Contemporary Television Series

Contemporary Television Series:
Narrative Structures and Audience Perception

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

WATCHING THE COPS:
POLICE PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA
REPRESENTATIONS OF POLICE WORK
IN BRITISH TELEVISION CRIME DRAMA

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Introduction

For many people, media sources—newspapers, films, fictional and 'reality' television shows are the main source of knowledge and perceptions of the police (Skogan, 1990; Mawby, 2003; Huey, 2010; Reiner 2010). There is considerable evidence to bear this out. In the Policing for London survey, 80% of respondents said that the news media were their principal source of information about the police while 29% of respondents got their information from 'media fiction' (Fitzgerald et al. 2002). In the British Crime Survey (2006–7), 59% of people said they got their information from television and radio news, with 10% citing media fiction. As a consequence of this, as Huey (2010) has pointed out, there has been a growing body of work particularly in the United States on the question of whether fictionalized and 'reality-based' television crime programmes have any impact on audience knowledge and expectations of the criminal justice system (Stenross & Kleinman, 1989; Podlas, 2006; Tyler, 2006; Mann, 2006; Shelton, Barak & Young, 2007; Schweitzer & Saks, 2007; Coles & Dioso-Villa, 2007). However, the issue of whether the police themselves perceive that television portrayals of police work might have an impact on both public expectations of the police role and on public co-operation with the police remains an open empirical question (Huey, 2010). Some work has been done in a U.S. context (Arcuri, 1977; Perlmutter, 2000; Huey, 2010) and in an Eastern European context (Branea and Guguianu, 2013) but to date no work has been done in this

area in the United Kingdom.

   This study explores British police officers' perceptions of the influence of police procedurals on public expectations of the police and on public interaction with the police. Through focus groups with officers from two different forces—the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and the Greater Manchester Police Service (GMP), I look firstly at these officers' perceptions of mass media images of policing and how these affect police work and the public's treatment of the police. Secondly, I examine whether police officers from these focus groups perceive mass media images of policing to have an impact on public expectations of the police; and thirdly, I explore how police officers from the focus groups might wish the police to be represented in crime fiction in ways which, in their opinion, might increase public understanding and support.

Research

   In this paper, I draw on the results of three focus groups—one from the Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and two from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)—in which participants were asked to watch an episode of *The Bill* and then to engage in a semi-structured group discussion. There were six GMP officers (two male, four female) and two civilian indexers in the first focus group; eleven officers (nine male, two female) participated in the first MPS focus group and in the second MPS group, four officers (all male) and two civilian indexers participated. The officers in the GMP group and first MPS group were all detectives—their ranks ranging in both groups from Detective Inspector to Detective Constable. In the second MPS focus group, all the officers were uniformed and their ranks were either Sergeant or Constable. In the study, I refer to respondents only by the police service for which they work and not by rank or occupational group in order to ensure anonymity.

   The focus groups all started with a screening of an episode of *The Bill,* followed by a semi-structured group discussion. *The Bill* was a British police procedural television series that was broadcast on the ITV network from 16 October 1984 until 31 August 2010. The programme focused on the lives and work of one shift of police officers, both uniformed and detective officers, rather than on any particular aspect of police work. At the time of the series' conclusion, *The Bill* was the longest-running police procedural television series in the United Kingdom. I decided to show an episode of *The Bill* to these officers, partly because of its longevity and popularity but also because it depicted a variety of police work and roles. In addition, the show always placed particular emphasis on procedural

accuracy and, for that reason, may have been seen to be particularly influential on audiences in terms of making claims for authenticity (Leishman and Mason, 2003). Participants in all three groups were asked questions about the episode they had just seen and questions related to other police procedural dramas. All questions were related to the core concerns of the study: (1) to what extent do officers perceive fictional representations of their work to have an impact on public understanding and interaction with the police and (2) what aspects of police work and the police role would they like to see portrayed in television drama in order to increase public understanding and decrease unrealistic expectations of police work.

Synopsis of episode shown to the focus group
The Bill: **'Corrupted', ITV 1**

Sergeant Stone and PC Sally Armstrong are called to a fight in a nightclub. Once there, Sally is pushed to the ground. One of the men involved in the fight goes back to help her. It transpires that he is an undercover officer from another station—PC Andrew Tipping—investigating drug dealing in the club. Tipping knows he will be arrested and asks Sally to take a stash of cocaine that he has on him, which he has just taken from a dealer. Sally agrees but regrets it. Meanwhile, the other person involved in the fight, David Bartlett, has been rushed to hospital. He has DC Jo Masters' card in his wallet. DC Masters is called to the hospital. Bartlett's daughter died at the club two years earlier after taking cocaine and her death was recorded as accidental. Bartlett has been doing his own investigation and believes that the undercover officer, Tipping, is involved in corruption. Meanwhile, Stone tries to pull strings for Sally to make sure no-one discovers she has covered up for Tipping.

Do police officers perceive that mass media images of policing have an impact on police work and interaction with the public?

The proliferation and expansion of mass media communications—radio, television, the newspaper industry and the Internet—has been one of the most significant social transformations of the last sixty years. One of the effects of this expansion of the mass media has been the social diffusion of images of the police.

Loader and Mulcahy (2003) have suggested that one of the consequences of what they describe as the 'routine visualization of policing on British television' (p.17) is that police dramas have enabled people to feel they know about the world of policing, and to fit their own encounters into this 'cultural imaginary'. This was echoed by one respondent from the GMP

group, who suggested that:

'I think [police dramas] create the expectations of society, people's expectations of the criminal justice system, should they become witnesses, etc. The vast majority of people have very little contact, if any, with the police and they get their perception of it from the television. And when they do come into that situation, they react with that perception they've developed. If you see on a police show, that it's okay to say, I'm not going to talk to a police officer or to swear at them, then that's what they'll do. Television creates the perception for a lot of people because they have no real perception of dealing with the police.'

Officers from the Greater Manchester Police focus groups also believed that representations of police engendered expectations in the public as to how the police might treat them. For example, as one Greater Manchester Police officer pointed out:

> I think the thing for me is that it is so far from realistic, going up and talking to people or interviewing people. Everybody is aggressive with you or anti, everybody, as you said, carries on doing what they were doing. I mean, half the officers there, they never cautioned them or gave them the opportunity to have a solicitor present. It's just completely procedurally inaccurate.

Mastrofski (1999) argued that there are some fundamental expectations that should shape our treatment at the hands of the police, which include 'attentiveness, reliability, responsiveness, competence, manners and fairness'. Officers in the Greater Manchester Police commented on the high levels of aggression shown by both the public and police in their interaction on *The Bill* and contrasted it with their own experiences and need, as one officer put it, to get people onside and to trust them. However, although Foster (2003) argued that these principles tend not to be among the most valued of street policing culture, other researchers note a marked difference in the gendered quality of some street encounters. Braithwaite and Brewer (1998) found that 'the tactical choices of male officers more often placed them at risk of physical confrontation... Females were generally more supportive of citizens, preferring tactics which emphasized mutual power in the interaction' (p.286). Similarly, Loftus (2009), in her ethnographic study of two forces, suggested that in the main, a more service-oriented approach to street encounters was taken by female officers. As noted previously, the Greater Manchester Police focus group was made up predominantly of female officers and civilian staff and such perspectives may reflect a gendered reaction to interaction with the public.

When asked directly if they had ever found the public unwilling to engage with them, for example, because of something they had seen in a police drama such as *The Bill*, there was again a marked difference in response. Officers from the Metropolitan Police focus group said that none of them had experienced any problems with members of the public due to anything they might have seen on television, but officers from the Greater Manchester Police focus group indicated otherwise:

> If they go off what they've seen off the television and then they think, oh, I'm going to be a witness, I'm going to get petrol bombs through my front window, I'm going to get ran off the road, I'm going to get threatened and I'm going to get assaulted. Now I don't know about you but I know all the shootings we've worked on off Moss Side and I've never known one witness to get injured or actually ... but it's the perception it creates. And then when we come to investigate a job, people all say, "Oh no, I'd rather not get involved." And we say, "Why, what's been happening, what experience have you had that you'd rather not get involved?" and they say, "Oh no, I've seen it on *The Bill*, I'll be threatened, you'll give them my name and address, I'll have to go to court and stand up in front of others."

The Greater Manchester police officer suggested that, by portraying the handling of witnesses in a way that was unrealistic and out of date, the show might also create a fear of crime and a fear of the judicial system in the public.

However, both focus groups raised the point that, on occasion, television drama can be too realistic, especially in terms of depiction of forensic procedures. In the 1970s, respondents to Arcuri's (1977) survey on how police officers viewed fictional depictions of the work were highly critical of the way in which police dramas portrayed the resources available to police for their investigations. According to Arcuri (1977), one respondent observed that 'They, the public, feel that all experts are at our fingertips... as well as all up-to-date crime labs. In most cases, that's crap' (p.243). Writing over thirty years later, Huey (2010) elicited similar responses from respondents in her study of criminal investigators' perceptions of the impact of media representations of their work on public expectations. One of her respondents commented that 'CSI makes us look like idiots when we go to scenes, because they all think that they know exactly where a fingerprint can be found and what technique to do' (Huey, 2010, p.63).

Brunsdon (2000) argued that, since the late 1990s, there has been a move towards the medicalization of crime within the police drama genre, with programme makers increasingly depicting the police themselves employing new forensic methods to catch criminals, rather than this being

the sole preserve of pathologists—a move which some officers find actively poses a threat to their work. One Metropolitan officer described how an episode of a police drama portraying criminals using caustic soda to cover their DNA had been used by offenders on a rape case in North London. He made the point that:

> The only thing I really object to on these sorts of things is when they do say how we deal with issues of forensic importance that are important to us and not commonly known outside of our fraternity. I mean, why on earth do you put all the cards on the table? We don't have that many cards left in our deck at all. So why do we tell the whole world how to do this, how to avoid that. If you're gonna show that sort of thing, could you at least send them down the wrong path.

In conclusion, officers from both forces raised concerns about the increasingly inaccurate and out of date portrayals of aspects of police procedure but, on occasion, officers conversely suggested representations of policing could be too authentic, particularly where forensic 'trade secrets' were being given away to potential offenders.

How do police officers perceive representations of policing might affect public perceptions and expectations of policing?

In his study of police attitudes towards media representations of policing, Perlmutter (2000) drew upon a study by Radelet and Carter (1994) to argue that citizens form expectations about the police from a variety of sources, including the mass media, and that if the police meet a member of the public's expectations, that person is more likely to have a favourable image of the police. However, Perlmutter (2000) argued that problems arise when those expectations are based upon unrealistic criteria and that one of the main sources of unrealistic criteria by which the public judge the police is the mass media and, in particular, television drama.

A number of commentators (Arcuri, 1977; Perlmutter, 2000; Reiner, 2003; Huey, 2010) have argued that, from the police's point of view, positive representations of policing can create almost as many problems for the police as negative representations, in terms of creating unrealistic expectations in the public about the police's speed and ingenuity of detection. This was a theme that was picked up by all the focus groups and they cited inaccurate timescales of police drama and how events were compressed and edited to render more rapid resolutions of the issue. Transitional but necessary events such as filing forms and completing paperwork are culled to make the narrative more interesting but, as one Metropolitan officer pointed out, this can have a negative effect on

members of the public:

> I think that's the thing that gets me, totally unrealistic timescales. The problem is that people, whenever you speak to them, they say, oh, is it like *The Bill*? People have got this perception that our job is like that, and the fact that when we turn round and say it's gonna take a month to get this or it's gonna take weeks to get this, they think we're having 'em over, because they actually think we can get it straight away. And that's the problem, it's just totally unrealistic.

Officers were then asked questions about the storyline they had just watched and whether they thought specific details of the story might affect the public's perception of the police organization—i.e. the fact that this was an episode entitled '*Corruption*' and was about a young female uniformed officer's attempt to cover up for another corrupt officer.

Officers from all three focus groups believed that this episode had not shown the police organization in a favourable light and were concerned at the impact this might have on members of the public, particularly if asked to sit on a jury. One officer commented, 'They see that and they think, right, we're all, you know, corrupt.' Respondents from both focus groups commented that the storyline was inaccurate and showed a lack of research; that if an officer had been asked during the course of a raid in a nightclub to take a wrap of cocaine from another officer, the initial reaction would be to wonder if this might be an integrity test. However, the fact that the sergeant then attempted to cover up the young officer's mistake seemed to create the biggest controversy in the Metropolitan Police focus group:

> I thought the problem with it at the beginning was, the skipper, when she actually confessed, he had a go at her, and was saying, you know, outrageous, blah, blah, and then, he then goes on her side and then starts trying to cover it all up and there was a comment at the end, we all gotta look after our own and each other, and you're thinking well, you know, people do actually believe this is exactly true and this is what happens, and this makes 'em out to be corrupt, really...

The key line of the episode, which triggered the most controversy in the discussion, was at the end of the episode, where the young officer thanks the sergeant for covering up her mistake. The sergeant comments that, as police officers, 'we have to look after our own.' One Metropolitan officer commented that 'the general public do think the police all stick together, don't they? You are one big gang, one family and you have to look after each other and that's taken to the extreme. We know that's wrong.'

Although participants from both focus groups were at great pains to argue that the police had never been more accountable at any time in their history, and that any idea that the police 'looked after their own' was simply erroneous, many commentators have emphasized the internal solidarity of police officers (Clark, 1965; Westley, 1970; Cain, 1973; Reiner, 1978; Graef, 1989; Skolnick and Fyfe, 1993; Crank, 1998; Waddington, 1999; Foster, 2003; Loftus, 2009). Many studies also have stressed the codes of behaviour that enjoin officers to back each other up in the face of external investigations (Stoddard, 1968; Westley, 1970; Punch, 1985; Kleinig, 1996; Newburn, 1999; Loftus, 2009) though often, as Cain (1973) and Loftus (2009) point out, the offences that colleagues shield are not major but frequently attempts to conceal minor violations from supervisors. Thus, while internal solidarity and looking out for colleagues in beleaguered situations might be part of police culture, it would seem from the response of officers in both focus groups that this was an aspect of the 'backstage' (Waddington, 1999) of police work that officers would not wish to be made public on screen.

How might police officers wish to see themselves portrayed in television drama?

Participants from both focus groups, when asked how they would wish the police to be represented in television drama, argued that three important aspects of their work—black humour, the effects of some cases on police officers and what some officers called 'the reality of police work' or the service-oriented aspects of both frontline and detective work—were left out of current police drama. These were aspects that, in their opinion, would do more to increase public support for the police than attention to accuracy and detail.

Waddington (1999) has talked of how the police station canteen is a 'backstage area' where officers, whose actions are often invisible on the street, engage in displays before their colleagues and relate versions of events that affirm their world-view—that such banter is a palliative to the 'dirty work' (Hughes, 1962) of everyday policing. However, Perlmutter (2000) has argued, in his study of police officers' perceptions of media representations of their work, that the police officers he observed on patrol would see the inclusion of black humour in media representations as an unacceptable front-stage projection.

Garland and Bilby (2011) suggested that 'laughing and joking about the job, the villains and each other' (p.119) is a key ingredient of successful British dramas. However, officers in all three groups argued that the humour in the episode of *The Bill* they had just watched was too

'sanitized'. Instead, as one officer argued, the humour was simply not black enough and what was omitted from most police dramas was the way in which banter helps officers as a coping mechanism to deal with the horrors they see on a daily basis. One murder detective illustrated this:

> I'll give you an example. The team are all sitting there and the team all know they're going to watch a video of the murder scene. And you see people sitting there, laughing, joking, on ours, we've got this fella eating his second bacon butty and one of the girls says, "Bloody hell, you're gonna watch a murder scene." And he says, "If I didn't eat every time, I saw something gory, I'd be anorexic because that's all I do."

Another officer suggested that the depiction of humour in television drama might also serve to 'humanise' police work: As she suggested, 'if you get people to laugh with you, you've won half the battle to get them onside. And it makes us seem more human too, I think.'

Focus group participants also said that police dramas rarely portrayed accurately the effects of some cases on police officers. One Greater Manchester Police officer argued that too often the creators of television drama appeared to have very clichéd ideas of what stress did to police officers. As she commented, 'the way they show it at the minute in police drama is that every man goes home, drinks too much and beats his wife and every policewoman feels guilty about putting her job first.'

However, the same officer suggested that if the public were to see the effects on police officers of dealing with sudden deaths, cot deaths or dealing with victims, public support might be increased. She described the impact on a colleague who found the body of a missing child:

> He had searched it [the area where the child was found] and said he remembered seeing the bag but he didn't look in it, he thought it was rubbish and it absolutely destroyed him, absolutely destroyed him. She was already dead, he could never have saved her but the fact as he was saying, that her little body was left lying there two weeks-and you could see where rats had gone into the bag and things like that. Just haunted that man.

By contrast, researchers have suggested that, from very early on in their careers, officers of both sexes (Martin, 1979) learn that the expression of emotion is problematic. As Jackall (2007) suggested, 'the whole construction of the police world depends on officers maintaining the appearance of a rugged emotional distance, especially from the most emotion-laden and draining aspects of their work' (p. 236).

The last aspect of police work that both uniformed officers and detectives believed was missing from television drama was the service-

oriented aspects of their jobs. As Foster (2003) has pointed out, despite the 'image of fast cars and catching criminals' (p.200), policing is frequently a more mundane and routine activity than is portrayed in the media, popular fiction and by police officers themselves. Many observational studies (Punch & Naylor, 1973; Skogan, 1990; Bowling & Foster, 2002; Loftus, 2009) have supported this and have suggested that, rather than speeding to the scenes of crime at high speed, in fact the police spend much of their time as 'the only 24 hour service agency available to respond to those in need' (Morgan and Newburn, 1997, p. 79). However, as Foster (2003) and Loftus (2009) have argued, the obsession with excitement and the emphasis in police working culture on crime-fighting being 'real' police work may lead to officers perceiving that some of the social service tasks they are often asked to perform are a waste of time and effort.

In his study of American patrol officers' perceptions of media images of their work, Perlmutter (2000) suggested that the officers he observed believed 'real' police work to be about crime-fighting. As part of his research, Perlmutter (2000) took photographs of the officers he observed at work and comments that when the officers looked at the photographs:

Overwhelmingly their preferences, the pictures that they stopped to comment on and ask for copies of, were action pictures: cops with guns raised, cops running, struggles with suspects, moments of anger on the street. Pictures displaying the procedural aspects of police work were flipped past without comment. (p. 13)

In the same vein, Perlmutter (2000) suggested that the officers he interviewed also believed such media images helped to shape public expectations of the police and that role strain was created by officers believing themselves to be under pressure to live up to that expectation. By contrast, the British uniformed officers and detectives in this study believed that more emphasis on the service aspects of both occupational roles would increase public understanding of policing and possibly even help to increase public support. Frontline officers argued for more storylines showing police work with communities while murder detectives argued for more screen time to be devoted in police drama to depicting detectives' care of victims and victims' families:

I think Yorkshire were the first ones who said we've got to get a property bag that we can take property back. But a lot of people, they've lost a husband or they've lost a son and they can't open it. They put it away in a cupboard and they might decide two years later they can't stay in that house any more. So they go to move and then they find this bin bag and they don't even know what it is, they rip it open and bang, they're right back on the floor again. So you have to have something that is

> recognisable—how do you do it? Can't be black because that's rubbish bags. Let's have them green? No, green's for garden rubbish. The thought that goes into the bags...

As the same officer argued, such elements of care and thought on the part of the police for victims' families are rarely, if ever, shown in police dramas—yet in her opinion, such depictions could only increase support for the police and what she described as the 'reality' of police work.

As Loftus (2009) pointed out, there have been many developments in the British policing landscape over the last decade, many of which could be expected to transform police culture or cultures. There has been, according to Loftus, a notable increase in the number of minority ethnic, female, gay, and lesbian officers. Added to that, as Loftus (2009) has argued, another development in the police organization over the last decade, as a result of recommendations of the Macpherson Report (1999) which found the Metropolitan Police institutionally racist, has been 'the emergence of respect for diversity and recognition of cultural and gendered identities in policing discourse and practice' (p. x).

With that in mind, it could be argued that changes in the field in terms of a more diverse society and in terms of greater political sensitivity around policing may have led to changes in police cultures and that this is reflected in both uniformed officers' and detectives' emphasis on wishing to see the service elements of their role reflected in television drama.

Conclusion

In this study, I have attempted to explore whether or not police officers perceive that representations of their work in police procedurals such as *The Bill* have any impact on their interaction with the public and on public support for the organization. I have also attempted to explore what aspects of the police role or of policing in general officers would like to see represented in such dramas in order to increase public understanding of police work.

Through focus groups with uniformed officers, detectives and civilian staff from two British police forces—the Metropolitan Police Service and the Greater Manchester Police Service—I suggest that officers of both occupational groups do perceive representations of the police and policing in police procedurals to have an impact on interaction with the public. Officers gave specific instances of this—witnesses refusing to come forward in murder investigations as a direct result of representations of the treatment of witnesses on British police shows. Conversely officers argued that, on occasion, police procedurals could be too accurate in terms of

depicting crimes such as rape or burglary and sometimes gave 'trade secrets' away to offenders, enabling them to elude arrest. Officers also expressed concern at the representation of their organization in the episode of *The Bill* shown to them as part of the overall discussion. Respondents argued that the sub-culture of internal solidarity among police officers gave a very negative and inaccurate picture of the organization. They also argued that the depiction was inaccurate as a result of extensive reform in the police organization, despite recent British police researchers' findings to the contrary (Loftus, 2009).

The second research question explored the issue of how police officers would wish to see their work depicted in television drama and which aspects, in their opinion, were never covered. Firstly, officers argued that the black humour they employed to help them deal with difficult cases was often 'sanitized' and they suggested that the depiction of such humour might serve to 'humanise' them in the eyes of the viewing public. This was in direct contrast to Perlmutter's (2000) study of American police officers' perceptions of media representations of their work, in which Perlmutter (2000) argued that this is an aspect of police culture officers would not wish to reveal to the public. Secondly, officers argued that too often television police drama depicts a clichéd view of the effects of stress on officers, showing both male and female officers as dysfunctional in their personal lives as a result of stress at work. Focus group respondents argued that depictions of the effects of certain cases on officers, particularly those involving children, might serve to increase public understanding of police work and the 'real' stresses of the job, even though this contradicts police ethnographers' findings (Martin, 1979; Jackall, 2007) that any display of emotion is seen as weakness in both male and female officers. Lastly, both uniformed and detective officers argued for a greater emphasis on the service-oriented aspects of the work of both occupational groups, despite previous ethnographers, particularly of patrol work, suggesting that this is the aspect of police work least valued by officers (Van Maanen, 1978; Foster, 2003; Loftus, 2009).

While it is only possible within the scope of the present study to suggest very tentatively that such findings may indicate a shift in British police attitudes and cultures, following the extensive reforms in the organization over the last ten years, it is certainly possible to suggest that police officers believe that media representations of policing can and do shape interaction with the public and, on occasion, impact on police work. It is also possible to suggest, given the influence of media representations on public understanding of the police role, that more portrayals of the

service-oriented aspects of both frontline and investigative police work in crime drama might very well increase public understanding of police work and decrease unrealistic public and media expectations of the organization.

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CHAPTER TWO

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMES
AND THE NARRATION OF TV TECHNOLOGY

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In this chapter, I will discuss how TV technology has been narrated in several different ways over the years in Swedish public service children's programmes. The narratives in the children's programmes have been adapted to the TV institution's expectations regarding the child audience. Thus, studying TV narratives in children's programmes (cf. Lury, 2010, 2005) allows us to investigate how the TV institution imagines its child audience. It also allows us to examine notions of technology and a child TV audience as intertwined configurations (Woolgar, 1991) in the narratives of children's TV. I will provide examples of implicit and explicit use of technology in children's programmes and discuss examples in which the children on screen are more agents in their own right than followers of adult intentions with regard to TV technology, as well as examples in which the adult addressers are the ones introducing TV technology into the narration. In particular, this chapter deals with the fact that TV communication is one-way, but that, despite this, the narratives configure a joint 'we' between the TV institution and the imagined child audience (cf. Allen, 1992, Ang, 1991, Bignell, 2005, Buckingham, 2002, Edin, 2000, Hartley, 1987, Pettersson, 2013, Woolgar, 1991). This is accomplished both by ignoring the use of technology in TV production in the narratives as well as by using technology to tell stories in TV programmes for children. The analysis draws on TV Studies, Child Studies and Visual Studies to theorize and investigate how technology and children as a TV audience are co-produced, intertwined configurations in TV narratives (Corner, 1999, Ellis, 1993, Landström, 2009, Lury, 2010, 2005, Pettersson, 2013, Rose, 2001, Woolgar, 1991).

What stuck me when analyzing a large number of children's TV programmes is that the way in which programmes take up aspects of TV programme production has changed over time. This raises questions

concerning what a 'proper' narrative for children is, what role TV technology is allowed to play in the narratives of children's programming and what this can tell us about the imagined child TV audience.

Children's public service programmes have existed since Swedish TV broadcasts began in 1956 (cf. Rydin, 2000). And since almost the very beginning, children's programmes have had a fixed time in the schedule. In this respect, children's programmes can be seen as a long-running TV series with a format recognizable over time and with hosts and characters who stay with the programme for long periods of time. Thus, children make up an audience that the public service TV companies have recognized from the beginning. Moreover, these companies are required to produce and broadcast programming for this group to fulfill their obligations to the state (cf. Pettersson, 2013). Here, I will present three examples of how TV technology has aligned with the TV–child audience configuration to produce narratives in children's programmes. These examples stem from research material from my PhD thesis *TV for Children—How Swedish Public Service Television Imagines a Child Audience*, which investigated TV programming for children from 1980–2007 (Pettersson, 2013).[1] Altogether the study investigated about 500 TV programmes for children, and the examples analyzed here are based on the analysis of the entire research material (Pettersson, 2013).

TV technology and children: what should children be told?

In the following, three different narratives from three time periods will be analyzed. The questions addressed are: In what ways are the technological aspects of TV production incorporated into the narratives for a child TV audience? And how are the technology and the child audience configured in relation to the TV institution?

Technology disrupting the narrative

In 1980, there was a public service monopoly on TV broadcasts in Sweden, and only two TV channels were broadcasting (cf. Hadenius et al., 2011). In one of them, the children's programme the *Half past four house* (*Halvfem huset*) was broadcast. It was a series that ran for several seasons, with 30-minute-long episodes that filled the whole children's programme

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[1] A pilot study covering TV material from 2005–2007 was also conducted, and one of the examples discussed here stems from that study.

timeslot on Channel 1. The programme analyzed here contained several songs, an animated film, a saga about trolls and a band; moreover, both children and adults were present in the programme studio.[2]

The programme starts with an intro that resembles a filmed illustration in a children's picture book. When the intro ends, a man is seen walking around in what looks like a big living room and greeting a number of children, most of whom are sitting on a sofa in front of him. He introduces himself as James[3] and places himself on a stool in the middle of the room. He asks the children to look around the room; he says he thinks the room looks nice and suggests that a king might have lived there. Some of the children join him in talking about the story of the make-believe king and the room. The camera is moved to correspond to James and the children's talk, sweeping the parts of the room they are referring to. All of a sudden a child's voice is heard saying: 'So many cameras!' and another child's voice is heard joining this line of the conversation. This topic is, however, ignored by James, who instead focuses on his guitar; it is also ignored by the camera, which does not show any filming equipment at all. That the host and the production team are not interested in focusing on the technology or the TV production aspect of the setting also becomes clear a few seconds later. James is mostly filmed from the front. Between him and the camera, with their backs to the camera, are the children seated on a sofa and on the floor. James talks to the children sitting in front of him as well as to the audience by looking over the children and into the camera. The boy sitting closest to the camera on the right is looking quite attentively at James during the discussion of the room and he raises his hand to get attention. The other children are not raising their hands but talking freely, and the host does not recognize that there is someone waiting for his turn to speak. The boy's attention is, however, caught by the camera behind him, and soon he as well as some other children sitting close to the camera are looking straight into it and at the technological equipment near it. One boy picks his nose and stares into the camera and a girl also turns her head. This only takes place on screen for a second, as the camera focus is moved closer to the host, but when it moves away the boys comes into focus once again and one of them says: "Look we can see

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[2] *Half past four, The half past four house* (Halvfem, Halvfemhuset) 1980, 19 September, Channel 1, 16.30-17.00. Produced by the Swedish Public Service Television Company.

[3] His full name is James Hollingworth, and he recorded several children's songs during the 1970s. Information on him and the programme can be found in the TV guide magazine for Wednesday 17th of September in 1980 (Röster i Radio TV 1980, no. 38).

ourselves on TV!" The camera focus then shifts quite quickly onto two other adults in another part of the studio, and the children looking into the camera are thereby moved out of the frame. The programme continues with an adult man reading a folk saga followed by a short animated film and live music. James and the children come back in focus as soon as the different programming parts have ended. But the camera is not placed behind the two boys again.

The programme addresses children using child drawings, animation, music and singing, but foremost by connecting the children in the programme and the child audience at home in its narrative. The host, James, tries to continue to build on this link by asking all children—both those in the studio and those in front of the TV—to look around the room, but the room that the host and the producers want to create for viewers is not sanctioned by all of the children in the studio.

When the children on screen focus on what they find interesting and talk about what they see, some of them show their opposition to following the narrative offered to them by the host. That this is not what the producers want can be seen when the camera moves away from the boys looking into it and focuses more closely on the host and other adults. However, the production thereby misses the opportunity to portray the children looking at the host and thereby to offer a position that the imagined audience can join.

The narrative—according to which the viewer is to join the audience on screen—is disrupted by the focus on the technological TV-producing equipment pointed out by the children on screen. It becomes obvious that there are things going on in the studio that are not shown on the screen and that the audience is by no means taking part in the on-screen activities there, but instead seeing only what the production team wants it to see. Thereby the talk about technology reveals that the viewers are not invited to join in on everything going on in this studio, but only to join the preferred narrative.

If the point had been to let the children in the studio act in whatever way they wanted, the technological aspects they pointed out would not have been ignored by the host or by the camera. This episode could be an example of when children are employed by adults to perform *children* in planned ways (cf. Lury, 2010), but where the children on screen are better characterized as agents in their own right than as followers of adult intentions. Nevertheless, it is the adults who are in charge of how the technology is used, and it is in their power to guide the narrative away from this topic.

This programme is built up using almost all the signs of doing child

address, such as child drawings, picture-book images and picturing children (cf. Pettersson, 2013). Moreover, the adults—by trying to create a joint 'we' between the children on-screen and the child viewers off-screen—fill the programme with events that are linked to notions of child-related activities, such as sagas, songs and animations. The narrative is disrupted, however, when not all of the children act as though they are in on it, but instead some are more interested in the making of television and the technologies used in TV production. The technological aspect is not part of the preferred narrative, and hence it is not something the child audience should be aware of or take an interest in. However, this is something that would change over time.

Technology in the narrative

In 1992, the public service broadcasting monopoly had just been abolished and a commercial channel had entered the Swedish broadcasting arena (cf. Hadenius et al., 2011). The public service children's programmes still have a fixed timeslot, a set frame and a few hosts that alternate. The host Johan is always seated behind a desk talking strait into the camera when addressing the audience. He is not, however, only talking to the audience. To make the narrative of this programme work, he also talks to a rubber rabbit and to a never seen or heard technician named Bertil. When addressing Bertil, Johan looks out of the frame to his right, as opposed to facing the camera as he does when addressing the audience. Bertil is most often portrayed as causing Johan trouble, not wanting to change anything and not buying into Johan's ideas. Johan does not appear to think Bertil's job is particularly advanced, and in one episode he is heard saying: 'It is just a matter of pushing the button!' when Bertil hesitates to start a film.[4] But in regard to the technological aspects of TV programme making, Johan is also portrayed as dependent on Bertil to make sure that the short films, which are essential parts of this program, are put on and shown correctly.

On the desk in front of Johan a microphone is always visible. Johan also refers to the films by showing both film rolls and videocassettes. In this way, the TV technology is much more present in the narrative of this programme than it is in the example above. The fictive technician is needed to make the narration of the studio interesting, as Johan then has someone to talk to and argue with. Because Bertil also seems to be a bit

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[4] *The Children's Programmes* (*Barnprogrammen*) 1992, 17 April, Channel 1, 18.15-18.45. Produced by the Swedish Public Service Television Company.

backward and stubborn, this creates a joint 'we' between Johan and the imagined child audience, as they are joined in opposing Bertil's somewhat boring attitude. The TV technology represented by the microphone, the film rolls, the videocassettes, and the technician also plays an important role in the programme narrative by making Johan and the studio meaningful and having a story to tell. Here it is made clear to the audience that TV is something created using technology: Even if Johan is speaking directly to the audience he needs a microphone in order to be heard and the technician needs to start the films in order for the viewers and Johan to see them. Nevertheless, this narration is also a fictive one, for example in that Bertil is never seen or heard. But the representation of how TV is made is also fictive, for example the sequences showing that Johan can just throw a film roll out of the frame and the film starts. In this program, technology provides the narrative with a plot as well as a way of allying the programme host with the imagined audience. There is no sign of hiding the TV production equipment from the viewers, as was the case in the previous example, but neither is there any attempt to explain how TV production really works. But, as we will see, there are ways of telling that story too.

Technology as the narrative

In 2005, the Swedish media landscape was largely digitalized and very diverse in comparison to the situation in 1980 as well as in 1992 (cf. Hadenius et al., 2011). Both the digital Children's Channel and Channel 1 were broadcasting public service children's programmes and the same host as in 1992, Johan, was one of the hosts of the flagship children's programme *Bolibompa*. This studio show framed all short programmes and films broadcast in the children's programme timeslot in 2005, and it still does. In the example analyzed here, Johan is going to film the control room of the TV studio.[5]

The whole narrative of the programme this day is built on showing and explaining to the audience how a TV programme is run behind the scenes. To accomplish this, a complex structure of technological gear is set up in the studio and all the way to the control room. A man named Björn is presented as the brains behind the set-up, and he hands Johan a camera with a long cord, which is connected to a screen placed in the programme studio. Johan then films his way to the control room and the viewers are invited to see this.

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[5] *Bolibompa* (*Bolibompa*) 2005, 31 August, Channel 1, 18.00-19.00. Produced by the Swedish Public Service Television Company.

The whole sequence takes only a few minutes, and in this time Johan manages to get out of the studio, enter the control room and film the multitude of screens, buttons and lamps, which are what furnish that space. Two people, a man and a woman, are sitting in front of the screens. Johan asks the man if he is the one controlling all the buttons and the man admits that he is. The woman is introduced as the producer, and Johan says that she is in charge of making everything that is supposed to happen in the show happen, like starting the films, etc. She is then shown making the programme jingle appear on a screen and she says: 'But now you should be in the studio, Johan.' The woman is thereby also presented as Johan's boss, and Johan hurries to return to the studio. On his way back, just when he re-enters the studio, a cameraperson can be seen filming the studio setting.

In this program, the narrated plot is an investigation of how a TV programme is made and controlled, beyond what is usually covered by the camera. Johan and his technologically skilled friend Björn take pains to reveal what is actually hidden behind the scenes and to make these things visible for the audience. The audience watching the programme is invited to see this, and to see the people running the program. This differs from how the fictive technician Bertil was portrayed in the show from 1992; for example in 2005 there are no videocassettes being tossed out of the frame. Here the TV technology looks highly advanced and it is controlled by two people, who also tell the programme host what he should do. However, by showing the control room and the measures taken to make this possible, some things are also complicated. Instead of just presenting the cameraperson who films the studio everyday, Björn is invited to the show and the un-introduced cameraperson is to continue filming the studio, while Johan has a camera of his own. In this way, the narrative shows some of what is going on behind the TV screen, but it fails to question that the direct speech (cf. Allen, 1992; Edin, 2000; Pettersson, 2013) Johan directs to the camera is part of his conversation with the audience and not with the anonymous cameraperson who is omnipresent in the studio, but almost never seen or heard.

Conclusion

As we have seen, TV technology has been narrated in several different ways over the years in the Swedish public service children's programmes. In all of these examples, there is one common factor underlying how the producing institution has chosen to narrate and hence tell about the technology needed to make television. The ways in which the narrations