Preface

This book is the culmination of a number of years of teaching and research on fact-fiction forms – those film and television texts which retain elements of documentary aesthetics but do not fit comfortably into most existing definitions of ‘documentary’. We are very conscious that comparatively little writing has been done in the specific area of mock-documentary, and we hope that this work will serve to stimulate debate both on the nature of this form in particular, and fact-fiction forms in general. Many of the observations we make of mock-documentary are based on texts produced within the last few years, and, given the apparently increasing acceptance of this form within mainstream cinema and television (with even the American animated sitcom *The Simpsons* featuring a mock-documentary episode entitled ‘Behind the Laughter’), no doubt readers will be able to add to and contest our analysis of its main textual strategies. We are in the position of attempting to create a general theoretical framework within a comparatively under-theorised area of media studies, and consequently our discussion inevitably ranges across a wide variety of areas within the study of cinema and television. We hope that readers who are more expert than us in any of these areas will grant us licence to cover their speciality in such a cursory fashion.

This book is primarily intended to introduce ideas about mock-documentary to students and academics working within media and documentary studies. For media studies students unfamiliar with work on documentary, and for the more general reader, Chapters 1 and 2 are intended to cover theoretical material that we feel is relevant to mock-documentary. We full acknowledge the difficulty of presenting a subject as complex and challenging as ‘representations of the real’ in such an abridged fashion, and we hope that the reader who is a novice in this area will feel inspired to pursue some of the more comprehensive theoretical texts that are available. Similarly, those readers who are already familiar with recent documentary theory are encouraged to treat these initial chapters simply as an explanation of the wider framework that we use to discuss mock-documentary.

A feature of this book which we hope will prove useful to both teachers and

students is a listing of texts which we have identified as ‘mock-documentaries’ (contained in the first section of the Filmography). We have found many of these texts difficult to obtain, and some items of this list are films and television programmes that we know only by reputation. Please bear this in mind before expending time and expense hunting down any texts that look promising. We must also acknowledge that this list is inevitably incomplete, both because we have taken the rather arbitrary decision not to include short films within our discussion and because any number of mock-documentaries are likely to have been produced between the time that this book was written and its publication date.

Our research into mock-documentaries has proved extremely enjoyable, and there are a considerable number of our favourite scenes and pieces of dialogue from mock-documentaries which (despite our best efforts to include them) did not survive the final editing for this book. We hope that the often sober analyses contained here add another layer of appreciation to viewers’ encounters with mock-documentary, and encourage readers to seek out the more classic examples of the form.

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