess a narrative's coherence by its fidelity. Fisher proposes that fidelity "is assessed by applying what I call 'the logic of good reasons'" (p. 47), logic being "a systematic set of concepts, procedures, and criteria for determining the degree of truthfulness or certainty in human discourse" (p. 27).

Playing Truth in Editing

The follow-up question in the survey, as listed in Appendix D, addressed the conscious decision by editors to manipulate what they considered to be the truth in the editing of a scene. Half of all editors in the sample, mainly those working in the reality television format, confirmed that they had sacrificed their own definition of the truth. As examples of manipulation, the respondents described "moving chronology around," or "adding sound effects like tears and crying" to heighten drama, and inserting non-diegetic sounds or random cutaways of people looking angry or annoyed. In defending their practice of manipulating events in the cutting room, reality television editors frequently alluded to the postmodern notion of the mediated quality of *any* form of communication, a defense that is less than satisfying since it offers a blanket justification for any degree of manipulation.

The reflections on "reality" and "truth" as brought forward in the survey are also reminiscent of Nichols's (1991) observation that the human experience reflects a world full of contradictions of everyday life. Presented with the tensions between how they judge and will be judged in the narrative fidelity of their work, editors found the gaps here and created linkages there in their work, forming coherence from contradiction. Through the editor's efforts to vivify the mental practice of constructing meaning from contradiction grew the effort of presenting the factual program's truth as true to human experience. Not one survey respondent accepted the simple concept that what was recorded took place, and as a result, it is true, and therefore will be accepted by the spectator as truth. Several editors made a point of observing that if one considers the truth as something that the presence of a camera alters, nothing in television can qualify as truth. There is indeed no reason to assume that what gets recorded on tape is true, however spontaneous, unrehearsed, and undirected it may appear. On its own, recorded reality is not

sufficient to qualify as truth. That leads to the conclusion that the reality of the social world and reality on record is not the same. Still, Nichols proclaims that "a common, self-chosen mandate to represent the historical world rather than imaginary ones" (quoted in Eitzen, 1995, p. 84) unifies the community of practitioners of the traditional documentary form. The completed program is described by an "informing logic" that includes "a representation, case, or argument about the historical world" (quoted in Eitzen, 1995, p. 84). The viewing public should be able to trust two general suppositions: "The images we see and sounds we hear have their origin in the historical world" and, secondly, factual programs "do not just portray that historical world but make some sort of 'arguments' about it" (quoted in Eitzen, 1995, p. 84).

As in Fisher's narratology, editors narrativize the recorded events after they have taken place. For the editor, the subjects' everyday lives may become cutting material. A central ethical challenge grows out of the editor's experience of the taped subjects as representations on a screen, rather than being real people. One set of questions in the survey was about the relationships editors develop—or not—with the program participants. Editors were asked if they had the subjects in mind while making editorial decisions and the potential impact those editorial decisions could have on those persons in real life. Thirty-four of the 50 editors responded positively with comments like "when I cut something together I want the participants to recognize themselves when they watch the program. I will never change what they are expressing" or "I think of them. They will watch the program and [this] will affect how their friends and peers will perceive them." Several respondents added qualifiers to their answer: "You can't cheat the facts to serve the participants" or "sometimes you need to save them from themselves." Despite the two-thirds majority of editors who confirmed they had the participants on their minds while editing, many of the same group of respondents referred to the need to build

story as the determining factor in making editorial decisions: “It is a balancing act between what the story requires and how to make people look the very best way possible. Story comes first. You can’t please everybody.” “I need to keep the story first. Not everyone will look good, and people might feel hurt.” Fisher’s (1987) argument that human beings are inherently storytellers —“The narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers” (p. 18)—appears to be confirmed in the editor’s responses. Factual programs feed off storytelling as a central feature of our culture. “Story” as a justification to manipulate reality will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, “Cross-Pollination and the Problem with Story.”

Several participants used concrete examples of how they compromised the perceived interests of the participants. One of them phrased it this way: “I wouldn’t say I’d never use camera run-ons [audio or video that is recorded even though the subject believes the recording device is turned off].” Surprisingly, among the eight editors who exclusively edited documentary television, three did not respond with an unqualified yes to the question whether they’d consider the potential impact on the participants in their creative choices in the editing. One respondent was aware how, after spending considerable time watching participants on screen, a familiarity with the material might be confused with an assumption that they had become familiar as real people. One editor referred to the distance between themselves and the program participants as necessary:

> Directors have a relationship with characters. As the editor, I can’t violate a relationship that I never had in the first place. The editor’s job is to make the best story out of the footage. When it comes to a moral compass it is about the director. As an editor, the participants are not my responsibility.

Nichols (1991) described “social actors”—people who play themselves in reality or documentary television—as taking part in a “virtual performance” that corresponds to conventions of dramatic performance (p. 122). That phenomenon is amplified in reality television when participants like

those described above are made, through editing, to express statements or feelings that are not theirs. Falsehood becomes reality as the distinction is blurred. A rare display of authentic emotion may be removed from its context and appear performed, and as a consequence excised from the cut. One example is the reality program convention of the confessional, often edited so comments that refer to one character or incident are positioned to refer to another, unrelated event. After signing a release form, there is little recourse for the participants but to go public and denounce the editing for a negative portrayal. As a case in point, in 2001 a contestant revealed in a media interview that the editors reduced an hour-long taped talk with a male contestant to seven words—"My sex drive is out of control"—a statement that essentially reduced her character to a sex addict (quoted in Watts, 2011, p. 45).

The follow-up question of the survey asked what kind of thoughts or emotions editors experienced in observing program participants on the screen or monitor for weeks or months at a time. There was no measurable difference in the responses between documentary and reality program editors. Seventeen, or nearly one-third of respondents, described a sense of discomfort. Respondents described situations of meeting participants as real people instead of characters on screen as "odd," "strange," "awkward," "disorienting," even "weird" and "creepy." One participant described an encounter that left them troubled:

> Early in my career, I cut a documentary series about kids. One episode featured a 12-year-old boy, who then came to the series wrap party. When I saw him in person, I was actually "creeped out" by how much I knew about this kid—what his bedroom looked like, the rhythms of his speech, the things he liked, the way he laughed—and that he had absolutely no idea about me. The imbalance was so weird to me that I left the party.

Several other respondents, including one of the documentary editors, saw no issue with using participants as material. Fifteen editors replied that they did not have participants on their mind at all while cutting a program. As one editor said: "there's nothing wrong in reality TV to create

drama where there is none before. The creators and participants are all in it together. I would not give them a second thought. And audiences are in on the premise, too."

Notable in these responses is the agency editors ascribe to participants, repeatedly using the argument that they know what they are getting themselves into. Their replies in this survey evoke a considerable theoretical debate around the question of consent in factual program. Gross, Katz, and Jay's (1988, 2003) criticism centered on the unethical dealings with participants or dishonorably making use of private matters of ordinary people for entertainment purposes. Ruby (1986) argues the practitioner's responsibility towards the participants shapes an "ethical position" (p. 310). Rosenthal (2005) remarks that "the essence of the [ethical] question is how creators should treat people in films so as to avoid exploiting them and causing them unnecessary suffering" (p. 245) and queries the duties practitioners have in caring for participants.

All of this foregrounds the question of consent. As it is not the legal responsibility of the editor to obtain a release from participants, should they even be considered in connection with issues of consent? Furthermore, is consent once granted always explicit or can be implied or hypothetical, and once granted it is absolute, or dependent on the conditions in which it was granted? These kinds of questions do not address the morality of whether it is right or wrong to gain consent from participants. Instead, they explore the diverse possibilities of what constitutes informed consent. A common argument voiced by editors is that participants, as adults, make a conscious decision to take part in a program and sign a consent form that lays out the framework of their involvement. The difficulty is to determine whether the given consent is informed. Breinholdt, a commissioning editor at TV2 in Denmark, approached a subject who wanted to revoke the consent he had previously granted:

> I bought the girlfriend a big dinner, allowed them to talk to each other via phone which was against the rules, told him how great he was, and managed to get him back on board. It's all psychology at the end of the day: you are their friend, understand their troubles, you think the same, but. . . . (quoted in Thirkell, 2010, p. 179)

Heggessey, a former controller [the British term for commissioning editor] at BBC, described a participant with mental illness who agreed to be filmed and had signed a release, despite his family advising him not to. When the subject changed his mind:

> It was too late as we were well into editing. And our lawyers said the release was legally robust. I went public and said: "We all feel bad about this. But how would we feel not allowing the mentally ill their freedom to be on TV just because of their illness." It worked. Always tell people they are right before you tell them they are wrong. (quoted in Thirkell, 2010, p. 269)

That incidents like these erode the public's trust in the sincerity of program makers is not surprising. However, the line between good intentions and intentional deceit is indeed fluid. The decision to appear on camera might be motivated by unreflective ambition for notoriety, the pursuit of an acting career, or a desire to look good in the eyes of friends and family, any of which can affect the subject's ability to make a truly informed choice when they are unaware of the potential risks of manipulation in the editing process. The participant signs a release before the taping starts. There is no recourse after that, certainly not in the editing phase. Further possibilities for informed consent as a potential means of addressing ethics in the editing of factual programs are discussed in the following chapter.

Loyalties in the Cutting Room

It is essential to recognize that the process of building a television program, as in other cultural industries, is a collective enterprise, involving a number of actors. According to Negus and Pickering (2004), "creativity arises not from a cultural context which exists in monolithic isolation, but from cultural borrowings and transactions" (p. 40). But the subjectivity that grows

out of individualism can conflict with cooperation, turning all social exchanges into competitive acts, creating conflict between the ideals of individualism and a collective creativity. Because of continuing insecurity, the freelancer's relationship with their employer has turned into a microcosm of the dependent relationship of the producer to the broadcaster, which sacrifices risk-taking or originality to the demands of prevalent hierarchy. The consequence of a blunted taste for risk-taking and innovation maintains itself after decades of structural shift in the television landscape.

Questioned about where they placed their main loyalty on their work, the editors interviewed gave multiple responses. Most documentary television editors named the director, producer, broadcaster, participants, or they identified themselves as the locus of their main loyalty. In reality television, where the director generally does not get involved in the post-production process, almost all editors named their producer (sometimes called the "show runner") as the authority they were accountable to. Nine respondents also mentioned the broadcaster (or network, sometime also referred to as "client"), acknowledging an economic hierarchy. Eight of the 50 respondents described "serving the story" as their main loyalty. This tends to confirm Fisher's (1987) ideal of human beings as "homo narrans" situating narrative as the primary form of rational thought and communication, where narratives are rhetorical as they become guide "to thought and action in the world" (p. 90). As one editor reported:

> I can't think of the interests of participants first because then I can't stay objective and tell the truth, as there's more than one side of the story. You can't be fair to everyone. Participants come third for me because I need to stay objective, and be fair to the story, even though I might make someone look not so good.

Just four editors, working in both documentary and reality television, named the program's audience as their primary loyalty. Similarly, the program's participants were mentioned by only four editors, and in each case the reference was accompanied by a qualifier, acknowledging that

combining the producer's interest and those of the participants was a "delicate balance." One editor gave a reflective response that echoed many of his colleague's individual observations:

> I am responsible first to the participants; then, to my own sense of morality, only then to the audience. After that it is to the director, producer, and broadcaster, the order of which would depend on the project. That's in an ideal world. But in practice, my ethical responsibility as an editor most often plays out in an undemocratic, authoritarian organization where decisions are made from the top down. Who will say no?

Several respondents mentioned the triangulated model involving participants, audiences, and economic stakeholders (broadcaster, producer, or show runner) they operated in. Editors working in either reality or documentary television acknowledged that economic realities were what counted in the end.

Meeting an Ethical Challenge

When editors experience a conflict with an ethical demand while practicing their craft, they must find a path between a set of contesting obligations or loyalties. Unavoidably, the calculation between obligations and duties will ultimately force choices, advancing one over the other based on moral or pragmatic principles, and it will be open to being contested within the triad of media practitioners, participants, and viewers (Aufderheide et al., 2009; Nichols, 2001, 2008). This presupposes that practitioners, in fact, have a defined set of professional ethics.

One central inquiry of this survey was asking the 50 participating editors about their own professional ethics, without offering any definition of the term in advance. Almost 70% of respondents declared that they followed certain ethical principles. Sixteen of those explicitly mentioned the program's participants as the main focus of their professional ethics, with one adding a qualifier: "I won't embarrass someone who shouldn't be. If it is not part of the story." Another commented, "I believe in manipulating facts for a greater truth—the story. But is it true to the character?" Of the 50 editors, only four placed "truth" first in their ethical priorities.

The remaining 25% of respondents answered that they had no defined professional ethics or had adjusted their professional ethics to the format they were working in. Several respondents put their families and their need to pay the bills over any other ethical consideration. Among those were two documentary television editors. Three editors questioned whether it was even possible to separate professional from general personal ethics ("Professional ethics don't exist. Only personal morality," one said). Just two respondents referred to the industry hierarchy in lieu of personal ethical considerations, confirming previous studies in which factual program practitioners often referred to the hierarchy of the company or organization they worked for as the reason why they did not have agency to make decisions that were solely based on their own ethical beliefs (Aufderheide et al., 2009).

Several editors allowed their current employment situation to determine an ethical position, as described by one of them: "My ethics float according to the specific situation." They considered ethics only after meeting the required task, as expressed by another: "I am in the business of exploitation. But what I work on, there's nothing of stake to worry about. Who is presumptuous to think others know what is right or wrong?" Five other editors defined their professional ethics not in the context of a moral framework, but in a work ethic—being punctual or maintaining confidentiality and a professional attitude. Another had resigned themself to the nature of the industry:

> When I was younger I worked on films that had a real impact, like getting people out of jail. That's no longer the case—now we bend the truth for dramatic convenience. I have adapted my professional ethics to the new marketplace. I am no longer interested in serving greater principles.

Several editors conceded their ethical responsibilities without reservation. In the words of one respondent: "It is in service of the story, to sacrifice truth and abandon authenticity to carry emotions. It is someone else's show. To recognize that is part of being a professional."

One editor argued that the process of manipulation began early in the production stage: "Directors make people say things on set 'just for fun,' and then we use it in the final show anyhow . . . so whatever happens in postproduction is not that much of an escalation." An example of that process is the 2009 series *Revamped* that followed several women living together while trying to give up alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes. An unnamed producer revealed that at one stage "We weren't getting the shots we needed, so the host approached a cast member and offered her a cigarette so she'd relapse on camera" (Landau, 2013).

Overall, in describing whether they followed their own ethical principles, there was no significant difference in the responses between documentary or reality television editors. Three of the eight documentary television editors declared that they had no defined set of professional ethics. The responses above appear to confirm the hypothesis that practitioner ethics are principally situational and relativist, limited to specific problems or difficulties, and not engaged with overarching moral principles. The professional ethics professed by survey respondents were in general not presented as deontological principles, but were tied into mundane systems of production circumstances.

Any ethical position is without consequences until it is put to the test and the individual holding it is forced to make a choice between their own belief system and the demands of other stakeholders. Asked to describe a specific situation that demanded of them to take and defend a position during the editing process, 17 respondents denied having ever compromised their professional ethics. Several dismissed manipulating material as a kind of game devoid of moral content, pointing to, as one editor put it, "back stabbing among the show's participants" as posing a creative challenge to them.

But 20 of the editors confirmed that they had been in situations that did compromise—or could have compromised—their professional ethics. Several respondents offered concrete examples, such as using comments from participants even though they were made when they believed the recording device had been off, moving a statement out of context, or making subjects appear as totally incompetent because the format required it. Half of all respondents who exclusively edited documentary television confirmed that they had compromised their ethics. One editor described a specific situation that echoed many of his colleague's individual observations:

> I worked on a piece about racism that exclusively featured white middle-class subjects, and I was asked to add dismissive statements against an ethnic group because the documentary director had his agenda and wanted to emphasize it. That kind of manipulation is much more damaging in a documentary because it happens under the guise of a noble search for the truth.

I myself have responded to a potentially compromising circumstance with a situationist approach. I agreed to edit an episode of a documentary series even though it was against my ethical beliefs because it was situated in a military environment, without offering any critical perspective, or even historical context. I completed the assignment, but in the end I donated half my earned fees to a charity.

Several respondents working on reality television described situations in which they had manipulated the material in a way that compromised their ethical standards, but they were able to salvage the situation with an acceptable workaround, as described by one respondent:

> There was one moment when the camera captured a girl crying. The director had made her deliberately feel bad about the way she was dressed. I used the image in the show. Later we had that participant record some lines that actually describes the story why she cried. I cut it in, and that scene "saved the show." Her deep unhappiness was authentic. In the end the girl loved what we did to her character. It made her change her life.

There were various examples of editors describing how they found a compromise between

expectations of the producer and broadcaster and their own ethical standards. Negotiating a position between those two poles also gave the professionals agency to be in this world as responsible human beings.

Negotiating Ethical Conflicts

The final phase of editing is the decisive moment in which the broadcaster intervenes in the final version of a program. Its commissioning editor may have conceived the project or selected it from many submitted treatments. The concept is developed and discussed before it goes into production. But in the editing phase the broadcaster will impose their distinctive standards, requiring the editor to emphasize a certain tone or frame the events more as conflict and crisis than as negotiation and consensus. As the commissioning television station or network sells commercials to advertisers based on the size and demographics of a projected audience, viewers must be "grabbed" by shock or spectacle, and story and message need clarity. These expectations are laid out in the branding of a series and the broader trademark of the television channel itself. Branding concerns have increased with market competition. The edit room becomes the site of contestation between the various stakeholders, creating an atmosphere that can be highly problematic for the editor.

The subsequent question asked of the participants in the study was whether they ever found themselves defending creative choices on ethical grounds or if they had challenged a decision by a broadcaster or producer because it violated their sense of professional ethics. Twelve respondents replied that they had not. Seven editors expressed the view that it was not their place to fight battles as the production hierarchy situated them below producers and broadcasters.

However, 13 of the 50 respondents, or more than 25% of those surveyed, recalled a situation in which they had challenged their producer or broadcaster. Among the 22 respondents who edited both reality and documentary television, nine replied that they had had conflicts with either producers or broadcasters, and "won some and lost others," as one editor said. Several documentary television editors described specific situations:

> It was about female circumcision. In their paper edit the director had completely flipped the meaning of what was said by an interview subject. I wrote a strongly worded note to the producer that the context had been changed and that the edit was not representing the facts right. The producer agreed with me.
>
> I remember a story that was being cut in the edit bay next to me, about acupuncture on animal where the director wanted the whimper of dogs removed from the sound track to make the practice appear as if it is painless. The editor complained and the entire story was killed.
>
> In a documentary on immigration, a participant had shown a lot of courage to escape an oppressive situation. The director and I wanted to reduce the man's motivation why he escaped to being one of conscience. It was the writer of the program [who] reminded us that there were also self-serving reasons why the man had fled his home country. The writer won the argument, and the documentary became more truthful because of it.

Dover (2001), too, found that documentary practitioners detach themselves from television network executives who expect them to arrange their creative agency in line with economic imperatives. However, Dover frames such compromise as proof of the ability for critical reflexivity and resistance, and not as a strategy practitioners apply to maintain artistic or moral integrity while making creative compromises. Editors in reality television responded to similar situations by getting the producers to agree to a compromise:

> One show featured a mother with her autistic child. The producers wanted me to cut it as if the child's behavior was out of control. I didn't want to do that, as it was disrespectful to the mother who did her best to manage her child. The story editor worked with me to come up with a compromise solution that would represent the mother and child truthfully, and still create a dramatic scene. But the show runner didn't go for it and took us off the job, and on to another episode. I

> could have been fired, but I didn't want to compromise that family. It would gut me. It isn't true.
>
> In one show I realized that I wasn't comfortable making an editing choice that was not ethically correct. I really had to mull it over, and found a compromise, meeting the producers half way, achieving the same desired effect non-verbally, by adding meaningful glance by the participant, instead of a lengthy statement. The producers were taken aback at first: "That's not what we expected." I held my ground. They said "Let's see what the network says." The network didn't mind. So, I was able to negotiate this compromising (sic) solution.
>
> One show participant called another, who was Asian, a "Sumo wrestler." I felt that was a racist comment. My producer told me: "Use it—it's funny." I thought it was ignorant and challenged him. I won. But in the end, I can't force the producers to change their mind.

Other reality television editors revealed incidents that compromised their ethical stands: "The producers asked me to find a participant using the term 'nigger' in the footage, but I couldn't. I wouldn't have used it if I would have found one, either." "Some female participants talked amongst themselves without knowing their audio was recorded. Others on the post-production team supported my refusal to include that audio in the edit." "Me and a co-worker challenged the use of a racist joke in the show. The producers disagreed and still played the joke in the program. I was taken off the episode [and] moved to another show."

Other editors in reality television found different ways to deal with compromising their ethics, either by leaving the program or not signing on again for the next season. One editor described a specific situation that echoed many of his colleague's individual observations:

> It was about an argument between subjects. I used a moment of someone getting really mad. It made it more dramatic, but ethically questionable because I had placed it out of context. I kept thinking about it. The next time I was asked to edit something like this I thought to myself "This is just going to keep happening." I had to re-evaluate if I was going back to that show and I didn't. It was a turning point for me.

Other respondents determined whether the work accorded with their ethics before signing on to a show. One reality program editor was asked to work on a documentary television project:

> A few months ago, I was talking to some producers about a documentary that sounded like a very powerful project. Their footage, however, was basically poverty tourism. The camera crew embedded themselves with some impoverished alcoholics, and I was certain that several of the people on-camera had no idea of the ramifications of the release they signed. The pregnant high school girl who smoked a lot may have signed the release, but she had absolutely no sense of the outcome of exposing herself on camera. I declined to take the project, and tried to gently explain to the producers that the story they were looking for wasn't going to be found in that footage. I have turned away other projects to avoid situations like that.

Several respondents replied that tight production schedules don't allow for time to challenge executive decisions, or referred to the production hierarchy that left them with no choice. One editor described the dance between producer, director (in the case of documentary television), broadcaster, and editor. Editors' responses revealed that distancing (oneself from the final program) and evaluative tweaking (performing corrective adjustments in the edit to protect participants or uphold ethical standards) are work strategies that editors have agency over in order to preserve personal or artistic integrity.

Editors in both reality and documentary television deployed such methods when facing challenges to their artistic integrity in the cutting room. At first, these responses appear like contradictory strategies of rationalization: distancing programs from the self ("Not my responsibility," "It's a job," "A fact of the occupation") while associating with the show by making editing adjustments and justifying compromises as a reflection of their morals ("I did what I could to protect the participants"). Relying on technical logic or even argumentative proofs as the standard for rationality and reason would mean for Fisher (1987) that the majority of our actions, decisions, and values are by their very nature unreasonable. But in this case, the editors tested their actions for their internal coherence and their fidelity to their own lives and values, and in this way created felt-beliefs that may become confirmations of their decisions in

the execution of their work. An intuitive response does not mean, however, that it cannot become a more reflected, reasoned, rational belief or conviction.

Yet again, there was little difference in the responses between those editing reality and those editing documentary television when challenging a decision by a superior in the production chain, or being challenged by them. The same applies to the outcomes. When editors spoke up, they were either listened to and affected change, or they were ignored. Not a single editor in either format was fired because they refused to execute an edit. It is important, now, to place the above responses and responsibilities in a theoretical context.

Artificial and Real Persons

The philosopher Wolgast (1992) rejects the formation of professional codes of conduct, preferring to make individual agents aware of the duties they are expected to fulfill in their role. Wolgast criticizes professional codes as "role morality," because they are frequently used to insulate actions from fundamental moral criticism. She points out that the majority of discussion about professional ethics and codes "tends to be framed in terms of role moralities, separating a person's character from her role" (p. 5). Codes are written for a person with "moral blinders," not for the "whole moral person." To retain moral autonomy and responsibility, Wolgast contends, a willingness to make "radical revisions, both in our ways of thinking and in our institutions" is necessary (p. 146). Wolgast defines corporate institutions like broadcasters as "artificial persons" within which "real persons" operate in a complicated system of conflicting roles and interdependent relationships. In a collective authorship environment such as this, it is often impossible to determine the role played by any one creator in determining outcomes. "An artificial person" creates moral obligations and expectations that may have a substantial impact on the ethical choices made by individuals operating within it. A corporate entity, like a

television production company, affects many of the elements usually associated with the circumstances of an individually held responsibility, like being aware of the effects of one's behavior in circumstances, however complex, and/or involving many other stakeholders. Still, the possibility of identifying the individuals who caused them so their behavior can be judged also requires the presence of free will. Wolgast's constructive response to that problematic is to make those roles more open to individual agency and individual responsibility within their institutional contexts: "If we are to retain moral autonomy and responsibility, it requires that whatever a person does, she and no one else is in charge, she alone is responsible" (p. 116). That might suggest that Wolgast endorses a situationist approach to ethics for professionals, like editors, in taking the specific circumstances of their task in the edit room under consideration. However, she insists that ethical decision-making be grounded in the fundamental values that are widely shared by people as moral beings. In contrast, the responses from the survey sample, as outlined earlier in this chapter, do not conform to any widely shared fundamental values. I will return to Wolgast in Chapter Eight, suggesting a way to address the ethical challenges in the edit room.

Layers of Decision Making

The above responses reveal a series of underlying issues. Firstly, television production overall is not "authorless," but "poly-authorial" (Thompson & Burns, 1990, p. xiiii) and "synergistic" (Gordon, Kittross, & Reuss, 1998, p. 46). It is the product of the "collective action" (Sandeen & Compesi, 1990, p. 161) of a multi-faceted team of creative, technical, and managerial individuals who bring their expertise to the creative challenge. Given the multilayered structure of decision-making, is not realistic for the actual overall "tone" of a television program to be the result of any single person's conception (Sandeen & Compesi, 1990). Pointing at commercial pressures

for problems of fakery and for dumbing-down content, editors highlighted a need to adapt to the economic conditions of their employment, while at the same time claiming some integrity as creators through their resistance to the cost-effective and audience-pleasing demands of broadcasters.

My survey confirmed that the post-production of factual programs transpires as a place of mediation that permits some degree of creative, aesthetic, and ethical agency. Therefore, unduly emphasizing its hierarchical form invites the danger of generalizing as well as underestimating the role of the individual practitioner/editor, as "media themselves . . . cannot be ethical or unethical, only their staff members can" (Merrill, 1996, p. 1). Furthermore, the individual imagination, artistic concept, refinement, and moral values of the practitioner are in permanent interaction and quite often conflict with the exigencies and regulations of the industry and market forces, regulatory bodies and aesthetic conventions, and views of public taste (Ellis, 2004; Gordon et al., 1998; Sandeen & Compesi, 1990). That does not translate into structural determinism but rather situates the process in a middle ground between determinism and the romantic, idealistic concept of the media practitioner as a free agent solely led by their own artistic vision and moral principles.

This environment highlights the related issues of creative autonomy and personal accountability. The unraveling of the responsibilities of professionals towards the participants and viewers is especially instructive as it includes a distinct set of ethical quandaries centering on questions of power (inequality) and (mis-) representation. This present study does not focus on the particulars of the interaction between editors and participants, as any such encounters would take place only by chance. It will, however, address the interests and responsibilities of the audience in the latter chapters, as these are unavoidably involved

whenever the public component of television post-production and participation enters the ethical debate, that is, media exposure and its consequences. For example, several editors responding to the survey argued that it was actually against the interests of the producer to permit extreme manipulation of audio-visual material in the edit, and at times producers reversed edit decisions so as to prevent a potentially harmful outcome: "My producers wouldn't permit the statement by a self-described homophobic guy to say something anti-gay because they didn't want to invite any controversy. So, we edited it out." Another respondent reported:

> I've never put words in someone's mouth that they haven't expressed themselves. It doesn't happen because it's mostly ineffective storytelling to do that. Television is a very collaborative medium, and I don't know where the ethics of everyone else in the creative pipeline is at, but it's widely recognized that being completely "untrue" is counter-productive because it rarely—if ever—makes for a convincing story. Outright lies are extremely difficult to sell in a story, and lead to an unsatisfying end product.

The responses seem to suggest that regardless of which format the editor is working in, whether reality or documentary television, a satisfying situationist response to ethical challenges depends on the individual's attitude and determination to find compromise. The concept of situationism in describing the relationship between theory and practice embraces flexibility in applying moral principles. Despite the desire for recognizing context, situationism does not imply a drastic relativism. Winston (2000) explicitly addresses this by quoting ethicist John Merrill who postulated that a dual sympathy to both moral principles and the complex reality of actual situations can "center moral judgment and responsibility on a personal level" (p. 127), while maintaining a sense of authenticity and integrity. Winston (2000) argues unequivocally for a situationist methodology through an individual, rational, and voluntary ethic where the practitioner is sensitive to the effect of the process and actual program on the subject. Situationism is best described by a focus on context; moral principles are applied with flexibility.

During the production process, ethical questions need to be solved through an understanding of the circumstances that have an impact on the stakeholders directly involved. That includes the power relationships that exist within organizations that partake in the production of the program. A situationist perspective best reflects negotiations by practitioners about perceived ethical issues. Aufderheide et al. (2009) found that practitioners themselves advocated routinely situational decisions relating to ethics, made on a case-by-case basis, even though they agreed on central values. They shared principles such as "do no harm" and "protect the vulnerable" in relation to subjects, and, in relation to audiences, "honor the viewer's trust" (p. 1). Winston (2000) and Aufderheide et al. (2009) return to four principles as being central to ethical inquiry: 1) respect for autonomy that is based on an ideal scenario of implied consent and the right to privacy; 2) honesty as the key code that governs the triangular relationship between practitioner, participant, and viewer; 3) the expressed intent of practitioners to eliminate harm to anyone resulting from the process or distribution of the program; and lastly, 4) acting for the benefit of society to support the social value of the factual television form. One can argue that these four principles, which are grounded in the history and broad currency of Western moral philosophy (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001), are not reflected in the practice of producing reality television, and are increasingly questioned in documentary television. What could bring practice in line with the ideal? How can practitioners locked into the production hierarchy be empowered and protected to become moral agents?

An Ethics of Time: The Editor's Dilemma

Posing those questions, there are certain expectations of the editor in the post-production reality that bear reiteration—the act of manipulation is inherent in the craft of editing. Selective editing is a necessary tool of factual programs even though it is manipulative. The process

collapsing real time into screen time while editing a show includes choices that editors may consider from an ethical position, but justify any resulting distortions obligatory for storytelling or compression of ideas and time. A jump cut [an abrupt change of visuals cutting from one moment to another within the same scene] appears displeasing to the eye of the viewer, and even though Jean-Luc Godard introduced it into the filmic canon with *Breathless* (1960), on television it remains an anomaly.

> You could argue that cutaways in a scene taped with one camera are a distortion—you cut from a person talking to a reaction shot, condensing or reshuffling dialogue before you cut back to the person. But those kinds of distortions are often necessary to tell the story or to compress ideas that would otherwise take too long. Jump cuts (the removal of content by splicing the sections before and after together) might depict a more honest rearranging of reality, but they still are considered jarring by audiences. (Ascher & Pinkus, 2012, p. 528)

A transparent approach to editing can also backfire with audiences. The documentarian Errol Morris reports:

> In *Gates of Heaven*, I show jump cuts because I thought it is a way to be honest with your audience as you can see the edits and how the film's been put together. They said: "Now we can see how dishonest you are." If I had just covered them up the question would never arise. (Ferrari, 2008)

The following section will further track the process of selective editing and compressing time to harness the untidiness of real life and how it can descend from the agreed upon, necessary, and essential, to deliberate misrepresentation, falsification, and character assassination.

Since much of the collapsing of time happens in the audio, it remains invisible to the audience and can easily be concealed by a cut-away. That leaves many possibilities for editors to manipulate time and space. One set of questions I asked participating editors involved collapsing captured time in editing and the potential for taking a program participant's statement or utterance, or an event, out of context. In their responses, 10 editors stated that their work actually

helped make participants sound and look better, or they appealed to higher values, for example, a "form of dishonesty in the service of the truth," as one respondent phrased it. Among the documentary television editors, three described having performed substantial manipulation in condensing time but always with the motivation to "help people express themselves" or "make them sound more eloquent" as two editors responded. Eight respondents drew the line in collapsing time in editing at not lying. Another eight stated that they would not put words into someone's mouth or change meaning and intent. One editor echoed many of his colleague's individual observations:

> I reduce what participants say and need to stay truthful, instead of just serving a director or producer's vision of what they should be saying. And I voice my opinion. I don't want to be in that world. I would feel sick. I don't want to cross that line.

Several respondents were aware of the potentially dishonest characterization of a participant in which everyday real-time behavior was condensed to a few moments that needed to be entertaining, with one respondent elaborating:

> When I have an hour of material on a character and he freaks out three times during that time, I edit those together to a 30 second clip and eliminate the boring bits in between. The result is a scene with a participant who is permanently on the edge. I do whatever drives the story and character development forward.

Overall, editors varied in the degree to which they used truthfulness and representing cast with dignity as criteria by which they evaluated the quality of their own work. Some blamed others for unwanted decisions or results, often distancing themselves from ethical violations by offloading responsibilities to external forces, such as broadcasters, or an abstract like "our audience" or "the market." Many reasoned that they created television because others demanded it from them, and claimed that such ethical trespasses were necessary because of their roles as company employees; this was by no means a representation of their identity of craftsperson or

artist. Editors rationalized the ethics of their intervention in the continuity of time in various ways. One said: “I ask myself—could the participant have said this?” even though they had not communicated with nor met the participant in person. When questioned about the apparent contradiction, the editor replied that they were capable of “thinking for the participant,” adding, ”I am a good reader of people and know what they would or would not say.” The obvious absence of logic in the argument —to assume knowledge of people’s communication pattern without having met them in person—confirms Fisher’s (1987) narrative theory that deems *engaging* stories as more convincing than facts or logic. The statement quoted earlier also emphasizes that although fidelity is partially retrospective, in that practitioners use previously held experiences and values to evaluate narratives, it is also *pro*spective in that they also consider how those values play out in the narrative and whether the resolution of the conflict between values adheres to what they consider the most successful editing decisions they can conceive for themselves. Once again, there was no marked difference in the sample between those working in reality and those in documentary television. In the public debate, however, it is usually only reality programs that are criticized for the falsifying effect. Few scholars draw the connection to the documentary form, with the notable exception of Winston:

> The need for structure in documentary implicitly contradicts the notion of unstructured reality. The idea of documentary, then and now, is simply to contradict this notion. Documentary’s essence lies in the dramatization of actual material. Molding the film into a culturally satisfying shape, to sequence rushes, crosscut, build climaxes, remove or add sound, add commentary and music raises questions how much actually is left behind? (Arthur, 1993, p. 109)

Making a Villain out of a Lawyer

The line between documentary and reality television is indeed vague. Both are artificial, more or less contrived, and both are created in the editing. I experienced that tenuous crossover while editing an NFB documentary about Canada’s changing legal landscape vis-à-vis

prostitution. The documentary included an interview with Alan Young, the lawyer for a group of sex trade workers that advocated legalization of prostitution. The documentary's director opposed that position. After viewing the finished documentary, Young (2013), a professor at York University's Osgoode Hall Law School, took issue with its apparent bias. Through a freedom-of-information request, he accessed several thousand pages of e-mails, proposals, and other documentary materials relating to the production to "demonstrate the total lack of integrity and ethical conduct in the making of 'Buying Sex'" (p. 2). Part of Young's analysis was to compare his original interview transcript with the one complied from the final version of the film I had co-edited. In a letter to the NFB Acting Commissioner, Young (2013) concluded that

> it became apparent that the filmmakers' intent was to trivialize the constitutional challenge and to replace the discussion of the constitutional issues of security and gross disproportionality with an attack on my character and integrity. Through brutal and clever editing . . . I was reduced to a sound-bite attention-seeker as the makers could not overcome their inherent bias. (p. 5)

Analyzing the transcript of the initial interview and final selection for the documentary, Young made the claim that our intentions were to "trivialize the applicants and to reinforce the idea that they were mere pawns with no real interest in the issue other than being sound-bite spokes-persons who can entertain the media" (p. 11). Young considered the removal of five words as "nothing more than a deliberate move to maintain the false image of a sound-bite spokesperson with no serious history of involvement with the political issues" (p. 21). According to Young, a pattern of "trivialization and dismissal continues for the third applicant" revealed by selected editing to deliberately create "urgent conflict between the compelling stories of an abolitionist and a male lawyer who is not moved by these narratives" (p. 22). He continued:

> There is simply no excuse for this type of unethical editing. Cleverly, the filmmakers create the false impression that the film is balanced and objective. . . . The excerpts selected to portray the challenge were carefully edited to make most of our commentary appear vacuous and self-serving. . . . I am personally offended

> and hurt by the deceitful assassination of my character. (p. 2)

To further his claim, Young quoted the e-mails of a number of members of the production team, including the production executive, the producer, the director, and myself, the editor, to establish that the team had its own pre-arranged story and would not let "facts [get] in the way of a good story" (Stevens, in Ferrari, 2008). In one exchange, the director wrote to the producer: "People are NOT liking Alan Young . . . he is a real villain, are we sure we want to do that?" to which the producer responded: "I would want to make sure that this is well understood. He has used V. and T. [the sex trade workers] for his own gains . . . for business, money, notoriety" (Young, 2013, p. 17). Young also quoted me as the editor in an e-mail to the producers: "It is very clear now how Alan deceived the public regarding street workers. Great!'" Young continued:

> I am not entirely clear what all this cloak and dagger deception and disguise is all about, but it is clear that the filmmakers reached the conclusion, based on unquestioned assumptions, that I did not genuinely care about the plight of sex workers and that my only real interest was, in the producer's words, to "masturbate with the media." (p. 18)

Young concluded his letter:

> My complaints and concerns extend far beyond my sense of violation and disgust in having been recruited to participate in a film designed to denigrate my many years of hard, unpaid work on developing this challenge. I do think it is shameful that public funding earmarked for the production of movies designed to "represent Canada" could end up being used for a movie which trivializes the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, misrepresents the state of Canadian law while over-representing the value of the law of a foreign jurisdiction, and silences the voices of many women in Canada who believe that safety is more important than ideology. (p. 23)

Through the Freedom of Information Act, Young was able to access documents and exchanges that exposed not just the intent of us as practitioners to stick to our preconceived ideas about the story, but also how he was cast as the story's villain. As part of the documentary team's action, I helped to turn a complex protagonist into the story requisite of an antagonist. In reducing

complexity to stereotype, I was complicit in giving the story more importance than reality. My participation as editor confirms Fisher's (1987) supposition that narratives offer persuasive power as people are moved by them and assess them in the same way they do fictional stories. One may well question where the difference lies between rearranging words of show subjects in order to increase entertainment value of the program and splicing together documentary interviews sequentially into a desired narrative.

The final section of this chapter arrives at the frankenbite, which has become a symbolic expression of the unethical ways in which reality programs manipulate audio-visual material and the human beings featured in it.

The Frankenbite

Until now, scholarly research about the application of techniques of sound manipulation and the views and positions editors have about those practices, has remained quite limited. My goal is to contribute to a necessary discussion by looking closely at the patterns and editorial choices that emerged from my research and by creating a map of perceived ethical challenges that factual program editors face in the practice of their craft.

Ruby writes that the philosophy of positivism has encouraged documentarists "to hide themselves and their methods under the guise of objectivity" (quoted in Rosenthal, 2005, p. 67). But, he adds, "so long as our images of the world continue to be sold to others as *the* image of the world, we are being unethical" (quoted in Rosenthal, 2005, p. 211, emphasis added). The compression of an interview to statements that serve the practitioner's intentions is a practiced technique applied in reality television. The escalating step in creating drama and story—the frankenbite—also gave this thesis its title.

The term “frankenbite” is used to describe the rearranging of voice-over clips to create a completely new meaning or a heightened sense of drama and conflict. A frankenbite enables editors to build a story dramatically by excavating elements from interviews and arranging them into provocative or revealing statements that heighten the appearance of tension and struggle. It is considered an effective tool for editors of reality television for directing audience perception of a program’s participant. In Crew’s (2007) research, anonymous practitioners agreed that franken-biting is an “ethical stretch,” while at the same time acknowledging that they employ it themselves.

The term is used to refer to three general types of dialogue editing. The first applies when an editor reduces “um’s” and “ah’s” from the sound track to condense time, to tighten wordy interviews in order to sharpen or maximize the impact of an interview statement. An additional step is to remove words or syllables that are unintelligible for technical reasons by replacing them with content from another part of the interview. Taking sentences, words, and syllables from different times and environments involves finding a common background ambience, removing hiss and rumble, and sometimes even “dirtying up” a perfectly acceptable phrase to match an unfixable, bad one. Secondly, editors often need to create what the camera missed. For example, frankenbiting can approximate a missing scene by constructing it to fill missing footage when events occurred off-camera. Aside from finding appropriate visuals, it becomes the editor’s concern to “narrate” what took place off-camera by combining sounds to create a soundtrack appropriate to the missing scene. That requires listening through many hours of audio material. Sounds and images need to work in tandem. For example, to depict an emotional break-up between two participants, the editor needs to find the words indicative of the break up and images that reflect the body language or looks of anger or disappointment. The third use of the

term “frankenbite” is in relation to selecting words or word fragments of unrelated sentences and editing them together into a new sentence that creates a totally new meaning not intended by the speaker, to serve the story intended by the program makers. There is little in the literature that alludes to ethical positions of editors concerning the practice, except some practical advice to further one’s career in the television industry:

> If you can work a Frankenbite into smooth phrase 80% of the time, you will make some serious money in reality TV. Some of us don’t mind Reality TV. A few really like it. The show still tells stories, needs characters, exposition, sequences of events, conflict and resolution, or a cliffhanger for the next episode. The task of creating a story from the disparate pieces provides some great learning experiences and can be a very engaging challenge. I have been able to earn a very good living and provide for my family, and work with fascinating people in fascinating places. That is, simply, “the reality” of the situation. (Urban, 2012, p. 26)

The use of digital media permits carefully fabricated, undetectably edited, manufactured moments, culled from a captured reality upon which editors can build their narratives and construct new meaning. The soundscape underneath the image is to be considered a principal ground for reality construction in factual programs. The question in this inquiry then became whether and to what extent the frankenbite is used in documentary television as well. All respondents, except five documentary television editors, were aware of the term frankenbite. And almost all of those—41 in all including editors of documentary television—practiced frankenbiting. Respondents described the technique as having two main purposes. Firstly, “to clarify meaning,” “collapse time,” “make someone sound more eloquent without betraying the speaker’s intent or the truth.” Secondly and more controversially, “to create conflict and stakes where there was none before.” Almost all respondents, including most documentary editors, acknowledged the former usage, with qualifications: “Sometimes a sentence has to be constructed because the edited story has been changed from the original story as it had been told,

for whatever reason (clarity, simplicity, interest, or running time), and you need to guide the audience through the narrative," and "I frankenbite in documentary as well. You craft the truth by interpreting the intention of the subject. But I would not create a conflict when there was none, only embellish what there is already." Several editors took a very pragmatic position vis-à-vis needing to create a scene that included someone who wasn't even present on set by adding his voice from other scenes. They expressed a degree of pride at being at the service of the show. Two editors offered a nuanced justification to intervene in someone's speech pattern:

> Very often I have to manipulate or rearrange the story. Partly, that rearranging is to heighten tension or drama, but it's also for clarity. Inexperienced people tend to talk in wandering, stuttering, rambling sentences and playing them without editing would make them sound like uninteresting idiots. In my parlance, that's not "fair" either. Playing their words as they spoke them may be the "truth," but it doesn't present them in a way that makes the inexperienced talent look good. In story-telling terms, clarity trumps truth. Often these manipulations are there to save people from themselves in the contexts that I work in. The pressure to manipulate is based in being mindful of your audience and respectful to the people who may not be skilled television presenters.

> I never changed actual words, but [have] removed qualifiers to manipulate statements and make them come across as more extreme in order to respond to what the producer requested. I wanted a career and he was a big name in the industry. I justified my decision, I didn't make people say things they didn't actually say and the damage I caused was limited.

Only a few respondents confirmed that they applied the more interventionist and manipulative techniques of the frankenbite to completely manufacture new meaning:

> We had a participant say off-camera that "In the Bible it is not Adam and Steve, but Adam and Eve." But he refused to say so in his on-camera interview. So, I performed the frankenbite to make him say it. But the producer removed [it] in the end as he feared a backlash from the public against the show.

> There was an interview subject who said that she didn't have sex with someone, and the producers asked me to make her say exactly the opposite by performing a frankenbite. I did it because it was a pitch demo [a test for a show to get a broadcaster to order a series] for a network that would not be broadcast. Otherwise I wouldn't have followed that request.

Five editors, although familiar with the term frankenbite, did not practice it for pragmatic reasons. They argued that a conflict can be artificially created once through a frankenbite, but not maintained throughout the four-act structure of a typical program. Just two respondents explained how, in their view, the production process can be self-policing when it comes to frankenbiting. One editor elaborated:

> Television is a very collaborative medium, and I don't know where the ethics of everyone else in the creative pipeline is at but it's widely recognized that being completely "untrue" is counter-productive because it rarely, if ever, makes for a convincing story. There's a certain point where the manipulation becomes counter-productive to telling a good story, both in the field and in post, and that process tends to keep people on the right side of sinister ethical lines, at least in most cases.

As Nichols (1991) suggests, viewers read a documentary text not just as a sequential order of authentic sounds and images "that bear the palpable trace of how people act in the historical world, but as serial steps in the formation of a distinct, textually specific way of seeing or thinking" (p. 29). When asked how they described what they did to others, one editor told me that he is a writer, "using other people's words."

Frankenbites in a Documentary

In my own practice as a documentarian, I experienced a situation that points to the danger of attempting to understand and interpret the real because it can lead to fateful manipulation. Years ago, I interviewed Daniel Libeskind, a world-renowned architect, for a documentary project on the creation of the Canadian National Holocaust Monument. Libeskind is known to find inspiration for his design concepts in literature. In our interview, I mentioned that this reminded me of the phrase "The word made stone" as a way to define his creative process. Libeskind agreed with that association, but would not repeat the phrase on camera, instead replaced "word" with "something made stone," even when I pressed him on using the term

"word." During the editing of the interview for a demo-reel [selected visuals to sell the idea to a broadcaster] I determined that "something" was too vague and unclear for the audience. As I could not find a use of "word" in his entire interview, I replaced "something" with the word "language" that Libeskind used earlier in the interview. "The word made stone" became "language made stone." Applying Fisher's narrative paradigm that narratives provide situational contexts for a practitioner like myself to consider interpretations based on values, I convinced myself that it was a frankenbite that served four purposes: a) portraying Libeskind as being precise in his expression; b) carving out the true meaning of the moment; c) providing the audience with an insight into the creative process of an artist, and finally d) arriving at the truth at the core of his statement. But something kept nagging at me, so I researched the origin of the expression "the word made stone" and discovered that it is attributed to Speer, Hitler's architect, who had once declared that his goal was "to turn his Fuehrer's words into stone" (Krier, 2013, p. 33). I realized at that moment why Libeskind didn't want to repeat the phrase: he is Jewish, and the child of Holocaust survivors. However, I didn't remove that frankenbite from the edit of the demo reel, as the actual documentary project was never realized, nor was the edit shown publically.

In general, the frankenbite is practiced—and justified—by editors in both reality and documentary programs. Here, as well, it is a case of building one's own narrative coherence in justifying their actions that allows editors to make problematic statements that, upon reflection, seem to contradict each other: "I frankenbite in documentary as well. You craft the truth by interpreting the intention of the subject" without ever meeting the participant in person. A statement such as "in storytelling terms and the context of our show, clarity trumps truth" offers little comfort or sympathy for the participants whose words are interchanged to clarify or create

meaning. However, one documentary television editor summed up the dominant position held by practitioners:

> I live by frankenbites, virtually all the time. Even though it is considered a great sin, I love it even if some look down on frankenbites. The viewer doesn't care. The audience wants to be entertained. In fact, viewers in general don't notice skillful editing.

This assumption requires further investigation. In the triangulated model of practitioner/editor, subject, and viewer, the position of the latter needs to be acknowledged.

Viewers and Media Literacy

Next I inquired of participating editors how they described their work to people in their social circles who were not in the industry. The responses allowed me to evaluate how editors assessed the degree of media literacy among television audiences. The results contradict Hill (2007) and Corner's (2002) research and their trust in a high level of media literacy among viewers. Respondents came up with dozens of explanations, metaphors, and descriptions to explain what they do for a living to relatives or friends. Eighteen of 51 respondents, more than a third, concluded that trying to explain editing was a futile exercise because people do not care about understanding how television is created or do not want to know. Those 18 respondents included three of the eight documentary editors. Only a very few editors felt that people understood what went into their craft.

The responses raise the key question of whether reality programs deceive their audiences or assume that viewers are actually in on the deceit. So far, this survey has confirmed that through staging, scripting, and particularly editing, programs create sentiments and stories, turning what effectively is false into a version of truth or reality. Editors are supposed to work in the service of the audience, and many in the survey actually named viewers as their primary loyalty. Theoretically, the pretense to be something it is not renders the reality format deceptive.

Practitioners create an axiological deception of the viewer. Unless editors are themselves deceived or ignorant about the post-production process and its impact—and the results of the survey suggests otherwise—this is a deliberate process with an intended effect on audiences. Or practitioners may not consider the potential for harm to be of importance: "It's just a little nip and tuck, nothing serious. Just to add a little more drama," one editor said. As for the viewers of reality programs, there are conflicting assessments of the level of awareness of manipulation like frankenbiting. Hill's (2007) work on television spectators suggests that 75% of British viewers generally question the authenticity of the content of factual entertainment, while over 50% believe that stories were at times, or always, made up. Most audiences remain highly skeptical about the form's claim to represent the real. Hill concludes from her collected data that viewers are continuously engaged in critically examining factual television. A 2006 *Time Magazine* poll of American viewers found that just 3% believed that events depicted on reality programs were presented "exactly as they happened in reality," while 58% believed them to be "completely made up" or "not very close to what happened at all" (Time, 2006). Hill stipulates that while audiences assume show participants role-play, they also expect those presentations to collapse at some point during the program to reveal their real selves. That viewing strategy involves going beyond the obvious and making a game out of detecting when participants have an "authentic moment" of genuine emotion overriding the performance. This distinguishing between performance and authenticity gives the audience both pleasure and agency (Corner, 2002). The codes that separate the fictional from the real are not easily demarcated, and demand of viewers "a thick judgmental and speculative discourse around participants' motives, actions, and likely future behavior" (Corner, 2002, p. 264). Corner considers the ability of the viewer to grasp reality television's intent and construction, to critique as well as enjoy the stories in reality

programs as central to the understanding of the reality genre and the role practitioners play (in Hill, 2005). From this perspective, frankenbiting and the public discussion of it only enhance the attractiveness of reality television for audiences. It is noteworthy that none of the responding 50 editors pointed to media-savvy audiences searching out erroneous and exploitative material as one of the pleasures of watching reality TV.

With their low expectation of television audiences and the actual experience of their low level of media awareness, practitioners in this survey showed little enthusiasm for enlightening their audiences. Asked if people in general were media literate to the extent that they could "read" TV and understand what went into creating a program, editors responded in three ways. Forty-five percent responded that people did not have a real understanding of how media worked and that this posed a problem for society at large. One editor quoted a report where audiences were shown a real childbirth and a scene from *Star Wars*, and described how viewers considered the latter as more realistic: "I think there's a great deal of ignorance about how media manipulates the public. To paraphrase Einstein, we are technically in the nuclear age, but in terms of media literacy, we live in the stone-age." Three of those questioned actually preferred not to explain anything to others, as one editor said, to "keep up the mystique of editing." Another one likened the craft to "playing God—the invisible hand." Twenty percent of survey respondents agreed with the view that there was a lack of media literacy among audiences, but concluded it was of no great consequence because they felt that there were no real stakes and because, in the words of one editor, "story-telling is mythmaking." Several other participants also pointed out that what they produced was entertainment, and therefore did not need to be understood. As one responded phrased it:

> I think a lot of people can see through programs, however, when you do that it takes away the entertainment value. You want them to have a good experience watching programs instead of analyzing them. Explaining takes away the joy.

This response is reminiscent of Coleridge's (1817) assertion of the "willing suspension of disbelief." Skilled writers, suggested Coleridge, could infuse "human interest and a semblance of truth into a fantastic tale" to facilitate the process (in Biographia Literaria, Chapter XIV). That same technique is still applied by factual program editors today.

Several practitioners who defined themselves as operating outside the ethical realm by announcing they produced "just entertainment," revealed a convenient yet unsupportable position. Any cultural expression is more than "just entertainment" in that it shapes ideas, provides societal bonds, and creates identities and views of the world. Cultural industries create and circulate texts that influence our understanding and knowledge of the world (Hesmondhalgh, 2012, p. 4). Although communication scholars disagree about the degree of power and the manner by which various media and messages affect audiences, media undoubtedly do influence individuals and social groups: our sense of how we should relate to each other, our ideas of right and wrong. People draw on a variety of media to construct their fantasies, emotions, and identities.

All post-production processes involve human beings behind and in front of the camera. And it is considered fundamental to moral thought that everyone, by virtue of being human, bears personal responsibility for the impact of their actions on others.

The Mono Form

In their response to the survey, one editor associated the question of whether contemporary documentary television was under pressure to conform to market expectations and thus abandoned principles of educational values, with the media critique Peter Watkins. The

British filmmaker (*The War Game* [1965], *Edward Munch* [1974]) and educator had already observed in the mid-1980s, prior to the rise of reality television, that the increase in noncritical and dominantly Hollywood form and content in popular culture was leading to a crisis not just in media, but democracy as a whole (Watkins, 2003). Watkins' goal for society is to point to the problematic function of form and process in the production, distribution, and reception of what Watkins calls "mass audiovisual media" (MAVM). Watkins laments that there is little to no debate in the public, educational, or professional spheres about the language forms that structure the implied messages that are carried inside film or TV programs and the hierarchical process of its production and delivery. Almost all MAVM received by audiences are now structured by what Watkins coined as "the mono form." It is a single language system applied to edit and structure all media from cinema films, TV programs, news broadcasts, and almost all documentaries and reality programs, now encoded in a standardized and rigid form. That form, contends Watkins (2003), first ascended in the Hollywood cinema and has "resulted in an audio-visual language in which spatial fragmentation, repetitive time rhythms, constantly moving camera, rapid staccato editing, dense bombardment of sound, and lack of silence or reflective space, play a dominant and aggressive role." Watkins' writing, as well his more recent documentaries, have largely been ignored by the industry, public, and scholars alike. I will take up Watkins' appeal for a wider-ranging debate on the mono form in Chapter Eight, "Where Do We Go from Here?" as I shift focus from participants back to the need to empower audiences to read, mistrust, and deconstruct media texts.

Several respondents expressed hope in the next generation of viewers who are more technology savvy and social media creators themselves; other editors acknowledged that knowing how technology works does not mean understanding what effect it has on audiences.

Two editors lamented the fact that the surge of media education in the school system of the 1980s had all but disappeared: “In film schools they should emphasize media literacy, so to understand, and create transparent media. I feel a lot of academia snubs its nose at the reality genre.” “People haven’t jumped on the idea that we need to teach our kids how to critically watch media. It’s crazy since it’s likely the biggest influencer in their lives.” One respondent suggested a practical test:

> Start by asking your friends, family, neighbors or roommates what a “cutaway” is and what it does. I bet that while some might be able to describe the image of the nodding reporter in the interview, few will suspect that below it hides the cut in the interview, covering a break in continuity of time, and pretending a continuity where there is one. That’s the first lie in movie making!

In general, respondents believed that audiences had less understanding of how they are manipulated than they think they do. But most expressed the view that it was not their job, nor was it of interested to them, to change that. One could draw the conclusion that the reality television industry deliberately caters to this receptivity, as it creates an additional layer of entertainment that is fashioned especially for attentive viewers. The survey results, my own interactions with audiences, and the fact that a critical position would rob reality television of its veil of deception casts doubt on Kilborn’s (2003), Corner’s (2000), and Hill’s (2007) trust in audiences’ critical capacities. The frankenbiting is neither visible nor, to an untrained ear, audible. I doubt the skepticism shown in published audience research to truth claims translates into any real ability of the viewer to separate purpose and effect. Audiences likely do not notice sound dissolves, etc., while they might notice their visual equivalents, as they possess a more explicit consciousness of visuals than of auditory signals.

In this chapter, I have determined that sound editing, and its implied manipulations, is instrumental to documentary. Like reality television editors, documentary practitioners

emphasize or rearrange sentences, words, or utterances into stimulating dialogue and cohesive interviews. By adding music, laying in ambient sounds, and creating an entire soundscape, any practitioner of the audio-visual medium imposes their point of view on the taped material. Winston (2008) recognizes that choice, order, and alteration are essential parts of the art and craft of creating audio-visual works. He goes further and appeals to the viewer to "embrace an understanding of the inevitable mediations of the creation process" (p. 289). However, editors in this survey were loyal to the story above all else. Nichols (2016) coined the phrase, "storytellers representing reality" for documentary television practitioners who take their liberties with a demanding genre (p. 69). In the next chapter I will further explore the allure of "story" as a justification to manipulate truth content.

Chapter Seven: Cross Pollination and the Problem with Story

In the previous chapter, I discussed the multifaceted challenges faced by editors of factual programs in practicing their craft while negotiating between the rights of program participants, producers' expectations, the formal requirements of the television genre, the demands of the marketplace, and honoring reality as it unfolded in front of the camera. This chapter will explore aspects of storytelling that surface in the blending of documentary and reality television. It will ask whether the drift from Nichols's (1991) dictum of "documentary as sobriety" towards "documentary as diversion television" (Corner, 2002, p. 255) is behind the perceived increase in ethical challenges for editors, and if that shift in attitudes relates to the proliferation of reality television. The discussion is framed by applying communication theorist Fisher's (1987) narrative theory that deems humans to be story-telling beings, suggesting that engaging stories are more convincing than facts or logic. I will conclude this chapter by exploring voices in the academic discourse that are cognizant of the dangers of giving in to the rhetorical power of the narrative.

Reality Television Conventions in Documentary

> Documentaries—or whatever their directors care to call them are just not my favorite kind of movie watching. The fact is I don't trust the little bastards. I don't trust the motives of those who think they are superior to fiction films. I don't trust their claim to have cornered the market on the truth. I don't trust their inordinately high, and entirely undeserved, status of bourgeois respectability. (Marcel Ophuls, fiction and documentary filmmaker, quoted in Eitzen, 1995, p. 81)

Media commentators continue to view reality television as yet another attempt by broadcasters to follow a limited commercial agenda at the expense of maintaining public service standards. Rather than serving the public good and honoring the promise to say "something honestly about something that really happened" (Aufderheide, 2012, p. 362), an increasing reliance on the dramatic structuring of the audio-visual gathered from real life and an urge to

promote the extreme over the ordinary in human conduct tends to dominate factual programs. So this chapter will first focus on how reality television fits into the current landscape of documentary by tracking how editors of reality television programs borrow aesthetic elements from the documentary tradition. I will also question if they still follow the spirit of traditional documentary of keeping faith with viewers, as the primary task for editors in reality television is to entertain rather than to enlighten or inform. As well, in this chapter I will examine how editors' narratives reveal ways in which reality television influences the rhetoric of current documentary television. I will ask if the latter can uphold the traditional documentary attributes of inquiry and education or if, due to the demands of the commercial broadcast marketplace, factors of "entertainment" and "story value" have replaced those attributes.

The current academic debate asks if reality television debases the public service mandate that is part of the traditional documentary's mission statement by leading unsuspecting viewers to believe in false truth claims, or if it instead opens new venues and new audiences for documentary forms. Scholars worry that with reality television's appropriation of the documentary label the term itself will lose its meaning (Murray & Ouellette, 2004). After posing the question to the editors I interviewed, I agree with those insisting that reality television generates new models of presentation, new employment opportunities, and new applications for formal techniques previously reserved for documentary. However, the affect on the traditional form is worrisome, and to expect an audience to be sophisticated enough to see the mix of fact and fiction in reality television is cause for concern, given the prevailing low level of media literacy. (See work of Hill and Corner on audience reception in the previous section, "Viewer and Media Literacy"). In any case, the conflicts of reality and representation have always played

themselves out as a part of documentary production as well. It is what Corner calls the genre's "sliding scale of fakery" (quoted in Edwards, 2013, p. 55). In Winston's (1995) view,

> Documentary must abandon its limited, and always serious tone. It must cease to be always and only one of Nichols's "discourses of sobriety." . . . The time has come to liberate documentary from this spurious position and admit it as a species of editorializing in its essence. (p. 255)

A historical perspective supports Winston's argument. In the traditional documentary form of the past, in contrast to today's factual television, an unwritten aesthetic code suggested editors refrain from displaying grand emotions on screen and shun the predictable effects of close-ups. Documentaries about serious, dark themes such as disease, war, or mental illness often employed a distancing aesthetic, displaying black-and-white images and minimalist music to celebrate the human resilience and the beauty of real, everyday life. Traditional documentary's sober black and white and reality television's full color palette both alter the actual experience in their aestheticizing or sensationalizing effects.

Today's reality programs have successfully co-opted documentary conventions. Even the technical difficulties that invariably happen during production provide a guarantee of authenticity and are incorporated as formal conventions. Telltale "handheld" signs like a shaky camera, boom microphones in the frame, focus loss, or bad sound, etc. are employed as an indication of the reality claim of what is on the screen. Documentary scholar and practitioner Trinh Minh-ha has listed various formal methods applied by creators of reality television, like "the long take, hand-held camera, sync-sound (natural sound) overlaid with omniscient commentary, wide-angle lens, and anti-aestheticism" (quoted in Kahana, 2016, p. 759). In his study of the reality program *The Real World*, Bagley concluded that "the use of jump-cuts, natural lighting and sound, and hand-held cameras" creates a sense that the reality show is "real, un-manipulated action and interaction" (quoted in Reid, 2005, p. 14). These techniques, rather

than making the camera disappear, draw attention to it, as if to remind the audience that no suspension of disbelief is needed as the camera does not lie. This formal realism is meant to suggest that, like documentary films, reality television is reflecting "the truth" in packaging the real. This has ignited a critical debate about the effect on the development and future of the documentary form and documentary's cultural authority.

The umbrella of factual program covers both reality and documentary television. As outlined earlier, the academic discourse applies different measures to evaluate methodology and values of the two forms, often valorizing the documentary over the reality format. That hierarchy also extends to a comparison with fiction:

> If "Mad Men" or "Boardwalk Empire" depicts sexism, violence, or self-destructive behavior, it's "nuanced story-telling." But if a reality show does the same thing, it's immoral, misanthropic or bigoted. A reality producer argued that most practitioners of entertainment products resist seeing their work as ethically laden. They are uncomfortable serving in a role of "arbiter" of morals. That a work of pop culture should make the kind of assumption shouldn't surprise us, and when it comes to "higher" genres like fiction, it does. (Wyatt, W. & Bunto, K, 2012, p. ii)

A similar double standard emerges in examining the scholarly discourse on the use of audio manipulation in the traditional documentary form. In *Representing Reality*, Nichols (1991) proposes a closeness between a media text and the viewer: "especially in works by Fred Wiseman like *Hospital, High School*, or *Model,* the strong sense of an indexical bond between what occurred in front of the camera and its historical referent draws us not into the details of the everyday but also into the formulation of a perspective on these institutional domains of the real" (p. 27). Frederick Wiseman is widely considered a master craftsman of non-interventionist, "pure" observational cinema. Yet, in an academic review of Wiseman's work *High School* (2012), Chesler (2012) describes how "words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs may be moved around allowing for a compression of time and an arrangement, or rearrangement, of a

conversation" as an accepted documentary convention. Given sensibility and skill on the part of the editor—Wiseman himself—the pace does not reveal that time has progressed between images, or that the reality of the spoken word has been tampered with. In fact, recorded statements have been rearranged to "convey the meaning Wiseman *initially* observed in the sequence. In the interests of time and *dramatic action*, Wiseman has made an editorial decision to link two separate moments" (Chesler, 2012, italics added). In another Wiseman documentary, *Domestic Violence* (2001), a scene starts with a wide shot of a room, showing a speaker and a listener. However, the image does not reveal the lip flap [mouth movement] of the person whose voice is heard: "Here we see Wiseman use the technique to change a character's line of action, condensing a tangential story. This serves in condensing time and space" (Chesler, 2012). Wiseman constructs a real-time sequence through dialogue editing that is concealed, and just as other creators borrow from classical Hollywood conventions, observational documentaries hide the approach whenever possible to make it inaudible. When applied in reality programs this technique is dismissed as frankenbiting, with the connotation of truth manipulation. When Wiseman makes use of the same technique, it becomes, in the eyes of Chesler (2012), a "logical dialogue progression, to convey the meaning Wiseman initially observed in the sequence."

Meaning-making is a subjective action, here performed by the observational cineaste. Either way, the audience is left not with the real, but with the conveyed meaning as perceived in the eyes of the documentarian. In disguising these jumps in time, sound editing provides the foundation. Practitioners rearrange audio into stimulating dialogue and consistent interviews. Barnouw's (1966) illusion of "real-time" depends on dialogue cutting that track a progression of conversations that is logical. By masking the technique and imposing continuity, the seamless-

ness of the soundtrack creates the foundation of the indexicality as described by Nichols (1991). The passage of time is represented as a flow of words that progresses logically and naturally, without pauses or voice changes that might be noticeable to the listener. Other techniques, like scored music that is presented as diegetic or ambient sounds emphasized or relocated are manipulations that are commonly applied in the work of observational documentarians, and are freely acknowledged by Wiseman. Winston (2008) observes that while standing by the process of subjective construction, Wiseman simultaneously argues that he is

> editing with purpose, but insisting the viewers find meaning in the text for themselves. The claim now was that it is the creator's subjectivity that is being objectivity recorded. In this, though, direct cinema remains evidence of something—the maker's "witness." (p. 163)

Winston decries this replacement of objectivity by the creator's point of view as a "profound contradiction" (p. 164).

The Editor Working with Blurred Boundaries

One set of questions I asked the participating editors concerned the ways they came to terms with the above-described changing television landscape of blurred borders between documentary and reality formats. Editors that cut documentary television were asked if they experienced an increased pressure to "torque up" what actually happened in front of the camera, and what other changes might influence their creativity in the edit room. Ninety percent of the respondents agreed with the assumption that reality programming has influenced their work. Twelve of the 50 respondents confirmed that the average length per shot (ALS) has decreased substantially, with two seconds for a shot now being considered long. Terms like "flashier," "sensationalistic," "injecting adrenaline," "spoon feeding," "interventionist," "surface instead of depth," "form over content," "show and tell," "amping up," and "packing a punch" came up frequently. Eleven respondents replied they were torquing up drama, as the need to deliver more

entertainment value was increasingly replacing the motivation to truthfully depict the reality that was captured by the camera. One editor summed up the sentiment of many others:

> In the past, tension was built with subjects recalling an event, and building an alternative version of that event from evidence. There was natural drama, without artificially torquing things up. But that's no longer possible now. Now it is more about excitement and over-stimulated perception, a faster pace, adding more music. We are packing a much bigger punch. The bad news is that the audience is way more led by their nose.

Editors were told to "goose up the danger," as one reported, or another "completely fabricate an emergency situation." Another said that they had

> edited a documentary about a transatlantic ocean liner. Since it traversed the same route as the Titanic, we were pressured to play up the danger of transatlantic passages in general. Even though ships now have numerous safety redundancies, like more lifeboats than they need, we were still pressured to "raise the stakes" in the editing.

These kinds of directives include documentary programs for the national public broadcaster, the CBC:

> Now even public broadcasters sell out for entertainment: a CBC doc zone documentary about volcanic eruptions was torqued up to turn a vague possibility—the eventual eruption of a volcano in the next 50,000 years—into an imminent apocalypse.

Some respondents pointed to the growing influence of the American television market in Canada:

> Producers of US shows tell us to keep things simple, and cater to a lower IQ. We were told to expect our audience to be on a grade 3 level of education, meaning a lot of "show and tell," and "spoon feeding" [being overtly simplistic in the construction of a scene, making sure the audience always knows where they are and what is happening].
>
> We are losing the immediacy of a recorded and genuine event to our shows now because of the tightened budgets. Crews have shorter and shorter time frames to get the footage they need. The tighter budgets affect the edit schedule as well. We don't have time to try a scene a few different ways or to get creative with the material. We just stick to the format and just churn it out.

Eleven editors pointed to a larger attempt to water down content in documentary television itself, turning the form, in the words of one respondent, into "lifestyle hiding in the term documentary—docutainment." Several editors expressed doubt about the future of documentary on television. As one put it:

> History Television used to be a home for serious documentaries. It's all about entertainment now. There's no more resemblance to the documentary form: *Ancient Alien, Deadly Meteor*, with questionable "experts," or the ubiquitous narration line "Some people say . . ." which in fact means that there is neither source nor evidence, which are essential if you want to have something actually be factual.

Another respondent questioned if the medium of television itself was at issue:

> All of TV is a reconstruction of reality in line with assumptions, conventions and opinions. It conforms to a socially constructed reality. In the choice of subject matter, in the treatment, in the selection of participants, in the editing and by the constraints of commercial programs, at every stage.

Several editors mentioned an increased influence of broadcasters in the shaping of the programs, evidenced by the insistence that audiences need to be told what to think and feel at any given moment, with no room allowed for implicitness or open endings. One editor observed that in "factual" entertainment, fact was losing out:

> Shows rarely touch on controversial subject matters like environmental concerns and the like. It's become standard in the shows I've worked on to ignore the elephant in the room. I find that that is our biggest fault in the field of factual programs. It's entertainment first, and the factual comes only second, if at all.

Yet, another respondent considered the broadening of the genre as positive:

> More shows now labeled documentary are more fun and light and paced more populist, and still carry content and with a point to make. People now are more willing to look at a doc. It has become more popular. Reality TV has pushed docs to be more accessible. There's a larger catalogue of work out there.

One respondent challenged my line of questioning in the survey:

> I would disagree with your word "pressure," that has some loaded connotations in this context. Often that pressure is self-generated. I put myself under more

> pressure now than my executive producers do, which is part of my success in my career. I'd also disagree with asking about "factual programs" as in my experience reality television is not burdened with a need to maintain journalistic standards of "being factual." What you're asking covers a massive landscape with too much of a broad brush.

In summary, editors working in either format agreed that the reality television format had influenced the way documentary television was now constructed. A number of respondents commented on the need to be creative to circumvent the encroachment of television culture on documentary values. Practitioners' criticisms of the reality format have arisen from disagreements over what documentary is and how its editors should be following a high standard of delivering enlightenment to audiences. Some practitioners recoiled at the perception of reality television as a problem just because it contravened the conceptual and practical boundaries of the documentary. But evidently the reality format form poses a threat to the professional status of documentary television practitioners by weakening their association with quality, educational programming.

Turning Reality into Story

In its prevalent formation, documentary television is "collapsing into fiction's warm embrace" (Haddu, M. & Page, J., p. 69). The question becomes whether the end—the insight into an essence, a universal truth, a moment of beauty—justifies the means. In that respect, the creative process of the documentary is more of a construction than a capturing. The former is deliberate, similar to the plot building of classic fictional narratives that relies on an established dramatic structure that organizes the events into a three-act arrangement. Act one introduces the narrative's main conflict, the second act develops that conflict by bringing on further complications, and the third offers its resolution. In documentary, the drama as it takes place

in the socio-political life-world is reshaped to fit into that formal template. However, behind the seemingly useful structuring device, the method, by emphasizing crisis, also promotes a particular worldview by submitting the complex exigency of a social reality to the simplistic narrative plot. It is a plot in which the will of an individual becomes the instigating force for real-life events, and where the protagonists confront the obstacles with which they are faced with. Whereas in real life the outcomes are more often than not ambiguous and uncertain, the script demands a tidy resolution. The ideal of a documentary as "discovered drama" is now replaced by the concept of a "constructed drama." Within that context, the practitioner's ethical standards can be severely challenged.

Nichols (1994), too, wrestles with how to distinguish between reality and documentary television and concludes that the difference lies in reality TV's use of narrative over argument:

> A variety of evidence ranging from Reality TV to a pervasive hunger for information about the historical world surrounds us. But our hunger is less for information in the raw than for stories fashioned from it. The global reach and structural complexity of late twentieth-century reality calls for story telling that can appear to encompass it. We hunger for news from the world around us but desire it in the form of narratives, stories that make meaning, however tenuous, dramatic, compelling, or paranoid they might be. (p. ix)

Nichols's definition of documentary as being "a discourse of sobriety" is certainly appealing, however it is doubtful there ever was a time when audiences made sense of documentaries as "arguments" as he suggests. On the contrary, they might often be indifferent or oblivious to any truth content claimed by its creator. For example, the final scene in documentary television is constructed to evoke an emotional response from the audience, perhaps the shedding of tears. The effect of this scene does not depend on any rational argument but on a calculated appeal to emotion. This rhetorical operation is quite different from what Nichols calls "argument." But certainly, nowadays documentaries on television need little or no logic. Instead, commissioning

editors call for “stakes,” “character,” and a “storyline” that offer an emotional experience, meaningful or not.

The editor Walter Murch (2009) considers “emotion and story” in editing more essential to maintaining continuity than all other factors, like spatial and temporal continuity, combined. Loyalty to “the real” now means little when set against the seduction of story. The “real” is not of value in and of itself, but is rather considered a means to an end, to sell the program, products, and audiences. Both reality and documentary television apply a documentary/fiction genre mix to strengthen their emotional appeal to viewers and connect to audiences on a visceral level. As a consequence, the distinction between fact and fiction is increasingly difficult to sustain. A concrete indication of the dominance of “story” and “emotion” can be found in a current evaluation sheet of the Canadian Media Fund (CMF), one of Canada’s federal funding agencies for the production of television programs. The sheet was distributed to industry professionals to assess the validity and marketability of both fiction or nonfiction treatments and scripts submitted for funding. It asks evaluators the following questions:

- Does the story have strong universal themes?
- Does the first act establish character, quest, stakes, and an inciting incident?
- Are stakes high enough?
- Are there clear turning points?
- What are the main conflicts in the story?
- Does the climax resolve emotional and internal or physical or external?
- Is there a quest to satisfy the audience?
- Is there extraneous context or material that fails to forward the core narrative?
- Will audiences relate to the protagonist?
- What is the protagonist’s struggling to accomplish?
- What is their external quest over the narrative arc of the story? (CMF, 2014. p. 1)

What reads like a checklist for a dramatic fiction film is, in fact, for the CMF the evaluation criteria for documentary proposals that are submitted for potential funding. Under these criteria, the CMF judges a documentary proposal not as “a non-fiction representation of

reality" (see Appendix B), but by its adherence to the conventions of fiction, with its structured inciting of incident and climax. These criteria are far removed from the traditional documentary whose goal was to become a unified entity, rather than disparate fragments of information made to conform to a formal structural pattern. They are about story lines, featured characters, familiar dramatic themes, and satisfying resolutions to posed problems.

With all the blurring, why hold onto the labels "fiction," documentary," etc.? According to Waller, "there is no reason to junk the notion of genre (and subgenre), because cultural products cannot be categorized and classified as precisely and objectively as natural flora or fauna" (quoted in Edgerton & Rose, 2005, p. 7). While embracing the change of perspective that sees genre as an evolving concept rather than a fixed set of categories, the concluding chapter of this thesis will arrive at a different conclusion than Waller's by questioning the ongoing validity of established genre distinctions in the current television landscape.

Documentaries are fashioned after fantasy and entertainment as they appeal to our senses by arranging images and sounds to alternately move, infuriate, and excite the audience. What evokes the strongest emotion is what audiences report as their most compelling moment or experience. Because the reception of images and sounds stimulate both rational and emotional responses, and because rational and emotional responses are closely interwoven, factual programs need to address both in their work of persuasion. The problem occurs when emotions are permitted to push aside the rational argument; when rational thought based on sound empirical fact is suppressed for the sake of engagement.

Oberacker (2009) cites Michael Moore's *Roger & Me* (1989) as an example of a popular documentary that builds a convincing emotional narrative while sacrificing journalistic accuracy in falsifying the order of chronological events. Questioned about treating empirical facts freely,

the activist filmmaker responded that he "told a documentary in a way they don't usually get told. The reason why people don't watch documentaries is they are so bogged down in journalistic detail" (quoted in Oberacker, p. 77). *Roger & Me* became the most successful documentary in US history and was selected by the Library of Congress to be preserved for its "cultural, aesthetic and historical significance," despite its questionable montage of fact and fiction. The scholar Ruby (2000) responded to Moore's film: "Documentary images with a political intent are usually viewed by the already committed, people who immediately comprehend the film's thesis. Few revolutions were won in a movie house" (p. 147). Not unlike the confessional in reality programs that overrides the show's truth through pre-scripted answers, Moore conducts his interviews with alleged experts, who in many instances, are brought to the "right" conclusions with the help of the documentary maker who wraps their words in his own vision of events and context. Nevertheless, Moore's work does not abandon the cultural authority occupied by the traditional documentary: he pays homage to it. The charts editors follow in structuring this kind of documentary impose a structure onto their subject in a very conventional form that other factual programs follow as well.

Nichols (2001) calls interview-based factual programs characterized by the apparent abandonment of the creator's authority a pretense and a way for makers to hide their own personal voice and perspective behind that of their interviewees. Instead of being given agency to assert their own voice, argues Nichols, interviewees are cut sequentially together into a desired narrative, often borrowing the articulate, singular "voice of god" style of narration from the Grierson era, but spreading it across various interviews. Consequently, Nichols claims, interview-based works "promote uncritical acceptance and sobriety" (p. 25).

Herzog, considered to be a living legend of the contemporary documentary world,

declared that he would distance his work from the factual not just as a creative act, but also as a necessity for the genre to survive. His *Minnesota Declaration* (1999), one of his characteristic tongue-and-cheek proclamations about truth and fact in documentary cinema, criticizes the cinéma vérité tradition of nonfiction filmmaking as "superficial and tedious," an "accountant's truth" that threw "cinema back by decades." He compares vérité filmmakers to "tourists who take pictures amid ancient ruins of facts," and identifies his own principles in regard to documentary —that "fabrication and imagination and stylization"—to be the tools with which creators can reach his "ecstatic truth." That truth is more significant than empirical facts alone can provide. For Herzog these are the most banal elements of the telling—they are the tools of journalists. He considers his work as the art of storytelling, giving license to reach beyond the factual to a deeper truth below the surface. Herzog's commitment is to move outside the system of facts in order to depict what he has determined is "reality." Through his personal cinema, Herzog situates himself in the category of contemporary documentarians moving along the invisible border between the real and the imaginative:

> For me the distinction between feature and documentary films doesn't exist. They are all movies. In documentaries I keep inventing, I use my fantasy, I invent dreams, I tell a story in a way where I am searching for not the facts but something that gives you a deeper insight into an essence, the truth as an ecstasy of truth as I call it. If you want facts, go and buy yourself the phone directory of Manhattan. They are all correct but they do not constitute anything. (Ferrari, 2008)

The concept of "ecstatic truth" continues to be Herzog's main line of defense against critics of his creative process who oppose his use of flagrant fabrication and bold stylization. Herzog's concept and justification of manipulations of the real to construct a story that qualifies as his "ecstatic truth" mirrors Fisher's paradigm of narrative as people's principal way to order information and make sense of their experience, the means by which they create a meaningful

reality. However, traditionalists among documentary practitioners insist on a strict adherence to the most objective truth possible reinforced by careful fact checking. For a purist, a fabricated scene is a violation of the essential identity of the genre. In this tradition, facts are truth, and even the smallest of misrepresentations in the editing process poses a dangerous threat or a slippery slope, by which the whole tradition of nonfiction will lose all credibility with the viewer. The genre's reputation as an accurate, truthful representation of the real world around us depends on the ability of documentarians to present it as such, despite the qualifier that the concept of objectivity is highly contested: "There is a contract with the audience, an agreement that you are referencing or giving an account of evidence based reality" (Stevens, quoted in Ferrari, 2008).

Who Is to Blame?

Michael Moore's documentary *Roger & Me* was made just prior to the surge of reality television. Herzog watched cable soft porn, not reality television, the night he wrote his *Minnesota Declaration*. Solely blaming reality television for documentary's blurred boundaries is evidently not supportable. So where to turn to instead?

The need for structure in documentary appears to be in obvious contradiction with the unstructured nature of reality. The nature of factual programs, at its core, lies in dramatization of factual material. Shaping the program into a satisfying form, ordering the raw material, adding structure, building climaxes, removing diegetic and adding additional sound, voiceover, and music raises the question of how much actual reality is left behind by the time a program gets completed and ready for broadcast. For program creators, this is the point of crossover into fiction. Both genres are artifacts and contrivances, and both are shaped by editing.

When asked about their concept of actuality, six of the eight editors of documentary television in the survey confirmed having manipulated material in a way they felt "sacrificed"

the truth, "pushed a conflict further from reality," "removed qualifiers," "rearranged chronology," "used interview clips out of context," and "included statements that were said off-the-record" but had been recorded. Several editors who reported consciously manipulating material to serve the need for dramatic tension justified their action by pointing to other practices in the production chain, as when show participants are given alcohol on set to "push extreme behavior."

In the NFB documentary about the making of documentaries, ambiguously called *Capturing Reality* (2008), veteran editor Wintonick confirms:

> For me documentary filmmaking is a bit like being a vampire, we think it is a noble enterprise, capturing people's stories, and transforming them. But in fact, we rely on people's stories, sucking them right out of people. Appropriating them, sometimes sacred stories from other cultures. We have to feed a media machine with more and more. That kind of engagement is the most challenging for filmmakers in the capturing, editing and projection of those stories. That is for me a kind of challenge on an ethical level. (Ferrari, 2008)

Wintonick creates his own narrative coherence to escape the dilemma of being a practitioner in that abusive enterprise:

> For me, all docs are lies. All fiction is truth. There are contradictions in everything. It's the artistic interpretation of everything. I don't believe there are set facts, they are all interpreted. The role of the documentarian is to illuminate and create artistically a sort of object. Our way in engaging with the world has been altered. Purists would call this nothing but entertainment and diversion. (Ferrari, 2008)

Story as the Great Unifier

All narratives work rhetorically, as Booth puts it, to "impose [a] fictional world on the reader" (quoted in Fisher, 1987, p. 160). In a fictional world, this suspension of disbelief is usually limited, but in the case of reality television, audiences seem to remain convinced of the reality of what they have seen beyond the time they spend watching, expanding the programs' rhetorical validity into the real world. As noted above, one of the techniques employed in factual

programs is to emulate narrative approaches employed in fiction. This takes advantage of viewers' implicit awareness of an inventory of dramatic fiction. Stories use narrative methods like building tensions towards a climax and techniques borrowed from action movies like fast-paced editing and driving music to heighten dramatic impact (Dugdale, 1992, p. 13).

In the past, a traditional documentary was shaped to determine the way the audience experienced the socio-historical world. For the viewer, a documentary's message, what the creators wanted to express, came through by following that ordered principle of structure. But viewers experience the real world in all its varied situations very differently. Real life is messy and unstructured, and often frustratingly contradictory and ambiguous. People spend much of their time making sense of that disorderliness by trying to recognize connections between seemingly disparate events. Different subjects and events constantly vie for attention. Unlike a linear media text, there is no expectation for any linear progression in real life with its randomness of lived experiences.

Compared to real life, traditional documentaries seemed unnaturally neat. Information about a specific theme was assembled, organized, and shown to the viewer in a coherent and effective manner with each new sequence building on the previous one and moving us forward into the next section. Real life lacks an exact course, but traditional documentaries, crafted using specific configurations of reason, organized experience to conform to what, if experienced in real life, would require a clear plan. Nonfiction media texts like documentaries project a specific relation to an aspect of the socio-historical world through strategies used by program creators to lay out their arguments or narrative. The structure is not just a tool for organization, or technique of reportage, but also an instrument of persuasion.

One of the challenges for the traditional documentary editor was to present the social world in a way that would persuade the viewer to arrive at an intended position. The way the editor constructed an argument was neither simply mechanical nor innocuous, but involved choices that reflected a distinctive political or philosophical position. Journalistic facts appeared to follow a seemingly natural organization once the practitioner had repositioned them. Furthermore, the narrative in traditional documentary used to have less prominence, seen merely as a facilitating device used to explain difficult contexts.

But now a shift has occurred away from the factual. For a traditional documentary, the challenge lay in the extraction and distillation of visible evidence, finding the story inside the facts, by delving into the past or present world to locate characters, empirical facts, and evidence that existed, and ordering those elements into a coherent narrative without violating notions of the truth. While traditional documentaries were mainly organized according to a hierarchy of key ideas and supporting facts, current documentary television is in large part organized according to an order of events that obeys the imposed conventions of a specific story syntax. Sheila Curran Bernard's (2011) text, "Documentary Storytelling: Making Stronger and More Dramatic Films," affirms that the main goal of documentary production is to tell a dramatic story. The author quotes filmmaker Jon Else: "I've never seen an even vaguely successful documentary film that does not move forward through time. . . . This whole business of a plot moving forward, I think, is just so inextricably embedded in our cultural DNA" (p. 75).

Van Peer and Chatman (2001) define narratives as "typically start[ing] with imbalances that protagonists attempt to redress. Usually these attempts lead to complications, setbacks, crises, and ultimately to success or failure" (p. 2). These stages can be assigned to the three-act structure as follows: stories "set up an expectation at the beginning, this is elaborated or

complicated in the middle, and is satisfied in the end" (Egan, 1986, p. 24). The parallels to plot building do not end there.

When it comes to providing a rationale for the deliberate manipulation of events during editing, increasing entertainment value, or serving "the story," stood out for the respondents: "sacrificing truth, fabricating conflict, and abandoning authenticity to carry emotions all is in service of the story," handing "the power of drama" to the editor, and elevating him to become "king of the world." Another editor said:

> It's all in the service of entertainment. But that doesn't mean character assassination. It is part of the industry. I don't have a problem with that. Ultimately people want to be entertained, or see others portrayed in an entertaining way. It's part of my professional code to portray people in an entertaining fashion. So I enhance what the camera captured.

The reality television editors among the respondents justified various degrees of manipulation of the material in order to produce a narrative coherence in various terms: "the impact isn't really that harmful," "*Jersey Shore* is entertaining but the going-on's are artificially created. But what's wrong with that?" "[because] my action has no bearing on the story or character I am good with it," "our hearts are at the right place. We feel for the participants but at the same time make sure we play 'the moment' for the show." Another editor said:

> I've done some absolutely fabricated bullshit while working on reality shows without thinking twice, because the fabrications were considered "fair" by the cast, crew, producers and myself. That is, the end result of my manipulation was in keeping with the intentions of the participants on-camera and practitioners behind the camera.

Several documentary television editors described situations in which they manipulated the truth for the requirements of story, director, or broadcaster. One responded like this:

> In almost every documentary that I have edited we "fudged" events by moving them out of chronology, cut a dramatic statement by a subject just before their mitigating qualifier, added a reaction shot that was from a different time or place [as most documentaries are single camera shoots this is an unavoidable device],

> juxtaposed images to create drama even though things didn't quite happen the same way. Every documentary is fiction. We constantly make choices about what is important and what we want to use as building block[s] for our story structure. Shaping people into story it becomes highly selective fiction. It needs to entertaining. "Truth" is not even a term I would use.

Reflecting on the editors' responses as outlined above confirms that in the post-production reality of factual television, a journalistically sound argument is no longer the portal through which all content must pass. Appeals to reason have been replaced by emotion. Knowledge is no longer equal to power. In the new context of fiction's conventions, viewer reactions are no longer determined by facts and rational circumstance, but are more like a conditioned response to an emotional cue.

The Dictatorship of Story

> There is no such thing as reality. Reality is just that we tell each other stories. (Curtis, quoted in Greenlit, 2010, p. 96)

In their description of their day-to-day work in factual entertainment, editors referred to story in several different contexts. Asked about how they would define themselves, four editors described themselves as storytellers in society, regardless of the genre they were working in. One editor described themselves as "finding a story, exploring the world that emerges from the material." Another simply as someone who "creat[ed] coherent stories." Another editor summed up the experience of being a storyteller:

> A five-minute short fiction piece or serial TV—for me it is all about storytelling and relationships. You eliminate the bad stuff, play up the good. Their story arc with a beginning-middle-end, conflict, and emotional value are the same. In reality TV people play themselves, even though they are not professional actors. It's not 100% truthful, and people suspend [their] disbelief. So ultimately what is the difference?

Eight respondents identified serving the story as the locus of their primary ethical responsibility. That is twice as many as those who listed the audience, and four times more than mentioned

pursuit of the truth. They spoke in terms of trusting their story-telling instincts: having "no limits as long as it serves story," being accountable or loyal only to story, not being their "job to tell the truth," getting fired if they did, and "believ[ing] in manipulating fact for that greater truth—the story."

Editors confirmed an increased pressure by producers and broadcasters to torque up story to increase its entertainment value, replacing or enhancing the drama that often emerged naturally out of people's different recollections, as described by one editor:

> Every documentary is fiction. We constantly make choices about what is important and what we want to use as building blocks for our story structure. Shaping people into story it becomes highly selective fiction. It needs to be entertaining.

In addition, 50% of responding editors, most of them working in the reality television format, confirmed they had sacrificed the truth—what took place in front of the camera—to serve entertainment value or the story. Six of the eight documentary editors reported having manipulated material in a way that they felt sacrificed the truth, and just four editors, when asked about their professional ethics, put loyalty to truth first. For most others, "sacrificing truth and abandon[ing] authenticity to carry emotions . . . in the service of the story" as one respondent phrased it, was the priority.

Describing circumstances in which they applied frankenbiting, several editors mentioned the story as the end that justified the means: "to complete his story," "re-arrange the story since [story] trumps 'truth,'" "to guide the audience through the narrative," "to tell a better story," and "ultimately it is a performance and we need to draw out what works for our story."

The frequency, if not dominance, of the story as the determining factor in making editorial decisions requires a closer examination of the underlying reasons and possible dangers presented by the power of story in the construction of factual programs.

> The motivation for every scene is that Big Jim or Arlene has told [the contestants] to get their fucking shit together pronto, or they won't get any of their dough. You guys need to be crafting setup, conflict and takeaways . . . to the point of giving them scripted lines to read. (Peter Waal, series producer of *Big Decision*, a *Dragons' Den* spinoff, in an e-mail to staff. Quoted in Landau, 2013)

Despite its historical roots in traditional documentary, including the perceived ethos of objectivity and other formal features, this section emphasizes that factual programs need to be examined through a narrative lens, applying Fisher's framework of narrative coherence. Such an approach will clarify the persuasive "reality" these programs construct by exposing the dramatic structures that have been built by their editors.

In narrative fiction, some kind of causality drives a story forward. The narrative is carried by characters who have definite goals and aim to reach their goals through actions. The narrative in a factual program, too, is carried forward by show participants on a mission/quest or pursuing romance or success at work. In a rhetorical or thematic documentary, the set logic of a character driven to actions and coping with the consequences as in fictional films has been replaced by the abstract logic of events driven forward by people—fate, greed, love, a struggle for liberation or self-fulfillment, or other impersonal imperatives. As well, the narrative in these traditional documentaries moved toward a steady and tightly logical exposure of its truth, in accord with a specific representation of socio-historical causation. That causation served as a substitute for goals and action of characters as a motivational force. Recently, though, both reality and documentary television have increasingly embraced the formal techniques of classical fiction: an initial stable state of the protagonist is violated by circumstance or deliberation and must be corrected in a satisfying resolution.

Of Stories and Anti-Stories

While in documentary and reality TV more attention is being given to storytelling

techniques and character development, elements borrowed from fictional genres, the academic discussion has only just begun to move from the content of factual programs to the post-production process that shapes the content. Turning to narrative theories to decipher factual programs, in the next section I will explore several theorists who draw attention to the power of the narrative as a means to give reason to being. On his interactive website, Buchbinder (2016) recognizes the story as "a living thing" and argues that human beings have been attracted to story throughout recorded history. Narrative is essential to what it means to be human; an engagement in life takes the shape of a story. The understanding of human interaction frames our lives as stories, lived out while interacting with others who, too, are living out their stories. To describe that, Buchbinder (2016) coined the phrase "biology of story." From a narrative perspective, the way individuals communicate and perform daily actions is inherently ethical because of an inclination to guard and support particular properties that give meaning to life. Nussbaum (1990) has determined that it is these narratives that shape our "moral imagination," which is universally understood. The pervasiveness of television may thus be said to be grounded in its ability to portray human stories.

Broadcast culture is distinctive, as the medium permits and welcomes the continuous flow of basic, easily understood stories that can be readily translated into other cultures because of their prescribed form and substance (Silverstone, 1988). Shorter segments within a one-hour police procedural are fashioned like miniature plays, imitating Freytag's (1985) pyramid of dramatic structure of introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and catastrophe. Any contemporary doc soap follows a dramatic structure that characterizes most sitcoms, featuring several storylines, faithful in their allegiance to the narrative order of exposition, disruption, and resolution (Kuhn & Harris, 2003; Seagal, 1993). However, in the medium of television, the

formative forces of most of these narratives are grounded in externalities: story formulas are achieved through market analysis, replacing complex poetics with a succession of superficial tropes. On a societal scale, there is a growing misappropriation of the individual story to serve corporate interest. The emphasis on sentiment and the careful attempt to involve the viewer's feelings is part of a bigger trend in mass media where producers seek an emotional investment in their stories or products, knowing the affective connection is what drives the viewer to become a consumer in the marketplace. Practitioners edit a trivial legal case into a three-act feature-length drama, following the dramatic formula and arc, because it is what audiences and advertisers expect. Those narratives might be well constructed, yet they are really anti-stories (Buchbinder, 2016). Anti-stories invert the evolutionary trajectory of story. While feigning an ethos of authenticity and credibility, of giving unmediated access to real people being themselves and telling their own stories, anti-stories are controlled by organizations with other motives and with a constant eye on ratings, such as commercial broadcasters or public broadcasters under pressure to deliver audiences. According to Buchbinder, formula narratives drain away meaning, turning the viewer into a passive consumer.

Lars von Trier, the Danish auteur and provocateur, moves the rhetoric against anti-stories a dramatic step further. In *Defocus* (MacKenzie, 2014), he names the story as "the villain." Because fiction is constrained by the limits of imagination, and facts by limits of human comprehension, there are parts of human existence that cannot be discovered by story. Like Herzog's postulation of an "ecstatic truth," von Trier (MacKenzie, 2014) contends that neither a factual practitioner nor a fiction creator can comprehend life and its contradictions because their techniques put blinders on them. But neither do they *want* to locate it, because their methods themselves have become the goal:

> If one discovers or seeks a story, to say nothing of a point that communicates, then one suppresses it. By emphasizing a simple pattern, genuine or artificial; by presenting the world with a picture puzzle with solutions chosen in advance. The story, the point, the disclosure and the sensation have taken this subject matter from us—the rest of the world which is not nearly so easy to pass on, but which we cannot live without! (von Trier, in MacKenzie, 2014, p. 472–473)

Story beyond the Screen

Salmon (2010) has tracked the political and socio-economic applications of the narrative throughout the latter part of the 20th century to show how a declining value of traditional product brands in marketing invites product narratives to take precedence over corporate logos. The practice was developed by a new generation of management and public relations experts who recognized how appropriate narratives could increase profitability and legitimize dubious practices. In the 1990s, management theorists and political consultants explicitly borrowed concepts from Barthes, Debord, Bakhtin, and Propp to create the "age of the narrative." Storytelling became a tranquilizer, subduing any demand for truth in favor of sustaining narrative form. The benign desire to communicate has been appropriated by late capitalism to invent narratives that make the message digestible and emotional, yet cleansed of much reality. Consumption is the way to relate to the world and build identity: "I buy, therefore I am." The objective of using story in marketing "is not just to persuade consumers to buy a product but to plunge them into a narrative world, to involve them in a credible story" (Salmon, 2010, p. 55). This dynamic adds dramatic tension to the exchange of money for goods, and the buyer is complicit in this narrative. A storytelling management style has infiltrated commerce: Enron's narrative for example, exemplified how political structures and financial analysts were unable to distinguish between fictional narrative and reality as the corporation collapsed. Enron managers had "transformed accountancy into an enchanted world" (Salmon, 2010, p. 82). Salmon names it the "fiction economy," in which the company "acknowledges no law but the story it tells about

itself, and no reality other than the fictions it sends out into the world" (p. 85). In his article for the *Harvard Business Review*, Fryer (2003) argued more positively that, in times of "unsettling transition," providing a story that is convincing to a co-worker, supervisor, friend, family, or even strangers inspires belief in the teller's motives, character, and ability to achieve goals. "Deeply true and engaging stories," Fryer contends, can make the recipients "feel they have a stake in our success." Managers, according to Salmon, listen to a story "not with their intellect but with their inner child" (p. 2).

The power of story permeates every aspect of public life. Marketing relies on the history of brands, managers tell stories to inspire employees and soldiers in Iraq train by virtual reality simulations designed in Silicon Valley but dramatized in Hollywood, and public relations experts create personal narratives on demand. Salmon (2010) speaks of a massive "storytelling machine," and considers it more effective than Orwell's dystopia of a totalitarian society. The citizen remains trapped in a fictive universe that filters perceptions, triggers emotions and frames performance and thought. Contrived narrative sequences infiltrate the public sphere. Consequently, public behavior is driven by emotions and irrationality instead of engaging with *logos*. Exploiting a collective attraction to anecdotes, stories are aimed at the citizenry in an attempt to influence and control. The political process is no longer the art of the possible, but that of the fictitious. Its aim is no longer the constructive amendment of the world, but the management of perceptions. As the lines between fiction and fact in the factual media and the public discourse overall, are continuously blurring, "storytelling goes in the opposite direction: it tacks artificial narratives onto reality, blocks exchanges and saturates symbolic space. . . . It shapes behaviours and channels flows of emotion. . . . Storytelling establishes narrative systems that lead individuals to identify with models and conform to protocols" (Salmon, 2010, p. 17).

Empirical rationality becomes yet another artistic lens through which to experience artifacts like any other allegorical structure. Human neurology confirms Salmon's analysis, as it has shown that humans prefer involving themselves in narratives rather than data points. A favoring of stories means that people also measure facts by accepting those claims that match narratives and rejecting those that challenge or obfuscate the story. Barthes (1966) wrote:

> Narrative is pervasive in our culture. Under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is or has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narrative, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with very different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (p. 237)

In response, one could argue that this world is one of empirical evidence, and to understand that people need to embrace the complexity of facts and not withdraw into the more comforting refuge of a story. The art of storytelling is morally ambiguous as it can be applied to perpetuate dominant power structures or promote marginal narratives that question those structures. Either way, if audiences are to evaluate external influences over their lives, a healthy intellectual distrust of story is essential. Our culture is cluttered with narratives, often of questionable value (Debord, 2014). It seems that consumers have replaced the meaningfulness of an objective and relational world with an isolated realm of fantasy. Narrative remains central to our existence as humans, prescribing how we make sense of the world and our place in it. However, does the addiction to the narrative come with inherent dangers, such as the lack of diversity in the formulaic stories that keep re-occurring? Analysis of the triumph of the narrative has not kept up with its burgeoning significance.

Reconnecting that argument to the focus of this thesis, the problematic remains centered on the medium of television. Though reality television is ostensibly a modern way for real people

to become part of our culture's stories and storytelling, the means of production, the true means of storytelling, are still controlled almost entirely by entities solely motivated by profit. In the next chapter of my inquiry, I discuss ways to respond to the ethical dilemma in the edit room of factual programs that have emerged from the scholarly discourse, and question if its practitioners—editors—have agency to play their part in proffered solutions.

Chapter Eight: Informed Audiences instead of Informed Consent

> For those who bewail its absence, honesty is a moral problem.
> For those who try to achieve it, it is a technical one.
> (Vaughan, 1973, p. 73)

This chapter is intended to provide a critical reading of suggested approaches to easing the pressure on industry practitioners as they try to balance the demands of the marketplace and other pragmatic considerations, standards of professionalism, and ethical positions among participants, economic stakeholders, and audiences. This will include several methods that have emerged in the academic discussion on how to address ethical conflicts that arise. Suggested approaches that have emerged from the scholarly community will be tested against the every-day practicalities and pragmatism of the cutting room, to highlight the shadow between the conceptual idea and working reality.

The Shadow between Theory and Practice

A number of differences between the academic discourse and the survey results are evident. For example, editors for both reality and documentary television in this survey sample questioned the need for a more open and inclusive public discussion about ethics in creating factual television, contrary to what the scholarly discourse suggests is a necessity. Respondents questioned the practicality and efficacy of suggestions from the scholarly discourse to improve the situation. In the academic discussion about ethics in factual programs, there has been a focus on protecting participants and audiences from excessive manipulation. Suggestions such as establishing mutually agreed-upon ethical standards or instituting training in media ethics for practitioners, have come in the main from media critics and academics, both groups existing outside the actual workplace. Their strategies are often defined by idealism. For example, one approach to ease the ethical pressure on practitioners is to help audiences decode what they

watch by visually labeling programs. Good and Borden (2010) suggest implementing a series of on-screen symbols signifying, for example, "re-enactment," or "creative license" (p. 115). Borrowing from journalism's distinctions between hard news and commentary, this system of symbols would disclose which standards the editor had applied.

Editors I surveyed dismissed suggestions of this kind, arguing that it should not be their role to come up with labels or any other kind of transparency strategy. They pointed to the hierarchy within the industry in which this kind of responsibility does not rest with the editor: "Ultimately it is the producer's cut and they are responsible if they force me to do something I don't want to do. I am still at the mercy of the producer." "The subject matter and the treatment of TV programs are defined by the broadcaster/distributor. Not by editors." And "In the end it comes down to a producer's responsibility." As well, Good and Borden's (2010) suggestion would entail labeling a program or format as being based on some form of deception and manipulation. While this would likely only take the form of a voluntary disclosure, there is a risk that a prominent display of labels would reduce the entertainment value for the audience.

Advances in digital technology offer other options. The entire footage that was taped for a program or series can now be uploaded and made accessible online so that interested viewers could view *all* the taped material to see what the editor had to work with, and determine how the editing changed—and manipulated—the meaning of scenes and/or interviews (Landau, 2013). This can be viewed either as a way to show transparency as mandated in traditional documentary, or to indulge the audiences' desire to peek into the private space of others. Either way, it would lead to an overwhelming amount of audio-visual material for even the most engaged viewer to digest. Already, Internet users can access the raw footage of the long-running *Big Brother* reality show: the Canadian broadcaster Slice has posted the combined material of 77

cameras that were installed around the home of the show participants. That adds up to 1,848 hours, every day, and nearly one million hours in the course of a weekly series over ten years (Landau, 2013). That kind of volume, one would assume, would drown any enthusiasm of interested audiences to investigate violations of truth in the edited footage, at least in a reality television series.

Aufderheide (2012) suggest that a crew member who participated in the original shooting be involved in the edit phase or be given a chance to sign off on the final cut to ensure what appears on screen is a truthful reflection of what, in fact, took place in front of the camera. However, production exigencies are moving in a different direction. Cost-cutting has led some production houses to delegate parts of production, effectively separating the shooting from the editing and packaging of a documentary. And increasingly, editors do not cut entire programs but just parts of them, like opening or closing sequences, act curtains, etc., leading to further compartmentalization. As well, the crew member Aufderheide et al. suggest, would be paid by the production company and not be an independent outside observer. A company employee would not be sufficiently protected to make independent observations and assessments that might not be in the interest of their employer.

Informed Consent Is Neither

As discussed in Chapter Three, Winston (2005) has argued for a shift of ethical focus from factual program audiences towards show participants, proclaiming that "we have confused media responsibilities to the audience with the ethical duties owed participants as if the outcomes of taking part were the same as spectating" (p. 181). After 30 years of pointing the lens at people, many of them living on the margins of society (which makes them "attractive" to a camera in the first place), I agree with Winston that the responsibility towards the participant is central to

ethics. Winston (2005) suggests that the way forward for practitioners is to stop hiding behind science or aesthetics and to put the relationship with participants on the pedestal where once other concepts were enshrined. He wants a "renegotiation of the traditional balance of power between maker and participant" (p. 162). Practitioners, suggests Winston, must surrender their position of power and control and take up the role of the supporter. But Winston also recognizes the naivety of such suggestions in an entertainment industry that is designed to take advantage of those without power or agency. The survey answers of editors in the field revealed the skeptical position that there's little to no room for advocacy in an industry that is about delivering media products and the audiences they attract, to advertisers. As one survey participant remarked: "In the end most of us deliver audiences to advertisers. And fill airtime between commercials."

In this context, informed consent becomes an issue, as discussed in Chapter Five. The central issue remains the participant's release form which is signed prior to any taping (and certainly before the editing process), and which has been drafted for the sole purpose of protecting the interests of a production company, rather than the participant. As editors in the survey confirmed ("they signed a release and then it's fair game," one said), the process leaves the participant vulnerable to virtually any form of manipulation and without any recourse. The fundamental problem of the release requires a re-evaluation of the entire matter of consent. Winston (2005) proposes the introduction of a standardized consent process that could include a cautionary clause. The cautionary clause could include a "cooling off" period between receiving and understanding of the consent form that both subject and practitioner would be entitled to take advantage of. It would require production companies to explain, in accessible terms, how program participants' involvement could directly or indirectly affect them and their social group, including their families. It may be unrealistic, though, to expect a broadcaster or producer to

accept the possibility of participants rescinding their permission at a later stage. Having to obtain consent after recording, for example, could result in potentially large investment losses. In addition, the effect on subjects or their families is, at best, a "known unknown." Common negative consequences of participation can be psychological, physical, loss of face or privacy, and often, simply participants being unable to return to their regular "before" life. Aside from these "known unknown" consequences, there are "unknown unknowns," potential yet unforeseeable consequences for participants many years down the road. Therefore, to provide the complete information implied in "informed consent" is impossible because practitioners cannot fully anticipate the consequences on commencement of a program.

Aside from the fact that the construction of most reality television programs relies on exposing participants, and is largely built on the pleasure derived from another person's misfortunes, I suggest that an "informed consent" is neither informed nor consent. Economic forces remain in control, preventing Winston's idealistic proposal from being implemented, if only for the fact that many potential subjects would reconsider giving consent if they were aware of all possible consequences of their participation. And finally, a proposed consent as discussed above still does not specify a meaningful participation in the post-production process, the one an editor is actively involved in. If the debate on ethics in factual programming includes a just and accountable treatment of participants, then editors must be assumed to be responsible for presenting the lives of ordinary people and their experiences on the screen in an ethically acceptable manner. That is a question of empowerment, as well.

Participants in the Edit Room

As a variation on Aufderheide et al.'s (2009) suggestion to include an employee who was present during the taping in the edit room, several other scholars have proposed giving

participants the ability to have input at the editing stage of the program by viewing the material and/or giving provisional consent. In theory, practitioners could show rough cuts [unfinished working edits] and ask participants to comment if they have objections, though the editor might feel nervous about presenting unfinished work and subjects might be reluctant to dispute a practitioner's choice. Some participants might become either so entranced or upset with their image that they would be rendered incapable of considering the implications of the persona on the screen.

I invited the editors in this study to respond to these concerns. Asked if they had ever been in a position to screen a work-in-progress with program participants while changes could still be made, more than 50% either had not done so or strongly opposed the idea: it would "paralyze the process," "be inappropriate," be "too complicated," "open a can of worms," or "trouble the waters." Worse, program makers might be "held ransom by the participants." Another editor said: "I won't screen on reality shows, or docs. I don't want them to know that I manipulate. All participants have signed a waiver—why have that extra hassle? Just go to air with it!"

Twenty percent of survey respondents have shown work-in-progress to participants, or would be open to the idea, but qualified their response with "only on documentaries," "just to fact check," "never the whole program," "not show the tricky stuff," "only when the stakes are high for them," and "only if I thought it would make the show better."

Four respondents mentioned pragmatic reasons, like reduced post-production schedules that delay the actual editing process, screen, and digest comments. One editor replied that it was not their decision to make, but that of the producer or director, and that there might be legal considerations as their contract might specifically forbid them from screening for participants.

Twenty-five percent of respondents, among them several reality television editors, responded positively to the question without any qualifications. As one editor said, "it is the right thing to do." But of the entire group, only one respondent screened for participants on a regular basis. This reality television editor is under contract to make changes according to participant's wishes. Working as a director, I encountered the contractual right of participants to give consent after viewing a rough cut only twice. First when I was working for federal agencies (in my case the NFB and the Mental Health Commission of Canada) that could afford to sacrifice a budget in order to allow vulnerable subjects to exercise agency and prevent a documentary from being shown that they did not agree. In the second instance I was co-producing a documentary and had the legal authority to change the edit after a participant asked for changes, so he would be able to show the program to his parents and still live with himself.

As with the responses to previous questions, the gap between the stated ethical standards and actual practices of editors became apparent, exposing gaps in the narrative coherence of the practitioner's responses. Several editors who did not believe in screening had also declared the program participants as their main, or one of their main, loyalties in the editing process. One of them agreed that it was right to screen for participants, but only if it "served the program and made for [a] better show." While some editors pointed to the hierarchy within the industry as absolving them of responsibility, several of these respondents were worried or downright fearful of being held hostage by erratic or irrational participants, assuming that a dispute or delay of a program's airing could have personal consequences for the editor.

Elevating one's role to that of judge for what is right for others might be considered an extension of the power the editor feels to arrange and rearrange the subject's lives on screen. Rabiger (2004) says of this aspect of professional identity: "[The reasons] why one works as a

documentarian all belong on a moral continuum anchored in one's sense of ethics and mission" (p. 335). Being in control of the image and being part of a production company "makes it easy to acquire an exaggerated sense of one's own importance" (p. 307).

Inviting participants into the cutting room leads to the next question: would editors be willing to make changes to an edit at the request of a subject? Seventy percent of the survey participants responded with a resolute "no." They gave various reasons: it was "not their place," "[participants] are not objective," "[they] have own agenda, like they are out for money," "[because] vanity can't be a guide," it would be "giving them an unfair advantage," and it would "jeopardize an entire project." Several respondents were willing to change an edit because of a subject's comments but added qualifiers such as: "As long as it doesn't change the story," "for journalistic accuracy, only," "depends who is asking . . . we made changes for Leonard Cohen. We wouldn't do it for a fisherman." Just four respondents, all of whom work in both reality and documentary television, reported on the experience of having made changes to a program according to a participant's wishes. As one editor said: "I have done so to accommodate the wishes of a protagonist even though it made for a weaker film. I figured it's just a movie, but the subject['s] life goes on." One documentary editor shared what they considered an unpleasant experience: "Someone threatened with a lawsuit just because he didn't like [himself] on screen. People might get upset because of the use of bad grammar or a pimple in the face."

In principal, screening for participants prior to completion appears to be a reasonable and constructive method to ensure the ethical depiction of participants and the truthfulness of the content, but that decision still remains outside of the editor's control. Producers tend to have little or no interest in jeopardizing the swift completion and delivery of a program to the

broadcaster by exposing the unfinished program to participants who might hold up the post-production process.

A Code of Ethics

If allowing participants into the post-production process is unlikely to be implemented, what other scenarios have been suggested within the academy that would give practitioners like editors guidance in negotiating ethics in cutting factual programs? The notion of a code of ethics emerging from shared experience and values, including the question of whether it could address the imbalance of power that is prevalent among practitioners, participants, and viewers, has occupied a larger space in the academic discourse. Such a code could affirm a principle of informed consent for subjects and at the same time acknowledge that the process is an artistic practice, not a scientific experiment.

A guiding principle, analogous to the Hippocratic oath's "do no harm," should be interpreted as "do nothing that would violate the humanity of your subject and nothing that would compromise the trust of your audience" (Nichols, 2016). But such a declaration is undoubtedly vague: What is the definition of trust? Who does the defining? What constitutes a violation of another person's humanity? On the other hand, a code of ethics containing strict definitions, if applied to all factual programs, could stifle creative thinking and hinder or prevent the production of significant nonfiction work. Arguments for an ethical code would not appeal to practitioners who struggle with artistic concepts or ideas of truth while editing their narratives, if they are tied to reference codes and standards to guide their moral decision-making. This is where one could situate the fault line in debating ethics of factual editing. A code of behavior as an orientation point for making feasible decisions appears to be too ambitious in light of the

realities of trying to stick to post-production schedules that must meet multiple demands of subjects, creators, funding agencies, commissioning editors, and other stakeholders.

The related question in the survey then became, do editors believe in the need for a code of ethics to give them guidance, like similar policies and practice guides for journalists in many media organizations? Or, alternatively, do editors prefer retaining the agency to determine on a case-by-case basis how to make ethical choices? Of the 50 interviewees, just two welcomed the idea of a code of ethics without reservation. One other editor responded positively to the idea, while reserving the right to violate the code if the need arose. Another respondent felt no personal need for a code, but agreed that such a code would serve to give guidance to junior editors, as a substitute for a senior colleague giving advice. Four other respondents liked the idea in general, but voiced concerns over how realistic the implementation of such a code would be in the absence of a system of enforcement. However, the overwhelming majority of the sample, 42 respondents, categorically rejected the idea, mainly for pragmatic reasons, citing that industry practitioners like themselves lacked decision-making power in the industry. Two editors replied that such a code would contradict the nature of the reality television genre itself and possibly eradicate the format, which, as one of them said, "could not exist without that deceit." The other agreed: "Audiences want to see humiliation to make them feel they are a better person." One respondent saw a danger in imposing any generic ethical code by limiting individual agency:

> I truly believe that would be a disaster—and likely lead to misinterpretations of such a code, like the Bible. Better to leave it open so both the editors and the audience know there is no code—let them judge for themselves, using their own ethical and moral compass—like art.

Three respondents resisted the idea of a code of ethics for their profession because it would separate their roles as professionals from their roles as citizen in society in general. Claiming that their personal and professional ethics reflect those of the society they live in, one editor said,

"We all struggle to be ethical individuals. If a conflict on ethics arises, all stakeholders have to participate in dealing with it."

Situationism and Whole Moral Persons

In Chapter Five, I introduced Wolgast's (1992) position on the ethical challenge for practitioners of all kinds: "If we are to retain moral autonomy and responsibility, it requires that whatever a person does, she and no one else is in charge, she alone is responsible" (p. 116). In this respect, Wolgast addresses the circumstances of the editor's task in the edit room. The status quo as described by participating editors reveals how practitioners largely depend on directives from company or broadcast executives and occasional exchanges with colleagues when making editorial decisions that might compromise their professional ethics. Many respondents also reported that when they encountered a conflict between the various stakeholders in the editing process, they tended to resolve them by executing as much agency as the system allowed, while trying to protect both the program subjects and not lose respect for themselves. The editors surveyed were accustomed to, and accepted, a certain degree of compromise of their personal ideals in the process of getting the work done. They agreed to concessions by accepting the fixed production exigencies as the ultimate bottom line. Applying Wolgast's concept of the "whole moral person," the question becomes: how are editors, situated on the lower end of the production hierarchy, to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions? Participants in the survey pointed to the chain of command within their work environments, in which they deferred to their producer and/or network (or in case of documentary television, director and broadcaster) as the relevant force in making decisions. However multifaceted the production process in factual programs is, the decision-making process is unmistakably top-down. Editors might make creative choices, but are not empowered to make executive decisions. As well, none

of the editors interviewed were permanent employees of a corporation, for example, staff members in a government run institution like the CBC, the NFB, or a commercial broadcaster like CTV. All respondents considered themselves as independent freelance contractors whose workplace and working conditions shifted from project to project. The overpowering presence of the broadcast industry in connection with the precarious nature of contract work ensures practitioners will submit, irrespective of formal agreements.

A BBC-commissioned study entitled "Consenting Adults?" (2000) examined the practice of involving participants in the post-production of factual programs from both the practitioner's and the participant's perspectives:

> Participants are sometimes unaware of the way in which programme-makers will use their contribution. We have found that this normally occurs in documentary strands of programming where editing and other post-production work can radically change the nature of the final product . . . where material was heavily reshaped due to the addition at post-production of music, narrative dialogue or selected editing, this could change the nature of the participant's original contribution. (p. 74)

The report's findings into actual involvement of participants during the post-production process offered inconclusive results:

> We found that there was less risk of discontent if participants had some input into the post-production process. . . . Unfortunately the majority of participants were unable to exercise this right. . . . We have seen that broadcasters retain editorial control for clear legal, organizational and creative reasons. (p. 74)

The study closes with a rather weak appeal to the producer's goodwill: "While we realise that programme-makers employ different strategies for gaining consent, we would argue that [participant's] participation can only be strengthened through cooperation" (p. 75). Seventeen years after the release of the BBC report as I was conducting my research, I could not detect a measurable increase in the inclusion of participants in factual programs edit rooms in the UK.

In conclusion, the suggestion from the scholarly discourse to establish a binding ethical code was soundly dismissed by the survey respondents. It should be noted in this connection that editors in factual programs have no professional organization to represent them. Without a union or professional association, there is no formal structure in place to facilitate negotiating on behalf of practitioners. Currently there is also no urgency on a political, legal, or industry level to instigate an agreement on a code of practice. In a marketplace that consists of countless small companies and independent contractors operating as sole proprietors, the idea of negotiating an agreement on standardizing working conditions, including the building of safeguards for ethical behavior, is not realistic. On the other hand, to make ethical rules voluntary would mean relying on the goodwill of production companies, something that is unlikely to be forthcoming as the costs would not be in those companies' financial interests.

It's the Economy!

Overall, these well-intended suggestions from scholars do not appear to take into consideration that mass media is embedded in capitalism. Television providers, both commercial and public, deliver audiences to advertisers, the former because it is their statutory goal to maximize profits for their shareholders and the latter because diminishing public funding forces them to broaden their appeal to include commercial programming. And reality programs deliver audiences. Berger (1996) contends that "capitalism, from the perspective of consumer culture theorists, is not simply an economic system, but a kind of culture in which almost everything is subordinated to consumption" (p. 55). Reality television is simply another product, one which flourishes because the practitioners have surrendered themselves to market driven economics by giving audiences their reading of a dominant ideology. Reality television, therefore, is a result and reflection of a system of capitalism.

Referring to Althusser, Hall (1991) writes of the function of ideology to "reproduce the social relations of production" (p. 96). An ideology requires structures within a culture, like mass media, to reflect itself and its ideologies. In this context, reality television represents the commodification of culture. Over the last several decades, capitalist production has altered from the manufacturing of goods or provision of services to the production of cultural products. Culture is now a commodity itself, to be consumed by anyone who can afford to. Fiske and Hartley (1978) proclaimed that "television is one of the most highly centralized institutions within our culture" due to commercial interests, government regulations, and the necessity of a collective middle in fragmented societies (p. 86). The society is required to produce labor that comprehends and is fully subservient to the task of effectively reproducing a dominant ideology. This includes media practitioners, as they are technically competent in the "advanced systems of capitalist production" (Hall, 1991, p. 96).

To complete the series of proposals from the scholarly community to effect change in the industry, the Communications and Journalism scholar Wyatt went furthest in suggesting that the best way to stop the exploitation and manipulation of participants in reality programs was for audiences "to just stop viewing reality television altogether" (as quoted in Whitlock, 2013, p. xx). Wyatt's suggestion for audiences to vote with their remote controls appears completely out of touch with the fact that reality television is still growing in popularity and will not disappear from television screens in the foreseeable future. Instead, I argue the reverse later in this chapter: "Don't turn it off, take a closer look!"

Pryluck (1976) locates the complexity of the space where creative ideas and the actual production processes intersect. "Respect tends to flow to power" (p. 25). His main focus has been on the moral issues that arise between practitioner and participant, and he concludes that

"collaboration fulfills the basic ethical requirement for control of one's own personality" (p. 28). But Pryluck also points out that a "discussion of ethical issues will not by itself solve the problems" (p. 29). But such an open dialogue on the moral implications of making factual programs, and the values that guide the craft, could help advance an ethically responsible and accountable practice. The empirical turn in scholarship (Corner, 2008) includes a survey of US documentary practitioners carried out by Nisbet and Aufderheide (2009) about a series of ethical questions including relationships with subjects and perceived duties towards their viewers. The authors inquired about the impact of changing production environments that frequently impact ethical conduct. The principle of transparency was suggested as a key to ensuring the integrity of nonfiction television, while at the same time allowing the artistic vision of the practitioners to thrive. It would need a reciprocal relationship equally transparency on the part of the networks to function, for example, trust in broadcasters to actively scrutinize content they are about broadcast.

Is There a Desire for a Forum?

Requiring transparency and accuracy in representing realities remains a crucial factor in reestablishing the authority and trustworthiness of factual programs. Open dialogue, as the survey for this thesis suggests, is on the agenda of most practitioners. However, the responses regarding a question about open communication among editors revealed a more complicated picture. When asked if they communicated with colleagues about any ethical dilemmas, 12 respondents replied with a straight "no," or "almost never," five with "sometimes," and "on rare occasions." The issue of trust came up with eight respondents who expressed such sentiments as there isn't "too much integrity in the industry" and one "never knows how it gets back to people." However, 20 editors replied "yes," they did indeed discuss ethical dilemmas with co-

workers or trusted colleagues.

Aufderheide et al. (2009) concluded that practitioners desire a forum where they are free to debate the ethics of their craft, but lack that opportunity. However, in my survey 30 respondents had no desire for a forum, stating a variety of reasons. A lack of trust was mentioned by eight editors: "As contractor you are vulnerable and might get blacklisted. One year without being in the industry and you are out." "I can't be sure to trust everybody. Some editors want to take my job." Two editors pointed to a "code of silence" that exists in companies. Others simply felt no need. One respondent felt that a structured process would be out of sync with the reality of the industry: "Personally, I am interested in a group like that. But most people I know just do it as a job and have no thoughts about ethical considerations. They say: 'It's just TV, lighten up.' I felt at odds with the industry since I first got into this."

Several others doubted that there was enough consciousness of ethics among practitioners in the industry. As one saw it, "[it's] just as a job and [I] have no thoughts about ethical considerations." Others pointed to the hierarchy within the industry, and further questioned the usefulness of such a forum, as phrased by one: "The editor has to deal with those decisions in the edit room. In the end of the day you hold your tongue and put up with it. It's not a good thing but that's the reality for us now." Three respondents pointed to the fact that within social media, several forums to discuss issues already existed. Ten editors explicitly welcomed the possibility of a new forum to exchange experiences. As one of them said: "It would be useful for editors to know what other editors think and to start a conversation about storytelling because there's so much going on in terms of manipulation. I do manipulate, justify doing so and would want to discuss it."

Everett Hughes (1958) conceptualized work as a "social drama," focusing on how workers, in order to cast their duties in a positive light, actively shape the meaning of work through everyday interaction and with that, find occupational pride. Earlier research determined that cultural workers apply communication exchanges in the workplace to distance themselves from producers who force them to compromise their artistic standards (Faulkner, 1983). But overall, a perceived lack of possibilities to discuss issues that involve ethics in their day-to-day work was matched by the lack of desire by practitioners to set up any structure to provide that forum. Without that desire, Bertrand's (2000) appeal that the debate around morals be a continual call of the urgency of the questions while offering an incentive for the creation of media accountability systems remains an unrealistic goal.

Summing up, from the perspective of practitioners, the goal of addressing ethical issues in the post-production of factual program as proposed in the scholarly discourse (e.g., a collaborative approach, provisional/informed consent, a code of ethical conduct, consultation during the editing, etc.) is largely unattainable, given the existing decision-making hierarchies and the economic reality of production. Practitioners in this survey confirmed that their agency to make ethically sound editorial decisions was compromised by the exigencies and economic dependencies of their industry culture and workplace environment. The editor/practitioner as a moral agent is tangled up in the broader structures of the broadcaster and production company and societal standards. Where does this leave the debate on potential paths out of the ethical dilemma?

Shifting towards Media Literacy

After having evaluated the possible paths to establishing a level of security in respect to the representation of subjects, practitioners in their workplace, and audiences of the broadcast, I

have concluded that future scholarship of television studies needs to take a different approach. The survey data I collected confirms that an assumed convenient and simplified equation is unattainable. The current broadcast environment is a marketplace that is constantly rearranging, redefining, and erasing borders and boundaries between different genres and means of expression. It continues to be the task of the scholar to look at those dividing lines in order to expose them as either problematic or unnecessary. This is a genre landscape in which fiction creates a world for its story to inhabit; the documentary form is used to find its story in the world we live in; and reality television straddles documentary and fiction, taking its characters from documentary and its story from fiction. As these dividing lines become arbitrary or irrelevant, or too indistinct to be useful, the opportunity arises to question the entire genre model.

Reality and documentary television now exist in a space that is moving further towards the fictional frontier, to the point at which criteria for a traditional documentary themselves no longer apply. Furthermore, they are obscuring the narrative inventions and potential applications of a new creation of media. And beyond that, in the current era of cross pollination of genres and subgenres and the ongoing emergence of new formats, I question whether program makers and practitioners like editors should be given the responsibility to label programs using criteria that are not universally agreed upon. Rather than look to the formal features of the media texts themselves as a means of defining categories, a new approach would move in the direction of enabling informed audiences to perform their own evaluation of television programs. This would have to commence with a healthy mistrust of any labels. If audiences were not expecting reality on reality television, then practitioners like editors would no longer be required to deliver authenticity. I propose to liberate the reality television form from its confining label and accept it for what it is: storytelling, using nonprofessional actors, making explicit use of editors as

credited writers. Audiences would receive, evaluate, and draw their own conclusions from what they have seen. In that scenario, *Big Brother* in its laboratory layout becomes much like *Nanook*—real human beings in unusual circumstances (Clark, in Kilborn, 2003). Or in other words, a documentary would be what the viewer decides to make of it: "what they are accustomed to make of a television program that they presume to make truth claims. When 'JFK' is watched in this way, I maintain that it in effect becomes a documentary. When 'Louisiana Story' is not, it in effect becomes a fiction film" (Eitzen, 1995, p. 98). Certain films that are considered fiction, like *JFK*, are assumed to make truth claims, and are based on actual people or events. Other films that are labeled documentary, like *Nanook*, unfold just like a fictional film. Eitzen argues that a text that is inherently and automatically "a documentary" does not exist, but a specific "kind of reading frame . . . makes a text a documentary" (p. 98). Expressed more simply, in the end, a documentary is just what the viewer is accustomed to make of it.

What appears necessary is a redefinition of the mode of comparison by which a viewer categorizes a media text, since current theorizations echo the very problematic in question. This concept connects with existing scholarly discussion. Winston (1995) states the "difference is to be found in the mind of the audience" (p. 18). The editor and scholar Vaughan (1999) also posits the classification of media texts by their reception, as it is "not a style or a method or a genre . . . but a mode of response to the material" (p. 58). For Vaughan, obtaining pleasure from our search for meaning "involves, on the part of the recipient, a sparking of understanding across gaps in the text; such creative response, such active construction of meaning by the recipient, lies at the heart of aesthetic pleasure" (p. 202).

I am aware that this approach invites the immediate critique that viewers watch television to escape, not to work. Any re-reorientation would require a consolidated effort to increase

media literacy among the media consuming public. Carroll (1996) contends viewers watch television with a sense of the kind of program they are going to see. But the index of the text does not mean that the viewer must uncritically agree with the label the text has been given. Rather than thinking of a factual program as operating within a formal framework, it becomes the viewer's undertaking to interpret it. Andrejevic (2004) postulates that it is the opportunity to debunk the media's authenticity claims that makes up the enjoyment for audiences of reality television. A skeptical engagement with television is based on an ideological illusion that is sustained by this detachment, a skepticism that provides media-savvy audiences with a sense of privilege in consuming media texts that might be non-factual and exploitative.

Bruzzi (2006) concurs that "a documentary only comes into being as it is performed" (p. 21). This is where the creation of a media text parallels the cognitive process within the human mind. Fisher (1987) equates storytelling with sense-making. Part of Fisher's narrative paradigm is that human beings are inherently storytellers: "The narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers, as authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature" (p. 18). Not only are human beings able to assess stories through the tests of narrative coherence and fidelity, but they are also able to create them: "Viewing human communication narratively stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audience members (co-authors)" (p. 18).

Murch (2001) makes a similar argument. In *In the Blink of an Eye* he claims that the edit is the analog of eyelid movement in the real world, removing the in-between of a glance from one object and/or framing in our periphery to another. The blink serves as a real-world filtering of information, as a model for editing—we edit the real with a blink. Williams (1998) argues for a definition of a genre "not as an essence of truth but as a set of strategies designed to choose

from among a horizon of relative and contingent truths" (quoted in Rosenthal, 2005, p. 65). Again, this supports the idea that "the real" becomes evident when media texts are comprehended as being similar in their practices to the way that humans find order in this world through awareness. Furthermore, Williams suggests that in daily life people comprehend the world and their place in it when their experience is grounded in the permanent interplay between receiving and ordering that experience. We choose what we will believe about what we perceive, and create intricate, relatable stories to manage the experience of being alive. Therefore, the "truth" of facts can become the truth of meaning-making: "We are not just consumers, but constructors of story as well. As we process representation, we make our own selections, choosing elements of what we see and hear that are important to our understanding of any representation we access" (Japp, Meister, & Japp, 2007, p. 43).

This process puts the omniscient viewer in control of the situation, granting agency to the viewer to help make sense of the audio-visual experience of viewing television. Nichols (1991) supports this notion when he writes of documentary as being dependent on the processes of constructing meaning. He uses the term "vivification" as a rendering of what representations only indicate, creating "a glimpse across the gulf between representation and experience" (p. 15). Nichols continues:

> What should be vivified is the experiential awareness of difference that, in the social construction of reality, has been knotted into contradiction. A text may vivify these tensions and thereby heighten our own awareness and experience of contradiction or paradox as a step in the process of disentangling, recasting, or transforming them. (p. 16)

Nichols is describing the conscious process on the part of the viewer of reconstructing the material seen on television, as audiences concentrate on the variances between reality and its presentation. Vivification is a fundamental component in apprehending what is being seen on

television—the viewer *feels* an authentic experience based on what is on the screen, and distinguishes the experience from the constructed and fake emotions of reality television. Nichols advocates the audience's response of the mind's rational process in making sense of the world, rather than their experience of being present inside the program's world. Here, as well, Nichols proposes that the viewer's attentiveness to the perceived inconsistencies that merge in comprehending the factual program offers a similar experience to the way in which each viewer's mind makes sense of the many incongruities of their everyday existence. Confronted with the contrast between representation and experience, the mind must find the shadow between them and construct linkages, as if forming consistency from contradiction. At the same time, the editor's effort of vivifying the creative processes of finding meaning in contradiction also presents a reality, but not *the* reality, of what it means to be human. Reality is attained through the notion of linking the gaps that exist between the audio-visuals on the screen and "the real," and constructing meaning from that process.

Both reality and documentary television make a proposition about a world that is deciphered by the viewer. The spectator's reception of the social world is not just a perception of what they discern with their senses, but is negotiated by their personal knowledge and experience. The audience employs their own reading of that world, which marks the point of departure of interpreting the world that is proposed by the program. From the point of view of the viewer, a reality television program can be considered the experience of an invented, possible world. As a consequence, neither a reality nor documentary program constitutes the represented world, but a secondhand experience: the "experience of an experienced world" (Nichols, 1991, p. 232). Both reality and documentary television share in that characteristic.

Nichols's thinking evokes Hall's (1991) system of "encoding/decoding" and Baudrillard's (1981) concepts of simulation and hyperreal, in line with the postmodern declaration of the end of fixed meanings and metanarratives as a site of power. This breakdown also indicates the decline of previous genre boundaries that have long been concealed by hybrid forms that are in a process of constant cross-pollination. The concluding chapter will complete my proposition of shifting the attention away from practitioners towards audiences, as a means to equip and give agency to those who receive the media texts so they can be empowered to critically question, endorse, or dismiss truth claims made by television programs.

Chapter Nine: Where to Go from Here?

My point of departure for this thesis was the perceived lack of transparency and institutional ethical concern in the creation of factual programs, when methods are applied that compromise a truthful representation of real events in favor of entertainment. Editing, or the craft of rearranging video and audio to create new meaning, is one of those compromising methods. According to conventional wisdom, what makes the subgenre of reality television different from the traditional documentary form is that the former is solely intended to entertain while the latter is expected to inform and enlighten. In this thesis I argue that both reality and documentary television share a narrative rhetoric with the dramatic genre. For this dissertation, I mobilized scholarly and artistic lines of investigation in tandem, choosing a topic that emerged from my own practice as a documentary maker and editor. Working on documentaries is what led me to consider ethics a valuable subject for academic research as it gave me insight into the characteristics of the profession and the implications of a changing television industry. In my research I tried to move beyond the rhetoric that insists on simple dichotomies: creative freedom versus commercial interests, quality programs versus populist product, inquiring minds versus bland entertainment and a rhetoric that views the practices of editors as being entirely ruled by market forces versus a rhetoric that foregrounds the creative autonomy of the artist. I built an account of editors' experiences and opinions that contains the ethical dilemmas they encountered in performing their craft, while trying to contextualize that experience within their sense of narrative coherence as a guide to storytelling and their sense of responsibility and loyalties. By examining the production experiences of editors, I laid out the uneasy interplay between economics and culture.

What the survey responses underscored was that it is essential to explore why narrative or story dominate public life beyond television and communication because this explains why current story-focused reality television has become more successful with audiences than the traditional argument-centered documentary form. Applying the analytical method suggested by Fisher's (1987) contention "that human beings are inherently storytellers who have a natural capacity to recognize the coherence and fidelity of stories they tell and experience" (p. 24), I explored whether storytellers who created a narrative through editing applied the same test of coherence and fidelity as a guide to their actions while editing a factual program.

My study emphasized the rejection of the concept of a single, irreducible, objective form of reality in favor of multiple realities. In the context of factual television, there are both post-production and production realities in the multifaceted dependencies of economics, aesthetics, and ethics. Broadly, the debate over factual television ethics centered on topics that emerged from the interaction and resulting conflict between the interests, values, and rights of practitioners, the production company and/or broadcaster that they were contracted by, the participant-subject, and the audience. Major issues at play include impasses between the elevated principles such as media independence and freedom of expression, a constructive view of social responsibility, the public's right to know, the "reality contract" with the audience (Nichols, 2001), informed consent, and the right to privacy, all of which "may serve as a map with which to survey the territory in which many issues of image ethics arise" (Gross et al., 1988, p. 8).

More Similar than Separate

The research for this thesis led me to conclude that in the process of creating programs, editors of reality television are not the ruthless manipulators they are perceived to be by many critics and scholars. Instead, they are, like their colleagues in the cutting rooms of documentary

television, cognizant of the ethical dilemmas that occur in executing their craft, and they, just like documentary television editors, struggle to negotiate the moral hazards of their work. Overall, editors who participated in the survey confirmed that principles of journalistic integrity and reasoned argument in documentary television have given way to emotion, efficiency, and story. Analyzing the survey questions concerning editors' allegiances and loyalty brought surprising results. Survey participants delivered the anticipated responses (naming the audience, the producer or broadcaster, and the program's participants) but "being loyal to the story" was identified just as many times. These findings confirm Fisher's narrative theory as he deems humans to be story-telling beings and suggests that engaging stories are more convincing than facts or logic.

The current trend towards faster and cheaper production is challenging to practitioners' understanding of their responsibilities towards participants. They face pressure to overstate conflict within and between characters and build up drama where no drama exists. While the challenge to construct tidy three-act documentaries out of real life's untidiness has been felt by creators since the beginning of the genre, there is now added pressure to shape and arrange events to appeal to the viewers' need for narrative thrust. The outcome of this research goes beyond the established critique that reality television practitioners present anything but the real. Reality itself is adjusted for the needs of the program makers. In that environment, reality has become a commodity in itself, packaged like any other commercial product.

However, the responses I received from survey participants established that documentary television editors, too, in order to create narrative coherence in the programs they cut, construct artifacts that are far removed from the actual subjects or events programs claim to represent. Editors working predominantly or exclusively in documentary television reported applying

similar levels of manipulation at the expense of the program's subjects. The sentiments expressed about performing those edit manipulations were similar to those of their colleagues in reality television.

The realization that practitioners in both forms find themselves in very similar positions forced me to consider the broader parallels between the two workplaces, both of which position professional ethics within the triangulated system of the practitioner, participant, and viewer. The editor, unlike the director who has spent time with the participants as actual human beings, encounters participants only as they are represented on a screen, not as real people. The technical and impersonal structure of distributing programs on television separates practitioners from viewers. Because of that twofold separation, for the editor, both the participants and audiences are "imagined." Therefore, the ethics of treating subjects in a moral way while editing (and not misleading or betraying audiences) are "imagined" as well. Asked about whether and how they made editorial decisions with the program's participants or audiences in mind, editors often assumed they knew what the subject or viewer "expected," "felt," "thought," and "was comfortable with," without having any evidence to support their assumptions (since they had not met the former, and could only imagine the latter). Asked about ethical challenges, respondents to the survey preferred a situationist approach rather than a deontological interpretation of ethics when dealing with the duality between exercising "duty of care" that is based on principle and a flexible and fluid interpretation of ethical principles. This fluidity is a mirror of the blurred boundaries between reality and documentary television in general.

Television genres evolve through cross-pollination, rather than in a linear fashion. Any change is reliant on cultural tides, industrial trends, and audience preferences. Television genres are cultural categories that evolve from their specific historical settings and a combination of

cultural practices, audience responses, market forces, public policy, and critical reception. Genres are also part of the larger practice of determining a social world through variances and hierarchies; they are places of cultural contests over conflicting assumptions. The term "format" might be more appropriate as it addresses the need of broadcasters to produce work according to predictable, familiar templates, and the overall importance of packaging. But there seems to be no solid definition for variable formats of factual television, or even what makes a program nonfiction. The definition is not dependent on budget or length, nor does it pertain to a text's chosen subject, theme, or style. In the past, genre categories for television have been helpful in making some sense of the industry's offerings, assisting audiences by defining categories like "drama," "documentary," "experimental" etc. with clear lines of demarcation between them.

Post-Documentary

Television program making has always involved the constant transgressing of genre boundaries, as new ways are pursued to connect with the viewer and assemble profitable audiences (Turner, 2001, pp. 6–7). Corner (2000) asks if documentary itself has become an impractical category to evaluate the shifts that occur within factual television, pointing to what he sees as too many idealizations. Corner argues that the term "documentary" is usually safer applied as an adjective rather than a noun. He has concluded that reality television, in all its various guises, has pushed the limits of the factual genre, which in turn has pushed the limits of documentary. In Corner's (2002) "post documentary culture," reality television is less about genre and more about the treatment of "realities" in the "border crossing" between fact and fiction (p. 156). The distinct shift towards entertainment and diversion in factual programs is certainly displacing "serious" output, while changing viewing patterns and audience expectations.

Wide-ranging appropriation of the "documentary look" by reality television, combined with the borrowing by reality television of non-documentary aesthetics, like the imposition of artificial story as an ordering device, the polished look of the advertising commercial, and the driving music video aesthetic, have further blurred the lines and have led to a further watering down of the documentary status. Corner (2002) predicted that "the new levels of representational play and reflexivity will undoubtedly impact upon the conventional rhetoric of documentary seriousness, requiring in some cases quite radical adjustments and accommodations to be made" (p. 264).

So, the question remains: why hold onto the rigid genres of the past if they no longer seem to apply? I examined whether existing definitions surrounding factual programming have become essentially indefensible, suggesting the entire system of genre distinction ought to be discarded. Based on the results of the survey, I conclude that the term "documentary" is just as questionable as the more apparent contradiction of the term "reality television."

In the past, some documentaries have violated the fiction/nonfiction demarcation for questionable truth claims. Across the great genre divide, there also has been an over-simplification and confusion in differing definitions of what constitutes fiction. The expansion of reality television led to a blurring of the once clearly defined borders between dramatic and nonfictional forms (Andrejevic, 2004; Dovey, 2000; Hill, 2005; Kilborn, 2003), resulting in a further cross-pollination of genres (Hill, 2005). An argument for maintaining the fiction/ nonfiction distinction is that it has thrived for many television seasons in the face of its critics. But, borrowing from Tudor's (1974) assertion that genre is what we believe it to be, should one define documentary simply as whatever people commonly mean by the term, or does that make the statement so circular that it is rendered meaningless?

A media text is never a simple representation but a subjective staging of something that has been made by someone for someone. Through my own experience as practitioner "lying the truth" in the edit rooms of documentaries, I developed a growing suspicion that factual programs in their current iteration on television have long left labels behind. And yet, despite the linguistic acrobats forging new definitions and hybrids (docusoaps, soapdocs, mockumentary, docu-tainment, reality sitcoms, game docs, makeover, infotainment, lifestyle, island or house experiments, game shows, reality satires, celebrity shows, reality-sitcom, docu-sitcom, etc.), these colorful offspring are bound by the limitations of their antiquated heritage. It could be argued that documentary and reality genres have now reached a state of indefinability and definitions should therefore be discarded altogether. This would present the need to reorient an audio-visual world where the underlying forces of diversion and the appeal of performance determine a widely expanded array in popular representations of reality. To discard the genre distinction altogether poses other risks, a proper examination of which is beyond the scope of this thesis. If nothing else, the reality television phenomenon has heightened academic and, to a lesser degree, public awareness of the composed and mediated nature of television, specifically factual television programs that claim to give true-to-life accounts of everyday reality:

> As viewers become increasingly tele-visually literate, ever more aware of the tricks of the trade and constructed nature of documentary objectivity and balance, the amateur retains the power to cut through the layers of skepticism and cynicism with which we have learned to protect ourselves from the professional media, the great manipulator. (Keighron, 1993, p. 24)

If there is a need to think outside the proverbial box in addressing the ethical dilemma in the edit room, it has expressed itself in the answers given by the participants to the final question in this survey, a challenge in the spirit of John Rawl's (1971) "veil of ignorance": if the participating editors were to be approached, would they agree personally, or encourage family members, to

take part in a factual program? Among the 50 respondents only four said they might agree, but only if they were familiar with the producers, and then only if it was a renovation show or a traditional documentary. All other editors vehemently declined: “Too risky,” I know “what these people can do to you,” “practitioner’s interests aren’t those of the participants,” and simply, they “don’t want to look like an idiot.”

Factual program editors would not want to be subjected to the same manipulation they themselves perform on the participants in the programs they cut. For me, their responses were confirmation that how we make sense of the often contradictory presence—collectively and personally, privately and professionally—of the myriad appearances of the present in everyday life, the way we read media texts, and how we construct them, is determined not by truth content, but the narratological coherence of the stories that we tell (Fisher, 1987).

The gap between the academic discourse on documentary that has evolved over almost a century and the everydayness of current experience as expressed by random stories from the cutting room, reveals many contradictions that give reason to pause, reflect, and engage in further research. The intention of this thesis has been to come to some form of understanding of ethical propriety in creating factual programs, a moral perspective that is compatible with the human experience in a reality filled with ambiguities. At the heart has been my desire to maneuver through those contradictions by holding onto a compromised center, a track that is situated between the tensions that constrain the human experience in a world full of ambiguities. It is my hope that the navigation through this maze has repositioned the reader’s perspective on the production of factual programs and television in general.

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Appendix A: Synopsis of Classical Moral Philosophy

The concept and idea of *ethics* goes back much further than the age of audio-visual media. Borrowing from Christopher Meyers' essay, "Flourishing: Reality TV and a Life of Ethical Excellence" (in Wyatt & Bunto, 2012), concentrates on the two major schools of moral theory in the Western tradition: firstly, Immanuel Kant's respect for the inherent value of moral duties, especially, his "Kingdom of Ends" formulation of the Categorical Imperative, which postulates that one ought never to treat persons as a mere means, or tools, for the benefit of oneself, but always as absolutely valuable "ends in themselves" (Kant, trans. 2002); and secondly, John Stuart Mill's utilitarian exhortation to act so as to promote the greatest aggregate pleasure – particularly higher or intellectual pleasure (Mill, ed. 2002).

Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative provides a set of precepts for defining what is to be considered a right and wrong conduct to live by. Three interpretations comprise a Categorical Imperative, the second being the Principle of Humanity, stating, "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (Kant, trans. 2002, p. 188). For Kant, ethical decisions must be rooted in a person's good will, which is the only thing that is always and uniquely a moral good. Decisions cannot be motivated by self-interest or by possible consequences, for example, but rather by the good will, or sense of duty – the same ethical duty in all cases – that dictates the performing of ethical actions. This principle, of acting universally to fulfill duty, is Kant's Categorical Imperative: "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature" (Kant, trans. 1964, p. 89). In the act of performing a universal duty, people – described by Kant as rational beings who are an object of reverence – must be respected as ends in themselves.

Kant's principle of morality includes care for the other, like anticipating the prevention of injury to another human being. In a reality television context, a production company must endorse their duty of care by means of monitoring and avoiding harm to participants. A duty of care is connected to the legal responsibility of producers to attain participants' consent prior to broadcasting a show the participant appear in.

Producers and viewers of reality television cannot be moved by a Kantian good will when they encourage misleading portrayals of individuals or groups to increase audience share or maximize profits, or when viewers are amused by the false representation of others. In addition,

no ethical case can be made for exploiting human beings as a means to an end – may it be the profit for the show's producers, or the entertainment value it provides to viewers. Clifford Christians argues that "reality television as a genre must face up to Kant's claims that each person should be valued, no one should be treated as fodder for another's exploitation. To violate this principle is more than 'dissing' an eighteenth-century philosopher. It is, rather, to put human relationships in jeopardy" (Christians, C., Rotzoll, K. B., Fackler, M. B., Brittain McKee, K., & Woods, R. H. 2005, p. 278).

In line with the utilitarian tradition – which takes "all pleasure to be good, as long as it does not violate the ethical conditions," For John Stuart Mill some pleasures as better than others; namely, the higher, intellectual pleasures are better than the lower, physical ones. The higher pleasures are exemplified in many of the elements that make up virtue, and they help create the mental capacities necessary for practical wisdom, via which appreciation of those elements is made possible. Meyers postulates that "much of reality TV gets its appeal through stimulation of the lower pleasures, through erotic titillation, voyeurism and a vicarious amusement with characters' sexual, alcoholic and violent antics." (Meyers, 2012, p. 10) Without any normative limitations, the moral analysis of reality television would give free license to do anything within these bounds: as long as audiences enjoy it, and no one is significantly harmed by it, and others are not used as mere means, it is considered to be morally good. Meyers quotes David Ross' "The Right and the Good," that we also have a duty to strive for more excellent lives, to "improve our own condition in respect of among other things virtue or of intelligence" (Ross, 1988, 21-22). It provides people with enjoyment, but it also provides them with the sensitivity to improve relations with others that are based in morals, which in process is good for society overall.

Many scholars consider the substantial ethical problem with Reality Television as both epistemic (fact-based) and axiological (value-based), as deception leads to the corrosion or corruption of moral values held by both program makers and audiences. There is no question that these are obstacles to the ethical integrity of Reality Television. The majority of scholarship on Reality Television focuses on the potential for such programing to perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes and stimulate increased demand for humiliation and degradation of participants (Wyatt, 2010). This may be a result of the attitude of viewers and the moral discourse communities within which they are situated, as well as the extent to which networks that air

reality programs are responsive to communities with concerns and see positively-themed shows as opportunities to brand themselves as good corporate citizens. The substantial ethical problem with reality television deception concerns not epistemic but axiological deception – deception that concerns not facts but values. Such deception is conducive to the corrosion or corruption of those values.

Appendix B: Canadian Television Fund's (CTF) Definition of Factual Programs

The CTF defines a documentary as "a non-fiction representation of reality that contains the following elements:
• informs and engages in critical analysis of a specific topic or point of view;
• provides an in-depth treatment of the subject;
• is meditative and reflective;
• is primarily designed to inform but may also entertain;
• treats a specific topic over the course of at least 30 minutes (including commercial time);
• requires substantial time in preparation, production and post-production;
• has an original narrative and visual construction (which may include scenes of dramatic re-enactments);
• has enduring appeal and, therefore, a long shelf life." 1

This definition excludes such programming as: current affairs, public affairs, human interest or lifestyle productions, "how-to" productions, reality television, instructional television, formal or curriculum-based educational programming, magazine productions, talk shows, reporting and current events, religious programming, promotional productions, travelogues and interstitials.

The CTF also makes a distinction between factual documentaries (as described above) and auteur point-of-view/creative documentaries (POV). A POV does not include documentaries that are:

• a docu-drama, docu-soap, re-enactment or
• performance piece with people playing themselves or with professional actors;
• a factual project;
• a profile or biography;
• segmented or capsular one-off or series;
• a video "diary" of social events (e.g. a series on graduations or family reunions);
• a project dependent on light "information" format; or
• "Surveillance" television.

Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles

Like the CTF, Société de Développement des Entreprises Culturelles (SODEC) operates with two definition levels for documentaries. SODEC has a broad definition, which like the CTF's broad definition, includes a wide range of non-fiction programming types examining issues of social, political and cultural importance.1 At the same time, SODEC also maintains a POV definition, which emphasizes that the filmmaker maintains creative control at each stage of the development and production process.2

The comparison of the definitions of documentary definitions yields a few observations. First, reality television is clearly excluded from all definitions, thus preserving the distinction between these two non-fiction genres. The second aspect to note is the distinction made by the CTF and SODEC between documentary and POV documentary. This distinction underlines the

importance of POV documentaries. They warrant a separate category, and often require that funding resources be set aside so that they can be made with public support.

The third observation is that the CRTC definition is quite broad; it includes any non-fiction program designed to inform by way of in-depth critical analysis. This broad definition affords broadcasters some flexibility in terms of meeting their priority programming requirements.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Study name

The Frankenbyte – Ethics and Reality in the Post-production of Factual Programming

Researchers

Researcher name
Doctoral Candidate
Graduate Program

Purpose of the research

Ethics concerns every facet of human interaction, including the application of general moral precepts within professional practice. Ethical codes and guidelines articulate standards that allow members of professional communities to push back against exigency with principle. Not only do they offer ethical guidance for members of the community, but they also provide a framework for accountability to the people the community serves and allows for resistance against pressure to lower standards for short-term gain.
Television or Film editors, however, find themselves without such tools.

What you will be asked to do in the research

Through long-form open-ended interviews, documentary and reality television editors will have the opportunity to describe how they deal with issues of ethics and representation that surface in their work.

Risks and discomforts

None.

Benefits of the research and benefits to you

I believe this baseline research is necessary to begin my inquiry into ethical standards in the industry today and to build a framework of representation, as neither professional field of traditional documentary or reality television has clearly articulated ethical standards to guide an editor's work. I do expect the evaluation of the long-form open-ended interviews will demonstrate a need for a more public debate.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality

No information that identifies you personally will be collected. Your participation will be anonymous and all information will be kept confidential. The interview transcript will be coded at the end of the process to ensure the confidentiality of your responses.

Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions about the research?

If you have any questions or concerns about the ethics or any other issue of the interview, please contact the chair of my department and thesis supervisor,

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics.

Legal rights and signatures:
I, _____, consent to participate in the study conducted by_____ I have understood the nature of this projects and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates by consent.

Signature of participant_____ Date_____

Signature of Principal Investigator _____ Date_____

Appendix D: Questionnaire for Editors of Factual Programs and Ethics

summer 2015

GENERAL
How many years have you been doing editing work?
Why did you choose editing as a profession? Is it a calling for you, a job to make a living, a stepping stone to directing?
What prepared you most for your profession - film school, being self-taught, or a mentor?
If the latter, what do you remember most she/he taught you?

SOCIETY
How do you describe what you do to others who aren't part of the industry? Are people curious to know?
Do you think audiences are media literate to the extent that they can 'read' TV and understand what went into making the program? Do you think it matters?
How you see what you do as a profession in a larger context of society?

SELF IMAGE
Do you consider yourself a craftsperson or artist?
Do you work predominantly in reality television or traditional documentary?
Do you go back and forth between the two genres? Describe the circumstances that lead to being involved in one over the other.
How would you define either, traditional docs and Reality TV?
Where is the dividing line between both genres for you?
Where in your view lies your main responsibility as an editor – to your director? Or producer? Broadcaster? Audiences? Participants? Society? Yourself?
There's an increasing pressure on factual programming to torque up drama for entertaining purposes, often sacrificing what actually happened. Have you felt that pressure, and has it influenced your choices you made in the edit room?
Would you say you ever sacrificed the 'truth' for 'entertainment' or story?
If yes, please give an example, or two. Be as detailed as possible. Be assured that all will remain confidential.
Apropos 'truth' – how do you define it?
When you leave the edit room at the end of the day do you leave your work behind or does is stay with you? Have you ever had 'editing dreams?'

MEDIA ETHICS IN GENERAL
What does the term 'professional ethics' mean to you?
Did you ever get close but made a decision to compromise your professional ethics? Describe that situation please. Try to be as detailed as possible. Again, all is confidential.
Examples: a participant thought the camera wasn't rolling … they regret saying some-thing after they said it … a scene makes a participant look particularly unsympathetic ... the participant misrepresented him- or herself .. circumstances have changed …

participant wasn't aware of the power of the medium, he/she wasn't clearly informed what was going on …
When you edit, do you think about the lasting impact an edit you make involving a character in the program that could have on the person in real life?
Have you had to defend or challenge a creative choice that involved ethics or challenged a decision by broadcaster or director because it violated your sense of ethics?

ETHICS EDITING
As editors we collapse time. In the progress we invariably lose context. Does that just come with the territory, or do you have limits as to how far you will collapse time (e.g. just playing the three moments of a character losing his cool, even though they happened over the course of three days in real time)?
Where would you draw the line for yourself of what's acceptable and what isn't?
Do you know the term 'frankenbiting'? How do you define it?
Do you frankenbite? If so, when? Describe a situation when you applied it. Be as specific as possible.
As editor you leave the post-production process of a project at some point. Have you experienced a gap when you saw the final product, where the intended meaning of a sequence or statement was changed? If so, what exactly happened?

RELATIONSHIPS TO SUBJECTS
As editors we seldom get to meet the people that are featured in a factual piece, yet we spend a lot of time with them in the edit room. What do you think about that?
In the past, have you ever invited the project's participants to screen a rough cut?
Would you change a cut to respond if a participant requests it? Why, or why not?

REALITY AND TRUTH
Someone once pointed to the fact that people who work on factual programs tend to claim to represent only 'reality', but yet they call themselves 'artists' in their interpretation of reality. Do you think that's a contradiction?
Should factual programming (docs or Reality TV) *only* represent reality - what took place in front of the camera?

WHERE TO GO?
Do you communicate any of the above questions with colleagues?
Do you feel there are opportunities to discuss choices, e.g. in professional forums and associations? Or is there even a need?
Is there a code of ethics for editors like it does for journalists in many media organizations, like the BBC or CBC has for journalists?
Is there even a need for such code to give guidance? Or do you prefer the creative freedom to decide on a case-by-case basis how to make decisions?
If approached, would you or your family participate in a factual program?
Is there anything you'd like to add, or ask of me?

Appendix E: The Documentary Association of Canada (DOC) Report "Getting Real"

• Reality programming, lifestyle programming, and news magazine programming were being labeled long-form documentaries. At the beginning of the priority programming regime, all of the broadcasters eventually switched the labels of 2a to 2b of daytime programming. By lumping all "other information" programming (categories 2-5) and lifestyle programming into documentary programming, it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate other kinds of information programming and whether to use other categories at all. Program loggers stopped differentiating factual programming categories and labeled everything as a "documentary."
• Heart of the City, Investment Television, and Town and Country were originally labeled as 2As (News and Analysis). After the creation of the priority programming regime, they were labeled as 2Bs.
• Travel programs such as Word Travels, and Valerie Pringle has Left the Building were labeled as 2bs.
• Sports programming was labeled as documentaries during the 2010 Olympics.
• DIY programming was labeled as 2bs: Real Renos, and a Holmes on Holmes Special
• Some examples of lifestyle programming labeled as 2bs are: Antiques Roadshow, Balance: Television for Living Well, Body and Health, Chef at Large, Healthy Ever After, and The Great Canadian Food Show. All private conventional broadcasters labeled their reality programming as 2bs.
Reality programming labeled as documentaries included: 10 Marias: 1 Year Later, Canada's Worst Driver, Canadian Idol, Family Restaurant, Hockeyville, How Do You Solve a Problem like Maria, Kitchen Nightmares, Making the Cut (I and II), Party Mamas, Pop Stars, Star Academy, and Survivor Man.
1. It blurs the distinction between fact and fiction because of its use of actual people in contrived situations.
2. Its storylines are superficial commentary on events as they happen, rather than contextualized using in-depth analysis.
3. There is little to no establishment of the context of the events, nor in-depth treatment of a subject matter.
4. Although it uses the Cinéma-vérité style, it employs it superficially in a short time frame of exploration, without the in-depth treatment common in documentary programming.