

# *Docudrama performance: realism, recognition and representation*

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Jonathan Bignell

### **Docudrama Performance: Realism, Recognition and Representation**

The hybrid television form of docudrama, blending documentary and drama conventions and modes of address, poses interesting methodological problems for an analysis of performance. Its topics, *mise-en-scène* and performers invite a judgement in relation to the real events and situations, settings and personae represented, and also in relation to the ways the viewer has perceived them in other media representations such as news, current affairs interviews and documentary features. In other words, docudrama's performance of the real asks the viewer to evaluate it in relation to anterior knowledge. But because of their adoption of conventions from drama, docudramas also draw on performance modes from fictional television forms and invite audiences to invest their emotions and deploy their knowledge of codes used in fictional naturalism or melodrama. These hybrid frameworks for viewing militate against docudrama being able to cultivate the authenticity or sobriety associated historically with documentary, and this has been a key reason for criticisms of the form. However, on the other hand, the multiplicity of available interpretive frameworks and routes of access for the audience can also enrich and broaden the pleasures and social purchase of docudrama. In this essay, I range over examples of docudramas on the post-1990 period, mainly made wholly or partly in the UK, to discuss some of the distinctions between kinds of docudrama performance, the implications of their links with related television forms and how docudrama performance exploits the capacities of television as a medium.

### Docudrama performance and documentary practices

The aim of television docudrama is, as Derek Paget (1998: 61) has described, to ‘re-tell events from national or international histories’ and/or ‘to re-present the careers of significant national or international figures’ in order to review or celebrate these people and events. The key figures and important moments depicted are often familiar to the audience, and close in time to the transmission of the programme. Devices like opening statements and captions make clear the factual basis of docudramas, while disclaimers state that some events have been changed or telescoped, and some characters may be amalgamations or inventions. The desire to produce unmediated access to the real, a desire that derives from docudrama’s factual base, works alongside this but is potentially contradicted by the necessity to contain and present that factual material by means of dramatic codes of performance and narrative structure. Docudrama sets up a claim for validation based on anterior real events which are then performed using the narrative forms and modes of performance familiar in screen fiction. It is a hybrid form that ‘uses the sequence of events from a real historical occurrence or situation and the identities of the protagonists to underpin a film script intended to provoke debate [...]. The resultant film usually follows a cinematic narrative structure and employs the standard naturalist/realist performance techniques of screen drama’ (Paget 1998: 82). The television medium is especially appropriate for these two divergent components of docudrama because television has always offered both of them to its audiences, though usually in institutionally separated factual and fictional genres.

British docudrama's sobriety is based on a professional production culture with roots in journalistic documentary. Broadly speaking, this tradition is different to the one that underpins US docudrama, which is characterized by its popular address through entertainment and drama forms. However, in both British and US docudrama the characteristic interest of television in the present, addressing current concerns and working over ways of understanding it in and for the culture, has been preserved. Fictional and factual modes are mixed on the assumption that the television audience can recognise their modality, based on the audience's familiarity with television's codes and conventions. These conventions already include elements of hybridity between factual and fictional performance because of the practical necessities of documentary programme-making. In the formative period of the socially conscious television documentary, emerging from the British Documentary Cinema movement and migrating to television as it achieved the status of a mass medium in the 1950s, it was accepted that situations that had previously occurred could be reconstructed by the film-maker (as in the classic wartime documentary *Fires Were Started*, directed by Humphrey Jennings, 1943). The film-maker had witnessed the original event's occurrence, or had other credible testimony about its truth. Based on this prior witness, it was routine for film-makers to fully or partially script documentary films, to reconstruct settings in a studio, and to coach participants in repeating actions for the camera.

So it is misleading to present documentary as a kind of programme-making that represents an authentic reality in an unmediated way, perhaps contrasting it with the staged situations of docudrama. The making of documentary already includes the likelihood if not the necessity of manipulating the real in order to shoot it. Shooting

documentary often requires a programme maker to prompt a documentary subject in some way, for example by asking that an action be undertaken so that it can be clearly seen by the camera. When something goes wrong, a documentary maker might reasonably ask the subject to perform an action again so that it can be recorded. After shooting, the procedures of editing very often involve a level of manipulation. Sequences shot at different times can be linked together to give the impression of continuous action, and cutting between sequences shot at different times gives the impression that they happened at the same moment. By acknowledging these practical necessities of production and developing them into a coherent narrative form, docudrama recognizes a kind of performance that documentary already necessitated but frequently repudiated. Docudrama makes the necessity of performance into its primary and acknowledged focus of interest, within an overarching intention to inform its audience and to make events accessible.

These docudrama intentions exploit the hybrid functions of television broadcasting as a socially embedded technology, a relationship between the technology, its forms and its audiences which is rendered most accurately by the untranslatable French term *dispositif* (something like 'apparatus' in English). The television medium inhabits a tension between its functions as a window and a mirror (Gripsrud, 1998) for its audience. Television can function as a window on the world, most obviously in news, current affairs and documentary programming. These factual genres have a special claim to present the public world outside, giving access to that world for its audiences. But like a mirror, television's representations of the domestic, of the family, and of ordinary life and the culture of the present have also been crucial to its role. Television shows how

people perform their lived realities, offering the possibility of recognizing and comparing one life with another. Overlapping this dual function as window and mirror, television also exhibits tensions between characteristics of immediacy and intimacy. In news or the live broadcasting of sport, for example, television claims to bring immediately occurring events to its viewer, and the medium's heritage of liveness is crucial to this. The possibility of live broadcasting was also significant to dramatic performance in the decades before the routine use of videotape or production on film in the 1960s, and still remains as a rare and special event for some drama performances. Intimacy, on the other hand, has more to do with relationships of identification, with an exchange not only of information but also of feeling between viewers and programmes. Television is an intimate medium in the sense that it is broadcast into the private space of the home, and much of its output promises to reveal the detail of individual action through image and sound, with a special emphasis on the ability of the close up to provide analytical observation of human behaviour. While this capacity is a resource for all television forms, it has been exploited particularly in drama, where ways of expressing psychology and emotion are facilitated by the use of the close-up and the patterning of dramatic forms to emphasise moments of performance that reveal character. These possibilities of television as window and mirror, as immediate and intimate, have been crucial for the development of docudrama in varying ways according to the purposes and subjects of the programmes. As a subset of documentary, docudrama would be expected to emphasise immediacy, the function of the screen as a window, and representations of the public world outside of domestic space. However, offering the attractions of drama too, many docudramas are interested in intimacy, character, psychology and the establishment of a

mirroring, comparative relationship between the viewer and the people featured in the programme. In these ways, docudrama is a conjunction of the interdependent but apparently opposed cultural functions of the television medium.

One of the variants of the docudrama mode is where a past historical event is analysed in documentary mode, including witness testimony by the actual people involved, with added fictionalized performance and visual effects. Testimony and witness have become crucial to television docudrama, because the use of interviews with real or fictional subjects, alongside dramatised reconstruction sequences, emphasizes moments of crisis or transformation. The aim of this hybrid form is to allow the audience to reflect on the forces impacting on individuals and how individuals respond to those forces. Its aim is also to enable the documentary subject himself or herself to have a space in which to speak about personal transformation, whether that subject is a real person or an actor standing in for the person. In *Hiroshima* (2005), for example, components from different television forms were combined to tell the story of the atomic bomb raid on the eponymous Japanese city in 1945, from the perspectives of both the US military personnel undertaking it and also of the Japanese people who were its victims. Archive footage, some of it quite familiar from historical documentary series, was placed alongside acted reconstruction. The testimonies of witnesses, such as the survivor Akiko Takakura, expressed their impressions of the blast verbally while CGI sequences portrayed them visually in the manner of a disaster movie (like *Deep Impact*, 1998, or *The Day After Tomorrow*, 2004). In some parts of the programme, performance was used in the same way, such as when verbal testimony from Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the Enola Gay bomber, was juxtaposed with performance by the actor Ian Shaw playing Tibbets's



younger self. These different kinds of components were brought together by a contextualising voiceover spoken by the actor John Hurt. This linkage of forms questions the priority of any one over the others, since each has different claims to authority. The viewer is able to shift between ways of accessing the meanings of performance, looking both at the performer and also through him or her to a catalogue of other kinds of representation, including audio-visual records from news film, documentary interviews and fictional forms whose conventions derive from (in this case) war films and disaster movies.

The witness statements out of which docudrama is often created, and which are sometimes included in the completed programme, are reports of past events that produce the events in acted reconstructions, and each legitimates the other. The two components are ways of bearing witness to something that happened in reality, but which is inaccessible because there was no camera there at the time to witness it in the intimate and accessible way that a docudrama can do. Instead, the interview and the fictionalized reconstruction witness the event subsequently for the camera, reconstructing it in retrospect. This form of performed witnessing has two contrasting meanings. In the first, the witness is an observer who testifies to the presence and reality of what he or she has experienced. Both the television viewer and the real person on screen can occupy this role since each has access to a version of a real event, reconstructed for the viewer and recalled in memory by the witness. This form of bearing witness is clearly dramatic, whether in the sense that it is scripted and performed, or offered by a real person re-living an emotionally charged experience. The witness statement derives from a documentary tradition, the heritage of the Mass Observation project which collected the comments and

personal accounts of a large number of people who kept diaries of their everyday lives and commented on the social and political events of the time. Founded in 1937 and continuing until the 1950s, the Mass Observation organisation recruited both observers and volunteer writers to document everyday life in written records that grew into an invaluable anthropological resource. In television, the BBC's *Video Diaries* and *Video Nation* (1990-) series continued this, focusing on everyday work and leisure, and individuals' attitudes and worries. In relation to the social functions of television, this process of programme creation from witness statement, diary material or recollection presupposes a community of interest in which the witness and the audience both take part. While different narrative structures and balances of factual and fictional components are used in individual programmes, they all assume the criterion of relevance to the audience and adopt a mode of address calculated to produce viewer engagement with the material.

The video diary format has become a component of both conventional documentary and also of created Reality TV formats, as in *Big Brother's* (1999-) diary room (Bignell 2005: 12). Participants speak to camera about themselves, knowing that this private speech will become public when the programme is broadcast. Bearing witness is a form of performance in which the presence and speech of the real person testifies to the actuality of what he or she experienced. Thus the witness creates the reality of what he or she experienced, rather than observing something that occurs in the same present time. The reality of the past event is recreated at a later time in a reconstruction that can only take place once the person concerned has recounted it, since its detail is unknown until the story is told. However, inasmuch as the witness's narrative

may be incomplete or inaccurate, bearing witness after the event or embodying the event in a reconstruction raise further questions of truth and knowledge. Bringing the real person into public visibility to bear witness may be a means of accessing a special truth, but it is also a performance that is necessarily affected by the real person's expectations of how television will represent him or her, and is understood by the viewer in relation to the other factual and fictional components of the docudrama and their relationship with other television forms. The criteria that viewers bring with them to the evaluation of docudrama therefore centre on questions of authenticity, but the kinds of authenticity at stake may derive from the match between the fictionalized performance and the factual base, or between the expressive performance techniques used by real on-screen witnesses or actors and the factual base that legitimates them. In each case, evaluations of docudrama programmes rest on how ideas of modality are brought to bear.

#### Performance and modes of address to the viewer

The modalities of television are varied because of the medium's breadth of genres, from documentary to naturalist drama to melodrama for example. The dominant form of naturalism in television fiction is a product of the epoch of modern industrial society, deriving from theatrical antecedents, and also affects performance and performance of self in both docudrama and documentary (Paget 2002, 2007). The ideology of television naturalism proposes that individuals' character determines their choices and actions, and human nature is seen as a pattern of character-differences. These differences, expressed through performance, permit the viewer to engage with a wide range of characters. The comparisons between performed characters and the viewer, and the judgements

consequent on this that are made by viewers about identifiable human figures are reliant on a common code determining the limits of 'normality'. This normality is the terrain on which the viewer's relationships with characters can occur. Television's psychological naturalism represents a world of consistent individual subjects, and addresses its viewers as similarly rational and psychologically consistent. The text of a performance is designed to establish communication and offer involving identification (based on television's capacities as a mirror, discussed above), and television programmes are constructed as wholes which promise intelligibility and significance. The naturalist assumption of the match between the docudrama text and a pre-existing reality underlies this process, by posing the programme as equivalent to a real perception of recognizable social space and the people who function within it. This notion of equivalence rests therefore on the forms of subjectivity that are consensually shared by the viewer and the docudrama's represented characters, in the context of a textual world created in the docudrama. Since that textual world is already proposed by the docudrama's factual base as one that is authentic and plausible, the terrain of identification and shared norms of subjectivity are pre-established to a greater extent than in fictions that cannot make the same claims.

One recent BBC docudrama series makes use of the genre's basis in fact together with its naturalist performance conventions to explore scenarios that are neither in the past nor the present but in an imagined future, thus presenting their performances as a conditional-tense hypothesis. This example therefore illuminates unusually clearly how docudrama performance works, since the series cultivates authenticity primarily by means of its textual conventions rather than by relying on the acceptance of facts which

the viewer may already know. The BBC's five-part *If ...* series (2004) addressed short and medium-term social and economic issues that could have been the subject of current affairs programmes and documentaries, but which were realized as docudramas. *If...The Lights Go Out* posited a power crisis in 2010 in order to address Britain's dependence on imported energy. *If...Things Don't Get Better* imagined social unrest in 2012 because of the escalating gap between the poor and the wealthy. *If...The Generations Fall Out* dramatised violent unrest in 2024 as a way of exploring the probable generation gap between middle-class pensioners and the young adults whose taxation will have to support them. *If...It Was a Woman's World* presented a feminist society of 2020 in which men had become second-class citizens, and *If...We Don't Stop Eating* imagined government policies designed to stigmatise and punish the overweight. Each docudrama began with voice-over to give pertinent factual information about how the future scenario was based on present trends, often exemplified by statistics, then introduced a series of fictional characters representing people affected in different ways by the consequences of the imagined future. The premise of these programmes was that 'it could be you', and their makers cast little-known actors to actualize the ordinary detail of how the future scenario could be experienced, so that relationships of identification and mirroring could be made available to the viewer. Voice-over as a documentary technique, and logical extrapolation from factual data claimed one kind of authenticity, while naturalistic performance expressing recognizable action, emotion and incidents claimed another.

One-off docudramas with similar hypothetical scenarios worked in similar ways. *Gas Attack* (2001) portrayed the process and effects of a nerve gas release in a British city, based on an actual incident in Tokyo. *Smallpox: Silent Weapon* (2001, repeated

2002) dramatized the impact of a potential pandemic that had been proposed in many media outlets as the next likely terrorist threat following 9/11. *Dirty War* (2004) explained and documented the likely effect of a small radioactive detonation in London. *The Day Britain Stopped* (2003) was set at Christmas, where multiple pressures on emergency services and political coordination were posed by a plane crash in London, gridlock on the city's orbital motorway the M25, and a terrorist attack on the city's financial district. Each of these programmes combined scripted performance with intercut news footage and other visual material signifying actuality, such as CCTV video. Because they were conditional-tense docudramas they cast actors without established personas deriving from previous programmes, inviting viewers to recognize the performers as equivalent to themselves. They adopted the conventions of television crime and disaster reconstructions, and in some cases also included simulated news interviews and witness statements. In each case, an understated performance style aimed to signify the ordinariness of the characters and their similarities with the imagined audience, by adopting the modified forms of psychological naturalism inherited from theatrical and cinematic modes of acting.

Historically, television fiction has realised the original aims of Naturalist theatre. That nineteenth and twentieth-century form was characterised by dramas set in domestic and private space, and showed a small group of characters living out their private experience in distinction to a larger public world. But individualization and privatization was placed in relation to the pressures and tensions of an unseen public sphere of economic and political restriction. The acting style developing from this is important because of its links with gestural and bodily expression (in distinction to linguistic

expression and heightened verbal delivery) and its relationship to ideologies of subjectivity that were discussed above. Psychological naturalism proposes that the actor's performance should be based on the realisation of the character's psychological truth (Baron et al, 2004; Butler 1991). In the terminology of this acting style, the character has 'tasks' to perform, is motivated by 'wants' and a consistent 'logic' in the 'given circumstances' of the drama. In docudrama based on real past events, these given circumstances are to some degree ready-made, since the historical records, interviews and background research associated with the docudrama's factual base will provide them. The same is much less likely for fictional drama where the script is not closely connected with actual events, so that actors' and directors' research takes different forms such as a programme of improvisation or reference to the actor's own emotional memories. The actor trained in psychological naturalism will look for a 'through-line' which takes the actor through his or her part, and a 'spine' or set of key moments by which the rest of the part is supported. In docudramas reconstructing actual events, or events based (like the BBC's *If ...* series) on extrapolations of factual evidence, such key moments are determined not only by the dramatic arc of the programme as in fiction, but also by the ways that the docudrama selects moments from a known past or an already-hypothesised future. Coherent psychology, contemporary forms of speech and gesture, and an emphasis on the revelation of the internal (wants and needs) through the external (action, movement and gesture) suit docudrama's purposes and restrictions well. The emphasis on motivation and psychology in this performance style tends to reduce the importance of the script, however, and this raises some problems for docudramas based on verbatim records. For docudramas based on verbatim language, or those where the experiences of

people in non-Western or pre-Modern societies are being represented, the inherited predispositions of psychological naturalism make the style much less successful.

### Melodramatic docudrama performances

Performance styles are very different in two examples of another kind of docudrama, where in one-off television films already-known public personalities are represented by actors. The mode of *Thatcher: The Final Days* (1991) and *Diana: Her True Story* (1993) has much in common with melodrama, which in television is marked by its focus on women characters, on the emotional and the psychological, and on moments of dramatic intensity (Bignell 2000). *Thatcher* was a dramatized reconstruction based on documentary records and interviews. *Diana: Her True Story* was based on Andrew Morton's bestselling book of the same title, which drew on interviews with Diana and her friends and dramatised her life from her childhood up to her separation from Prince Charles. The dramas were promoted as factual documents of the women's personal struggles, revealing their private lives and their private reactions to public events. Their documentary base was signalled by opening statements about the accuracy of their content, and by the appearance of journalists and television cameras within the dramas, where the news media frequently intruded into and commented on the actions of the central figures. There were many documentary programmes about Diana both before and after the *Diana* docudrama, including *Diana: The Making of a Princess* (1989), *Diana: Progress of a Princess* (1991), *Diana: Portrait of a Princess* (1994), and many tribute programmes after her death, such as *Diana: A Celebration* (1997). Similarly, Margaret Thatcher was the subject of documentaries including *The Thatcher Factor* (1989),



*Thatcher: The Downing Street Years* (1993), and *Thatcher: The Path to Power - and Beyond* (1995). Granada Television's fact-based dramas, like *Thatcher The Final Days*, derive their authority and production process from Granada's current affairs programming. The central figures in this tradition conceive docudrama to be based in immaculately researched journalistic investigation (Paget 1998: 165-8), including a requirement for exactitude of chronology and a sequential narrative structure. Date captions are very common at the beginnings of scenes, and captions also identify the names and job titles of politicians and civil servants. *Diana, Her True Story* is more closely related to US television docudramas about sensational news events (like *Amy Fisher: My Story* (1992) or *Casualties of Love* (1993), each based on the same crime of passion). While *Thatcher* showed no events which could not be confirmed by two or more sources, *Diana* relied heavily on Diana's own point of view, and used few written sources. In different ways, these docudramas were legitimated by testimony and their factual base was easy for the audience to recognize because of the iconic presence of the two women in public life and in television factual programming.

The performance style in both *Diana* and *Thatcher* derived from the melodramatic mode, as opposed to more naturalistic, understated performance modes. The cues offered to the viewer for interpreting performance drew on popular gossip and personality reportage about the personal lives and characters of Margaret Thatcher and Princess Diana, supplying the means to interpret dramatic turning-points and crises through a repertoire of stock character-types and codes of gesture and expression. Morton's on-screen introduction to *Diana* alludes to this narrative mode by describing the drama as 'a vivid human interest story about a dream marriage that turned into hell for

Diana: it's a story of a fractured fairytale'. Action representing the public appearances of Diana and the royal family was counterposed and given significance through its relationship to Diana's private life and her psychological and emotional turmoil. Her increasing stature as an independent player in campaigns and charitable work in the public eye was seen by the media as in part an attack on her husband, Prince Charles, who was having an affair with Camilla Parker-Bowles. Princess Diana became bulimic and occasionally suicidal, and in the docudrama, a sequence of scenes aboard the Royal Yacht show Diana (Serena Scott Thomas) first discovering cufflinks on Prince Charles's shirt featuring the intertwined Cs of Charles and Camilla. 'You pig!' she screams, and walks out of the room. There is a cut to Diana voraciously eating cake in the Yacht's kitchen, accompanied by foreboding music in a minor key. The next shot is of Diana leaving a toilet, whose flush is heard in the background. So the sequence attributes Diana's physical problems to emotional disturbances provoked by her husband. The programme marks the emotional dynamics of the sequence by musical cues, as would be expected in melodrama whose historical evolution (and whose name itself) indicates the importance of music as a system to direct audience response. As in melodrama, conflict between characters produces emotional drama in *Diana*, and characters also experience conflicts within themselves which are expressed by rapidly alternating and conflicting emotions, made concrete through physical, bodily behaviour.

Melodrama emerged in the early nineteenth century as a form that could dramatize the ideological changes and contradictions thrown up by capitalism. Rather than focusing on a surface level of realism, melodrama expressed these tensions by 'pressuring the surface of reality' (Brooks 1985: 15). There was a transition from a

spiritual order governed by the institutions of the church and the monarchy into a secular order that replaced these legitimating values by an ethical code that infused the everyday with meaning and significance. This ethical dimension of the everyday, Brooks argues, is repressed by realist narrative, but by contrast the mode of melodrama heightens moral conflict and pushes narrative and style towards excess, thus provoking the revelation of an otherwise buried realm of moral and social values. Violent emotions and physical action emerge which physically catalyse this moral struggle and lead to the liberation and moral triumph of the protagonist. Film and television melodramas have developed these schemas to focus primarily on relationships within the family, and between familial groups and a broader society (Bignell 2005: 97-100), and a few television docudramas have used the mode to represent female public figures like Thatcher and Diana.

Since media icons like politicians, film stars, and members of the royal family are recognised by their characteristic media images, their representations are already composed of a restricted repertoire of facial expressions, tones of voice and gestures, like the repertoire of characteristics which define melodrama characters. Reference to the images that the audience already knows, together with the actors' mimicking of familiar bodily movements, facial expressions and tones of voice, both aids perceptions of authenticity and triggers the audience's response to the central figures in terms of television melodrama. In a dramatisation of an interview with a *Times* journalist in *Thatcher The Final Days*, for example, Thatcher's familiar patterns of speech and gesture and her political dogmatism are brought together in her reaction to Michael Hestletine's candidacy for Conservative Party leadership. Thatcher (Sylvia Syms) leans forward in close-up, speaking loudly and emphatically, saying 'We cannot go that way, we *cannot*

*go that way*', then breaks into a confident smile. Diana's characteristic glance from under the fringe of her hair, and her relative awkwardness in her youth versus a more confident bearing later in life, are used in *Diana* both to recall media images of her on television and in the press, and to chart her emotional development. *Thatcher* shows Mrs Thatcher in a simulated broadcast of a parliamentary debate where she famously said 'No, no, no' to European integration, where the camera angle and shot type exactly match the conventions of the real television footage of the parliamentary debate. Reenacted moments in *Diana* include the positioning of the camera to duplicate the famous press photograph showing her legs through a see-through skirt, and the Royal Wedding itself where close-ups on the actors portraying Diana and her father are carefully integrated with parts of the real broadcast coverage of the event. In both *Thatcher* and *Diana*, lead actors were selected in part because of their physical resemblance to the real people they play, making these matches with real footage more easy to achieve.

In the 1980s prime-time television melodrama *Dynasty* (1981-9), the central woman character Alexis Colby used her (and men's) sexuality in her struggle for power. Alexis was aggressive and sexually manipulative, but all because of her untimely separation from her beloved children. In other words, her masculine behaviour was the result of a thwarted and distorted femininity. Similarly, Margaret Thatcher was represented as a masculinised woman, reputed to be domineering and ruthless, to the extent that satirists sometimes portrayed her in men's clothing or with a male body. In *Thatcher*, Margaret Thatcher maintained control of the male-dominated and patriarchal Conservative party and the Government. At a Cabinet meeting near the beginning of the drama, Thatcher complains that the drafting of bills is behindhand, asking sharply

‘Would someone care to tell me why?’ A series of brief medium shots follows, showing the assembled Ministers looking down at their notes sheepishly, or fiddling with their papers to avoid her gaze. While the scene is based on factual evidence, its dramatic significance comes from the performance’s melodramatic characterisation of Thatcher as a domineering boss.

The expression of emotion is both a marker of femininity and of working-class culture (Lusted 1998). While masculine values (like those of politics, journalism, and the British royal circle) entail the suppression of emotion in favour of efficiency, achievement, and stoicism, feminine values encourage the display of emotion as a way of responding to problematic situations. Similarly, elite class sectors value rational talk and writing as means of expression, versus emotional release. These distinctions have been important to work in television studies on the relationship between gender and the different genres of television, where news and current affairs are regarded as masculine, and melodrama as feminine. On the basis of these gender, class and genre distinctions, the role of emotional display in *Thatcher* and *Diana* takes on increased significance. Diana’s frequent tearful outbursts separate her from the stoical elite group which surrounds her, some of whom are also women, and parallel her with the ordinary viewer. Thatcher’s eventual capitulation to tears at the final meeting with her Cabinet is also a marker of her defeat by masculine forces and the values of the political culture which she had sought to control. She is seen in medium shot across the cabinet table, making a final statement before withdrawing from the leadership contest, remarking, when her voice breaks, ‘I’ve never done that before’. Christine Geraghty (1991: 74) argues of US prime-time soaps that they are set in a world controlled predominantly by men, but offer

pleasures to the woman viewer by showing that male power can be challenged ‘on the one hand by moral questioning and on the other by women’s refusal to be controlled’. In contrast to this, *Thatcher* and *Diana* show women failing to hold onto their power within masculine elites. The dramatic climaxes of *Thatcher* and *Diana* attain their climactic status at the cost of the ejection of the women from the masculine public world. The mode of melodrama imposes restrictions on characters, limiting their ability to act and creating a sense of claustrophobia and the domination of particular spaces by social and ethical forces that intrude into them and infuse them. *Thatcher* and *Diana* offer the pleasure of recognising familiar figures, events and issues in the public realms of politics and elite institutions, and also the pleasures of identification and fantasy focused through their private experience. The history of television features on the two women shows an interest in both their public roles and their private lives and personalities, but in *Thatcher: The Final Days*, the political environment is depicted in the familial and domestic terms of television melodramas like *Dallas* or *Dynasty*. Discourses of femininity were important to the public images of both Diana and Margaret Thatcher, and performances in the two docudramas also link public and private in their linkage of documentary reconstruction with melodrama.

#### Docudrama as a vanguard form

The imperatives of television documentary, emerging during the era of scarcity (Ellis 2000) in British broadcasting when there were few terrestrial channels, matched the ethos of public service to draw together the nation’s cultures, classes and regions by showing viewers how other people lived. Documenting audio-visually ran alongside analysis,

often by professional experts, to prompt intervention into material circumstances. Documentary aimed to contribute to the public sphere of rational debate and democratic participation by enabling the exchange of information and the possibility of transcending separations of place, class, education and ideology. But changes in television and in the broader culture have meant that the ambition of documentary to connect with these large-scale ideological strategies has become significantly less important. Individual documentaries are surrounded by many more competing programmes and channels, splitting their audience, and audiences have been understood not as clients but as markets. Assumed relevance to the audience's interests has reduced the number and prominence of factual programmes about other nations and unfamiliar cultures, alongside a surge in factual programmes about ordinary people including the various forms of Reality TV.

Television docudrama has grown in prominence and frequency as part of this shift. It is one of many contemporary audio-visual forms characterised by generic hybridity comprising documentary and dramatic modes (Corner 2002). In cinema, examples include *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and *The Queen* (2006) or the bio-pics *The Aviator* (2005), *Capote* and *Walk the Line* (2006). The events of 9/11 were the source for *United 93* and *World Trade Centre* in 2006. In television, the high-budget mini-series *Band of Brothers* (2001) was based on fact and testimony about the Second World War, and docudramas on aspects of this historical conflict included *D Day* (2004), *Hiroshima* (2005), *Conspiracy* (2002) and *Dunkirk* (2004). Five television docudramas addressed the 9/11 events: *The Hamburg Cell* (2004), and in 2006 *9/11: The Twin Towers*, *The Path to 9/11* and *9/11: The Flight That Fought Back*. These docudramas share a concern to

investigate recent events of historical significance in a hybrid form, as did *The Government Inspector* (2005) about the controversy over Iraq's absent weapons of mass destruction, and *The Road to Guantanamo* (2006) about the 'war on terror'. Reality TV programmes like *Crimewatch UK* (1984-), and history programmes like the Channel 4 series *English Civil War* (2005) also adopted docudramatic performance techniques in order to attract popular audiences. Entertainment and drama producers experimented with hybrids such as the 'mock-documentary' *The Office* (2001) in order to revive established fiction genres (Roscoe and Hight 2001). Television always aims to contain and explain the real, especially through the form of narrative, in order to address cultural understandings of the real. Docudrama performance is a crucial aspect of generic verisimilitude because it signals to the audience which genre codes should be adduced to evaluate these narratives about the real. Docudrama is a rapidly-evolving part of contemporary television culture, and its transgressions of the boundaries between factual and fictional modes foreground performance as an aspect of docudrama's hybridity. The kinds of performance evident in recent docudrama illuminate the tensions between the different claims to authenticity that this hybrid mode can make. More broadly, the hybridity of docudrama that is being explored in ever more innovative and creative ways expresses a widespread interest in calling on the traditions and future potential of the television medium, as an intimate and immediate window and mirror.

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