Hybridized forms or representation, whether for the big screen or for television, have only recently aroused the interest of researchers, though the practice itself can be traced back to the origins of film. The tug of war that lies at the heart of docudrama — the generic term for this type of representation — springs from the mixture of elements borrowed from the fictional and documentary genres. Unlike conventional fiction films, docudramas claim a testimonial dimension. In Introduction, Drama-documentary, Dossier 19, the extensive investigation Andrew Goodwin and Paul Kerr carried out for the British Film Institute into the adjustments of documentary to television, the authors come to the conclusion that “television ‘drama-documentary’ is not a programme category, it is a debate,”¹ a contention based on the problems of taxonomy but also on the blurring of boundaries which are issues that this paper is going to try and explore.

Naming Hybrid Productions

In The Television Genre Book Glen Creeber chooses to situate his examination of genres within the broader framework of television studies, taking into account broadcasters, notions related to reception and television as a whole. Exploring the hybrid combination of documentary and fictional genres, Glen Creeber draws a fine line between documentary drama² on the one hand and dramatised documentary on the other hand: “Whereas dramatised-documentary might include conventional documentary material alongside the dramatised sequences, it is likely that, with the exception of brief scenes from archive footage, most of a documentary-drama will be the product of full directorial management of scripted action and speech.”¹ Derek Paget takes the taxonomy a step further in No Other Way to Tell It by giving meaning to the several linguistic combinations that can be worked out with the words “documentary,” “drama” and all the related morphemes that compose them, not to mention the absence or presence of hyphens. His study highlights the fact that although the passage from complete forms — “dramatised documentary” and “documentary drama” — to
amalgamated structures — “dramadoc” and “docudrama” — is mainly telling of the evolution of the genre over time, the choice of the word “docudrama,” “dramadoc” or “faction” is, on the contrary, very meaningful. He takes the opportunity of a linguistic analysis to start a semantic explanation on the distinction between the British and US traditions, the latter favouring fictionalisation while the former is more inclined to evidential forms of representation. Yet, Derek Paget first investigated the differences between productions from the USA and Great-Britain, in True and Truer Stories - Documentary and Drama published in Médias : entre fiction et réalité, an article which also represented the opportunity for him to define the typically American concept of “faction,” and also to underline that the notion of crisis stands at the core of the hybrid genre of the docudrama.

In British TV Docudrama: Origins and Developments, published in Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV by Alan Rosenthal, John Corner’s ambition is also to offer a general approach of docudrama. He studies the genre from the point of view of terminology and draws conclusions from the combinations between the abridged and complete forms of the words “documentary,” “drama” and “fiction.” His study is also diachronic and spans the origins of the genre, from World War II propaganda — designed to foster a feeling of patriotism — to the beginning of docudrama on television.

The differences in approaches on either side of the Atlantic are also examined in detail by Susan Boyd-Bowman in Popular Television and Film. A Reader. As far as Susan Boyd-Bowman is concerned, the American drama documentary “privileges dramatic fiction over factual documentation.” It perfectly fits into the definition of US productions as putting a premium on fiction, which results from the powerful influence of Hollywood over filmic representations in the USA.

For Peter Kosminsky, the acclaimed British filmmaker, every film is a fiction film and the difference between the documentary and the docudrama genres is artificial and irrelevant. “There’s nothing inherently objective about documentaries. Every time someone chooses a particular section of an interview and juxtaposes it with a particular piece of music, they are steering the audience,” he confessed to a Guardian journalist in an article entitled Kosminsky Defends Docudrama. Among filmmakers, this approach to the filmic material was first supported by Peter Watkins who, in Media Crisis, stated that “We can no longer separate or differentiate films in terms of being artistic, pleasurable, aesthetic vs. those we consider as rubbish – without understanding that nearly all contemporary cinema films, documentaries, and TV programmes (including news broadcasts) which are intended and shaped for a mass audience, share certain common elements: a mono-form structure and a hierarchical relationship to the public. Whenever we watch a film, or even a few moments of TV, we are – with alarmingly few exceptions – participating in a repetitive process of manipulation, whether this was intentional on the part of the filmmaker/producer, or not.”

The debate that occasionally rages over whether films should be labelled as “fiction,” “documentary” or “docudrama” is one that is widespread and fruitful among academics and critics. Although filmmakers are fully aware of the impact taxonomy has on reception, their main concern is getting their message across. Derek Paget, in the second edition of No Other Way To Tell It, aptly sums up the situation: “two things keep the ‘debate’ going and keep fuelling the effort to define as well as describe. The first is a continued demand for clear definition (if not taxonomy) on the part of students, non-
academic commentators and, not least, ordinary viewers. This fire is continually stoked by print journalists. Television journalists and programme makers believe the reason for this is that newspapers feel threatened by the investigative power of television and see the docudrama as a weak point.”

A Survey of Hybridity

Legitimized by their claim to testify to ethnographic and social issues, the acclaimed British documentarists of the early years of the twentieth century offered viewers fictive constructions which were later heralded as documentaries and which have gone down in history as such. L’Angleterre et son cinéma : Le Courant documentaire 1927/1965 by Olivier Barrot, Philippe Pilard and Jean Queval abounds in references to British films made in the early years of the twentieth century and which purported to be testimonial. Documentarists roamed the world in an attempt to record on films as much of the diversity of customs and habits only ethnographers had until then approached, an anthropological dimension that still runs through many productions from drama documentarists. John Caughie, in Television Drama. Realism, Modernism, and British Culture offers a diachronic approach of the genre that encompasses its origins and the influence of the British tradition of the documentary; seminal figures like John Grierson, the father figure of the British documentary, and John Reith, the founder of the BBC, occupy prominent places in the debate on the promotion of hybrid forms of representation.

The main source of criticism levelled at the productions from the budding years of the British documentary had to do with their escapist dimension. The necessity for filmmakers to be politically committed and to choose topics in keeping with the concerns of the population, whether it was unemployment or housing problems, was John Grierson’s credo. As the pioneer of the British documentary tradition, John Grierson was highly critical of the tendency to lend filmic technique to escapist fantasies. In Grierson on Documentary he is adamant about the need for documentarists to focus on social realities in Britain. Robert Flaherty was directly targeted by his attacks: “Flaherty’s most considerable contribution to the problem is, as always, his insistence on the beauty of the natural. […] He took a year to make his study of the Eskimos and this after ten years’ exploration in the Eskimo country of Labrador and Baffin Land. […] We know our England glibly as an industrial country, as a beautiful country […] but we don’t know it in our everyday observation as such.” For John Grierson, the filmic media is a tool that must be wielded to help support social and political causes, a guiding principle that still stands at the core of the British docudrama.

Even at this very early stage in the history of filmic practices, hybridity was the subjects of debates. In Grierson on Documentary, John Grierson feels the need to pinpoint filmic technique as being the cause of inevitable hybrid productions and expands on how they impact the message filmmakers want to convey. Grierson on Documentary, along with John Grierson’s filmic work, paved the way for the politically committed fictionalized documentaries as television has promoted them since the 1960s.

The other major breakthrough brought about by John Grierson is, for Su Holmes and Deborah Jermy, his rather equivocal description of documentary as “the creative interpretation of reality.” In Understanding Reality Television, Su Holmes and Deborah
Jermyn explain how they see in John Grierson’s famous statement the roots of the debate on filmic hybridity. They highlight the fact that as early as the 1930s the distinction between “drama” — to be understood as synonymous with fiction — and “reality” was already blurred. Another recent approach of this issue is afforded by John Izod, R. W. Kilborn and Matthew Hibberd in From Grierson to the Docu-soap: Breaking the Boundaries. About the criteria to assess the documentary value of a film, the authors insist on the veracity of the allegations and on the relevance of the points put forward rather than on the degree of artificiality. Some years later, Peter Kosminsky brushed aside the issue in his interview to The Guardian entitled Kosminsky Defends Docudrama. On whether the value of docudramas should be questioned because they rely on elements of fiction, he declared: “If you have a statement at the start of a film saying ‘this is a true story’, you have to apply the same editorial processes and rigour you would to a documentary.” From his point of view, docudrama makers inherit a debate that is not theirs: as professionals they are fully aware of the capacities and limits of the genre; they neither twist reality nor cheat with facts and chronology but offer a point of view that is their own.

The Controversy over Re-Enactment

The second debate, which has been going on for decades among film and television critics, is about the value of films which claim to be testimonial. Ever since the early years of cinema, re-enactment and the need to stage events or employ special effects have often been a necessity. Because of the lack of mobility that would not allow for the capture of the profilmic, the early filmmakers were forced to ask professional actors or the protagonists of the events to perform the scenes they had witnessed. Once again the interwar years provided illuminating examples of the staging of the real. One of the most famous is afforded by Ruby Grierson who was in charge of briefing the ones whose testimony would be collected: “Ruby Grierson [...] was involved in the encouragement and general preparation of the speakers.” John Corner’s anecdote about John Grierson’s sister, mentioned in The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary, offers an enlightening illustration of the staging of the “raw material” as John Grierson himself named the recorded images and sound, to be edited at a later stage. For Derek Paget, in True Stories? Documentary Drama on Radio, Screen and Stage, this type of professional practice resembles what John Grierson called “the creative treatment of actuality” or what Judge Milton Pollack misremembered as “the creative interpretation of reality,” a statement Derek Paget mentions in No Other Way To Tell It. The purpose of re-enactment is not, and was not at the time, to deceive in any way but to make it possible for viewers to catch a glimpse of the Zeitgeist, or spirit of the time, by allowing the camera to capture a simulacrum of actuality.

John Grierson was undeniably the driving force behind the political dimension of the documentary movement. Since, in those days, hybridity, under all its forms, could not be bypassed, John Grierson did not object to it. Nevertheless, Harry Watt and Alberto Cavalcanti were the true proponents of hybridity, a point which is interestingly investigated by Roy Armes in A Critical History of British Cinema. From his point of view, “Cavalcanti supported the work of Harry Watt who, in films like The Saving of Bill Blewitt (1937) and North Sea (1938), moved towards fictionalised and acted documentary,” an opinion expressed some years later by Jean-Louis Passek in Dictionnaire du cinéma: “Cavalcanti [...] was probably the first to dramatise the documentary.” Roy Armes
insightfully pins down the origin of what would later be known as docudrama when he defines Alberto Cavalcanti’s *Coalface* (1935), as being “hybrid work.”\(^{16}\) This statement is later qualified when, writing about the collaboration between Alberto Cavalcanti, Harry Watt and John Grierson, he posits: “In many ways *Night Mail* is the culmination of the G.P.O. period – a collaborative effort which balances Grierson’s concern with public information, Watt’s naturalistic direction and the more lyrical and experimental approaches of Cavalcanti and Wright.”\(^{17}\) Because Roy Armes’s and Jean-Louis Passek’s books encompass periods prior to the existence of television, they offer an insight into filmic practices that were later acquired by TV and then seen as typical of it.

It did not take long before the communication industry, in the forms of both journalism and propaganda, understood the huge benefits that could be derived from the blurring of the distinction between fiction and documentary. In 1935, under the title *The March of Time*, Henry Luce, the editor of *Time Magazine*, introduced the twenty-minute filmic version of his famous magazine in several theatre houses across the USA. Each weekly batch covered the topical issues of the time and tapped into various genres, whether documentary, journalism or reportage. Even though the main purpose of this undertaking was the information of cinema-goers, it hinged on re-enactments: the protagonists of the events or professional actors were asked to stage what had happened or what had been witnessed by others. Raymond Fielding in *The March of Time, 1935-1951*, dispels any illusions that might be entertained about the objectivity of filmic journalism and he contends that “both in the United States and in Europe, newsreels were compromised from the beginning by fakery, re-creation, manipulation, and staging.”\(^{18}\) Yet, from his point of view, fakery should not be equated with film. He traces the origins of the loss of illusions about journalistic objectivity to radio broadcasting which offered the first forms of dramatization of current events: “In 1928, in association with radio executive Fred Smith, Larsen undertook the weekly broadcast of a 10-minute program series of brief news summaries, drawn from current issues of *Time* magazine, and featuring what Larsen later described as one ‘hair-raising’ news event in each broadcast. […] Each broadcast lasted 10 minutes (later 15 minutes) and was offered free of charge to radio stations in return for publicity for *Time* magazine. The series was intended by Larsen to stimulate magazine circulation.”\(^{19}\)

**World War 2 and the Semi-Documentary**

None of the practices mentioned above was necessarily objectionable insofar as the recipients were aware of the absence of objectivity in the treatment of news. But such was not always the case. John Grierson himself is explicit about the deceptive dimension of film and he makes it clear in the analytic section of his book *Grierson on Documentary*: “the camera-eye is in effect a magical instrument. It can see a thousand things in a thousand places at different times, and the cunning cutter can string them together for a review of the world.”\(^{20}\) In the book she devotes to *Went the Day Well?* (1942), about an English village invaded by German paratroopers, Penelope Houston goes as far as to praise the superiority of fiction over all other forms of representation because of its treatment of factuality. From her point of view, *Went the Day Well?* was “the only British feature film made during the war to deal seriously with the prospect of invasion, to show British civilians coming to grips on home ground with the German army. […] It came at a time when British film-makers were trying to assimilate the
lessons of documentary-making into feature production, as a way of bringing a
necessary realism into their treatment of war.” Penelope Houston’s book proposes a
rich and detailed analysis of the evolution of World War II documentary productions,
and particularly the semi-documentary – also called quasi-documentary – with
references to examples taken from the Ealing Productions of the time, such as The
Foreman Went to France (1942) and The Next of Kin (1942), to name but a couple. Her
thorough analysis of Alberto Cavalcanti’s films points to major features like the choice
of topical issues and the fictional treatment of actuality which will later become major
landmarks in the definition of docudrama. Penelope Houston shrewdly strikes at the
heart of the tension of the genre when, about Michael Balcon, the English filmmaker,
she writes that “documentary as then understood, was by no means the only route to
realism, not even the best, but it was characteristic of Balcon that he should take this
direct and practical approach. The problem then became one of striking proper balance
between the factual elements of a film and its narrative.” The notion of semi-
documentary was born and supporters of the national military efforts to win the war
resorted to it, as Humphrey Jennings did in I was a Fireman (1943).

Faking the Real

It is only in retrospect that the notion of fakery appears rather blatantly. In Lies, Damn
Lies and Documentaries Brian Winston examines the notion of fakery in its various filmic
aspects. He analyses the use of artificiality in documentaries. From his point of view,
though the problem was raised a long time ago, it has never been totally solved. He
articulates the question in the following terms: “David Meeker, of the British National
Film and Television Archive, when including Humphrey Jennings’s 1943 classic Fires
Were Started in a list of the most important films of the cinema’s first decades, queried if
this reconstruction of fire-fighting in the Blitz (which used real fire-fighters, but sets for
interiors and a blaze started by the film-makers rather than the Luftwaffe) was what we
could still call a documentary?” Brian Winston’s answer is unequivocal: “What
matters here is that the creation of a form, ‘dramadoc’, which is all reconstruction, has
helped cast the use of reconstruction in the old form, ‘documentary’, into doubt.”

Few recent books on documentary-making fail to mention hybrid productions, and
receptive researchers into the documentary genre include sections on this form in
their analyses. John Corner is one of them. In The Art of Record. A Critical Introduction to
Documentary he provides an insightful view into the various types of documentaries and
the characteristic elements of each. Hybrid forms are rightfully devoted entire sections.
Equal weight is given to different theories, as when the author writes about “action
formats,” and to analyses, as when he chooses to contrast early instances of hybridity
from Housing Problems (1935) and Coal Face (1935) to more recent ones like Cathy Come
Home (1966) and Roger and Me (1986). What holds together all these filmic undertakings
is the willingness of their creators to bear witness to the plight of the needy and the
efforts made to increase viewers’ awareness. These filmmakers disregard the widely
shared injunction that documentary should not be tainted with fiction. They endow
their work with the aesthetic dimension required to reach the widest possible audience.
Referentiality

17 For John Corner, docudrama corresponds to the combination of viewpoints and claims for referentiality, “high imaginative potency,” and a strong emphasis on watchability. He concedes that though hybridity may generate confusion, the mixing of different modes was a key factor in achieving a powerful popular impact on viewers and in offering demanding issues a spellbinding treatment. One of the strengths of these fiction-films is undoubtedly their referentiality.

Referentiality stands at the core of Real Emotional Logic: Film and Television Docudrama As Persuasive Practice by Steven N. Lipkin. The author analyses this notion in conjunction with that of credibility: why cannot docudrama’s “motivated iconicity” have credit, while “documentary progressively has aligned representation and actuality?” The iconic dimension of docudrama also stands at the core of Steve Lipkin’s article entitled Defining Docudrama: In the Name of the Father, Schindler’s List and JFK and published by Alan Rosenthal in Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV. His theory, which he also develops in Real Emotional Logic: Film and Television Docudrama as Persuasive Practice, is formulated along the following lines: in docudrama, the lack of indexicality is replaced by “a quasi-indexical narrative,” which means that it tries to make up for the lack of indexical unstaged images by being faithful to what actually happened and what was said. The scriptwriters’ respect for actuality is prompted by the need to make up for the lack of ample iconic references. A concomitant explanation to justify this respect for what actually happened is the attempt to revitalize morality: “Like melodrama generally, docudrama suggests that lost moral structures can be recovered and restored.”

Docudrama on Television

The Realist Tradition

19 Docudrama per se really took off with the expansion of television and more particularly the realist approach used to tackle social issues. TV realism stands at the core of John Corner’s British TV Drama: Origins and Developments, an analysis which underscores the 1960s realist tradition in cinema and in literature. The notion of “realism” is further investigated by John Corner himself in Studying Media: Problems of Theory and Method which represents a compilation of his writings. In this collection, he divides the notion of “realism” into two, one referring to “the project of verisimilitude” and the other to “the project of reference (of being about the real).” His analysis scrutinizes the social, stylistic but also political aspects connected to the treatment of topical issues like housing, abortion, the relations between the sexes, unemployment, etc. The innovative approach of topical issues, adopted by filmmakers in the 1960s, challenged the dominant conventions which, until then, had ruled filmic representations. John Corner insists on one of the main appeals of this type of television image which was the credit it had among viewers, due to its referentiality and to the need filmmakers felt to strive for accuracy and relevance.

20 The major appeal of the experimental TV docudramas of the 1960s lay in the reflexive dimension which would lead some directors to emphasise filmic technique so as to break the suspension of disbelief and to encourage viewers to think critically about
what was offered to them. David Edgar in *Theater of Fact: a Dramatist’s Viewpoint*, published in *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV* by Alan Rosenthal, defines this reflexive dimension as one of the salient elements of an ambitious, politically committed television which meant to promote the education of citizens.

**The Heyday of Authored Television**

21 In the wake of the aftermath of World War II, at a very early stage after the resumption of TV broadcasts, heads of programming paid special attention to the dramatization of documentaries. Both the public and the private sectors set up their own departments in charge of investigating the mixing of genres. This is a field that is particularly well explored by Andrew Goodwin and John Kerr in *Drama-documentary, Dossier 19*: while the BBC, in the 1960s, set up its *Dramatised Documentary Group*, the Granada company was trying to break fresh grounds with its *Dramatised Documentary Unit*. *Drama-documentary, Dossier 19* was meant as a special publication, commissioned by the British Film Institute, and it was designed to focus on the hybridisation of the genres that dealt with factuality. The research conducted by Andrew Goodwin and John Kerr is extensively documented, which makes their book a reliable source for inquirers into the promotion of information through fiction. It represents the first attempt at trying to exhaustively address docudrama from analytical, historical and descriptive points of view.

22 More recently, in 2004, Tony Currie, in *A Concise History of British Television, 1930-2000*, examined the notion of hybridity in the 1960s from a social perspective; his book highlights the necessity of the then new media to inform the population differently so as to establish some form of dramatic continuum in the treatment of current issues.

23 An identical analysis was carried out into US fictionalized documentary by Douglas Gomery in *Brian’s Song* (1971), published by Alan Rosenthal in *Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV*. Docudrama is envisaged by the author within the North American audiovisual landscape. It is seen as the final stage of a long process, from 1946 to 1971, and it takes into account the initiatives by many networks to commission their own productions in the context of a highly competitive film industry and the birth of payable cable TV.

24 For Gill Branston and Roy Stafford, in *The Media Student’s Book*, the 1960s were the “Golden Age” of the British television drama: the BBC and the ITV companies relied on “in-house” productions, and staff and equipment were viewed as corporate resources. This liberal spirit was conducive to creativity and was later denounced by the reformers of the 1990s as “featherbedding.” Gill Branston and Roy Stafford examine in details the impact of such economically liberal measures on genres — in particular on docudrama — and the retaliation TV companies suffered from in the wake of the production of highly political fiction films like *The War Game* (1965) and *Cathy Come Home* (1966).

25 Focusing on the public sector, Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel, in *Understanding Television*, state that the BBC’s post-war resumption of television transmissions was marked by the creation of a new unit, the *Dramatised Documentary Group*. As an extension of the *Illustrated Talks Department*, it was in charge of what *Radio Times* at the time described as “story documentaries” with scripted scenarios, sets, and actors reconstructing recent world events. BBC’s obligations were not only to provide news but also to document the new post-war Britain.
In *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries* Brian Winston analyses the adaptation of cinematic practices to TV constraints with a view to impacting a wide audience on critical issues. As pointed out by Philip Schlesinger, in *Putting “Reality” Together: BBC News*, the 1960s corresponded to a massive influx of information on television which was largely accounted for by the development of lightweight material which allowed for the coverage of events almost instantly. Radio news was superseded by TV news which became the main source of information for the public. The content of popular TV series like *Z Cars* (BBC, 1962-1978) and *Dixon of Dock Green* (BBC, 1955-1976) was also informed by social and ethical issues, dealt with in a fictionalized manner. They followed in the footsteps of the dramatized wartime documentaries which had proselytized about the war effort and the need to remain united in the face of adversity. Series and one-off TV fiction films were designed to document endemic social diseases. This comprehensive approach, which takes into account not only the technical but also the political dimension associated with the new media, is the one chosen by George W. Brandt for his collection of essays entitled *British Television Drama in the 1980s*. The authors offer readers an overview of how, from the 1960s onwards, TV programmes were affected by the evolution of technologies and by pressures from the governments of the time to urge the public sector to compete with the private sector for audience ratings.

The docudrama form has witnessed both periods of enthusiasm, from filmmakers and viewers, and periods of intense adversity, from the political authorities. As evidenced by the criticism leveled at Peter Watkin’s *The War Game* (1965), the TV regulators saw to it that the genre became discredited on aesthetic grounds for lack of any valid criticism on the matters debated or on the ideas put forward. This point is stressed by John Corner in *The Art of Record*. About *The War Game* (1965), he writes that “As with so many other “controversial” drama-documentaries, objections which were primarily about the substantive content and viewpoint expressed were strategically displaced into becoming objections about the unacceptability of the form itself.”

The choice of topical issues for the production of fiction films stood at the heart of the policy of weekly TV events like *Armchair Theatre* (ITV, 1956-1974), *The Wednesday Play* (BBC 1, 1964-1970) and *Play for Today* (BBC 1, 1970-1984). In *The Evolution of Drama*, Irene Shubik praises docudrama as a genre thanks to which, in those days, television channels managed to ensure loyalty around politically committed programmes. Thanks to this format, viewers were attracted towards apparently unglamorous issues like abortion, poverty or homelessness. The debates they generated in the population were meant to reverberate among parliamentary circles so as to generate positive social change. According to Irene Shubik, *The Unloved*, transmitted in June 1955, was the first major play of this “drama documentary” type. Directed by Gilchrist Calder, it was a carefully researched piece about a home for delinquent children which proved that docudrama was particularly suited to a fictional approach of weighty matters on television. Irene Shubik insists on the innovative nature of films which were scripted by playwrights who wrote with the idiosyncrasies of TV in mind, such as new filmic equipments and techniques, filming in open-air locations, against true-life backgrounds, sometimes even amongst ordinary people. *Edna the Inebriate Woman*, though broadcast in 1971 is, from Irene Shubik’s point of view, the epitome of this new genre of television films which thematically originated from the British documentary tradition of the interwar period and which succeeded in conveying a political message through the inherently escapist conduit that is television drama. Through Edna’s
progress from hostels to psychiatric asylums, the viewer is afforded an insight into how poverty can lead to distraction and how the life of the homeless is strewn with addiction and violence, whether mental or physical.

Both docudrama and dramadoc were born out of the need for television, as a new popular media, to inform and entertain. Yet, from Glen Creeber’s point of view, developed in *Tele-Visions: An Introduction to Studying Television*, the genre followed trends in artistic representations and particularly the trend from modernism to postmodernism, from classic and authored single plays to hybridity and self-reflexivity that prevailed during the last decades of the twentieth century.

**Committed Fiction Films**

In the first edition of *No Other Way to Tell It*, Derek Paget underlines the strained relationship between politicians and the filmmakers who endeavour to inform the population on politically sensitive issues in a way that differs from daily news reports. Paget traces this contentious relationship back to *The War Game* (1965) by Peter Watkins, which, on the eve of the broadcast, was subjected to a ban from the authorities. As a consequence, the following year, Ken Loach took extreme precautions against censorship. Worried about the potential threat to his work, Loach pretended, just hours before the release of *Radio Times*, the weekly magazine, that *Cathy Come Home* (1966) was a love story while actually it was a fierce indictment of housing and family affairs policies. The broadcasting of Ken Loach’s film had a reverberating impact both upon the authorities and the British population.

Derek Paget skilfully shows how gradually docudrama evolved towards foreign rather than home affairs. The situation on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain became Leslie Woodhead’s favourite topic. What was life like for dissenters in the USSR (*The Man Who Wouldn’t Keep Quiet*, 1970) and how to decipher the signs of political dissent in the Eastern Block – the Polish dock strike in *Szczecin* (*Three Days in Szczecin*, 1976), the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (*Invasion*, 1980) – were the main subject-matters of his docudramas. The exploration of contemporary issues from a journalistic point of view is an issue Sita Williams perceptively analyses in *The Making of Hostages*, about David Wheatley’s *Hostages* (1992), a dramadoc about John McCarthy, Terry Waite and Brian Keenan, three among several hostages held captive in Lebanon in the 1980s. The principal asset of this type of production was the credence they would lend to docudrama. Paradoxically, they also undermined the political dimension of the genre: while originally scathing in their attacks on domestic affairs, docudramas gradually lost impertinence by being critical of politics in foreign countries. Derek Paget’s presentation of the docudrama and dramadoc productions in the 1970s and 1980s sheds light on the coincidence between the souring relationships with the Middle East – the first oil crisis and the kidnapping of Westerners – and the commissioning of productions raising questions about the political regime in Saudi Arabia (*Death of a Princess*, 1980) and the political situation in Lebanon (*Hostages*, 1992).

While irritating for politicians when dealing with domestic issues, docudrama gradually helped stoke anticommunist defiance during the Cold War period, and the anticommunist streak in Leslie Woodhead’s films largely accounted for their success.

Derek Paget also underlines the lobbying force of the genre in obvious miscarriages of justice or hushed-up cases. Filmmakers, deeply moved by the will to redress the
wrongdoings of justice, have resorted to docudrama on account of its capacity to gather
record audiences and to succeed in informing them and swaying their point of view. “A
television programme alters nothing. We do not have trial by television here.”35
Margaret Thatcher’s statement about Who Bombed Birmingham? (1990), by Mike
Beckham, proves how seriously the authorities took the discomfort caused by
allegations of miscarriage of justice about the Birmingham Six, several decades after
their imprisonment. Lance Pettitt dedicates several pages to it in Screening Ireland: Film
and Television Representation, a book which spans the period from the beginning of the
cinematographic representations of the conflict in Northern Ireland to the end of
twentieth century. A whole chapter is devoted to television and in particular to
docudrama. His emphasis is on how these made-for-television films managed to raise
public awareness about the situation at different stages in the history of the conflict.
His analysis of these programmes – whether they originated from the public or the
private sector, whether they resulted from in-house commissions or externalization,
from inside or outside Northern Ireland – gives the reader an insight into the political
motives behind the production of committed programmes. Yet, the pages Lance Pettitt
devotes to the conflict in Northern Ireland help situate these productions within the
wider context of independence and the need felt by the activists to maintain pressure
on the authorities for the advancement of their cause.

34 As far as the conflict in Northern Ireland is concerned, Who Bombed Birmingham? (1990)
served as a reminder to the population that the problem of the Birmingham Six was not
solved and that, pending the outcome of a new trial, information had to be spread
about the new-found evidence pertaining to the innocence of those convicted. Mike
Beckham’s film even goes as far as to name those responsible for the Birmingham
bombings. His docudrama was broadcast – on April 28th, 1990 on ITV — months before
The Birmingham Six: The Inside Story a documentary on the topic produced by the
journalistic team of World in Action and released on March 18th, 1991 on ITV.

35 In No Other Way to Tell It: Dramadoc/Docudrama on Television Derek Paget places Who
Bombed Birmingham? within the broader context of committed journalism on television
along with Hillsborough (1996), about the 1989 tragedy of the crushing of hundreds of
people in the Sheffield football arena and the need for the victims to have the guilty
parties condemned by a court of justice. Paget’s book also includes in this category
cases of cover-up on the grounds of raison d’état, like Shoot to Kill (1990) about the 1984–
86 Stalker Inquiry into the 1982 shooting by the Royal Ulster Constabulary of six
terrorist suspects in Northern Ireland. The credentials of this type of production rely
on the collection of all the information available, whether official documents,
testimonies or newspaper clippings. For Derek Paget, who defines the genre by
opposing British and American productions, trial-by-media fiction films perfectly fit in
the “fact-rich British tradition”36 of the documentary, based on a “discourse of sobriety.”37 Most of the examples he chooses are analysed along these lines which, from
his point of view, account for the success of the genre on British TV channels. The link
between the notion of “discourse of sobriety”38 and genres, whether film
documentaries or investigative journalism, is also touched upon by Bill Nichols in his
No Other Way to Put it?

While in 1965 The War Game had first raised public awareness about the danger of the military use of nuclear power in case of conflict, some years later Threads (1984) took up the challenge again: this production strongly opposed Margaret Thatcher’s decision to acquire Trident weapons. The situation had been the same for Ken Loach with Cathy Come Home (1966): the political problem of housing had been smouldering for decades and Ken Loach’s docudrama was meant to force the political authorities to confront the issue. Having failed to convey the reality of homelessness through radio documentaries, Jeremy Sandford, the scriptwriter of Cathy Come Home (1966), turned to TV documentary drama. Retrospectively, this choice proved very wise, since its impact was stronger than if it had been a regular documentary. Documentary drama highlights social evils and indicates paths for remedies: this is a point Derek Paget drives at in his article entitled Cathy Come Home and “Accuracy” in British Television Drama published in the New Theatre Quarterly. This article represented an opportunity for the author to explore the reasons behind the doubts and suspicions that surrounded the genre in its first televised productions. In it, he also examines the links with radio broadcasts and gives the example of Homeless Families, the radio programme that paved the way for Cathy Come Home (1966). The connections between TV and hybrid radio programmes are further investigated by Derek Paget in Tales of Cultural Tourism, an article published by Alan Rosenthal in Why Docudrama? Fact-Fiction on Film and TV. Being particularly conducive to affect and second-order experience, docudrama has always been conceived as a way to raise the awareness of TV audience about topical issues, whether social or political. This point is later adroitly addressed by Derek Paget in his second edition of No Other Way To Tell It.

New Forms of Fictional Documentary

No filmic document can claim evidentiality without running the corresponding risk of having the producers taken to court. The legal side of the fictionalization of facts is what Keith Beattie examines in Documentary Screens: Non-fiction Film and Television. The author insists on committed programmes which put a premium on challenging the official versions of famous cases. He analyses the fine balance between the appeal of these programmes and the risks run by their producers: they allow broadcasters to gather large audiences though the likely litigation arising from slander and defamation leads producers to be scrupulous about what is being claimed.

An equally cautious approach is required for fictionalized documentaries on high-profile personalities, especially when they are still alive or when, as politically prominent and influential figures, their interests and image need to be preserved. Jonathan Bignell examines the semiological and legal dimensions of docudramas aiming at accuracy and factuality. Regarding productions on Margaret Thatcher and Lady Diana, the author insists on claiming a point of view rather than on endorsing the "notion of 'objective' accounts of events in the news."

Through his choice of feminine figures, Jonathan Bignell tackles the issue of the gendering of docudrama. His principal guideline is the notion that documentaries are supposedly more masculine, while dramas are more melodramatic and consequently more feminine. The insistence on the personal rather than on the political is a point Gail Coles also stresses in Docusoap:
Actuality and the Serial Format published in Frames and Fictions on Television: the Politics of Identity Within Drama by Bruce Carson and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones. Because Gail Coles’ approach focuses almost exclusively on hybridity, many pages are devoted to post-modernism, examining how far post-modern formats were fostered by a period in which boundaries were blurred and intertextuality was favoured – what John Corner called the post-documentary culture of television in Documentary in a Post-Documentary Culture? A Note on Forms and their Functions.

In Documentary and the Mass Media, John Corner shows how, in the 1960s, journalism had already given ample evidence of its capacity to bring viewers into contact with real referents. Channels started a shift from TV as visual evidence to TV as the locus of a national agora. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed the popularity of programmes divided into two parts, the first part consisting of a film, which would then be followed by a debate. Docudrama, as the genre favoured by this type of broadcast, would very often offer a committed point of view that would later be discussed by specialists invited by journalists, like Jeremy Paxman and Tom Hewitt, who gained a reputation for handling this type of format.

The 1980s and, to a lesser degree, the 1990s, corresponded with docudrama’s fall from favour. The obligations imposed by the Thatcher governments to TV channels – including to the BBC, then forced to outsource several of its activities – added to the crackdown on the renewals of the franchises. It deterred professionals from producing contentious programmes that might irritate politicians. George W. Brandt, in British Television Drama in the 1980s (his research actually spills into the beginning of the 1990s) expertly analyses the links between drama and politics. His analysis highlights the changes in drama brought about by the political decisions taken by the governments of the time. The concept of docudrama was maintained partly because of the popularity it had among viewers who enjoyed the fictional reprocessing of recent events. Nevertheless, the genre itself became slightly innocuous. The end of the twentieth century witnessed the beginning of a new lease for the genre with the “conditional” or “subjunctive tense” documentaries.

These new evidential formats took over the docudrama recipe to gather audiences around sensitive issues such as the environment, the depletion of the Earth’s resources and overpopulation. In Pre-enactment, the paper she wrote about pre-enactment documentaries, Alisa Lebow surveyed the genre from The War Game (1965) to the BBC IF ... series (2004-2005), not to mention one-off drama films meant to fictionalize anticipatory scenarios. Her philosophical approach leads her to analyse these programmes with both the modern techniques for the recording of actual referents and man’s ingrained tendency to fictionalize the future in mind. From her point of view, these fiction films are educated guesses that help people adjust to their environment by developing survival strategies. By prophesising rather than hypothesising the future, these programmes generate both anguish and apathy at the thought of a future that seems to be ineluctable. In the second edition of No Other Way to Tell It, Derek Paget devotes several pages to this new format which he also envisages in conjunction with the development of the latest technologies, in particular Computer Generated Images (CGI). More than committed productions meant to help guide citizens in their daily lives, these films are seen as harmful to the docudrama genre insofar as they entertain rather than inform the population.
Conversely, Peter Kosminsky, a proponent of a form of committed fiction on television, has managed since the 1990s to provide viewers with politically dedicated productions on highly sensitive issues. Among the important changes in Derek Paget’s second edition of *No Other Way to Tell It* are paragraphs on the new generation of docudrama filmmakers on television, Peter Kosminsky and Paul Greengrass being the most prominent figures. While the latter works on either side of the Atlantic with topics inspired from the US and British societies for both big and small screens, Peter Kosminsky is faithful to the UK TV screen. His work is strictly in keeping with the British tradition of the documentary, which explains the almost exclusive choice of topics extracted from the British news and current issues and the rejection of exoticism and escapism. Kosminsky’s filmography reveals a highly political commitment to television and a refusal to give in to cinema with a view to reaching the largest number of citizens. By opting for television, Peter Kosminsky clearly indicates the political dimension of this mass media. From his point of view, television addresses citizens: consequently, it cannot do without the holistic alternative to journalism which is offered by the fictional treatment of contemporary issues. These filmmakers’ productions follow in the footsteps of the socially and politically committed work of Jeremy Sandford, Tony Garnett, Ken Loach, Jim Allen and G. F. Newman, who according to David Edgar in *The Theatre of Fact: A Dramatist Viewpoint*, were recruited “to smuggle a political message.” For David Edgar, these productions convey the revelatory dimension of Greek tragedy by exposing viewers to unorthodox approaches which are designed to widen the viewers’ awareness of social and political issues. Though David Edgar’s work focuses mainly on programmes from the 1960s, the conclusions he draws can easily be transferred to Peter Kosminsky’s work for television, whether in the case of the British military involvements in the conflicts of the former Yugoslavia or Iraq. It is a way of making recent History palatable, of engaging the viewers’ interest in matters which, as citizens, they ought to be concerned with but which, on the whole, they have not been used to thinking about critically.

**Conclusion**

A bibliographical approach to docudrama confirms that, ever since the inception of film, representations of the world have been shaped by the will to bear testimony to actuality and the concomitant will to make the result both watchable and entertaining. Right from the beginning, British filmmakers accepted this apparent contradiction although it has always raised questions about the gap that can exist between intention and reception. The first rows were fuelled by a tendency to lend the newly devised filmic technique to escapism and John Grierson criticized Robert Flaherty for his choice of exotic topics. World War II propaganda benefitted from a political refocusing on weighty matters, as did journalism with a format like *The March of Time*.

Television followed in the footsteps of the great British tradition of the documentary: the debates that animated the newly appointed TV groups on docudrama and dramadoc, whether in the private or the public sector, were about the place channels should give to the political debates of the time. Because of its fictional dimension, which facilitates empathy, docudrama was perfectly suited to convey the filmmakers’ political messages and have the largest possible audience exposed to them.
The pervasive post-modern atmosphere that has prevailed since the late 1980s has been conducive to reflexive forms of documentation and fictional works mimicking the documentary format — like mockumentaries and reality-based fiction films — have become prominent elements of the cinema and television landscapes.

Weakened at the end of the twentieth century by the repeated attacks of successive governments on TV channels and on programmes that were too critical of their policies, docudrama gathered strength at the turn of the twenty-first century with a new wave of politically-minded filmmakers. The recent popularity this TV genre has acquired among producers of films targeted at a cinematic audience is a measure of its resounding success in promoting unconventional approaches to contemporary issues.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

2. The original, non-hyphenated spellings (“documentary drama”; “dramatized documentary”) will be favoured so as to avoid confusion.
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8. John Grierson, Grierson on Documentary (1946; London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 140.
10. Deans, “Kominsky defends docudrama.”
13. Paget, No Other Way To Tell It, 116.
17. Ibid., 138.
19. Ibid., 10.
20. Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, 140.
22. Ibid., 29.
24. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 43.
28. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 131.

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**ABSTRACTS**

This bibliographical essay sets out to provide an updated approach of the monographic works dedicated to docudrama, a filmic form which encompasses several practices combining facts and fiction. This extensive compilation includes both diachronic and theoretical studies and it is enriched with comments on the viewpoints adopted by the authors. It is composed of writings chosen for their originality. Another criterion for selection was their innovative take on the theoretical debate on the issue, at the time of their publication. The thematic perspective adopted by the author is meant to underline the specificities of each document, the context in which it was written and the light it throws on the genre.
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