



TE KURA KETE ARONUI

Graduate and Postgraduate E-journal – Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Volume Two

'Reality' in New Documentary Hybrids: A Case of PBS's *Frontier House*

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Abstract

In the first half decade of the twenty-first century, a large range of documentary hybrid programmes became a mainstay of western networks' television schedules, developing into a global media phenomenon. However, the majority of fact-fiction television programmes have been criticised for merely claiming to be reality and in practice "dumbing down" cultural standards. *Frontier House* (2000) has been regarded as PBS's "educational answer to reality programme". It took three modern American families back to the 1880s and documented their five-month experience living in a Montana homestead. The 'hands-on history' strand demonstrate that documentary hybrids are not necessarily predestined to be confined to the examination of banal or quirky aspects of everyday life; instead they have potential to engage with more serious topics. This welcoming and valuable hybrid formula seems to have a currency in the increasingly competitive international television market. This study explores the presentation and the concept of 'reality' in the 'hands-on history' hybrid form through textual analysis of the television series *Frontier House*. The research discusses the complexity of new documentary hybrid forms; addresses critical ambivalence about the documentary hybrid trend and evaluates the specific types of 'reality' presented in the hybrid forms.

Documentary Hybrids

In the first half decade of the 21st century, a large range of "Reality TV" programmes became a mainstay of Western networks' television schedules and have developed into a global media phenomenon. 'Documentary hybrid' is a neutral term of "Reality TV". It refers to a large range and variety of television programmes which focus on presenting 'real people's real life' and combining artificial television genres with conventional documentary styles. Although various fact-fiction programmes have achieved unprecedented commercial success in the global television market in the last half decade, their immense attraction for audiences does not meet with universal acclaim; instead, this new television form has provoked many furious critical debates within Western publics and academics.

The premise of documentary hybrids often appears to be unscripted, non-directed and non-performed. It suggests that the newly-bred television forms have kinship to the conventional documentary genre. However, many critics are anxious about documentary hybrids' threatening the existence and development of the high-brow orthodox documentary genre. The argument about whether documentary hybrid programmes bring the viewer closer to the real or distances the viewer from the real has been central to critical debate about the presentation of documentary hybrid forms (Kilborn, 2003, 10). In fact, it is noticeable that many so-called "Reality TV" shows have been criticized for claiming to be reality and their apparent "dumbing down" of cultural standards.

The complexity of documentary hybrids attributes to the specific nature of the new television form. Such programmes often deliberately blur the boundaries between the factual and the artificial, educational/informative and entertaining, and private and public. They have been generating wide audience confusion. Many well-known documentary hybrid programmes, such as the

gamedocs *Big Brother* (Endemol, 1999-) and *Survivor* (CBS, 2001-), and the docu-soap *The Osbournes* (MTV, 2001-) all reflect an obvious hybrid nature and have generated wide audience confusion. On the one hand, their premise of presenting actual people's reality and their wide adoption of documentary traditions (for example, observational mode, fly-on-the-wall camera, synchronous sound, voice over and interviews) give the viewer an impression of watching conventional documentaries. On the other hand, these programmes also contain many identifiable elements (such as light entertainment, character-driven narrative, larger-than-life performances and contrived settings) which are borrowed from various established fictional television genres, such as the game show and soap opera. The employment of a documentary style generates the viewer's 'documentary mode of engagement'. However, its format encourages the audience to read the real by referring to other entertainment-oriented genres. This generic mixture results in a complex understanding of the documentary hybrid forms by the public.

The prosperity of documentary hybrids in the beginning of the new millennium largely attributed to the commercialization of the Western television broadcasting system in the late 1990s. As Kilborn (2003, 36) articulates, "[a]ll television channels have had to adjust to the harsh, market-oriented realities of the new broadcasting age". Not only the commercial channels, but also the public service channels have been influenced by the ongoing commodification of television output. The legacy of television as public service broadcasting has gradually lightened. The broadcasters need programmes with high audience appeal but relatively low production costs. Documentary hybrids represent the generic change of documentary itself through diversion and expansion and the exterior push from the commercialization of the television ecology. The emergence of the new documentary hybrids is a response to the increasingly tight budgetary constraints of programme production in the contemporary television world (Kilborn, 2003). Documentary hybrids are considered to be a quick solution to the relief of marketing pressure, because in comparison with many other television genres, they are often "relatively inexpensive to produce, infinitely diverse in content, sufficiently interesting to attract stable, core audiences and global enough to appeal to international television buyers" (Dovey, 2000, 17).

In general, the production of documentary hybrids has pursued a narrow commercialist agenda, in terms of delivering light entertainment, looking for staged spectacle; generating sensational engagement and voyeuristic pleasure. Making a substantial profit has become many documentary hybrids' ultimate goal. This has not always been achieved without reducing quality levels.

The foregrounding of entertainment value and a lack of educational foundation and social responsibility in many documentary hybrids has resulted in a wide criticism on debasing public taste. Documentary hybrids programming reflects a tendency of "going for the lowest common denominator"(Dovey, 2000, 13). The content of the hybrid programme is often "trivial, the product of kinds of irresponsibility (a slippage of values in ethics, tastes and social judgement) among the programme-makers" (Corner, 2004, 293). The viewers were entertained by watching people making fools of themselves for the camera, conducting some kind of inhuman task or playing the "rat race". More recently, there is an obvious exhaustion of the'Reality TV' rage.

"Hands-on History" Formula

While people are wondering how far documentary hybrid can go, there is a strand of documentary hybrid format, called "hands-on history" programmes appearing as highbrow "Reality TV". The idea is to document the modern-day people re-enacting the everyday lives of people in an historical era. This hybrid format melds reality docu-soap with a strong educational foundation. The promotion defines this series as PBS's "educational answer to reality programmes" (Ostrow, January 10, 2002, F.03). Among the variety of documentary hybrid formats, this "experiential history" format is a rare example that has achieved both commercial success and favorable critical reviews. It demonstrates that entertainment and education can co-exist in the documentary hybrid form. It inspires the public service channels to explore a new way to maintain their social-cultural role as well as to survive in the increasing competitive broadcasting environment (Kilborn, 2003).

The studied case, *Frontier House* (PBS, 2001) premiered in the spring of 2001. It is a co-production of Thirteen/WNET Public Television (US) and Wall to Wall Productions (UK). The series took three modern American families back to the 1880s and documented their five-month living experiences in a Montana homestead. These families did not compete for any luxury reward; instead they tested their ability to survive like many Montana homesteaders in the 1880s.

The *1900 House* (BBC, 2000) had already proven the marketing test that this concept can work among the competitive television market. This British initiative received ratings nearly double the PBS primetime average and also won a prestigious Peabody Award (1). It observed a present-day family trying to live in the middle of England with the technology of Victorian times. Following on the highly-acclaimed *1900 House*, producer Simon Shaw and Beth Hoppe shifted their interest to a great American myth, the Western Expansion in 1880s. *Frontier House* also achieved critical acclaim and even higher ratings than *1900 House*. Its ratings were 80% higher than the average PBS series (Johnson, April 29, 2002, D.03). The success of *Frontier House* proved that "hands-on history" documentary hybrids are appreciated by a wide audience.

Since the "hands-on history" formula is a very wide and highly complicated topic, this study mainly discusses two significant contributions of the trend to the documentary genre by using *Frontier House* as an example. One is that "hands-on history" formula extends the traditional documentary's approach to the established history and the other is that it demonstrates the possibility of keeping its balance between education and entertainment in a documentary hybrid form.

(1) The Peabody Awards (The George Foster Peabody Awards) are annual international awards given for excellent in radio and television broadcasting. It is considered one of the most selective and prestigious of awards in the electronic media industry.

A New Approach to the History

Significantly, the "hands-on history" formula provided these modern people with an entirely new experience of exploring and approaching the social history of the period. Traditionally, people learn history from books or films. The institutional knowledge in the history book and educational documentary are based on existing resources, such as archives, audio records, newsreels or biographies. Although the depiction of history in the novel and fictional film often involves the writer and filmmaker's imagination and a subjective interpretation of the past. As the example of Westward Expansion, this important era of American history has evidently been romanticized in the depiction of various fictional genres. Neither nonfiction, nor fictional genre achieves a direct engagement with the history. In practical terms, modern-day people cannot experience the past in a realistic way, but only access this history from a certain distance, such as via the fictionalising of historical narratives or the reliance on archival materials. However, the idea of "hands-on history" programmes technically allows twenty-first century people to travel back in time and to 'live' in the history. This approach opens a new way of accessing the history, making it come to life.

A living Social Experiment

Linda Peavy, the project historian, calls *Frontier House* a "bold sociological experiment in time travel" (Healy, May 18, 2002). This is a vivid depiction of the "hands-on history" formula. In the case of *Frontier House*, it is a "self-testing" project which provides an opportunity for the modern-day people to test their ability to survive like Montana homesteaders in the 1880s. According to the established history, living through the winter in the frontier appears to be one of the biggest challenges for the homesteader. As a living social experiment, three modern-day American families were given tasks to prepare for survival through the winter in Montana from spring to autumn in 2000. Each family could decide how to achieve this goal by maximally allocating their labour force and carefully deploying their available resources. They did not need to actually live through the winter. By the end of the five-month experiment, the experts would judge which family did better according to their preparations of their food and fire storage.

The idea of *Frontier House* may seem to be a spin-off of CBS's popular gamedoc, *Survivor*. Similar to many other gamedocs, in the *Frontier House*, the participants did not live according to their own wishes followed prescribed format or rules. They dedicated themselves to completing the given tasks and needed to live according to certain rules, including living in an isolated Montana valley for five months with no present-day conveniences; obeying the rigid social hierarchy of the era, and enduring the drudgery and many unexpected challenges. However, there is a fundamental difference between the commercially competitive format of *Survivor* and that of *Frontier House*. The latter has no big cash reward to compete for and no tribal council to vote off the participants. The producers expected the volunteer families to maximally involve in the history and develop a community rather than encouraged them to compete with each other. It seems that self-knowledge meant to be the goal of the "hands-on history" format. In terms of *Frontier House*, the producer Simon Shaw said that "[k]nowledge is the prize" (December 2, 2000). Therefore, the volunteers' motivation of participating *Frontier House* project should be simpler than that of the *Survivor* project.

Constructed Reality

By closely examining the production agenda of the gameshow-based hybrid programmes, it is obvious that the "hands-on history" formula *does* share some similarity with many other gamedocs. Unlike conventional documentary dedicated to recording natural happenings, the gameshow-based programme makers set up the situation for the participant to encounter and often govern their on-media life throughout the production, with the participant signing a consent contract. Therefore, the claim of 'access to the real' in those gamedocs no longer has the same meaning as that of conventional documentary. In the gameshow-based hybrid programmes, documentary practice has been extended from simply recording the naturally existing reality to the "constructed reality" in a contrived and controlled media event. In terms of the "hands-on history" programmes, it can be viewed as an innovation of the documentary genre, because it explores a unique type of "reality" that only exists in the specific created-for-television event.

There is a complex interpretation which can be made of the constructed reality in the *Frontier House* series. Conventionally, the practice of documentary involves a long term investigation while the making of the fictional production follows a script. However, in the production of documentary hybrids, the producer largely works on a basic concept of the media event and follows a "before-during-after structure" of the event (Scannell, August, 2002, 272). The "real" in documentary hybrid rests on its very nature of unpredictability. As Haralovich and Trosset (2004, 75, emphasis in the original) argue, "it documents an evolving situation *as it happens*". The producer probably can predict what kind of situation will happen by setting rules, but how the participants deal with situations, including their behavior and their voiced feelings, is not under the programme maker's control. They have only a certain amount of control over the media event. The producer of *Frontier House* initially expected that the families would form a community and emphasized the idea of the self-testing of the participants, but the competition and conflict between the Clune family and the Glenn family remind the viewer of many competition-based documentary hybrids, such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor*. The friction and the conflict between the neighbours surprisingly became one of the central issues of the series and had a significant influence on the participants' lives in the homestead.

After the production of *Frontier House*, the producer Simon Shaw said "[i]t showed us more about 21st century families than 19th century families" (May 12, 2002). Due to its unpredictability a documentary hybrid can show more than it claims to show. Initially, the documentary hybrid producer merely works "on the basis of not knowing the end of the story" (Dovey, 2000, 173) and the development of the event contains much uncertainty. In the case of *Frontier House*, until the end of the production, the production team surprisingly discovered that the accomplished six-episode series actually teaches the viewer more about how modern families adjust themselves to live like their pioneers did a century ago than did their initial plan.

By and large, the unpredicted outcome of *Frontier House* effectively indicates that the series creators have insured the authenticity of their approach, in terms of presenting what happened in

front of the camera. The value of this new approach to the established history is rooted in the issue of how the modern day people encounter the history.

Emotional Truth

The most valuable and thought-provoking aspect of the "hands-on history" approach is probably the exploration of the volunteer participant's emotional engagement with the historical life. In the *Frontier House*, besides the observation of the daily routine of three families' homesteader life, the understanding of their historical experience largely depends on the feelings expressed through their video dairies and various on location interviews. Those personal reflections and subjective viewpoints are valuable information which contributes to the viewer's understanding of the extraordinary experience and enhances their engagement with their context.

It is important to note that the truth explored in "hands-on history" format exists at the emotional level. To dress like the pioneer and do similar work to a hundred years ago does not make the 'Frontier House' project special. People are likely to see this kind of re-enactment in fictional film or on the Discovery, History and National Geographic documentary channels. What is really unique about the "hands-on history" format is that the participant has an emotional connection to the past. By re-enacting the historical life, the participant would be able to share the feeling of the people living in the past. Therefore those recorded personal comments and reflections of the family member are offered as 'first-hand' information.

It is worth noting that the families' emotional engagement with this historical experiment often combines with their modern perspective. As the example in the *Frontier House* series, with the unfolding of the story, the audience's interest of the programme has been shifted from the premise of exploring what life was really like for pioneers living in the American West during the late nineteenth century to the curiosity of whether a modern-day family could handle a pioneer family's lifestyle without the take-for-granted modern conveniences. This partly is because many participants address the issue of their adjustments of the life style, such as the teenage girls' (the Clunes) frustration of not having makeup; female participants' dissatisfaction with the rigid class and gender roles, and the general realization of their personal-growth. Therefore, how these modern people adjust themselves to living like their pioneers did a century ago become the central issue of the programme.

Unlike a conventional history documentary dedicates to collecting the historical evidence, the approach of "hands-on history" programmes is to explore modern people's personal reflections to the historical experience. Therefore, the interview and video diary play an important role in the production of the *Frontier House* series.

In order to record the participant's personal reflection on their historical experience, a personalized video camera was allowed in each family's cabin. It is convenient for the participant to record their thoughts and feelings about the extraordinary experience. The confessional mode of the video diary conveys a sense of intimacy. The gesture of recording appears to be the participant's direct communication with the viewer. Though the authenticity of the confessional mode is arguable, the function of video diary in this project seems more like a supplemental device. It not only provides a chance for the participants to speak about their feelings or comment on the others, but also opened up another channel for collecting their thoughts.

In order to enhance the value of the first person information, the programme interweaves the participant's interview or video diary with the observational footage of the daily routine of the frontier life and the specialist's commentary. The observational footage shows what is happening; the personal comment elicits the impact; and finally the specialists explain the reason. The construction of the series conveys a sense that the TV experiment confirmed much of what the historians' research had indicated. It also enhances the authentic feeling of the personal reflection and subjective comments.

The emotional truth explored in this documentary hybrid form is valuable to the anthropologic study of the history. For instance, by watching the observational footage, the viewer can merely notice that women in the frontier have to endure endless drudgery from sunrise to sunset. Surely, using voice over can convey their feelings, but it would not appear as persuasive as the participants directly express their emotional response to the camera. In the case of Adrienne Clune's complaint of the isolation, the viewers are not only allowed to witness her working alone during most of the daily time and hear her confession and comments, but are also able to receive an expert's comments. The historian confirmed in the programme that "[i]n frontier memories, women frequently complain of the drudgery and isolation". This kind of construction effectively enhances the authenticity of Adrienne's emotional response to the unbearable situation.

Educational as well as Entertainment

Historical Veracity

Like many other popular documentary hybrid programmes, the "hands-on history" programme uses the observational mode to record the media event, in order to stress the nonintervention of the crew (Nichols, 1991). But what makes "hands-on history" unique is their dedication to the historical veracity. The key members of the *Frontier House* crew have a rich experience in documentary making. During the preproduction, the production team heavily researched the time and era of Western expansion in 1880s. They put great effort into ensuring a historical veracity and tried to accurately recreate historical setting in Montana as far as they could.

It is noticeable that the series used a lot of genuine objects from the period and recreated a lot of items according to the appropriate period, such as the clothes, tools and cookware. The volunteer families were not only asked to dress like the pioneers and live in the recreated historical setting; but were also required to arm them with knowledge of how to live in a historically accurate way and to be dedicated to live as close to the pioneer lifestyle as possible.

Significantly, a group of historians and experts were involved in the *Frontier House* project throughout the whole production. This arrangement shows the producer's attempt to maximize the authenticity of the project. The experts brought a wealth of expertise in various aspects of frontier living, including domestic life and daily life skills, Western modes of transportation in nineteenth century and historic preservation. They not only contributed to accurately rebuilding the past according to the historical period, their knowledge also adds great educational value to the 'Frontier House' project.

Before the production team headed to the Montana homestead, the experts provided a two-week compact training for the three modern-day families to learn how to use the period tools, prepare typical food and deal with livestock. The lectures also discussed social and political issues and provided sources of historical information.

This exhaustive exploration of the daily routines of the past has been excluded from most of the history books, fictional films and even conventional documentaries on this subject. The high rating of the series not only indicates that contemporary viewers appreciated this kind of unique approach to history, but also demonstrates that the production team is capable of carrying out PBS's educational obligation through the "hands-on history" formula as well as further exploring the entertainment value of the hybrid format.

Casting

The highly acclaimed "hands-on history" programmes has testified that education and entertainment are not necessary against each other. On the contrary, they can coexist in a documentary hybrid form and benefit each other. The casting of *Frontier House* reflect the producers' attempt to generate a dramatic effect through the conflict created by the participants' different social identities, diverse personal interests, and various personalities. This programme

recruited an interesting mix of people who really wanted to explore the history and were ready to go through with the challenge, rather than simply looking to be on television.

The three ordinary American families were carefully selected from more than 5000 applications to typify very different forms of the contemporary American family. The millionaire Clune family of California is a large family including three kids and a niece. The contrast of their current living conditions with the harsh life in a frontier house, and potential issues between the family and their close relative would clearly generate some interesting stories during the production. The religious Glenn family from Tennessee is a matriarchal middle-class family. The harsh living condition and struggle for survival would be a big challenge for testing the relationship between the couple and the step-father and the children. The newlywed Brooks family from Massachusetts balances the other families. The intimate and solid relationship between the father and son, and honeymooning young couple with no child would be a contrast to the other two families. Moreover, their ethnic identity as African-American also gives the show a broader representation of the contemporary American family. Referring to the entertainment-orientated documentary hybrids, the casting ranges through various traits, social backgrounds and demographic differences to largely ensure conflict between the contestants complicate their community interaction and make for some interesting stories.

Apparently, the three selected families represent three different stereotypes of contemporary American families. The clever arrangement of the producer would not only maximize the possibility of creating dramatic moments, but also be able to effectively achieve a wide public appeal. This arrangement minimizes the distance between the subject and the audience. The viewer would "recognize the participants as belonging to her or his own habitus" (Tincknell and Raghuram, 2004, 258). This casting decision not only reflects the producer's attempt to replicate three different stereotypical homesteader families, it also maximizes the possibility of generating interesting stories.

Scenario

The carefully designed scenario also enhances the entertaining possibility of the series. Although three families challenge the same task and work towards the same goal, three families were given different financial backgrounds and resources. The Glens are the only family to have a fully built cabin waiting for them. The Clunes were allocated a semi-constructed cabin and the Brooks started their frontier life by having to chop down trees. Each family also adopted diverse survival strategies according to their available resources, labour force and personal preferences. The Glenn family invested their money in poultry raising; the Clunes worked hard on complementing the storage of a food supply for their family of six; and the experience of the Brooks mainly focused on a frontier wedding. The diversity of the three families open up new opportunities for intra-family interaction and relationships between families. It allows the programme to portray a vivid picture of homesteaders' life in Montana.

Like many other game-doc producers who openly intervenes in the programme "from start to finish, fixing everything to suit their own ends" (Peyser, August 2002, 49), the producer of *Frontier House* also set the tasks and decided the overall rules of the experiment during the filming. They also planted some theatrical elements to ensure dramatic stories and enhance the entertainment value of the series. One of the most obvious examples is the young couple's attempt to marry during the production. The frontier wedding undoubtedly could add extra dramatic flavour and romantic touches to the programme. Similarly, the giving of permission to each family's bringing one modern product into the 1880s setting and receiving letters from the outside world also guarantees that the series will have plenty of valuable footage to work with.

Besides the deployment of these potentially dramatic elements, the producer also planned to throw surprises at the participants, for instance, the arrival of a school teacher and the visiting of Karen Glenn's mother and Tracy Clune's parents. Besides these planned surprises, there also some unpredictable surprises, such as a June snowstorm, unanticipated starvation, the Clunes' breaking

the rules, and the disintegration of the Glenn family. Altogether these surprises create dramatic stories and enhance the entertainment value of the series.

Narrative

In *Frontier House*, the three families' five months of frontier life experience has been condensed to approximately six hours to accord to the demands of a television schedule. The selection of footage and the decisions made for editing demonstrate its intention to keep the promise of truth telling, enhance an educational function, as well as maximizing the entertainment value of the programme. Moreover, as discussed previously, the interweaving of observational footage, interviews and video, and historian's comments effectively enhance the educational value of the text and ensure the referential value of the emotional information.

The narrative structure of the *Frontier House* maintains a similarity to that of the soap opera. It encourages the audience to read the real by referring to other entertainment-oriented television formats. This editing strategy is not to distort information or create appearances that do not exist in reality. Haralovich and Trosset (2004) asserts that "the power and popularity of reality programming depends on the authenticity of the contrived reality" (79). In the case of *Frontier House*, the editing still "support[s] the credibility of the experience" (Dancyger, 2002, 122). The *Frontier House* series deliberately blurs the boundaries between documentary and soap opera in order to convey a sense of watching a "real life" version of a soap opera, or the dramatic and spectacle aspects of real life. This strategy certainly intelligently keeps the balance between marketing appeal and documentary value. It helps to hold the viewer, but does necessarily distort the reality.

Conclusion

As Kilborn (2003, 5) argues, "[c]ommercial pressures on broadcasters are hardly going to get less intense" which means "serious television documentary seems to have to fight for its place in the schedule alongside other genres" (Kilborn, 2003, 8). Relying on the broadcaster to leave a privileged or protected space for traditional documentary is no longer feasible (Kilborn, 2003). The ideas of education and entertainment are not necessarily against each other. As the American journalist Ed Murrow said, "Television can entertain, it can educate, it can even inspire" (cited in Willis, 2000, 100).

PBS's *Frontier House* and many "hands-on history" programmes have proved that in the documentary hybrid form it is possible to keep a good balance between entertainment and education. *Frontier House* has given an educational answer to 'Reality' TV. The 'hands-on history' strand demonstrates that documentary hybrids are not necessarily predestined to be confined to the examination of banal or quirky aspects of everyday life; instead they have potential to engage with more serious topics.

Frontier House reflects a high educational value with an emphasis on accurately recreating the historical environment of the 1880s' Montana homestead and providing detailed information of the lifestyle of homesteaders. Moreover, the idea of modern people encountering history contains value for social and anthropological studies. To a large extent, the "hands-on history" programmes are very thought-provoking to many viewers, because those ordinary peoples' unique experience inspired the viewers to re-evaluate their modern lives, such as learning to appreciate the modern convenience that they used to take for granted and re-building their family value. On one hand, using documentary approach to the topic ensures a high educational foundation of the "hands-on history" formula. On the other hand, borrowing elements from artificial genres enhances the entertainment value of the documentary hybrid form.

To some extent, watching *Frontier House* is like having a vivid history lesson of an important era of American history. For many viewers, the "hands-on history" programme is probably much easier to access than reading a history book or watching a traditional history documentary. It possibly also gives the viewer a feeling of enjoying a well-scripted TV drama.

This kind of welcoming and valuable hybrid formula seems to have a strong future in the competitive factual television market. The production team has continued to produce these 'hands-on history' programmes, for instance, *The Colonial House* (2002), *The Manor House* (2003) and the new series *Texas Ranch House* (2005), in which a group of modern-day people are taken back to 1876's Texas, the era of Western frontier expansion. The later installations show that this strand has a currency in the increasingly competitive international television market and has the potential for an enduring appeal for the mainstream audience.

The "hands-on history" strand is an innovative documentary hybrid format. It allows history to become more accessible to the ordinary viewer. Renov (1993, 36) notes that the development of a genre is "an ongoing process of self-examination and boundary-testing". The emergence of "hands-on-history" programme can be regarded as an extension of traditional documentary practice. The generic mixture of nonfiction and fictional television genres opens a wide space for the programme maker to test the boundaries and innovate established formats. It is likely that more new breeds of such hybrid shows will emerge worldwide in the future.

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