CHAPTER 8

The Fact/Fiction Divide: Drama-Documentary and Documentary Drama

Television schedules reflect the increasing prominence of productions which meld the conventions of drama and documentary. Historical dramas, 'biopics' (filmed accounts of the lives of famous and infamous people), dramas constructed around incidents from news headlines, dramatic plays which replicate the visual styles of documentary and journalistic inquiries which include dramatic re-enactments, are all a part of this popular global televisual practice. The film industry also continues to produce work in this field, most notably filmed biographies and historical dramas including *JFK* (1991), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Braveheart* (1995), *Michael Collins* (1996), *Hurricane* (1999), *Pearl Harbor* (2000), *Iris* (2001), *Ali* (2001) and *Pollock* (2002). Works of this type raise a number of questions regarding the documentary form, and the legitimacy of its relationship to dramatic treatment of historical events. Depending on which interpreters are read, the meeting of fact and fiction results in either the subversion of documentary claims to authenticity and veracity, or, innovative and productive approaches to documentary representation. While the movement or dispersal (again, depending on which interpretations are followed) of the documentary impetus within dramatic forms occurs across both film and television, the presence of documentary/dramatic programmes on television has at times resulted in a number of issues and controversies which focus and inform discussion of such works. Within the context of such controversies, and the

regulatory restraints imposed on the form by broadcasters often in response to controversy, this chapter examines Peter Watkins' *The War Game*, a representation of nuclear holocaust in Britain made for the BBC in 1965 but banned and unscreened for 20 years.[1] The analysis includes definitions of forms on the fact/fiction divide, and the history and functions of these forms. The future of such productions and emergent works within the field are also considered.

The meeting of 'documentary' and 'dramatization' has produced numerous variants. In defining these works it is important, as Corner (1996: 32) points out, to note the difference between the term 'drama', used to indicate an exciting, suspenseful event (as in the journalistic turn of phrase, 'the situation took a dramatic turn') and as a reference to enactment, a restaging of an event, often using professional actors. Though the forms discussed here negotiate both usages of the term, the emphasis is on drama and dramatization as related to restaging, reconstruction or the re-enactment of events. Among these terms, 'reconstruction' has popularly been applied within the context of current affairs programming and investigatory journalistic documentaries where it is used to recreate certain details of an event. A more extensive use of dramatization – full-scale reconstruction, the focus of this chapter – occurs in the subgenre of documentary that includes the forms variously referred to as dramatized documentary, drama-documentary, documentary drama, docudrama, dramadoc and faction.

Paget (1998) refers to what he calls 'dramadoc/docudrama' as a genre, a form in its own right and devotes two chapters of his study of the form to definitions, while Goodwin and Kerr (1983: 1), in contrast, reject the notion of a homogenous category that can be conveniently defined or classified. The multiplicity of drama/documentary works and the problems associated with characterization have led certain commentators to favour descriptions which refer to a range of forms within a general field of conventions. In opposition to a strict categorization, Leslie Woodhead (1999: 103) theorizes fact/fiction forms within a spectrum running from journalistic reconstruction, on one end, to dramatic enactment, on the other. Goodwin and Kerr (1983) also refer to a range or continuum of works involving drama and documentary features, and Hoffer and Nelson (1978), in their study of US examples, posit nine formal variants in the field ranging from a so-called pure form of re-enactment based on investigatory and trial records, to programmes or films which include varying degrees of fictionalization.

Despite their increasing complexity, the interpretative value of such taxonomies is complicated by the continual emergence of new hybrid fact/fiction forms.

A useful and productive approach to the complexities of defining the forms on the fact/fiction divide has been provided by John Caughie in his important essay 'Progressive Television and Documentary Drama' (1980).[2] Caughie's essay provides succinct definitions capable of accommodating the majority of established and emergent works in this area. Within a discussion of the ideological implications of realist styles of television production, Caughie identifies two dominant forms within the fact/fiction representational divide: 'dramatized documentary' and 'documentary drama'. According to Caughie, dramatized documentary is an approach based on facts derived from investigation and research. Such practices are commonly signalled in a programme's opening titles, or within television scheduling guides through a statement to the effect that the content is 'based on fact'. In this form factual material, such as that contained in court transcripts, or the biographical details of a well-known historical figure, for example, is communicated through the conventions of drama. An example here is the work *Police State* (1989), a dramatized documentary from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation which uses professional actors to re-create the findings of a government commission of inquiry and journalistic investigations into police corruption in Queensland during the 1980s under the premiership of Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

A documentary drama, on the other hand, is a work which relies on dramatic codes and conventions for the basis of a fictional narrative that makes reference to factual or possible situations, people and events. Documentary drama draws heavily on what Caughie calls a 'documentary look', a style which creates the impression of facticity within a fiction by replicating the visual language of documentary film through techniques such as shaky camera shots and a reliance on natural lighting (Caughie, 1980: 27). A notable example of a documentary drama is *Cathy Come Home* (BBC, 1966), a programme dealing with the plight of a fictitious homeless family in the Britain of the 1960s. Though the characters were invented, the details of homelessness and its effects were informed by a range of factual sources. While he draws on a range of examples to establish the distinctions between the two forms, it can be noted that Caughie's distinctions are not comprehensive; certain

examples, notably *The War Game*, tend to confound the categories. (*The War Game* can be considered a documentary drama, but one which deals with a non-existent event, unlike *Cathy Come Home* which derives its documentary effect from historically verifiable social conditions.) Nevertheless, the general distinctions between documentary drama and what Caughie calls dramatized documentary, or what is here called drama-documentary,[3] has a basic interpretative and definitional value which is drawn on in this chapter as a way of characterizing the varying historical and contemporary approaches to the intersection of documentary and dramatized material.

The recent high profile in television schedules and in cinemas of forms from the fact/fiction divide may tend to suggest that such forms are a new development on the production scene. However, the histories of cinema and television contain numerous examples of works which negotiate aspects of fact and fiction. Among the examples that can be pointed to in this regard is the work of George Méliès who, in the late nineteenth century, together with making the fantasy and trick films for which he is best known, produced a number of short films in which he used dramatic reconstruction to re-create real incidents. Similarly, D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) constructs a dramatic narrative, albeit one inscribed with the racial attitudes of its era, from scenes based on detailed historical research. Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) drew on the historical details of a mutiny on board a pre-Revolutionary Russian warship as the basis of a work which mixes fact and fiction in an expressive way. The Inuit 'family' in Flaherty's 1922 key work of documentary cinema *Nanook of the North* was composed of unrelated Inuit individuals who re-enacted often anachronistic aspects of Inuit life for Flaherty's camera. In Britain, the documentary film movement of the 1930s and 1940s, following Grierson's definition of documentary as 'the creative treatment of actuality', established an inventive or 'creative' approach to documentary material which embodied an acceptance of the place of dramatization in the documentary text. Paul Rotha's comment (quoted in Winston, 1988b: 21) that 'Documentary's essence lies in dramatizations of actual material' made explicit the practices of many works from the documentary film movement, among them Harry Watt's *North Sea* (1938) and his *Target for Tonight* (1941) and Humphrey Jennings's *Fires Were Started* (1943). These films adopted a 'story-documentary' format which melded factual details to a heavy

reliance on characterization and narrativization borrowed from fictional forms.[4]

The number of examples of work on the fact/fiction divide produced outside television tends to qualify the assertion, made by one commentator in 1956, that 'The dramatized story documentary is one of the few forms pioneered by television' (Doncaster, 1983: 8). Nevertheless, the demand of television to produce new and appealing forms in its search for wider audiences has provided a certain impetus for the production of works in the fact/fiction category. Corner (1996: 38) has noted the ways in which television producers in the 1960s developed the story documentary within realist plays which were based on intensive research and grounded in authentic social settings. A prominent broadcast environment for work of this kind was provided by the BBC's *The Wednesday Play*. Notable programmes produced for this slot in the 1960s included *Cathy Come Home* and *The War Game*, both of which created controversy, a characteristic that has consistently attended various documentary drama and drama-documentary practices.

Unleashing the beast: controversy and functions of the forms

As the production of documentary drama and drama-documentaries increased with the expansion of television in the late 1950s, criticisms of the forms also increased. Typical of the growing criticisms was a review published in 1960 in *The Listener* of a drama-documentary series about the British police force produced by the BBC Documentary Department:

> Drama or documentary? – the 'Scotland Yard' programmes fall uneasily between. Basically these are documentaries, each dealing with some different aspect of the extremely complex activities of Scotland Yard. Unfortunately, it seems to have been felt, quite wrongly, that this would be insufficiently interesting in itself, so little shots of drama are injected and these give the impression that the police are incompetent or venal or both. (quoted in Caughie, 2000: 102)

The reviewer's unease over the melding of dramatic and documentary moments was echoed in the reception of the breakthrough documentary drama *Cathy Come Home*. In a review of the programme in the *Sunday Telegraph* in 1967 the reviewer complained that a description of the play in the *Radio Times* as

a 'semi-documentary' created confusion and 'deliberately blurs the distinction between fact and fiction. Viewers have the right to know whether what they are being offered is real or invented' (in Petley, 1996: 15–16).

In 1980, Associated Television's *Death of a Princess*, a drama-documentary of the execution for adultery of two members of the Saudi Arabian elite, threatened diplomatic relations between Britain and Saudi Arabia and led to criticisms of the programme in Parliament. Speaking in the House of Commons, The Lord Privy Seal, Sir Ian Gilmour, insisted that 'the so-called dramatizations or fictionalizing of alleged facts or history is extremely dangerous and misleading' (quoted in Woodhead, 1999: 101), and Lord Wigoder argued in the House of Lords that 'television companies ... present programmes deliberately designed to give the impression of being documentary based on fact whereas the reality is that in substance they are no more than fictional reconstructions' (quoted in Petley, 1996: 11). Reviews of the programme in the British press fuelled the controversy. A reviewer for *The Sunday Times* (13 April 1980) argued that the programme distorted the 'known facts' through 'elaboration and embroidery'. A review in *The Guardian* (6 August 1980) asked of the form, 'Well, what is it? Fact or fiction? History or current affairs ... Significant episodes in [the] lives [of historical figures] are ... presented in fictitious form ("artificial, counterfeit, sham"), or, rather, in a mishmash of fact and fiction and producer's whim. It is a profoundly unsatisfactory development in the use of television' (quoted in Edgar, 1982: 15).

The substance of the various criticisms – essentially, that the dramatization of fact is misleading – has continued to impact on debates concerning drama-documentary and documentary drama. Interestingly, the criticisms reveal the persistence of a basic assumption concerning the nature of documentary representation. The claim that dramatizations are misleading carries with it the implication that a more accurate representation is available through 'traditional' documentary techniques which, supposedly, refuse dramatic re-enactment. As has been pointed out earlier in this book, Grierson's definition of documentary as the creative treatment of actuality admitted dramatic reconstruction as a legitimate component of 'creative' representation, and the practices of reconstruction have continued as a structuring component of much documentary work. The allusion to the existence of a documentary mode entirely devoid of 'dramatic' techniques or moments

of dramatization posits the existence of a 'pure' documentary form which is difficult to locate in the documentary tradition.

An acknowledgement that conventional documentary contains reconstructive and dramatized elements does not, however, release drama-documentary and documentary drama from the requirements of meeting standards of accuracy which it is expected to uphold as a documentary form. All-too-often, though, it is clear that the emphasis on factual accuracy in criticisms of dramatization have functioned ideologically to mask concerns and anxieties generated by the politically or morally problematic nature of the content of these documentaries. The controversy surrounding *Death of a Princess* can be interpreted in these terms. Comments in Parliament on the programme's form only partially served to displace the fact that the real cause of the critical attack was the programme's politically sensitive subject and the threat it posed to relations between Britain and Saudi Arabia. In another example, much of the adverse critical reception of *Cathy Come Home* stemmed in part from the play's depiction of quite intimate scenes of marital life and not any confusion over distinctions between fact and fiction. The extended controversy surrounding Peter Watkins' *The War Game* and its subsequent banning is a significant example of the reactions of broadcasters to 'difficult' content. The reason given by the BBC for this action was that the programme was 'too horrifying' and likely to incite panic, even suicide, within an audience. However, research has revealed that the ban was in large part a result of official concerns over the effects of the programme on Britain's nuclear defence policy (Tracey, 1982). According to the research findings, the charge that the programme was 'too horrifying' takes on different resonance, one which suggests that the programme was censored for being 'too close' to the truth.

In addressing questions of accuracy and credibility, producers and broadcast regulators have implemented procedures and approaches which emphasize the distinction between factual and fictive elements in the drama-documentary and documentary drama. Promotional announcements for a programme often stress the factual basis of the content and, as Kilborn (1994b: 65) notes, the production of historically based drama/documentary forms is grounded in detailed research and the verification of factual sources similar to that operating in news and current affairs programming. Producers are aware of the move toward litigation arising from slander and defamation and are, as a consequence,

careful to check their facts. The threat in the United States of such litigation may well account for the popularity of 'docudramas' based on transcripts of court proceedings which are by their nature verified as accurate records of evidence.

Broadcast regulators have implemented codes of practice which contain details concerning the production and scheduling of drama-documentaries and documentary drama. Both the BBC Producers' Guidelines and the Independent Television Commission's Programme Code, for example, include directives in this area. The latter code states that:

> a clear distinction should be drawn between plays based on fact and dramatized documentaries which seek to reconstruct actual events. Much confusion may be avoided if plays based on current or very recent events are carefully labelled as such, so that fictional elements are not misleadingly presented as fact... Care should be taken in scheduling drama and drama-documentary programmes portraying controversial matters... Impartiality may need to be secured by providing an opportunity for opposing viewpoints to be expressed. (quoted in Petley, 1996: 20)[5]

Leslie Woodhead, the founder of Granada's Drama Documentary Unit, acknowledged many of the concerns that such a code seeks to address – the potential for viewer confusion and deviations from historical accuracy – and pointed to other issues associated with the production of work on the fact/fiction divide, in particular that such work is 'uniquely time-consuming and alarmingly expensive' (1999: 102). In the presence of the many issues surrounding the forms, Woodhead asks why producers continue to invest in their production. 'Why unleash such an unruly beast at all?', asks Woodhead.

As if in answer to this question, the playwright and script writer David Edgar (1982: 23) insists that the power of the drama-documentary 'lies in its capacity to show us not that certain events occurred (the headlines can do that) or even, perhaps, why they occurred... but *how* they occurred: how recognizable human beings rule, fight, judge, meet, negotiate, suppress and overthrow'. In Edgar's assessment, a drama-documentary or documentary drama provides a way of invoking psychological or emotional motivations capable of rendering human action intelligible. Returning to his question, Woodhead argues that certain situations demand the use of reconstructions and justify the difficulties of unleashing

the beast. Such situations include those events which occurred before the invention of the film camera, legal restrictions on cameras in courtrooms, subjects who are willing to provide information 'for the record' but who, for various reasons, are unable or unwilling to appear on camera, and incidents which governments declare 'off limits' to cameras. The media scholar Derek Paget (1998) summarizes what he interprets as the essential function of drama-documentary and documentary drama forms when he argues that such forms provide an effective means of representation when there is no other way to narrate the facts of an event.[6]

This capacity is especially relevant in the case of *The War Game*, a programme which deals with a hypothetical event, namely, nuclear attack on Britain. In the absence of documentary footage or eyewitness testimony, Watkins relies on dramatization to construct a fact-based account of the devastating effects of such an attack. Watkins recognized that the extent to which his critique of British nuclear policies accorded with the known facts of nuclear war was crucially important in a political environment supportive of nuclear weapons proliferation. Thus, within the boundaries of what is clearly a fiction, Watkins provides a range of information on thermonuclear war and its aftermath, while at the same time he uses the documentary drama form to comment on the factual validity of the information. The film performs this complex task through the construction of a hierarchy of knowledge in which varying modes of address, and the information delivered by the modes, is simultaneously criticized and informed by being placed against and superseded by other layers of articulation. The result is an ascending order of modes of address, and an accompanying presentation of varying knowledge concerning the effects of nuclear war.

The War Game: addressing the information gap

The War Game deals with the time before, during and after a nuclear attack on Britain. The film, made in 1965, is set in the near future but draws on contemporary events such as the war in Vietnam and Cold War hostilities between the West and the Soviet Union as the basis of its narrative. Though it follows a chronological structure, overlapping levels of address and action replace a single narrative strand. The first part of the film describes the

lead-up to nuclear attack on Britain. The war in Vietnam precipitates a Soviet invasion of West Berlin which, in turn, provokes a decision by Western nations to retaliate by firing an 'Honest John' nuclear missile. In response, the Soviets use intermediate range thermonuclear missiles to attack NATO targets across Europe. As this sequence of events unfolds, officials in Britain begin to evacuate the women and children of London, and many evacuees arrive in Kent to be billeted in local households. Citizens are interviewed in the street about the effects of radiation as a policeman delivers pamphlets containing rudimentary information on nuclear attack. Those citizens who can afford to purchase expensive building materials begin to construct bomb shelters.

The narrative of disaster is fully realized when a Soviet thermonuclear missile falls short of its military target and explodes in Canterbury, unleashing a firestorm which engulfs many people and asphyxiates others. Intercut with scenes depicting the bomb's physical effects, various authorities, among them a representative of the Vatican Council, a bishop, and a nuclear strategist, speculate on the moral and military implications of nuclear attack. In the immediate aftermath of the strike, medical supplies and medical personnel are in short supply, and corpses pile up in the street awaiting burial. Two weeks after the blast law and order break down and civilians arm themselves to battle the police. Food is scarce and hunger and disease follow as firing squads are used in an attempt to quell the social chaos. People lose any sense of motivation and live in squalor, much as they did after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Three months after the attack children interviewed in a refugee camp in Dover are apathetic and anxious about the future.

Watkins used this chilling scenario to address what he saw as the lack of widely available information on the possibility of nuclear war and its effects. According to Watkins, this 'information gap' was the result of a situation in which the British government refused to release necessary information on nuclear build-up and thermonuclear war (in Blue and Gill, 1965: 14). The film seeks to ameliorate this situation by providing well-researched factual information to fill the information gap. Indeed, as Watkins pointed out, overcoming the information gap demanded extensive research: 'With *The War Game*, I had to do a great deal of original research because nobody had ever collated all the information into an easily accessible published form. Quite a lot of books have been written

on the effects of thermonuclear bombs, but very few of these had ever been seen by the public' (quoted in Rosenthal, 1988: 595). As part of this research, Watkins met with biologists, radiologists, physicians and academics and studied the medical effects of exposure to nuclear radiation. Among the written sources he consulted were reports on the destruction of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Dresden and the nuclear tests conducted by the US government in the Nevada desert in 1954. In order to gauge the nation's level of preparedness for nuclear attack Watkins wrote to the Home Office for information concerning plans for civil defence in case of nuclear war. (He received no reply, though the Home Office contacted the BBC regarding his inquiry, with the result that the BBC warned Watkins not to pursue that line of research.)

The War Game represents the information gathered from its array of sources within what can be identified as five major modes of address. Though other, lesser forms of address occur in the film (the megaphone-like voice derived from newsreels used to announce certain segments is a case in point), the principal hierarchically organized voices, or forms of representation, are those comments derived from interviews with people in the street; the opinions of authoritative figures; the voice-over narration which provides technical information on nuclear war; the voice-over of a second narrator which narrates the action in the present; and the visual image.

Whereas the majority of the action in *The War Game* is based on carefully scripted comments, some segments include unrehearsed spontaneous comments. One such segment includes a series of to-camera replies to an off-screen interviewer asking questions on the effects of the radioactive substance carbon 14. The respondents had volunteered to participate in the making of the film, though they had no prior knowledge of this scene. According to Watkins (in Rosenthal, 1988: 600) the ill-informed responses 'are perhaps the biggest single indictment in the entire film of the way we are conducting our society and of the lack of common public knowledge of the things that affect humanity'. It is this lack of knowledge of a crucial topic – nuclear armament and the potential for nuclear war – that the film works to overcome through the relentless delivery of information.

One level of information is represented in the form of statements on thermonuclear war made by real-life authorities, including a nuclear strategist who insists that in a nuclear war 'both sides

could stop before the ultimate destruction of cities, so that both sides could retire for a period of ten years or so of post-attack recuperation, in which world wars four to seven could be prepared'. The words (drawn from statements made by Herman Kahn, a strategist of nuclear war), together with other 'authoritative' or so-called expert statements made by a bishop and a psychologist are, within the context of the ascending order of knowledge, presented as dangerous fictions. The presentation of information is extended through the use of two narrators. The dual narrators produce separate modes of commentary in a way which revises standard forms of exposition. One narrator uses the conditional tense to speak of what could happen, as in the voice-overs: 'Should Britain ever thus attempt the evacuation of nearly 20 percent of her entire population, such scenes as these would be almost inevitable'; 'What you are seeing now is another possible part of nuclear war'; 'It is more than possible that what you have seen happen in this film would have taken place before the year 1980.' Against this position a second narrator sets forth action in the present. This is the voice that introduces the evacuees on the bus and similarly introduces the physician Dr David Thornley as he makes house calls in Canterbury immediately after the nuclear attack. This narration, imbued with a sense of immediacy, cuts through the dry narrational evocation of what could happen as it provides dramatic descriptions of unfolding events.

These voices interact with and complement the final level of address, that of spectacle and the visual image. It is at the level of the visual image that the 'unthinkable' becomes horrifyingly real. Images of nuclear holocaust supersede both the 'expert' opinions on the utility of nuclear war and voice-over statements on the hypothetical effects of such a war. More particularly, the realistic and graphic imagery has its own rhetorical valence that undercuts the arguments and assessments made in support of the use of nuclear weapons. The cogency of Watkins' visual 'critique' is heightened through the deployment of conventions of direct cinema and its stylistic claim on reality, including a reliance on natural lighting, a soundtrack that captures muffled often indistinguishable dialogue, and filming with a hand-held camera that tilts and pans as it documents the action. The wedding of direct cinema conventions and dramatic enactment makes a powerful appeal to the emotions which ratifies the film's informational content; viewers 'feel' or register emotionally the ideas and information presented within

the interviews and voice-overs. Through the use of dramatic conventions Watkins is able to represent the unrepresentable – nuclear apocalypse. It is only through dramatic enactment that a camera operator can survive a nuclear blast described as 'melting the up-turned eyeball' and 'thirty times brighter than the noonday sun'. Dramatization fulfils what Paget (1998: 89) calls the 'promise of complete seeing' that informs the film's mix of information and emotion. In documentary drama 'the camera's ability to go anywhere and see anything is both borrowed from documentary on the part of the drama and extended by the drama on behalf of documentary'. Drama and documentary 'go together to increase the camera's truth claim by denying its actual deficiency (it was not there in fact but we can pretend it was in fiction)' (Paget, 1998: 89).

Paget argues that the resulting form, what he calls the 'dramadoc/docudrama', is principally indebted to the television drama, and that the 'direct influence of documentary has been less marked' (1998: 89). *The War Game* qualifies this assertion. In its 'preconstruction' of a hypothetical event *The War Game* draws on the imaginative potential of drama in such a way that it links with the informational and agitational focus of documentary. The hierarchy of knowledge operative in *The War Game* produces knowledge, which in a progressively propagandistic way, is an exhortation to protest the dangers of nuclear weapons. The purpose of the film was, as Watkins stated (in Gomez, 1979: 53), 'to break the silence on the subject [of nuclear threat]' and 'to evoke sufficient public discussion to enlarge the whole issue ... and to try and provoke people ... to political or social or media means of confrontation'. It is in this provocation, as much as the degree to which it is based in fact, that the film returns to the field of documentary as espoused by Grierson. According to Grierson, documentary represents reality using creative methods, among them the use of dramatic techniques, with the aim of imparting knowledge that will mobilize viewers to act in the world as responsible citizens.

From the end of the world as we know it to the beginnings of the known world: from *The War Game* to *Walking with Dinosaurs*

In the three decades since the banning of *The War Game* the drama-documentary and documentary drama have featured prominently

within various national broadcast environments. In the United States, the lives of infamous people have provided a staple of content for a new generation of drama-documentary/docudrama.[7] Such programmes often draw on salacious headlines to emphasize the 'human drama' aspect of stories in ways which extend the basic form of the so-called trauma drama, domestic melodramas focused on family problems (Feuer, 1995: 31). The proliferation on US television of the 'headline' docudrama (Carveth, 1993) or 'instant histories' (Nimmo and Combs, 1983) is evidence of the commercial viability of a form which is able to draw on a certain level of audience familiarity with stories which have circulated widely in the news media.

The productive arrangements and scheduling practices of Australian television during the 1980s were structured to accommodate a heavy reliance on drama-documentaries on historical subjects, often with nationalist themes, presented in a 'mini-series' format. The success of a number of such programmes (among them *The Dismissal*, 1983, *Bodyline*, 1984 and *Vietnam*, 1987) established the mini-series as a prominent format on Australian television during the decade. In these programmes, and in an array of fiction films of the 1970s and 1980s, dramatization was deployed to rework historical and political subject matter within recognizable frames. In the case of the mini-series *Vietnam*, for example, the homefront effects of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War were reflected in a narrative of inter-generational conflict (the 'generation gap') which grounded the historical within the familial and the personal.

In Britain in the 1990s the drama-documentary was used as the basis of investigations into various politically sensitive topics, provoking the kind of controversy that attended earlier productions such as *Death of a Princess*. Among the programmes to meet with controversy were *Who Bombed Birmingham?* (Granada, 1989), an account of the 'Birmingham 6', *Why Lockerbie?* (Granada, 1990), a programme dealing with the bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie in Scotland, and *Hostages* (Granada, 1992), a reconstruction of the Beirut hostage crisis.[8] The prevalence of 'reality-based stories taken from topical journalism' on US and UK television in the early 1990s led one commentator to claim that such works 'are the most popular drama genre on U.S. and British television today' (Rosenthal, 1999: xiii).

While drama-documentary and documentary drama continued to be produced throughout the 1990s, the use of dramatized

reconstructions during this time was largely displaced on to varieties of popular factual programming, chiefly programmes within the 'emergency services genre' in which high levels of dramatization are interspersed with observational and expositional sequences. In such works the evidentiary potential of dramatization – its capacity to reveal information that was not captured by cameras – is reinforced in sequences that concentrate on moments of intense 'human drama' (motor vehicle accidents, violent crimes and so on). More recently, the investigative functions and broadcast appeal of the drama-documentary and documentary drama forms have been extended through the application of new film technologies in the production of work on the fact/fiction divide. The recent television co-production *Walking with Dinosaurs* (BBC/Discovery, 1999[9]) exemplifies this trend.

Digitally constructed dinosaurs put flesh on the bones of scientific theories which postulate the existence of such creatures. The resultant dramatization of aspects of what is at times anthropomorphized dinosaur behaviour occurs in a form that combines elements of the nature documentary and dramatic reconstruction. The work conforms to drama-documentary practice whereby dramatization is routinely employed to imaginatively fill gaps in otherwise complete documentary evidence (Kilborn and Izod, 1997: 142). As such the practice continues to anchor drama-documentary and documentary drama within the field of non-fiction which, as Michel Renov (1993b: 2) has argued, 'contains any number of "fictive" elements, moments at which a presumably objective representation of the world encounters the necessity of creative interpretation'. *Walking with Dinosaurs* satisfies our desire to know by visually recreating extinct animals and in this way it fulfils what has been called 'an explicit "documentary desire" ', that is, 'the desire for the evidence of our own eyes' (in Paget, 1998: 200). Digital dinosaurs represent a new mode of drama-documentary which has proved its ability to hold its own on crowded television schedules in which various 'traditional' and 'hybrid' forms compete for share of an audience, thereby pointing to a renewed future for work on the fact/fiction divide.

CHAPTER 9

The Evening Report: Television Documentary Journalism

The journalistic reporting of newsworthy issues is an essential feature of television programming. Two of the primary televisual modes deployed to report current events and notable personalities are news bulletins and current affairs programmes. Television news reports typically feature one or more news presenters or readers in a studio whose scripted to-camera comments are complemented by video footage of selected news items. Current affairs programming resembles new bulletins in those examples that include multiple studio-based items of interview and discussion. Alternatively, current affairs programming moves away from the format of the news bulletin in those cases where a programme is composed of short, filmed reports on a single topic. In such cases, current affairs programming intersects with a related, though distinct, form of television news reporting, that of the long-form television news documentary, the subject of this chapter.

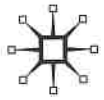
In contrast to the routinized presentation of multiple items in television news bulletins, and the studio-based interviews and short filmed reports of current affairs, television news documentaries – also referred to as special or feature reports – are longer filmed investigations of a single issue or event. The television news documentary is formally similar to the extended investigative reports of print journalism, and in this it approximates the lead report in a newspaper. Schlesinger *et al.* (1983: 166) draw a useful distinction between television news and television news documentaries by

Documentary Screens

Non-Fiction Film and Television

Keith Beattie

palgrave
macmillan



© Keith Beattie 2004

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2004 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN–13: 978–0–333–74116–0 hardback
ISBN–10: 0–333–74116–1 hardback
ISBN–13: 978–0–333–74117–7 paperback
ISBN–10: 0–333–74117–X paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturin processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3
13 12 11 10 09 08

Printed in China

For my mother, and to the memory of my father, Reginald Joseph Beattie (1922–1998)