

University of Aberystwyth

Faculty of Arts

Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies

# **History Documentary on UK Terrestrial Television, 1982-2002**

By

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is an examination of the connection between the changes in the political economy of television, and changes in history documentary form, between 1982 and 2002 on UK terrestrial television. It reviews the literature on the political economy of the media, including public service broadcasting (PSB), and on documentary form, including history documentary form. The thesis then poses three research questions which aim to explore changes in the political economy of television, the effect these changes had on the production of history documentary, and the effect these changes in production had on the form of history documentary. The thesis used official documentation, television listings, practitioner interviews and textual analysis to answer these research questions. The thesis then lays out a historical narrative of the developments in the production of history documentary on UK terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002, and analyses the causes and results of these developments. It argues that a direct link exists between changes in the political economy of television and changes in the form of history documentary between 1982 and 2002. The thesis demonstrates that the shift from traditional PSB values towards a market-driven broadcasting ecology affected the production, and form, of history documentaries. These changes in turn challenged traditional notions of quality and history documentary's function as a form of PSB. The thesis also demonstrates that the effect of political economic change on history documentary form was not as simple as had hitherto been implied in the academic literature. In particular, there was a parallel between the tension between public service and commercial aims, in both the structures of television production, and the form of history documentary.

## Declarations and Statements

### DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... (Candidate)

Date .....

### STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A

Bibliography is appended.

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### STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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## Dedications and Acknowledgements

*For Polly; without whom the destination would be final, and the journey finite ...*

*... i Dad a Mam; diolch i chi am agoriad llygaid, a'ch cariad amyneddgar...*

*... to Popty; who stood guard over me throughout.*

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis analyses the development of history documentary on UK terrestrial channels from 1982-2002. Recent academic writing (Cannadine, 2004; Hunt, 2006; Corner, 2007, 2006; Bell and Gray, 2007; Williams, 2007) has identified an increase in the frequency and significance of history documentary on UK television during the late 1990s, and noted changes in the form and function of history documentary. Whilst this work documents and comments upon the notion that there was an increase in history documentary on television, it neither attempts to describe nor analyse the extent of changes in the quantity or formal characteristics of history documentary, nor does it engage in detail with the historical causes of these developments.

This study seeks to address this gap, by examining the nature and extent of the development of history documentary on UK terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002. In part, the motivation of this study also lies in the professional experiences of the author, who worked at a number of production companies that specialised in the production of history documentaries between 1996 and 2004. In order to do this, this study engages with a body of work about the relationship between the changing political economy of broadcasting and changes in programming quality (Seymour and Barnett, 1999; Curran and Seaton, 2003; Golding and Murdock, 2005). The thesis therefore seeks to apply a political economic approach to the analysis of a specific form of cultural production, the history documentary.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to the theoretical foundation of this study. Firstly, it focuses on the theories related to the political economy of the media, and in



particular how this is related to the concept of public service broadcasting (PSB). The second part of the chapter reviews the literature on documentary form. The third part of the chapter reviews the literature about the development of history documentary form. The chapter then proposes three main research questions, which derive from a systematic review of the literature, which aim to further the understanding of the link between the political economy of the media, and the development of history documentary form. These are:

1. What were the key developments in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002?
2. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and the production of history documentary on UK terrestrial TV?
3. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and changes in history documentary form?

Chapter 3 describes the methodology applied in this study. A variety of methods were used: document analysis; content analysis; interview analysis; textual analysis. The chapter discusses the advantages and disadvantages of these methods, and the specific ways in which they were applied in the context of this study.

Chapter 4 reviews the development of the political economy of television in the UK between 1982 and 2002, lays out the foundation for the study of the effects of structural changes in UK television on the production and form of history documentaries in subsequent chapters. The chapter gives an account of the main

structural changes in the television sector, looking at changes in the legal framework, economic organisation and institutional organisation of the sector. Then it assesses the factors that drove those changes, and ends by discussing the consequences of the developments.

Chapter 5 applies the context established in Chapter 4 to the specific example of history documentary production. It uses journalistic sources and interview material to assess the development of history documentary production between 1982 and 2002 on the UK terrestrial television channels. The first half of the chapter comprises a detailed discussion of the changes in history documentary production according to several categories: institutional management; commissioning; audiences; production budgets; production schedules and emerging technology. The second half of the chapter summarises and introduces areas of discussion for subsequent chapters.

Chapter 6 presents results from the analysis of television listings. In particular, the chapter assesses whether history documentary experienced a boom over the period, as was suggested by the academic literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The chapter also assesses the question of the growth of history documentary in comparison to other programme genres and other types of documentary. Secondly, the chapter assesses the changing position of history documentary in the schedule. Thirdly, the chapter assesses the changes in content of history documentaries, in terms of period, topic and formal type.

Chapter 7 discusses the development of history documentary form, through the use of interview material. It does this by subdividing history documentary into its constituent

elements: interview, archive, presenter, dramatic reconstruction. The chapter also pays additional attention to the period and topics covered.

Chapter 8 conducts an indicative exploration of selected dimensions of textual change in the history documentary over the period through the detailed formal analysis of set of key history documentaries. The programmes are analysed in order to assess competing claims in the academic literature about the changing quality of history documentaries over the period.

Chapter 9 concludes the study by summarising the discussion and conclusions of all previous chapters. Chapter 9 then addresses the thesis' central research question, before placing the study in the context of other relevant academic work. The chapter ends by offering suggestions for possible further study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses aspects of the main theoretical debates in the fields relevant to the subject of this thesis, the significance of changes in a particular category of cultural production, the television history documentary. Section 2.2 will outline aspects of the field of political economy, with specific reference to the application of political economy to the study of the media. Section 2.3 will then discuss public service broadcasting (PSB), a specific area within communications policy debates that derives much of its impetus from the concerns of political economy. Section 2.4 surveys debates surrounding the development of history documentary on television since the early 1990s. Section 2.5 places the debates about the developments in history documentary in the context of debates about the changing function and aesthetic properties of non-fiction film. The chapter concludes by assessing the gaps present in the literature, outlining the way this thesis will address those gaps, and how it will make an original contribution to the field.

### **2.2 Political Economy**

This section will briefly introduce the field of political economy, before moving on to look at the application of this perspective to media studies.

### 2.2.1 Political Economy Overview

According to Mosco (1996), the term ‘political economy’ had its roots in ancient Greek, where it described the management of domestic resources (Mosco, 1996: 24). Political economy at its most basic sought to be both descriptive and prescriptive: to describe the conditions in which resources were produced and consumed, and to prescribe the methods and rules of how such management should be best conducted (Mosco, 1996: 24). Inherent in this dual purpose was the question of power: “One can think about political economy as the study of *the social relations, particularly the power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources.*” (Mosco, 1996: 25) (Italics in the original).

However, whilst the twin imperatives of description and prescription were fundamentally common to all political economy approaches, different perspectives emphasised one or the other. The descriptive approach was manifested in the attempts by classical political economists of the eighteenth century to describe the management of resources in terms of rational, mathematical laws, capable of being applied to any area of industry and human endeavour. The descriptive approach sought to deploy the rational processes of logic and science in order to create models of economic process that dispassionately and objectively described a given pattern of production and consumption. The results of these attempts were invested in the notion of a ‘free market’, a set of principles and mechanisms that ensured the easy exchange of goods and services with the minimum of human involvement and bias. Underlying this approach was the utilitarian aim of maximising the satisfaction and happiness of the individual through the exercise of personal choice (Mosco, 1996: 47-8). Any other system of economic control had the potential to be dominated by authoritarian

systems of power-relations, due to the central role of power in the management of resources.

Whilst a broadly descriptive approach cast PE as an examination of “the industrial activities of individual men” (Palgrave, 1913: 741, cited in Mosco, 1996: 24-25), the prescriptive approach was more concerned with “relations between the government and the governed” (Ibid). Therefore the prescriptive approach fundamentally disagreed with the mechanistic nature of the descriptive approach. For the descriptive approach, the moral dimension was essential in that without it, powerful social groups could dictate the machinery of production and consumption to suit the ends of their own class, and perpetuate unequal power-relations. This perspective most obviously manifested itself in the tradition of Marxist economics (Mosco, 1996: 56).

Whilst the labels ‘descriptive’ and ‘prescriptive’ could be useful to some extent, neither approach existed in isolation. Within the history of PE’s development, there are numerous attempts to approach the question of describing and prescribing production and consumption that contradict such a simplistic categorisation (Mosco, 1996: 22-70). The twin works of Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) show how moral concerns were central in the formulation of mathematical and rational economic models that form the basis of much contemporary neo classical political economic thought (Mosco, 1996: 35). Similarly, the complex economic models of the Marxist tradition show that there was a need to measure and describe economic processes before radical intervention could be formulated and implemented. But the emphasis on either prescription or description was crucial, as it played an important role in the structuring of the debates

at the heart of PE, “over the separation of fact and value, analysis and prescription, economics and moral philosophy” (Mosco, 1996: 36).

The divide between these two approaches is also evident in the political economy of communications. The next section will discuss these contrasting applications of political economy in the field of communications, under the headings ‘critical political economy’ and ‘neo classical political economy’.

### 2.2.2 Critical Political Economy

At a broad level of definition critical political economy is an approach that challenges mainstream economics, in that it seeks to analyse the processes of capitalism, in order to formulate a critique regarding the connection between production, consumption and unequal power-relations. This radical critique challenges mainstream economics’ reliance on the notion of the ‘market’ as the best arbiter of resource management, arguing that the market is not a value free system, but one constructed to operate in line with the interests of elite social classes. A key feature of a critical political economy of communications is how private ownership and market systems of production and consumption can limit the democratic function of communications in a given social setting (Golding and Murdock, 2005: 67).

Both Mosco (1996: 70-134) and Hesmondhalgh (2007: 33-35) subdivide CPE in geographical terms, into traditions derived from work carried out in the USA, in Europe and the UK, and the Third World. For the purposes of this thesis the third category is put to one side, and a discussion follows regarding the first two categories. The USA tradition, founded by Smythe and Schiller, grew out of a direct engagement

with the political structures of the USA during the first half of the twentieth century (Mosco, 1996:82-87). This direct engagement with macro political structures and processes characterised the tradition, as it concentrated on the link between media corporations and the state, and the effect this relationship had on the type of communications systems and messages produced (Ibid). Due to this focus, ownership concentration was a primary concern. A prime example of such research is Herman and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* (1988). The main concern of this study was the use of communication systems by powerful social groups to reproduce unequal power-relations within society, in what Herman and Chomsky named the "propaganda model" (Herman & Chomsky, 1994: 2).

The European and UK tradition of critical political economy, led by the 'Leicester School' of scholars such as Halloran, Golding, Murdock, Harris and Hartmann grew out of work on a variety of case studies. This approach tended to build outwards from specific cases towards issues of state and corporate control, rather than taking the same starting point as the USA tradition (Mosco, 1996: 98). Critical political economy research in Europe lacked the institutional base and finance it enjoyed in the USA, and therefore tended to be hybridised with cultural studies, as in the work of Hoggart, Hall, Blumler and McQuail (Mosco, 1996: 101). Garnham also made a considerable contribution to the development of the study of the political economy of media (Garnham, 1977, 1990) in which he integrated discussions of economics and technological advance into the context of cultural studies (Garnham, 2005: 482-6) One consequence of this structural difference in the conduct of critical political economy research was that European critical political economy tended "to adopt a more self consciously theoretical position" (Mosco, 1996: 100) as each separate



research project worked out its own theoretical bearing rather than relying on a given structure.

Both the USA and European models attracted supporters. Hesmondhalgh (2007: 35-37) clearly aligned himself with the European model of CPE, and questioned the USA model on a number of levels. Hesmondhalgh argued that some applications of the USA model, especially examples in what he termed the Schiller-McChesney tradition, lacked the flexibility and subtlety of the European approach. Too often contradictions in the power-relations between owners, producers and the state were ignored. Models of activity in one area were too readily applied to other areas, without due adjustment. Changing patterns of production and consumption were not fully acknowledged. Informational media was prioritised over entertainment media. Overall, the USA approach was accused of being inflexible and a-historical. Instead, Hesmondhalgh preferred Bernard Miège's 'cultural industries' approach (Miège, 2000). Hesmondhalgh claimed this approach was more cognisant of audience activity, the organisation of cultural production on an everyday level, the importance of entertainment media, and changes in the social relations of cultural production and consumption (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 36-7).

Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model also attracted supporters, even 20 years after its first appearance. Colin Sparks (2007) noted that the propaganda model had been dismissed and neglected in communication studies due to the perception that it was too simplistic, and made little mention of the various levels of contradiction within news production. However, Sparks felt that even from his perspective, which differed from those of Herman and Chomsky in terms of philosophical grounding,

discipline and geographical location, the propaganda model still had much to offer. Its critique of the function of ownership of the media by a social and cultural elite held strong. The assertions that the world's media were mostly owned privately held strong, as did the assertions that private interests sought to shape the size and demographic of their audiences for commercial reasons, and that such ownership tended towards a controlling of voices proclaiming dissent against corporate capitalism. Sparks argued that a refining of the propaganda model, to include a more nuanced discussion of media diversity, of political and economic circumstances outside the USA, and the admission of the importance of 'professional autonomy', meant that the model could be retained." (Sparks, 2007: 69).

One example of a critical political economy approach that attempted to combine the strengths of both approaches was the model proposed by Golding and Murdock (2005). In this model, Golding and Murdock sought to avoid what they saw as the twin pitfalls of other political economy approaches, instrumentalism and structuralism. Instrumentalism was exemplified for Golding and Murdock in Herman and Chomsky's PM, and particularly in the propaganda model's focus on the power of elite groups, such as government or businesses, who have privileged access to the news, and are able to control public debate. Golding and Murdock's approach contended that whilst there was substance to these claims, the structures of the media could contradict an easy one-way flow of influence and power. These contradictions could open up spaces of autonomy and contestation for producers and audiences to resist the agendas of the powers that would control them. Tracing the limits of corporate and state power on one hand, and the efficacy of alternative views in

struggling against dominant accounts on the other, is a central part of Golding and Murdock's approach.

This approach also sought to avoid what Golding and Murdock referred to as structuralism, exemplified by Schudson's 'black box' approach to news media (Schudson, 1989: 266) in which a study of the structures of media companies and relations in any particular case were sublimated in favour of studying the results of communicative behaviour. According to Golding and Murdock, approaches such as Schudson's conceived of media institutions as "solid permanent and immovable" (Golding and Murdock, 2005: 63). Golding and Murdock's approach insisted that structures of media production and consumption were constituted and re-constituted by proprietors, producers and consumers, and therefore such changes should be tracked in order that ever-changing power-relations could be evaluated accurately.

In order to track these historical shifts in structure Golding and Murdock suggested that five main areas of historical development in communications be examined closely:

1. The growth of the media
  2. The extension of corporate reach
  3. Commodification
  4. Universalisation of citizenship
  5. The changing role of state and government intervention
- (Golding and Murdock, 2005: 64)

Within this analysis, Golding and Murdock also defined three foci for research:

1. The limiting effect of the production of cultural goods on cultural consumption
2. The political economy of texts: how representations in texts are related to the circumstances of their production

3. Political economy of consumption: the relationship between material and informational inequality  
(Golding and Murdock, 2005: 66)

Golding and Murdock also sought to engage with these themes in four main ways that marked their approach as being different to classical or neo-liberal economics:

...first, it is holistic; second it is historical; third it is centrally concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention; and finally – and perhaps most importantly of all – it goes beyond technical issues of efficiency to engage with basic moral questions of justice, equity and the public good. (Golding and Murdock, 2001: 72-73)

Golding and Murdock's position therefore sought to combine an approach that looked at the organisation of media industries with one that emphasises the construction and consumption of media texts. They saw these processes as being closely linked, and believed that a neo—classical political economic position did not give enough emphasis to the way in which differing levels of regulation and marketisation can have an effect on broadcasting, and more widely on culture. By approaching political economy in this way, Golding and Murdock claim to bridge the gap between questions of institutional policy, and producer practice. This approach leads Golding and Murdock to argue that the market creates distortions and deficiencies that require some form of public intervention, even though the exact nature of that intervention may be disputed.

### 2.2.3 Political Economy of the Media: Liberal Neo-Classicism

Whilst the work of Smith and Ricardo in the eighteenth century, and Jevons and Marshall in the nineteenth century, is linked to contemporary political economists of the right through rhetoric and some shared central notions (Mosco, 1996: 53-56), the contemporary starting point for the neo classical political economy of communications in the UK can fairly be represented by the work of Alan Peacock.

Peacock was chairman of the committee on the funding of the BBC under the Thatcher government. By Peacock's own admission, it was the first insertion of market economics into PSB in the UK:

Despite the sterling efforts by Ronald Coase, Nobel Laureate in Economics, going back as far as 1950, the economics of markets hardly penetrated policy discussion of broadcasting in Europe until the discussion surrounding the publication of the Home Office Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC. (Peacock, 2000: 2).

Peacock advocated the adoption of market mechanisms in broadcasting to regulate the relationship between production and consumption in an equitable way, in which the choices of individuals were balanced against the choices of the many whilst also regulating the management of scarce resources. The market was the best arbiter of what should be produced and consumed, and not the state. This was because in the context of a market system, the consumer had sovereignty over their own choices, rather than being subject to the patronage of an elite. This enabled decisions regarding production and consumption to be made in a manner that would best satisfy the majority of the members of a society (Peacock, 1986: 28). Freedom, in communications as well as in other fields, was only guaranteed by a market system and could not be centrally planned according to value judgements.

Some areas of the neo liberal political economic tradition viewed communication as merely another industry, and its products as similar to the products of any other industry (Coase, 1974: 389). However, other areas of the tradition gave a degree of special status to media products, exemplified by Peacock's analysis in 1986. In economic terms, media products were different to other consumables. Due to the principles of 'non-excludability' and 'non-exhaustibility', media products were unlike

other products, and not subject in the same way to the laws of supply and demand. Non-excludability denoted the difficulty of excluding consumers from communications products, and the barrier that the cost of such exclusion was to competition. Non-exhaustibility denoted the peculiar nature of media products, in that they still existed for public consumption, no matter how many individuals had previously consumed them (Home Office, 1986: paras. 28-30). There was also a recognition that media products played an important part in forming public opinion, and that consumers might not choose media products that were essential for the working of a democratic society (Home Office, 1986: paras. 28-29).

This perspective was later taken up by Richard Collins in the mid 1990s. Collins (with Murrioni) rejected the central CPE notion that the marketisation of communications could lead to a decrease in diversity and choice. He countered the claims of Lovell (Lovell, 1980:51), Stuart Hall (Hall, 1978: 41) and the Glasgow Media Group (Glasgow Media Group, 1976, 1980) that socialism in the West had failed due to the ideological ascendancy of the ruling class, powered by the in-built prejudices of Western commercial media. Collins cited the collapse of the USSR in 1991 as proof that socialist economic models were flawed in comparison to neo-liberal models (Collins & Murrioni, 1996: 2). He also rejected the Left's mistrust of marketisation manifested in the Labour Party document *The People and The Media* (Labour Party, 1974), in which it was predicted that a marketised communication system would result in less choice and diversity. For Collins, the prediction had been proven wrong by 1996, after a decade in which, it was argued, a marketised and neo-liberal approach to broadcasting had delivered more choice than had previously existed (Collins and Murrioni, 1996: 10).

Collins and Murrioni agreed that there were several ‘market failures’ in operation in the media sector that could prevent a market-led system from delivering free access to consumers. Subscription broadcasting, for example, even though it was based on a market system, was expensive to implement, and did not deliver the “social gains” of subsidised free-to-air broadcasting systems (Collins and Murrioni, 1996: 7). Collins also noted that free market systems led to media monopolies in which large media corporations dominated. This was because of the peculiar nature of media markets: set up costs and initial production costs were high and duplication and distribution costs were low, leading to significant economies of scale and scope. This in turn led to a tendency to concentrate ownership of production and distribution, to the production of fewer original products, and an emphasis on distribution and marketing. All these tendencies could militate against choice and diversity of broadcast content. Collins and Murrioni asserted that a too simplistic belief in the power of markets to deliver choice, based on the fruits of technological advance, had led to media markets that “remain clogged by monopoly” with a resultant deficit in choice (Collins and Murrioni, 1996: 7).

However, if corporations could establish monopolies within a market system, so could the state within a system of state-regulated media. Collins and Murrioni agreed that some element of market regulation was needed, but not in order to preserve the tradition of delivering high culture to the masses, but as a way of correcting market failure. Collins and Murrioni differentiated between these two regulatory aims by using the terms ‘positive regulation’ and ‘negative regulation’ (Collins and Murrioni, 1996: 144). Negative regulation for Collins and Murrioni denoted practices such as

quotas, and restrictions on programming, which imposed a hierarchy of taste on media output. Instead Collins and Murrone advocated regulation which was ‘positive’, and which regulated the market so that it could overcome its failures and maximise the choices available to consumers.

Whilst critical political economy had an integrated approach to the roles of media producers, neo-classical political economy has no set view on this matter. At one extreme, producers were seen as being free agents, who were autonomous within the market system, able to produce any media product they so choose as long as that product is successful within the marketplace (Whale, 1980). Another neo-classical position on media workers denied any automatic relationship between large corporations and lack of producer autonomy, as “large size can bring the resources required for comprehensive high quality reporting” (Collins and Murrone, 1996: 75).

#### 2.2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the application of political economy to the media can be characterised as being split into two camps. The first, exemplified by Golding and Murdock, is concerned with the structures of power that constitute, and are constituted, by media structures and messages. This perspective is preoccupied with the role of media within democratic debate, and the effect that particular types of ownership can have on public debate. Private ownership is viewed as being a danger to the accountability of the producers of media messages, which can lead to the imposition of ideological control from certain political perspectives. On the other hand, the perspective exemplified by Richard Collins sees media and communication as a sector that needs to adopt free market structures in order to maximise the welfare of the consumer.



From this perspective, the media and communication sectors are to some extent different from other industrial sectors, the adoption of market structures in media production is thought to ward against authoritarian paternalism by the state. Both sides share a belief in the need for regulation, but in differing ways.

The relevance of the positions set out in this section for this thesis is threefold. Firstly, this thesis is concerned with the effect of ownership and regulation on the structures of cultural production, especially within the field of television production. According to the theoretical positions laid out above, the nature of the industrial structure of the media can have a significant effect on its relationship to its viewers and listeners, and on society as a whole. Secondly, this thesis is concerned with the affect such structures may have on the everyday behaviour of media producers, especially within the generic confines of history documentary production. According to the positions discussed above, the power-relations implicit in the industrial structures of the media effect the conditions under which productive work is undertaken, which could limit or enable producers in terms of their production techniques. Thirdly, this thesis is concerned with the relationship between the political economic structure of the media and the specific forms of representation produced by those structures. The positions discussed above strongly suggest that the freedom of producers to express themselves, and of viewers to gain access to a diverse range of media products, is dependent on how the media industry is structured.

There are many models for approaching the question of political economy of the media. However, these theoretical issues have been explored very infrequently in

discussions of documentary, in particular covering an important period of change in the 1980s and 1990s. This thesis seeks to contribute in these areas.

### **2.3 Public Service Broadcasting (PSB)**

In the UK, questions of resource management in broadcasting have been dominated by the concept of public service broadcasting (PSB). The following section will outline a brief history of the concept in the UK context, followed by accounts of the critiques and defences of the PSB model.

#### 2.3.1 Public Service Broadcasting: Brief History

In the UK the debate as to whether or not the state should intervene in broadcasting has been framed within a debate over the concept of PSB. According to Curran and Seaton there was a tendency to attribute the emergence of public service, the central tenet of broadcasting policy in the UK, to either the personal convictions of the BBC's first Director General, John Reith, or to the expedience of the civil service of the time (2003: 110-113). However, these reductive arguments ignore the significance of the socio-political context of the 1920s, in which the notion of public boards governing public utilities, such as forestry, electricity and gas, were an established norm. Public boards of this kind, of which the BBC was an example, were a mixture of commercial and governmental management approaches: "The public corporation sought to combine the best of both civil and commercial value, rejecting political interference on one side and market forces on the other in favour of efficiency and planned growth." (Crisell, 1997: 19).

Both the economic pressure from commercial considerations and the political pressure from the state were seen as factors that could inhibit the ideal of a public service (Scannell, 1990: 15). The commercial element of public boards facilitated a certain independence from government, and emanated from the belief of managers such as Reith that government business should be run in a business-like manner with little room for politics (Curran and Seaton: 114). It was also felt at the time that public ownership was essential because of the inefficiency of commercial competition, and the damage commercial competition would have on the standard and quality of broadcast material. This fear of the low standards of commercial broadcasting were derived to some extent from the example of the USA in the 1920s, in which the clamour of commercial competition had to led to what F. J. Brown called the “frantic chaos” (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 113)<sup>1</sup> of multiple radio stations overlaid on the same frequencies. The fear of technical problems also drove the decision to constitute broadcasting in the UK as a monopoly.

It was in this context that the particular moral position of John Reith was situated. The nature of the public service offered was a specific vision in which the indivisibility of broadcasting consumption and the monopoly of supplier came together with a strong commitment to an undivided conceptualisation of the public good. From this combination emanated Reith’s twin aims for broadcasting: ‘something for everyone’, and ‘everything for someone’ (Crisell, 1997: 113). The first aim was to provide a mixture of programming for all tastes. This was of particular importance given the indivisibility of broadcasting, and that all sections of society could access the services with equal ease. Secondly, the aim was that the mixed schedule of the public

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<sup>1</sup> This perspective is now being challenged by media historians such as and Camporesi (2000) and Hilmes (2003).

broadcaster would provide all the information any listener would need. Broadcasting therefore provided guidance in terms of what should and should not be listened to. More specifically, Reith outlined five main goals for a broadcaster that served the public:

1. To broadcast to everyone in the country who wished to listen
2. To provide high standards – the best of everything
3. To be a monopoly – competition would force the abandonment of ‘quality’ in order to maximise audiences.
4. Funded by a licence fee, to stop advertising, so individual programmes did not depend on audience size and minority interests could be catered for.
5. Independence from government and commerce, again facilitated by the license fee.

(Adapted from Crisell, 1997: 19)

However, the concept of PSB did not remain static, as the concept was adapted to suit a number of socio-political contexts throughout the twentieth century. Public service moved from a Reithian to a post-Reithian phase with the appearance of competition (Crisell, 1997: 114). As continental competitor radio stations, and after the 1954 Television Act competitor television services, appeared the claim that one BBC channel could be ‘everything for someone’ began to wane (Ibid).

However, the Pilkington Committee (1960-62) strengthened the traditional understanding of PSB, through its criticism of ITV’s dependence on American imports, its promotion of acquisitiveness through cash prizes and its lack of programme diversity. By awarding the third channel to the BBC and not ITV, Pilkington allowed the BBC to continue competing with ITV on populist grounds, while still providing quality minority programming that had been the hallmark of the BBC. In effect, the BBC’s reaction to competition had therefore been to split its radio and television services between majority and minority channels (BBC1 and BBC2),

effectively splitting the audience and weakening the idea of an indivisible public good served by one mixed schedule.

However, the aim of ‘something for everyone’ was to some extent strengthened, not only by the choice in BBC output, but also by the public service remits to which commercial broadcasters were tied through their licensing authorities. No longer was the BBC synonymous with PSB, but now the purpose of public service was distributed across a system that mixed the public and commercial, in a model that was consistent with PSB’s founding concern with the injurious affects of commercial competition on programme quality. Whilst the BBC and ITV competed for audiences, they did not compete directly for funding, a situation which prioritised programme quality over audience maximisation: “This left room for both sides to develop programming which was not designed to maximise revenues but, in theory at least, to meet wider cultural and political goals.” (O’Malley, 1994: x).

The next major shift in the understanding and deployment of PSB as a concept was surrounding the Annan Committee’s (April 1974 to February 1977) deliberations over the creation of a fourth channel. Few problems had arisen in the definition of public service between government and broadcasters between the 1930s and the 1970s (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 367). But the growing volatility of the political climate in the 1970s, and the growing role of the news media in covering politics made a broad consensus over the public good difficult to sustain. In terms of policing broadcasting’s engagement with the public, Annan saw the broadcasting authorities (the IBA and the BBC board of governors) as having two main purposes:

1. To ensure that broadcasting operated in the public interest
2. To defend broadcasters from undue political pressure

(Curran and Seaton, 2003: 367)

But this put the broadcasting authorities in a difficult position, where they had “both to reflect political pressure and resist it” simultaneously (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 368). This was a much harder task given the confrontational political climate of the 1970s. Earlier governmental reports had based broadcasting policy on “an assumption of commitment to an undivided public good” (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 364). The Annan Report envisaged PSB in a different way: “Rather it became for Annan, and those who supported and inspired him, a free marketplace in which balance could be achieved through the competition of a multiplicity of independent voices.” (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 363). Broadcasters were no longer to be guardians of taste, but facilitators for an increasingly multicultural society (Home Office, 1977: 30).

The Annan Report also introduced the notion that broadcasters should be judged on their programming, and not on their attainment of overall aims (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 370). This, again, was contrary to the ideals of public service, and a move towards conceiving of broadcasting as a service that delivered products to individuals, rather than an overall social project. This added to the fact that by the mid 1970s the commitment by creative workers to the ideals of public service had been replaced by a code of professional values, and decisions were being made on the grounds of ‘rational managerialism’ rather than on public service grounds. The result was a diminution of public service values in UK broadcasting: “Consequently, not only were the talented programme-makers upon whom Annan, for instance, rested the future of broadcasting less committed to public service than before, but also they had become less important within broadcasting organizations.” (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 371)

For Crisell this re-negotiation of PSB by Annan was not an abandonment, but did signal a move away from the traditional understanding that broadcasting engaged with the notion of an integrated public, and moved towards the idea of reflecting the interests of ever smaller interest groups (Crisell, 1997: 203). The Annan Report, and the evidence offered to it on both sides of the political spectrum, made way for an even larger shift in the concept of PSB in the 1980s and 1990s (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 365).

After 1979, the new Thatcher administration's monetarist project re-interpreted public service in terms of the atomised structure of individual consumers within a market system. For broadcasting this amounted to a "fierce ideological and political assault on PSB" (Kim, 1994 - unpublished thesis). The main vehicle for this re-interpretation of PSB into market terms was the Peacock Report. In the Information Technology Advisory Panel (ITAP) and Hunt reports of 1982 on cable and satellite broadcasting, "the basis of public service broadcasting was abandoned" (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 364) when new systems of broadcasting were suggested in which the only requirement of broadcasters was to show programmes that would attract sufficient audiences to be commercially viable. The Peacock Report (Home Office, 1986) went a step further by recasting PSB in terms of 'consumer sovereignty'. The Peacock Report presented PSB as a valiant attempt to simulate the conditions of a free market in an area of production that suffered from scarce resources. According to Peacock's version of PSB's history, spectrum scarcity had necessitated the use of PSB "as an appropriate response by taxpayers to market failure" (O'Malley, 1994: 104), a failure which was about to be corrected by increased choice offered by cable and satellite

broadcasting technologies. For O'Malley, such re-writing was a disservice to the history of PSB:

In the UK broadcasting was never viewed as being an embodiment of free market theory. It is completely misleading to judge its goal, achievements and future in the light of that theory. Broadcasting emerged and evolved to meet a much more complex range of needs than reading Peacock would suggest. (O'Malley, 1994: 106).

Whilst the Annan Report had re-defined the nature of PSB, the Peacock Report marginalized PSB within the context of UK broadcasting. The 1990 and 1996 Broadcasting Acts pursued to different extents the line that PSB was no longer the core aim of broadcasting in the UK. However, despite the ferocity of the attacks against public ownership of all kinds during the 1980s and 1990s, the notion of PSB still survived, albeit in an altered form (Matthews, 2004 – unpublished thesis). Discussions of policy within the BBC, Channel Four and ITV, still continued to grapple with the contradiction between public service and commercial interests (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 402), a conflict that has to some extent always existed within the UK broadcasting sector.

However, it is important to note that this conflict played out to a different extent, and at different speeds, at different broadcasters. These differing trajectories were often caused by the differing constitutions of each broadcaster, their varying levels of reliance on public funding or regulation, and on the specific resistances and pressures in each case. This necessitates the qualification of some of the landmark events in the period under question. For example, whilst the Peacock Report was a landmark event in the landscape of British broadcasting history, its effects were felt differently, and at different times, at different broadcasters. Whilst the BBC was affected by the policies of the Thatcher government, of which the Peacock Report was a part, the Corporation



managed to escape the full effects of the Report, which itself recommended less radical immediate change than was anticipated. Indeed, it was eventually Peacock himself who felt marginalised in terms of the application of his ideas to the BBC (Peacock, 2000).

However, the effects of the Peacock Report were far more visible at ITV, albeit through the filter of the political process that modified and selected some of the Reports' recommendations for inclusion in the 1990 Broadcasting Act. Once again Peacock was a landmark, but only part of a process, which was modified throughout the 1990s by the decisions of successive governments and key ITV management figures such as Michael Green and Gerry Robinson. The main effects of the Peacock Report on Channel 4 were only felt seven years later, when Channel 4 began to sell its own advertising, rather than having its advertising sold by ITV. This change had a significant effect on Channel 4 in terms of an increase in its adoption of commercial editorial strategies and a large increase in revenue. This level of variation was also in play in the adoption of new production technologies, financing models and programme forms.

### 2.3.2 Critiques of PSB

The following section will examine how PSB has been criticised from both a broadly leftist position, and a neo-classical economic position. Both these positions produced complex and voluminous literature that engaged with PSB, and the following sections deal with selected examples that bear on the topic of this thesis<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Writers such as Williams (1967), Curran (1986), Heller (1978), and Hall et al (1978), have also contributed to discussions of the merits and disadvantages of PSB from a broadly left perspective. From the neo-classical perspective, writers such as Altman (1962), Brittan (1987), Caine (1968), Coase (1950), Jay (1984) and Veljanovski (1989) have also made important contributions.

### 2.3.2.1 Critiques of the left

The *Glasgow Media Group* studied news accounts surrounding industrial disputes, (Glasgow Media Group, 1976), and argued that news in the public service sector had to create the illusion of balance and impartiality in order to claim that it worked in the name of a unified public good. However, such balance was impossible. Indeed, *Bad News* showed that rather than creating a public space in which balanced reports of events were reported, the news on the UK's PSB terrestrial television system was biased in favour government and business interests, and against trades unions (Glasgow Media Group, 1976:244-268).

Hall characterised this 'bias' as a systemic element that sought to retain the control of information flow in the hands of the powerful. This 'bias' was built on a system of representation that emphasised certain accounts and voices, whilst 'structuring' and justifying the absence of others, keeping all broadcasting messages within a narrow channel of possibilities. However, this 'bias' was difficult to isolate and challenge:

The word we most commonly use to describe it is 'bias'. But the concept is woefully inadequate and in many ways misleading. It suggests deliberate and wilful, self-conscious bending of the rules. Of course, a good deal of deliberate conscious 'bending' goes on all the time. And yet I am convinced that, if everyone in the system stopped 'bending' it tomorrow, the emphases and structured absences would continue. (Hall, 1986: 11)

Whilst Hall looked at the nature of the messages emanating from the PSB system, Garnham made a link between those messages and the organisational structures of PSB. In particular, Garnham later noted that the management policies and structures

of the BBC reproduced class divisions and unequal power relations (Garnham, 1990: 128-31).

The criticisms shared common ground in their conception of PSB institutions, especially the BBC, as being dominated by certain social classes that perpetuated their view of society rather than delivering a service that was suitable for the whole population of the UK. These critiques reflected a concern that the paternalist nature of PSB could lead to a misrepresentation of some sections of society, representations that carried significant weight due to the ideological power of broadcasting.

#### 2.3.2.2 Neo-classical critiques

The critiques of the right focussed on two main areas: the notion of choice and its relationship with freedom of expression, and the inefficiency of a non-commercial broadcasting system.

Peacock (Home Office, 1986) asserted that the best way to cater for consumers of broadcast media was to create a market system in which consumers could influence what was produced through their choices. Peacock did not dismiss the achievements of the PSB system, citing its ability to deliver a wide range of programme at a very low cost to the consumer. Peacock also commented that the diversity and range of programmes delivered through PSB was impressive, and would not have occurred had the system been entirely commercial. However, the disappearance of spectrum scarcity through technological innovation removed the main justifications for PSB, and Peacock believed that ideally a greater element of competition should be

introduced to broadcasting in the UK, in order that consumer sovereignty could operate as an organising principle (Home Office, 1986).

Collins cited PSB as an example of a disparity between cultural and political unity. There were dangers to the freedom of expression inherent in creating the strong links between national and cultural identities set up by PSB. In a discussion of EU policy, Collins asserted that diversity of culture was all-important to individual freedom, but that the regulatory nature of PSB endangered the cultural freedom of individuals, by the imposition of a synthetic culture (Collins, 1993). Sawers believed that there was a contradiction at the heart of PSB, for its advocates desired “independence from political interference, but funding from taxation” (Sawers, 1996: 90). He believed, as did Peacock and Collins, that “commercial services, funded by a variety of means, are more appropriate to a democratic society” (Sawers, 1996: 90-1). The present approach was paternalist in that it claimed to educate the viewer in a more effective way than the viewer would educate themselves through their choice of programmes, and ran the risk of mimicking the curbs on freedom of expression seen in authoritarian regimes. Sawers argued that PSB news programmes, for example, were under pressure from governments to support the status quo. Sawers claims such pressures were greater than those brought to bear by advertising money, and argued that a multiplicity of sources were needed to ensure unbiased news. The PSB equivalent to a market mechanism for revealing public wants was extensive audience research. However, this he argued has been a poor way of planning the production of consumer goods by the operation of the same system in the USSR (Sawers, 1996: 90).

Additionally, Sawers argued that the PSB tradition required that producers were “superhuman”, and were able to influence the audience to become “more responsible, intellectually more demanding and politically more inquisitive” whilst also entertaining them (Sawers, 1996: 87/88). He argued that it was unlikely that producers could achieve these ends, and indeed unlikely that they even set out to do so. Instead Sawers believes that producers made the programmes they wanted with no regard for the opinions of viewers, or managers within PSB institutions. Producers’ and PSB institutions’ resistance to change was therefore explained by a fear of a loss of expressive power, rather than a concern for lowering standards or detrimental effects toward culture and democracy. For Sawers, the autonomy of the producer posed a danger to freedom of consumption. Producers would best serve the consumer’s freedom to choose by prioritising the meeting of consumer demand, rather than producer’s autonomous agendas (Sawers, 1996: 90). Instead of producer taste, an increased degree of choice would give the viewers a chance to develop their taste through experiment, making the need for producer’s development of consumer taste redundant. A subscription system would also allow viewers to express not only their approval of a programme, but the strength of their approval, “by the amount of money they are prepared to pay for it” (Sawers, 1996: 88-9).

Peacock (Home Office, 1986) also criticised PSB’s lack of financial efficiency, as broadcasting did not conform to the norms of cost control and accounting that existed in the commercial business sector, which led to the profligate use of public money (Home Office, 1986: para. 585). Ten years later, Beesley agreed with Peacock’s view of PSB’s inefficiency when he called for the introduction of “far more stringent financial reporting standards”, adding that the license fee created an imbalance in the

broadcasting market, (Beesley, 1996: 27). In 2000 Peacock restated his doubts about the financial probity of PSB, and questioned the role of the license fee, as the BBC had taken up a strong commercial position and had grown in size considerably. But there was still a “mystique” attached to public service broadcasting, built around the idea of market failure in welfare economics, and the concepts of ‘indivisibility’ and ‘non-excludability’ in media economics that marked broadcasting out as different to other economic sectors (Peacock, 2000: 2).

However, Peacock repeated his claim that the elimination of spectrum scarcity has also eliminated the justification for PSB, and that cable and satellite technology introduced the possibility of pay-per-view, challenging the need for a licence fee. (Peacock, 2000: 4). While Peacock agreed that some state subsidy of the arts was necessary, he did not agree with the present extent and method<sup>3</sup>. He applauded the 25% independent quota of the BBC, but also reiterated his 1986 recommendation of a 40% independent quota as a way of transforming the BBC into a publisher rather than a producer. He also repeated his claim that the governance of the BBC was not transparent, and not in line with the norms of business practice, as the BBC was immune from having their accounts scrutinised by the Actuary General (Peacock, 2000). Sawers echoed this statement in 2000, asking that the BBC only make programmes that are clearly in the public interest. In addition, in order to balance the market and neutralise the BBC’s anti-competitive presence, he called for the BBC’s monopoly over public money to be lifted, and for other broadcasters to have access to public support for the production of programmes that are in the public interest (Sawers, 2000).

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<sup>3</sup> It could be argued that in the 1986 report, Peacock displayed his own tastes in the selection of the types of programme that should and should not be supplied through PSB. These invariably reflected cultural forms traditionally considered as ‘high brow’ (HMSO, 1986: paras. 580-1)

For Collins et al, economics in broadcasting was a question of reconciling the benefits of PSB and those of the market. PSB was good at delivering goods referred to as ‘merit goods’. They are goods that consumers would not choose because they were oblivious to their long-term advantages, such as “high culture, scientific research and education” (Collins et al, 2001: 3). However, Collins added, the benefits of introducing a system that allowed consumers to signal the nature and strength of their taste might outweigh the losses to society of ‘merit goods’ (Collins et al, 2001: 4). So a combination of PSB and market-oriented approaches was needed, and the policy question should be not the dominance of one or the other, but how they interacted.

### 2.3.3 Defences of PSB

The defences of PSB are many and wide ranging. This section focuses on two of the main ones. Firstly, that PSB is a better basis for delivering a diverse range of broadcasting output, which offers the audience choice and variety, than a market oriented system. Secondly, that the concept of public broadcasting contributes towards the strengthening of a public sphere, which is essential for the proper functioning of a democracy.

Tracey argued that an over-emphasis on efficiency could lead broadcasting into a process of McDonaldization, as defined by the sociologist George Ritzer. Such a process emphasised efficiency, speed of delivery, predictability of product and non-human control of production as essential elements of rational progress (Tracey, 1998: 55). Drawing on Weber’s notion of bureaucratisation, Tracey suggested that PSB could limit the mechanisation of culture, which was crucial in order “to preserve a

certain section of humanity from the fragmentation of the soul, this complete ascendancy of the bureaucratic ideal of life” (Weber cited in Tracey, 1998: 55). The techno-rationality of McDonaldization was a danger to freedom of expression, rather than a mechanism for delivering it (Tracey, 1998: 56). This danger is also linked to the prevailing ethos that humans were not capable of being anything but consumers, putting the project of democracy and the public sphere itself in doubt (Tracey, 1998: 61).

Related to this argument was one about PSB and choice:

The victims of media concentration are variety, creativity, and quality, while the proliferation of broadcasting channels in the hands of a small band of operators, ‘liberated’ by government policy from the obligations of public service variety, is likely to make matters worse. ‘Choice’, without positive direction, is a myth, for all too often the market will deliver more - but only of the same. (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 375)

The notion of choice through a market system was illusory, as commercial broadcasting did not sell programmes to audiences, but audiences to advertisers (Curran, 2005: 179-196). Increased commercial competition therefore had the opposite effect to that of increasing choice for the viewer, because as the choices proliferated the audience share of each channel decreased. This then focussed larger channels’ energies on the most popular genres, in order to guarantee audiences for their advertiser-funders. This in turn led to media concentration in the hands of those successful in capturing the most lucrative areas of the market. As a result there was a decrease in the range of programming made, and consequently, in the choices available to audiences (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 374). PSB, with its aim of ‘something for everyone’ was a bulwark against such movements to the middle of the market. In addition, the PSB system had not been inefficient in purely economic



terms, as it had built a successful broadcasting industry in the UK, which in turn became a significant exporter of television programmes (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 302).

If PSB was a better engine for diversity of content, it was also far better at ensuring that broadcasting played a constructive part in democracy. The Broadcasting Research Unit's (BRU) evidence to the Peacock Committee found that PSB was not merely a system for "policing the shortage" produced by spectrum scarcity, but also had an important democratic function. This democratic function could not be replicated by market mechanisms, and PSB was an integral part of "the social fabric" whose loss would diminish the nation (BRU, 1985: 25-32). The survey identified eight main features of PSB (BRU, 1985: 25-32). These features emphasised the community aspect of PSB, in serving all parts of the British public.

In a similar vein, Scannell (1990) asserted that PSB was more engaged with democratic processes than its commercial counterpart for five main reasons. Firstly, because of the lack of profit motive in delivering services to poor and rural areas, commercial services would not provide universal geographical coverage. Secondly, PSB ensured the delivery of programmes that suited a variety of tastes through the principle of the mixed schedule. The alternative to the mixed programme, generic channels, destroyed the "principle of equality of access for all to entertainment and informational and cultural resources in a common public domain" (Scannell, 1990: 26). Thirdly, "the privatisation of informational and cultural resources" recommended by Peacock's functioning market would lead to a two-tier society in which the universal access to information enshrined in the PSB tradition would be challenged.

Fourth, the PSB system keeps “a commitment to properly public, social values and concerns” against the prevailing grain of economic thought. Fifth, Scannell believed that PSB represented an important “citizenship right”, that had a crucial role in achieving a “common culture”, and a “shared public life” to which all citizens had equal access. This five-point defence emphasised the importance of social cohesion and shared public spaces as a fundamental element of democracy, whilst it played down the potential problems such social cohesion presented to freedom of speech. Indeed, Scannell implied that freedom of speech was contingent more on a universal access to a democratic public sphere, than a consumer’s ability to exercise power through choice.

For Tracey, the ability to create social cohesion was also an important part of PSB’s success for its programmes managed to “bind us together, however momentarily” (Tracey, 1998: 29). Tracey contested the neo-liberal assertion that a free market system was value-neutral. He claimed that “a hidden paternalism” that was not as open to accountability as it was in the PSB system, existed in commercial broadcasting systems (Tracey, 1998: 49). PSB was therefore not the only model of broadcasting with a strong ideological component, but at least the ideology of the PSB system was put in openly and with the stated aim of providing equal access to informational and cultural products. No such regulatory infrastructure would be present in a privately owned and wholly commercial service.

Curran and Seaton rejected the simple equation of freedom of speech with freedom to publish, which was often grounded in discussions of newspaper publishing. Arguing that producers in a free market did not take account of all members of their audience

equally, Curran and Seaton argued that the content of privately owned media tended to “represent the world in ways that are consonant with the interests of dominant groups” (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 288), and so they focus content on those who have the ability to purchase their output, and those whom advertisers want to attract to certain media products (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 287). In contrast, PSB was not only a guardian of social democracy, it was able to generate and strengthen democratic energies (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 209). In addition, Curran and Seaton took issue with the other branch of the neo-liberal attack on PSB, its vulnerability to political pressure due to its close relationship with the state. Whilst the notion of programmes made with the public good in mind had been eroded by successive measures throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the regulatory links between state and PSB organisations had not been removed. The re-orientation of PSB along marketised lines amounted to a confused re-regulation, which endangered broadcasting’s independence rather than ensuring it (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 320).

#### 2.3.4 The Notion of Quality

Although ‘quality’ has been a key part of political, policy, professional and critical discussions around PSB and television, the term is difficult to pin down, in fact there is not what could be called a dominant consensus around the term. This means that although the study intends to use ‘quality’ as a way of exploring changes in documentary form over the period, it is important to be aware of the different ways in which it has been understood.

A notion central to discussions around the value of PSB, was that of quality. This notion was often mobilised, in different forms, to defend different attitudes towards

PSB. The Pilkington Committee had viewed quality as the preserve of the BBC, and castigated ITV for producing low quality programming, marked by acquisitive appeal, sensationalism, and predictable programme formats (Crisell, 1997: 116-7). The Annan committee had sought to reflect the growing cultural diversity in the UK, and shifted the notion of quality away from a patrician presentation of ‘the best of all things’ to a perspective that privileged the professional production of a diverse variety of programmes (Crisell, 1997: 203). By the late 1980s, the preoccupation with quality had become the dominant concern in policy discussions regarding broadcasting (Smith, 1990: 1). This dominance was emphasised in the wording of the 1988 White Paper, *Competition, Choice and Quality*. Ostensibly, the debate at this time was framed by two opposing views; that the stable professionalism of the PSB system was the best guarantor of quality; or that the market was the best guarantor of quality.

The former attitude was typified by the positions of Simon Jenkins in *The Listener* (Jenkins, 1989), and the Broadcasting Research Unit’s (BRU) response to the White Paper *Broadcasting in the 1990s: Competition, Quality and Choice* (BRU, 1989). Jenkins argued that several concepts central to government policy were ill-defined in the White Paper, such as of ‘quality’, ‘PSB’ and “the enhancing of consumer welfare”. Jenkins suggested that professionalism was the guarantor of quality, and that a “secure institutional framework, which protected broadcasters from commercial and political pressures” was essential in producing quality television programmes. Therefore, the public subsidy of programming was important for social “nobility and cohesion” (Jenkins, 1989). The American model represented what could become of British broadcasting in a market system; a larger degree of choice in media outlets,

but a homogenisation of content across all outlets; in other words, a reduction in the quality of the overall service (Ibid).

The BRU asserted that quality television took risks, and explored and utilized innovation rather than replicating successful formulas. The BRU also claimed that although people enjoyed *Dallas* (Lorimar Productions, 1978-1991) and other imported programmes, “programmes from within their own culture and society” were of higher quality (BRU, 1989: 1). The BRU argued that diversity and range were crucial to describing broadcasting quality. Quality should also not be equated with popularity; market forces alone were seen as insufficient to guarantee programme quality. Certain other conditions were fundamental to generating quality television: that there should be a balanced and diverse schedule of programming; that quality programming did not “pre-judge audiences by presumed height of brow” and should work on the assumption that “we can all at some time and in some ways find our imaginations touched” (BRU, 1989) (Appendix 9).

Opposing these views was the view that quality could only be guaranteed by the market. Rupert Murdoch, owner of News International, in 1989 attacked Jenkins’ position that the free market would reduce quality (Murdoch, 1989: 131-138). By using the example of *Dallas* (Lorimar Productions, 1978-1991) as a popular but low-quality production, Murdoch argued that if all broadcasters went to the middle ground and tried to capture the same audience, most of them would fail financially. For Murdoch, PSB’s claim to be the only system that could create quality programming hid an elitist agenda, where quality was defined for all by small producer elite. This produced programming that most viewers only watched “under duress”, because of a

lack of choice. For Murdoch, a “service the public wants” was a public service, and a popular service was a high quality service.

Murdoch countered Jenkins’ notions that PSB had produced “reasonably good television”, and that a market system would bring about worse television, by challenging the example Jenkins and others gave of the low quality of television in the USA. By comparing the top ten most popular programmes in the USA and the UK, Murdoch concluded that the American schedule was full of programmes other countries wanted to watch, and the British schedule was full of “mundane, low-budget soaps both home-made and imported”. Thus, Murdoch concluded, competition forced innovation and the seeking out of new markets, rather than the slavish replication of the middle ground which commentators such as Jenkins and the BRU feared. Murdoch claimed that he did not want PSB to disappear but to become more like the Public Broadcasting System in the USA, where PSB was paid for by subsidy and voluntary contribution and was part of a market oriented mix. By doing this, Murdoch claimed that the free market would democratise broadcasting, and give control back to “the people” (Murdoch, 1989: 138).

A less crude version of this position was taken by Alan Peacock, the chairman of the Peacock Committee of 1985-6. For Peacock, the question of programme quality was difficult to pin down (Home Office, 1986: para. 299). However Peacock did subscribe to a working assumption that the consumer should be sovereign and that broadcasting should be mostly concerned with delivering the audience what it wanted. From such a position, quality broadcasting was the broadcasting that would arise from a well-structured market-based broadcasting system. However, there was a caveat to this

notion of consumer sovereignty. PSB had been able to mimic a functioning market in an age of spectrum scarcity, and had produced an impressive range of programme choice for the consumer (Home Office, 1986: para. 582), which was to some extent a mark of quality broadcasting (Home Office, 1986: para. 304). However, Peacock also identified a need to publically fund certain areas of broadcasting that consumers would find useful but were not aware of that use, or that consumers would be happy to pay for due to their social importance, such as the arts and news (Home Office, 1986: paras. 580-1). Such programmes seemed close to Jenkins' notion of quality.

For others, the simple questions of PSB versus market, or 'good' versus 'bad' quality TV, needed to be challenged. In a collection of essays devoted to the notion of quality published in 1990, Ellis, Mulgan, Kerr and Mepham criticised simplistic market-led and PSB-led definitions of quality. For Mulgan, letting the market solve the problem of quality was tantamount to "abdicating responsibility, vacating an important area of cultural argument" (Mulgan, 1990: 6). However, notions of quality in British broadcasting, often emphasising representations of heritage and high social classes to the detriment of representations of contemporary events and the working class, was open to an accusation of legitimating "the old hierarchies of judgement, a concept drained of meaning by years of (ab)use by those in power" (Mulgan, 1990: 5). For Ellis, the "ethical superiority in the name of a benign concept of civilisation" had indeed lost its legitimacy, and the paternalist underpinnings of PSB had gone with it. However, the market was "an empty theory", whose only claim to legitimacy in the broadcasting arena was that there was no organised and coherent opposition to it (Ellis, 1990: 34).

For Kerr, quality had become an unfashionable term on the left, associated with paternalistic and anti-democratic models of social order (Kerr, 1990: 45), whilst quality in the context of the quality threshold of the ITV franchise auctions was a contradictory notion that had political functions. It was deployed in order to “camouflage the abolition of ITV’s public service obligations” in favour of a market-driven system (Ibid), and as part of the internal battle in the Conservative party between the ‘wets’ of the Home Office and the dryer economic perspective of the Department of Trade and Industry (Kerr, 1990: 47). For Mephram, both the PSB and market led definitions of quality were flawed, due to their social origins. He preferred a definition based on “cultural purpose and morality”, that had three foci: the importance of a diverse diet of programmes made by a diverse group of producers; the “provision of useable stories” which required an equality of representation across social groups; and an “ethic of truth telling”, in which producers took on a duty to inform the populace (Mephram, 1990: 59). These foci at once resisted the traditional ‘high culture’ claims of PSB, and the seemingly ‘neutral’ perspective of the market.

Mulgan went further than a critique of the crude pro-PSB and pro-market positions, and identified several other ways in which the quality tag was used. The first was what Mulgan called ‘producer quality’, in which programme makers distinguished what was good and bad programming. ‘Producer quality’ is a definition that implied a strong commitment to producer autonomy, and allowed no concessions to bureaucracy or to the market. Central to this definition of quality was the notion of creative freedom, which was a freedom from interference from government and broadcasting managers above, but also a freedom to control the flow of information to those below, the viewers. In such a definition, producers were authors struggling



within mechanised, mass-manufacturing institutions. Such a definition raised awkward questions about the tastes and predilections of producers, and the social and institutional structures that allowed individuals to become producers. Secondly, Mulgan identified ‘consumer quality’, in which market mechanisms put the consumer at “centre stage”? This concept tended to ignore the large structural gap between producers and audiences, and overplay the ability of producers to read audience need, as bald audience figures couldn’t identify “the intensities of pleasure or satisfaction” offered by varying television programmes (Mulgan, 1990: 10-11). These two concepts most closely resembled the crude debate between PSB and market detailed above. However, Mulgan went on to outline another five definitions of television quality.

Thirdly, TV’s aesthetic was taken as the benchmark for quality. In this definition, either the durability and timelessness of programmes, or their differentiation from other cultural forms (such as books or films) marked them out as quality products. Such a perspective tended to see television as a receiver, and not a shaper, of culture and value and therefore ignored the wider context of broadcasting (Mulgan, 1990: 15-19). Fourthly, Mulgan defined quality television by its ability to bring an audience together in a ritual, communal experience, which had a direct link to the building of a morally coherent society. Whilst such a function could be seen as broadly egalitarian, it also raised questions regarding the definition of a community, with the possibility of some groups and perspectives being marginalised (Mulgan, 1990: 19-21).

Fifthly, television was said to be of a high quality when it encouraged ‘active citizens’ who could, through television “call their rulers to account” through an ethos of debate. However, Mulgan noted that notions of citizenship were often deployed

disproportionately by emergent classes, and while levels of participation remained modest such debates could amount to the perspectives of warring elites, such as the factions within a political establishment, rather than a more representative form of democratic activity (Mulgan, 1990: 21-24).

Sixthly, was the notion of a ‘televisual ecology’, in which a number of inter-related factors combined to create a delicate and complex system of checks and balances. Such quality was not “easily reducible to economic description”, and depended on a definition of what Mulgan calls a ‘pathology’ within broadcasting, such as a non-functioning or unrepresentative system. The definition of such a pathology was itself a value judgment open to debate (Mulgan, 1990: 24-26). Finally, television quality was dependent on the diversity of programmes and representations included in the broadcast material. However, this definition of quality required further definitions regarding the nature of diversity, whether it be diversity of programming genre, content or distribution (Mulgan, 1990: 26-28). In addition to outlining the different uses and understandings of the concept of quality in broadcasting, Mulgan outlined his own definition. Overall, it was Mulgan’s view that the notion of quality was itself diverse, and that a diversity of approaches towards the definition of television quality, that took into consideration the partial nature of any such definition, was required (Mulgan, 1990: 28-30).

Kerr agreed with Mulgan’s analysis of the multi-faceted nature of television quality. He outlined television programmes’ authorship and “unreproducible character”, their ratings, their difference from mainstream television discourse, and their ability to function in different generic contexts as competing definitions of ‘quality’ (Kerr,

1990: 43-48). Kerr also asserted that the notion of quality had become closely linked with that of diversity. Overall, then, it seems that ‘diversity’ was the dominant notion governing the definition of television quality, be it in terms of television’s content, its function, or the way in which it was viewed. Indeed, diversity had come to replace other notions of quality in broadcasting, as it was an open and adaptable concept. It allowed producers to stay in touch with the unfashionable notions of producer taste, whilst still engaging with the new market-driven political climate (Ellis, 1990: 34) and it allowed governments and broadcasters to contain and mask ideological differences (Kerr, 1990: 47).

However, diversity itself was a difficult notion to define. Ellis saw positions that deployed this definition of quality as problematic due to their tendency to comment on the balance of contemporary representation, but their inability to suggest overarching strategies or policies (Ellis, 1990: 34). Kerr noted that there could be many competing forms of diversity, such as the diversity of programme genre, programme content, producers and distributors (Kerr, 1990: 48). Kerr also noted that the situation was also fluid, and that today’s diversity could lead to tomorrow’s monopoly and dependency, as in the example of independent production companies initially commissioned to ensure diversity of programming, but whose later development and production strategies turned towards the mainstream in order to guarantee financial survival (Kerr, 1990: 50).

For Garnham (1990) the notion of broadcasting quality was best understood through the filter of the work of Bourdieu. Quality could be understood as a symbolic ‘tag’, which marked out one programme as different to another. This differentiation in turn

was part of a wider “game of differentiation”, which was played out constantly in the field of cultural or symbolic production, as different sets of symbolic producers (such as television producers) fought for symbolic dominance (Garnham, 1990: 74-5). For Garnham, as for Bourdieu, it was more important to use the way in which quality was deployed in order to trace the divisions and sub-divisions amongst producers, than it was to search for any essential hierarchy of quality within television. By tracing the social origins of the producers of dominant cultural products, and the circumstances under which cultural products were produced, it was possible to track the interplay of power within cultural production, which had an important effect on the legitimising of wider political power (Garnham, 1990: 85).

However, Garnham’s definition of quality in the context of broadcasting was not the same as the relativist or transitive ‘quality’ of which Kerr wrote. Rather, the differentials implicit in various strata of quality reflected the unequal distribution of symbolic resources within a society, and the process through which dominant classes retained their position. An example would be the elitist face of the PSB tradition: “the non-accountable model of cultural production by a privileged elite enshrined in the institutional structures and practices of British broadcasting” (Garnham, 1990: 133-4). In this model, ‘quality as diversity’ was less a matter of ensuring that broadcasting provided ‘something for everyone’, and functioned instead as a device through which the producer elite could maintain their power. Diversity of programming became the practice of ensuring a stable market of ideas where the inevitable risk involved in broadcasting (be it commercial or not) was offset, and the status quo in power relations could be maintained. This diversity was more a fracturing of a dominant perspective, rather than a radical inclusion of alternative or marginal views. Garnham

therefore called for a radicalisation of the distribution of production, rather than any particular change in programming content or style, as this was for him the key to the greater public participation and control that often underpinned calls for ‘quality TV’ (Garnham, 1990: 164).

Other debates around television quality later in the 1990s and 2000s, can be placed into the frame around the work of Mulgan, Ellis, Kerr and Garnham written around 1990. For example, Harvey (1996) also mistrusted quality as a descriptive term, and hailed the cultural populism of some of Channel Four’s programming as a means of escape from the cultural straight jacket of quality television. Popular television was a better barometer of a rapidly changing Britain with new social realities, such as: “a greater variety of ideas and lifestyles; sharper extremes of wealth and poverty, more ferocious political and ideological disagreement, together with a general lessening of public interest in official politics.” (Harvey, 1996: 205). This critique fell neatly into Mulgan’s conception of quality television as being characterised through the notion of the ‘active citizen’, in which the gap between audience and producer had closed significantly. However, Kerr’s note about the economic dependency of independent producers, and Garnham’s observations about the need for a radicalisation of the distribution system, temper any substantial conclusions regarding democratisation or wider public participation implied in Harvey’s analysis.

In a similar sceptical register Mullan (1997) asked how quality, unlike diversity, could ever be measured. Mullan believed that the emergence of cultural populism, and the consequent decline of cultural elitism, made such judgements meaningless. The inherent variety of television output also caused Mullan to question the usefulness of

applying the term quality to televisual output, and also to criticisms regarding the decline in diversity (Mullan, 1997: 72). For Mullan quality productions such as *Brideshead Revisited* (Granada TV, 1981) had been considered ‘quality’ programmes due to their pleasurable relationship to national iconography, rather than any demanding or challenging characteristics. Mullan therefore agreed to some extent with Garnham’s theory of the field of production, but disagreed with Mulgan’s conception of quality as being dependent on a number of interlacing judgements and measures.

Writers such as Creeber (2001) and Nelson (2006) challenged a Jenkinsite notion of television quality, as manifested in the championing of the single play by Dennis Potter (Potter, 1994: 16). They argued that the single play did not deserve to be considered the natural superior to the serialised productions which had typically been generated by the manufacturing methods introduced into the BBC in the mid 1990s. Creeber, in particular, argued against the dumbing-down discourse employed by Potter who had claimed that the single play had been killed off by the commercialisation of TV. Creeber suggests that the commercialisation of TV, and the death of the cultural elitism of duopoly PSB, brought about new dramatic forms, such as the ‘serial form’ which represented a coming of age for drama on TV (Creeber, 2001: 439). Here Creeber deployed a template of quality close to that of Mulgan’s ‘quality as aesthetic’, in which the evolving use of the television could sustain a claim of ‘quality’. At the same time, Creeber seemed to pay less attention to the struggle within the field of cultural production of which Garnham wrote, choosing to concentrate on textual characteristics of programmes, rather than the circumstances of their production and the social origins of the producers.

In summary, the notion of quality has a close relationship with the governance of broadcasting in the UK. However, the term is multi-layered and multi-faceted, and its meaning requires clear explanation and labelling. For the purposes of this study, programme quality is viewed from two particular vantage points. Firstly, it is viewed from a perspective that shares some of the concerns, if not the specific methodology, of Garnham. This study is concerned with tracing the connection between changes in the political economy of television, and the form of history documentaries and is therefore concerned with the circumstances of production, including the changing aims and views of producers. This study therefore shares Garnham's position, that the economic and political circumstances of the manufacture of cultural goods are essential in any analysis of their origin or wider significance. Secondly, the thesis speaks from a producer's perspective. The author's previous experience, and the methodology employed inevitably carry with them a heavy implication of the first of Mulgan's conceptions of quality, 'producer quality'. However, by grafting differing methodologies onto each other, this study attempts to ameliorate the extremes of the producer perspective on quality.

In terms of tracking changes in documentary quality, several possible methods are available, such as producers' views, critical reviews, awards and audience ratings. Producer views tap into what Cottle terms the 'micro' and 'meso' levels of media production organisation (Cottle, 2003: 24). Critical reviews can be used to compare the reception of significant opinion formers in the press and academia, and as such can provide a portrait of shifting values in the definition of quality. Industry awards provide a framework for the adjudication of quality that set industrial benchmarks and

production landmarks that drive changes in industry practice. Audience ratings, both in terms of audience volume and audience appreciation, can indicate changing patterns of audience taste and the pressures on producers to deliver different forms of text over a period of time. This thesis' emphasis on producer views of quality explores one of these dimensions in depth, and supplements Garnham's approach to seeing production in its context<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.3.5 PSB: Conclusion

PSB is a tradition of approaches to broadcasting that has evolved in parallel to social, political and technological advances during the twentieth century. Debates around the concept have focussed mainly on questions of freedom of expression, efficiency in the exploitation of a public utility, and the competing cases for private ownership versus public trust status and have often been played out at another level in debates about quality. The concept of PSB is relevant to this thesis in two main ways. Firstly, the way in which the political economy of broadcasting has been traditionally interpreted in the UK is through the concept of PSB. Secondly, the timescale of this thesis (1982-2002) coincides with a period of particularly dramatic transformation in UK broadcasting, during which the concept of PSB was significantly challenged and altered. Therefore, in the period of this thesis the debates about the nature of PSB occurred alongside the changes in structure, finance and organisation of TV, and form an analytic context for interrogating changes in the production and form of history documentary.

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of methods.



## **2.4 The Production of History Documentary on UK TV**

There are a number of references in academic writing to changes in the amount of history documentaries broadcast in the UK since the early 1990s (Corner, 1996; Downing, 2001; Winston, 2002; Hunt, 2004; Winston, 2006; Bell and Gray, 2007; Williams 2007). In discussing this issue, various ideas have emerged about the reasons for developments and by implication the determinants that have operated on TV history documentary.

### 2.4.1 The notion of a 'History Documentary Boom'

The view that there had been an increase since the early 1990s in the amount of historical documentaries on UK TV was expressed by a range of academics. Taylor Downing commented that there was a recent and significant increase in historical documentaries on television on both sides of the Atlantic (Downing, 2001). By 2004, Hunt was referring to a significant increase in the amount of history documentaries on television (Hunt, 2004: 88). In 2004, Downing made a rough calculation of the number of history documentaries in prime time that led him to conclude that there had been a significant increase, although he made no direct comparisons with any earlier data (Downing, 2004: 7). Cannadine cited a significant increase in history documentaries on UK television, as did several other contributors to his edited collection *History and the Media* (Cannadine, 2004). However, Cannadine also questioned whether talk of a history boom could be justified, and if so what are the qualities of such a boom (Cannadine, 2004: 1-2).

By 2006 Hunt revised his position of 2004, and suggested that history documentary had by then taken up a “dominant position in the terrestrial television schedules” (Hunt, 2006: 843). Corner noted “a remarkable run of success” for history documentary, thereby implying that the genre had become more popular and numerous in recent years (Corner, 2006: 466). In 2007 Bell & Gray (Bell & Gray, 2007) and Chapman (Chapman, 2007), cited a significant increase in history documentaries on television in the UK as a backdrop to their respective investigations into charismatic history presenters and historical drama-documentary.

These references to an increase in historical documentary on UK television offer a number of differing reasons for the increase.

#### 2.4.2 Causes of History documentary Boom: Wider Social Causes

Cook linked the increased production of history documentary to the anxiety of a world that sought to understand its position after the terrorist attacks on New York on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2001. This involved a search for links between the past and the present, and the comfort offered by the linear historical narrative in which historical causation was made more orderly, predictable and comforting (Cook, 2002: 376). In a similar, but broader vein, Cannadine suggested that there were a variety of reasons for the increase. These included: the advent of New Labour and that party’s attempt to sanitise its history; the final passing of the British Empire exemplified by the return of Hong Kong to the Chinese; the millennium; the death of the Queen Mother (31<sup>st</sup> March, 2002), and the golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II (June 2002); the IT revolution which made historical information more easily available; the highest ever number of history graduates in Britain; and the media taking over from schools in the

teaching of history after the national curriculum was put in place in 1988 (Cannadine, 2004: 1).

Cannadine declined to specify which of these reasons was the most important; instead he left the matter open to further investigation (Cannadine, 2004: 1-2). Hunt agreed with some of Cannadine's assertions, citing a "millennial spirit" as a major cause of the history boom. He added, however, that history documentaries provided "rational narratives of national becoming", which were much needed in a "secular, mobile society lacking the traditional signifiers of religion, class and community" (Hunt, 2006: 843). Thus some of the explanations see changes in the number of documentaries dealing with history on TV as linked to broad social changes as well as to specific developments that had national, or international, significance. Williams suggested that the increase in history was caused by "the weakening of class and other forms of traditional identity" which triggered a search for personal and community origins and identities (Williams, 2007: 130).

#### 2.4.3 Causes of History documentary Boom: Higher Education

For Fernandez-Armesto the growth of history documentary on TV was directly linked to a change in the relationship between academic and non-academic history. Fernandez-Armesto claimed that the growth in history television reflected a diminution in the status of the professional historian. This diminution was also itself part of a process whereby the authority of higher education as arbiter of historical discourse was being challenged by agencies outside academia, amongst them television (Fernandez-Armesto, 2002: 159). Kershaw (2004) agreed that there was a link between a history boom and a change in the direction and purpose of history

within higher education, but wondered whether television history posed a credible threat to academic history (Kershaw, 2004: 118). Hunt noted a link between a growth in history documentaries on television, and the growth in popularity of history in the education system, at secondary and tertiary levels. For Hunt, the growth in the study of history had coincided with increased interest and output outside academia within the radio, magazine and newspaper industries (Hunt, 2004: 88).

#### 2.4.4 Causes of History documentary Boom: Industrial Causes (UK)

Several writers situated the growth in history documentaries within the changing context of the television industry in the UK. However, these writers diverged on the nature of the relationships between the growth in programmes, and industrial changes. Downing contended that the growth in factual history programming was part of a wider growth in factual TV programming in general in the UK (Downing, 2001: 296). Bremner suggested that a dispersal of history documentary production across several BBC departments meant that when history documentary became popular during the 1990s, there was a large potential production base within the BBC to satisfy the increasing demand (Bremner, 2001: 67). Whittaker asserted that the increase in historical documentaries was caused by a combination of growing viewership and commissioner confidence in the genre. While she did not state whether viewer interest or commissioner confidence began the process, she implied a process of escalation: history documentaries increased in volume due to growing audience figures, which led to more favourable scheduling, which in turn led to higher audiences (Whittaker, 2005: 139). Hunt placed the increase in history documentaries into the context of an increase in the commodification of historical discourse. This commodification began for Hunt in a series of popular history book

publications in the late 1990s, such as Schama's *Citizens*, Foreman's *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire*, Davies's *Europe: A History* and Figs's *A People's Tragedy*, which captured the attention of certain "far sighted commissioners" such as Janice Hadlow, Laurence Rees and John Willis (Hunt, 2006: 844).

#### 2.4.5 Causes of History documentary Boom: Industrial Changes (Global)

There were several mentions of history documentary's place in the context of international media activities, especially in the USA. Whilst these perspectives did not relate directly to the cause of development in the UK, they pointed towards the international nature of history documentary making. Toplin argued that it was co-production agreements with British and French broadcasters that kept history documentary alive in an inhospitable US television system, citing Ken Burns' history documentary series *Civil War* (PBS, 1990)<sup>5</sup> as the starting point for an "abundant choice in history entertainment" on US Television (Toplin, 1993:1109), which led to a growing industry in history documentary making (Toplin, 1996). Taves began his examination of The History Channel by placing the channel in the context of an "evolving proliferation of cable stations that began in the 1980s", which led to the channel's launch in 1995, and its presence as a "standard part of basic cable packages, in both the United States and the United Kingdom" (Taves, 2001: 3-4). Thus Taves implied that the proliferation of cable channels on both sides of the Atlantic directly contributed to the existence of channels that showed almost exclusively factual historical programming.

Landy also used Ken Burns' *Civil War* as an example of the decidedly transatlantic nature of the growth of factual history on television, part of what she termed the

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<sup>5</sup> *The Civil War* (1990) was a co-production between Florentine Films and WETA-TV Washington for PBS. It was shown in the USA in 1990, and an edited version was shown on BBC2 in 1991, but the programme was not a BBC/PBS co-production (BFI, 2009).

“televizualisation of the globe” (Landy, 2001:19). Downing cited the emergence of a world market in history programmes and the emergence of satellite channels dedicated wholly to factual history programmes, such as The History Channel, and as such endorsed Taves’ earlier point. Downing suggests that the reason for factual history television’s growth to industrial proportions was because a critical mass of programming had been achieved, both newly commissioned and repeated, that enabled channels to service a niche on both sides of the Atlantic (Downing, 2001:29).

Downing also argued that trans-Atlantic co-production was a central plank of late 1990s history documentary production. Half of Downing’s list - *A History of Britain* (BBC & The History Channel, 2000-2002), *Lost Worlds* (Channel Four & Discovery Channel, 2002), *Reputations* (BBC & A&E, 1994-2004) - were the result of trans-Atlantic co-production. He added that The History Channel and the BBC/Flextech channel UKTV History added greatly to the number of individual broadcasts of history documentaries, and that UKTV history had been built on the “vast BBC catalogue of history programming made over the last twenty years” (Downing, 2004: 7). Williams suggested that the deregulation of broadcasting across Europe had created a number of cable and satellite channels that “demand historical programming not only to fill in the additional airtime, that has been created, but also to reclaim ‘histories’ of one kind or another.” (Williams, 2007: 130).

#### 2.4.5 History Documentary Production: Conclusion

Whilst there is a body of academic writing, which asserts the existence of a significant increase in history documentary on television in the UK, as well as the USA, the reasons for this increase remain ill defined. Whilst some academic work has

suggested causes, no academic work has attempted to establish systematically the nature, if any, of the increase, nor, if there has been an increase, what the causes were. The avenues left open by the literature are various: history documentary has become more common on UK television due to an increased demand by the audience; it has become more popular with commissioners due to its cost effectiveness at attracting audiences in comparison to drama; it is a genre that adapts well to an international, co-produced approach; it has grown in line with a wider growth in factual programming on television in the UK. This research addresses the issue of development in history documentary, using the framework of changes in political economy, and debates about PSB, in order to explore the topic in more detail than has yet been the case.

For the purposes of this study, detailed examination was limited to UK terrestrial television, with some subsidiary attention paid to the output of UK cable and satellite channels, and programming produced abroad. This was partly due to issues of research manageability. The amount of time required to create a workable sample containing both terrestrial and cable / satellite channels, and then to analyse it, would have been outside the time constraints of this study. This decision was also taken as it was fair to assume that throughout the period in question terrestrial programming still drove formal innovation and competition to a greater extent than material made for broadcast by cable or satellite. This was due to the low penetration and audience levels of cable and satellite in the period. Productions were often first shown on terrestrial television, before being repeated on cable and satellite channels to significantly smaller audiences (see chapter 3, section 3.4.3.3.1 for more detail).

## 2.5 Documentary Theory

The perspectives on the changes in the amount of historical documentary have their parallels in discussions of the nature of these documentaries, in particular in relation to developments in form and content since the 1980s. The literature on political economy already discussed in section 2.2 and 2.3 registered a paradigm shift in the way in which broadcasting was conceived of and organised over the last 25 years. The emergence of neo-liberal policies in the area and the accompanying theoretical justifications for those policies refocused the concerns of writers. Similar shifts have occurred in the literature around documentary film. Firstly, the literature around documentary and other factual screen forms will be discussed. Then the same process will be undertaken for historical documentary.

### 2.5.1 Documentary Definition: ‘classical documentary’

Between 1932 and 1934 John Grierson established the foundations for much of the later writing on documentary (Winston, 1995: 11-14). Grierson described documentary in terms of three principles:

1. A documentary must utilise “Cinema’s capacity for getting around”, and make use of camera technology by recording material from the social world.
2. A documentary must make use of the “original (or native) actor and the original (or native) scene” because they “are better guides to a screen interpretation of the modern world”.



3. A documentary makes use of the particular effect that spontaneous events have when captured on a camera and then presented on screen. Such material is described as being “finer” and “more real” and philosophically superior to more mediated material.

(Grierson, 1932-34, cited in Hardy, 1966: 146-7)

These criteria for documentary status were made in response to a specific context of film production in the 1930s. Firstly, Grierson’s statements about expressive superiority based on field material were made in the context of an industry dominated by studio-bound fiction feature film production. Secondly, the model signalled an engagement with social issues that grew from an interest in cinema as an educative and persuasive public tool (Hardy, 1966: 17-18). This engagement should, unlike the kind of approach to public issues in newsreel film, be an intimate immersion in a social situation, followed by the adoption of whichever visual method would be most suitable for the subject at hand (Hardy, 1966: 146).

However, a film that subordinated social reality to the display of visual ephemera such as *Berlin: Symphony of a City* (Dir. Ruttmann, 1927) was as unworthy a model for documentary as was newsreel (Grierson, 1932-34, cited in Hardy, 1966: 151-2). Grierson’s critique of Ruttmann’s film was a perfect illustration of Grierson’s famous formulation of the documentary project: “the creative treatment of actuality” (Grierson, 1933: 6-10). According to Grierson’s idealist philosophical position, reality was not to be found at the everyday empirical level of the ‘phenomenal’, but at the level of an underlying abstract reality (Aikten, 1990: 12). Thus treatment of raw field material (‘actuality’) was required to access this underlying structure (‘reality’).

Historically, there have been a number of adjustments to the academic understanding of the notion of documentary between Grierson’s formative work, and the writing

covering the period of this thesis. Most importantly were the adjustments made by the writing associated with key documentary film making movements in the 1950s and 1960s such as *Direct Cinema*, *Cinema Vérité* and *Free Cinema*. Roughly representative of the documentary tradition in the USA, France and the UK, these movements reacted to the growing availability and acceptability of lightweight cameras and sound recording equipment, and represented a move within producer communities towards a questioning of social structures, rather than exposition in the name of social cohesion (Winston, 1995; Barnouw, 1993)<sup>6</sup>. In more recent writing on documentary there are three main intertwined areas of concern: the evidentiary status of documentary film; the relationship of technology and form; and the industrial positioning of documentary in terms of public discussion, and commercially-driven entertainment (Corner, 2002).

### 2.5.2 Evidentiary Status of the documentary

For Corner (1986) documentary was a problematic category, in that it claimed to represent reality although it necessarily has to use metonymic<sup>7</sup> devices to do so. However, despite these problems, he still agreed with the fundamental Griersonian principle that documentary had an important public information function, and was still a “necessary and exciting use of media possibilities” (Corner, 1986: vii). While making this statement Corner strongly implied that documentary had been in a stable

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<sup>6</sup> There were also important differences. *Direct Cinema*, claimed that new camera technology had made the revelation of objective truth possible through observational filming techniques (Taylor, C, 1971: cited in Winston, 1995: 149). These technological developments rendered Grierson’s need for juxtaposition and interpretation redundant. *Cinema Vérité* on the other hand rejected *Direct Cinema*’s denial of the subjectivity involved in the selection of topic and the editing of material. Its main practitioner and theorist, Jean Rouch, recognised the limitations in scope and topic created by a stringent dependence on observation, and turned to reflexive narrative structures and parodies to initiate events that could then be documented (Rouch, 1975, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> *Metonymy* refers to a representational strategy in which “an attribute of the thing stands for the thing itself” (Macey, 2000: 250). This strategy is particularly necessary, yet particularly problematic when dealing with factual representations.

state for some time, as the balance between its claims for justification and the theoretical problems it raised had not changed for a substantial period (Ibid). For Nichols documentary occupied a particular cultural position due to its claim to a special relationship with the real world. This was not however due to the absolute nature of any claim to represent reality, but as a consequence of the positioning of documentary in a “discourse of sobriety” (Nichols, 1991: 3-4). Renov saw the evidentiary status of documentary in the context of a growth in ‘real’ depictions in all kinds of forms. Like Nichols, Renov saw documentary’s claim to have a special relationship with the real as a matter of discourse, and he emphasised the similarities between factual and fiction film making, rather than the differences (Renov, 1993: 1-12).

Winston asserted that the evidentiary status of documentary filmmaking was in crisis. The evidentiary claim of documentary had always been over emphasised, especially those of the *Direct Cinema* movement. However, Winston claimed that the recent development of technologies that facilitated image manipulation, such as Scitex, had challenged the fundamental justifications of the documentary genre, and its practices (Winston, 1995: 5-8, 242-250). By 1996, Corner had revised his position and was asserting that the institutional positioning of documentary on UK television had destabilised the hitherto balanced paradox between metonymy and indexicality<sup>8</sup>. The balance between the metonymic strategies of documentary representation, and documentary’s claim to accurately represent the real through an indexical relationship, was being severely tested. In its place he identified the beginnings of a move away from informational values towards either “self-consciously aesthetic

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<sup>8</sup> *Indexicality*, in this context, refers to the notion that the camera can create a scientific document of an external reality, in a similar manner to a scientific apparatus, such as a thermometer (Winston, 1995: 127-137).

devices” that “invites the viewer to consider its own mediations”, or a “new rawness” in service of delivering greater emotional power (Corner, 1996: 188).

Dovey developed this point, and suggested that documentary had developed the ability to cater for audiences’ need for knowledge that “goes beyond the pedagogic”. Documentary was no longer dependent for success on values of accuracy and factual clarity (Dovey, 2000: 169). Instead, documentary was being colonised by a set of preoccupations, and a mode of address, which Dovey named ‘First Person Media’. This new paradigm of documentary expression emphasised subjective and personal accounts of the world, over objective and official accounts. However, such changes in function affected the credibility of documentary as a form that delivered true representations of the social world (Dovey, 2000: 3).

Bruzzi adopted another position, in that the belief in the veracity of documentary footage had not been replaced by mistrust, but by a new relationship between the audience and the representation of the real. This was now a dialogic relationship, in which the audience was required to negotiate between the documentary film text and their real world experiences, through a more performative mode of documentary. Documentary had not lost its claim on the real, but the nature of that claim has been altered. Competing claims on the real, such as the claims made for the special nature of ‘raw’ material argued for by both Grierson and the *Direct Cinema* tradition of the 1960s had waned, however the basis of such claims had always been open to criticism, and the new dialogic relationship was more epistemologically robust (Bruzzi, 2000: 153-180).

Roscoe and Hight asserted that traditional documentary values had been destabilised through the influence of post-modernist thinkers such as Lyotard and Baudrillard. They also suggested that this diminution had opened up new possibilities for documentary in terms of stylistic borrowing and parody, with a resultant broadening of documentary's expressive potential (Roscoe and Hight, 2001: 28/29). Dovey went further and asserted that simulation had taken the place of observation as the documentary's claim to the real through the sub-genre of Reality TV. Taking *Big Brother* (Endemol, 1999-) as his model, Dovey suggested that the traditional evidentiary claim of documentary through observation was unsuitable for contemporary networked social structures. The notion of 'reflexive modernity' and the networked nature of modern society had replaced the linear causations of classic modernity, and that the simulations offered by Reality TV programmes were more effective at capturing social reality (Dovey, 2004: 235).

### 2.5.3 Technology and Documentary Form

In Nichols' outlining of documentary modes he implied an evolution of form, which was to some extent predicated upon the development of new technology. As one documentary form began to lose credibility, due to criticisms surrounding the accuracy of its portrayal of reality, another documentary form was developed, based on the ability of emerging technology to capture reality more accurately. Such re-inventions of documentary method were essential in reviving documentary's ailing claim to represent reality indexically (Nichols, 1991: 32-75). Winston agreed with Nichols' chronology of the development of documentary form. However, he described this evolution of form as illusory, as the successive attempts to justify documentary's claim on the real were all flawed by the same central paradox: that in

order for documentary to exist as a genre it needed to be able to claim a direct and unmediated relationship to the real, but that it could only achieve this relationship by mediating the pro-filmic through some form of technology. The extent of this paradox, especially in the light of digital technology, threatened the existence of the documentary genre (Winston, 1995: 259). Winston also took issue generally with any explanation of formal development determined by technological advance. Whilst advances in camera technology could lead to formal developments, often pre-existing technologies were popularised and ‘discovered’ by practitioners seeking to revive documentary’s justifications (Winston, 1996: 58-88). Dover agreed that the adoption of technology, and the resulting change in methods, was motivated partly by the changing identity and motivation of the documentary producing community in the UK (Dover, 2001:255 – unpublished thesis).

For Corner, the introduction of new technology was also partly responsible for the introduction of several new documentary forms, especially forms that utilised micro cameras and camcorders (Corner, 1996: 182). Corner noted that new technologies had altered the expressive possibilities of documentary. Documentary had acquired new aesthetic textures through new camera technologies, as a “more visually elaborated, intertextually rich depiction of place, person and even action” emerged. In addition, the ease of new lightweight cameras was partially responsible for “a stronger authorialism than was conventional in television documentary”, an authorialism “that is playful, and aware of its playfulness” (Corner, 1996: 182-183). This new aesthetic was strengthened by borrowings from other genres, such as the pop video, advertising and fiction cinema which were also to some extent derived from the possibilities offered by new technology (Ibid).

Kilborn and Izod related changing form in the 1990s with the need to attract audiences, rather than a shift in technology (Kilborn and Izod, 1997: ix). Later, Kilborn questioned the role of technology in the innovation of programme making techniques. The increased deployment of new lightweight cameras was often presented by producers and broadcasters as a ‘democratisation’ whereby ease of use gave a wider public access to the means of producing documentary programmes for broadcast, as in the example of *Video Diaries* (BBC, 1991-). However, Kilborn argued that the increased use of new camera technology was due to the greater cost effectiveness of such equipment, as budgets were driven downwards by the increasing competitiveness of the television sector (Kilborn, 1998: 202).

By 2000, Bruzzi challenged Nichols’ earlier formal chronology, in which successive new forms of documentary replaced their antecedents, justified by an advance in technology, driven in turn by the search for a more effective method of ensuring an indexical link to the real. Bruzzi noted that all of Nichols’ historic documentary modes were still utilised (Bruzzi, 2000: 1-2)<sup>9</sup>. The implication here was that whilst the adoption of new technologies had driven the development of documentary form to an extent in the past, by 2000 the relationship between the use of technology and the search for an effective documentary method had changed. If all modes of documentary were still in use, then no one mode has been rejected or selected because of its ability or inability to create an indexical link. This signalled an understanding that indexicality, or accuracy of portrayal, was no longer the prime aim of documentary.

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<sup>9</sup> This was an oversight Nichols later addressed (Nichols, 2001).

Dovey (2000) believed that the emergence of new forms through technology had contrasting effects. On one hand, the new camcorder and micro camera based programmes brought about a new balance between filmmaker and participant-subject. In the past, larger equipment and larger crews intimidated the subject. But in the new formulation, where new technology allowed single person crews, the power relation implicit in an interview was transformed into “one based upon a more equal footing” (Dovey, 2000: 60-1). The implication here was that technology had been appropriated to create new forms of documentary that reflected changes in social structures and attitudes. However, Dovey also cited technological and formal development as being part of the commercialisation of television, with the Docusoap a clear example. The Docusoap was a form made possible by the high shooting ratios, ease of access, and ease of use brought about by new camera technology, and was highly popular with audiences. But it was also characterised by low budgets and poor research, which linked the form to the exigencies of the political economy of television (Dovey, 2000: 137). This was a link that Kilborn readily used to further his critique of a decline in documentary standards (Kilborn, 2001: 115/6).

Corner also implied a certain relationship between the development of documentary form and technology. Newer forms of documentary programming were characterised by entirely new formats made possible by a convergence of the technologies of new media and television, exemplified by *Big Brother* (Endemol, 1999-). *Big Brother*, while being a hybrid of several genres such as the game show or the theatrical performance, was chiefly concerned with observing ‘real’ behaviour (Corner, 2002: 257). *Big Brother*, and other Reality TV series like it, dispensed with the problems



presented by documentary's claim to represent the social world through particularised examples, by creating its own 'social' in the form of 'the house' (Corner, 2002: 257). Such a formal development was only made possible through the technological advances in micro camera and computer technology that constructed *Big Brother's* 'social' realm.

In summary, in the writing on the connection between technology and documentary form there was a broad consensus that there was a close link between technological development and formal development. Some writers saw the relationship as being driven by technological advance, whilst others situated the adoption of new technologies, in the context of changes in the aims and methods of documentary practice. There was also agreement by Dovey (2000) and Kilborn (1997, 1998, 2004), on the connection between the growing commercialism of television and the deployment of technology in documentary production, albeit in varying ways. Underlying the shifts in the deployment of technology were two themes. Firstly, that documentary methods were constantly evolving in order to renew their justifications. Secondly, that the nature of those justifications were shifting, from ones based on the accuracy of the representation of reality, to other markers of success such as entertainment value and expressive freedom.

#### 2.5.4 Public information and commercial diversion

Documentary's shift from accuracy of portrayal to freer and more entertaining modes of expression is reflected in another main preoccupation in the writing on documentary: the shift in its cultural function from supplier of public information to diversion.

One line of thinking has condemned this shift. Kilborn condemned the effect that the shifting political economy of television was having on the public information aspect of documentary's function. He argued that commercial imperatives emphasised the need for action, drama and entertainment values within documentary, to the detriment of research and carefully constructed accounts of events (Kilborn, 1994: 60). Such downgrading of challenging programming could damage the traditions of documentary production as a cultural practice, and radically transform habits of documentary viewing (Kilborn, 1994: 64). One early manifestation of these changes, he argued, was a reluctance to produce programmes that challenged received wisdom (Kilborn, 1994: 72).

In 1997, Kilborn repeated his assertion of a link between television's political economy and a decline in the traditional standards of documentary. An accessibility threshold had developed, where documentaries needed to attract a certain amount of viewers, no matter what the subject matter. This in turn led to the loss of 'quality' programme strands such as *Disappearing World* (Granada Television, 1970-1993), and *First Tuesday* (Yorkshire Television, 1983-1993) (Kilborn, 1997: 184)<sup>10</sup>. Kilborn claimed that the 1990 Broadcasting Act was responsible, because it effectively withdrew the statutory protection for such programmes. The emphasis on broadcaster efficiency in the 1990 Broadcasting Act also pushed documentary towards entertainment values, and away from its public information role. This was partly because documentary was seen as a more cost effective method of production than drama, which in turn shifted the nature of documentary towards the populist (Kilborn,

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<sup>10</sup> Kilborn's understanding of the notion of quality here is similar to Mulgan's notion of 'producer quality', in which high levels of professional rigour guarantee the high value of a television programme.

1997: 175). This had the consequence of threatening to banish “though-provoking” work from the television system altogether, due to “ratings obsessed TV executives” (Kilborn, 2004: 31). Holmes and Jermyn agreed that the success of reality television, constructed reality television and formatted documentary was largely due to their success on a global market. Such formal changes were driven to a large extent by the needs of producers and broadcasters to make use of economies of scale, and therefore represented the prioritisation of commercial imperative over a public information role (Holmes and Jermyn, 2004: 14).

Other writers saw the dangers in the shift, but were less sure about the deterioration in quality described above. In 1996, Corner argued that ‘serious’ documentaries were being displaced by documentaries that were lighter, and less rigorously researched, because of reduced budgets due to a perceived need amongst broadcasters to be more attractive to audiences. However, the programming that took over from ‘serious documentary’ was, he asserted, a vital reinvigoration of the form, despite an increasingly commercial environment that was characteristically hostile to risk taking in programme production (Corner, 1996: 182). Winston also questioned a simplistic formulation of the decline in documentary standards. He drew a clear link between the shift in documentary function and the strength of the PSB tradition within a national broadcasting system. He did this by citing the examples of Germany and the Netherlands, both of whom retained ‘serious’ documentary output to a greater extent than countries with a younger PSB history such as Italy, Portugal and Spain. He asked, however, whether this was desirable in itself, asserting that PSB kept alive a “divine right” on the part of some documentarists to produce programmes no matter how few people watched them. However, he also admitted that the extremes of mal-

practice that lay behind the faking scandals of the late 1990s<sup>11</sup> were to some extent caused by the pressure to attract large audiences (Winston, 2000: 3). Winston also traced the ethical difficulties in which documentary practice found itself in the late 1990s back to the 1990 Broadcasting Act, and its unfeasible expectations of objectivity and non-bias (Winston, 2000: 13). On balance therefore, whilst PSB could lead to the production of self-indulgent documentaries by producer elites, the lack of PSB culture seemed to lead to a decline in standards of accuracy and ethics.

By 2002 Corner claimed that documentary has shifted significantly enough to merit the addition of a fourth function, ‘Diversion’, to the traditional functions of documentary:

1. The Project of Democratic Civics
2. Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition
3. Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective
4. Documentary as Diversion

(Corner, 2002: 259-260)<sup>12</sup>.

Corner linked this new function to the broadcasters’ need for popular documentaries, that attracted large audiences. Following this change in function, Corner suggested that the future of ‘quality’ documentary depended on producers who could work within the new rules of engagement; producing work that was successful in a

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<sup>11</sup> There was a series of scandals in the UK surrounding the faking of scenes in television documentaries during 1998. The main culprit was *The Connection* (Carlton Television for ITV, 1996) in which crucial scenes surrounding drug trafficking were faked. The discovery of these misrepresentations by *The Guardian* newspaper in 1998 led to proceedings in which the ITC fined Carlton £2,000,000. This case took place in the context of a number of other fakery scandals surrounding documentaries including *Driving School* (BBC, 1997), *Rogue Males* (Cicada Films for Channel 4, 1998) *Clampers* (BBC, 1998) *Daddy’s Girl* (Blast Films for Channel 4, 1998), *Undercover Britain: Stolen Goods* (Laurel Productions for Channel 4, 1998). See Winston (2000: 9-39) for more details.

<sup>12</sup> Corner’s four functions of documentary also act as a broad chronology of the changes in documentary function. “The Project of Democratic Civics” denotes the Griersonian impulse towards social cohesion and official discourse; “Documentary as Journalistic Inquiry and Exposition” refers to the American Direct Cinema and British *Vérité* movements of the 1960s, 70s and 80s; “Documentary as Radical Interrogation and Alternative Perspective” refers to the tradition of catalytic film making espoused by Jean Rouch and later makers of *Cinema Vérité* documentaries.

commercial environment, but whose aims went beyond mere profit (Corner, 2002: 267). Roscoe and Hight agreed that commercial pressure did not necessarily lead to “bad” documentary, adding that the effect of commercialisation on documentary had been limited by the form’s inherent topicality. This quality limited the repeat value of documentary, and preserved it as a labour intensive and bespoke form of television production (Roscoe and Hight, 2001: 27).

By 2000, Dovey had noted that documentary had been replacing light entertainment, sitcom and drama in the TV schedules of late 1990s (Dovey, 2000: 19). Dovey saw this as part of a move towards “subjective, autobiographical and confessional modes of expression”, and a move away from its public information role. Co-production was also a growing practice, and led to the development of “tried and tested formats”, “safe subjects”, “conventional treatments”, and “least element of risk” (Dovey, 2000: 174). These changes were clearly caused by a change in the political economy of television, which made television documentary vulnerable to accusation of dumbing down. However, Dovey also cited changes in the relationship between culture and identity as significant in the shift in documentary values. The commingling of private and public modes of address in mass media had transformed a sober public sphere into a “freakshow” in which “the performance and display of difference has become a driving force in our aspirations”, and therefore in the way identity was formed (Dovey, 2000: 4). Dovey argued that changes in documentary form need not automatically indicate a downward trend in quality and standards, and offered a defence of such programming:

The dispersal of intimate speech and confessional discourse is a wholly comprehensible expression of the changes that have occurred in our social and economic lives. Critics must therefore continue to hope and argue for

programmes that strive to increase standards and quality by recognising that these ways of speaking have an importance that goes beyond diversion, entertainment and spectacle. (Dovey, 2000: 174)

Dovey updated his view by stressing the primacy of simulation and play over observation and reportage as methods for public engagement in the context of contemporary mass media (Dovey, 2004, 2008).

In summary, the writing around documentary's shift from a traditional role as public informant to entertainer falls into three main camps. Firstly, one position contends that the commercialisation of television has eroded the traditions of documentary making. This has serious implications for the contribution documentary makes to public debates, and implicitly to the machinery of democracy. Secondly, another position admits that the growing commerciality of television has changed documentary form. However, whilst some forms have been put under pressure, others have flourished. Whilst such changes could lead to a detrimental effect on public debate, the changes have had some beneficial effects in terms of rejuvenating producer's communities and offering new ways of perceiving society. Thirdly, the shift in documentary function from public to private has been entirely consistent with a similar shift in society and mass media as a whole. Whilst there may be some detrimental effects to the traditional aims of documentary, the changes also represent a radical repositioning of the genre, giving it greater efficacy and relevance in an entirely new social and technological setting.

#### 2.5.5 Documentary Theory: Conclusion

There are three main groupings in terms of writing about the development of documentary over the last 20 years. Firstly, there is a position that contends that

changes in documentary's evidentiary claim and commercialisation of television since the 1980s has resulted in a decline in the quality of documentary production in terms of research and intellectual rigour, and a shift in documentary away from the discussion of public issues, and towards more entertaining and diverting content.

The second position takes issues with the first position's tendency to be overdeterministic. Whilst documentary's evidentiary claims do seem to be waning, those claims were themselves unsupportable. Whilst new technology has pushed documentary towards lighter modes of address, television documentary gained a renewed popularity and relevance through a rejuvenated sense of expressive freedom. Whilst commercial imperatives threaten to overtake traditional public functions, there are still spaces in which producers can operate in a variety of idioms.

The third position sees the changes to documentary form as indivisible from changes in both society and technology. A collapse of the difference between public and private had been reflected in documentary practice. The changes in the political economy of television and the uptake of new technologies in documentary have been part of the same process of change. Such a position attempts to avoid recounting the "stultifying binaries" of populist and traditional, serious and entertaining (Dovey, 2000: 3-4). Instead, documentary has changed because its context has changed, and those changes have brought real benefits in terms of documentary's ability to engage with and represent social reality in contemporary times.

The next section of this chapter will seek to place discussions of the development of history documentary into this overall theoretical frame. It will do so in order to assess

the extent to which history documentary was susceptible, or exempt, from factors that caused change in the wider documentary genre. It will also seek to track writing on the effects that such factors had on the form of history documentary.

## **2.6 History Documentary**

This section assesses academic literature which discusses the aims and form of history documentary both before and after 1986. 1986 is chosen as it was the year when the Peacock Report (Home Office, 1986) was published, marking a paradigm shift in the broadcasting policy debate. The choice of 1986 and the Peacock Report as a landmark point is made for reasons of consistency across broadcasters and channels, although the study recognises that the effects of the report varied across broadcasters and channels (see page 32). Section 6.1 examines the aims of documentary in three categories: education; national heritage; PSB and commercial issues. Section 6.2 will examine literature about the form of history documentary. In terms of the 1986 boundary, the literature in the following sections is reviewed according to the dates of its focus of analysis, rather than the date in which the literature was written.

### 2.6.1 Aims of History Documentary Before 1986

The discussion of the aims of history documentary before 1986 was limited, and mostly concentrated on a small sample of programme examples. However, several aims emerged from a consideration of that small sample. Firstly, history documentary had an educative purpose, in line with the educative function of PSB. Secondly history documentary aimed to bring the nation together in acts of shared



commemoration, again as part of PSB's traditional appeal to a collective public good. Thirdly, history documentary fulfilled a commercial role within the PSB system.

#### 2.6.1.1 Public Service, Education and National Heritage

Kuehl asserted that public education was a central purpose of history documentaries before 1976. The main aim was to bring the history to a mass audience that had very little access to its more obscure corners (Kuehl, 1976: 182). Connelly agreed, and described *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) as a platform for the series' historian John Terraine to challenge the prevailing concept of the First World War as collective war crime (Connelly, 2002: 21). The implication here was that such a revision was fulfilling an educative purpose. Ramsden agreed that the purpose, or at least the effect, of series such as *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) was to educate a mass of the British public about the First World War (Ramsden, 2002: 8). However, this was not the aim of all history documentaries in this period, as some also promoted what Ramsden described as "jingoistic" engagement with national narratives, in series such as *Churchill: The Valliant Years* (BBC, 1961) (Ramsden 2002: 12).

Hanna agreed that in the example of *The Great War*, one of the main aims was to open up historical discourse to those who had not had a formal education in history. However, this was not the aim of all history documentary series of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Series such as *War in the Air* (BBC, 1954) or *Churchill: The Valiant Years* (BBC, 1961) had required more historical knowledge on the part of the viewer than the more accessible *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) (Hanna, 2007: 95). Sendall briefly argued that a decade after *The Great War* (BBC, 1964), ITV had also begun to use history documentary as a means to educate. He took the Thames Television series

*The World at War* (Thames Television, 1973-74), as an example of how ITV's documentary output sought to educate through new communicative forms (Sendall, 1990: 243).

Petersen argued that the purpose of history documentary before 1986 was tied to notions of national heritage and national identity grounded in buildings, events and even texts, among them history documentaries themselves (Petersen 2001: 255-257). Similarly, Stephen Badsey argued that one of the functions of series such as *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) was to bring together an audience in national commemoration by engaging with notions of national identity and heritage (Badsey, 2002: 37). Hanna has since argued that this function was a conscious, premeditated intention on the part of producers. Again, through the prism of *The Great War* (BBC, 1964), Hanna demonstrated how series producer, Tony Essex, had intentionally used symbols and tropes of national heritage and identity in the construction of the series (Hanna, 2007: 96). Far from being purely educative, and concerned with an accurate account of events, this process placed the series in the context of existing notions of national heritage and identity (Hanna, 2007:100-105).

#### 2.6.1.3 PSB and Commercial Issues

Since the 1950s, history documentary on television occupied a space that straddled public service and commercial television. In terms of the BBC, Dan Todman argued that the viewing numbers and approval ratings success of series such as *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) challenged the audience share of the comedy shows and police series of the time. History documentary was at this point a useful ratings weapon in the context of BBC's competition with ITV (Todman, 2002: 30). However, while

series such as *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) had a function in the BBC's struggle for audiences with ITV, Ramsden argued that such series were also used to press the BBC's PSB claims rather than simply to attract large audiences. This allowed space for the BBC to produce 'lighter' programming devoted specifically to attracting large audiences (Ramsden, 2002:13).

Briggs also noted the competitive function of history documentary, as it played an important part in the BBC's competition with ITV (Briggs, 1995: 413). He cited the example of *The British Empire* (BBC/Time Life, 1972) made under a co-production agreement between *Time Life* and the BBC<sup>13</sup> (Briggs, 1995: 938). The relationship between BBC and the Time Life publication was criticised as a form of covert advertising or sponsorship that even ITV was unable to take part in at the time (Briggs, 1995: 939). In a similar vein, Watt argued that history documentary had become an increasingly profit oriented enterprise by 1976, and asserted that television producers had become concerned mostly with entertainment, whilst academic historians remained concerned with historical accuracy (Watt, 1976: 169-173).

History documentary at ITV had the function of bolstering ITV's educative PSB credentials (Sendall, 1982: 350). Sendall noted that series such as Lord Clark's *Five Revolutionary Painters* (ATV, 1959) was made in line with Clark's mission of "saving ITV from the worst features of commercialism" without having to compromise too far on audience size (Sendall, 1982: 350). Potter suggests that history documentary also played a part in ITV's strategy of internal and external competition. *The Day Before*

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<sup>13</sup> The co-production agreement was signed between Time Life and the BBC in 1970, when *The British Empire* was in the early stages of production. The agreement put the BBC in control of the television series, with Time Life in control of all publications, including a part-work weekly magazine series (Briggs, 1995: 938).

*Yesterday* (Thames TV, 1970-71) was designed partly to display Thames TV's great wealth. As such its function was not to attract audiences, but to show that Thames TV was not a slave to the requirement to produce a profit.

Similarly, *All Our Yesterdays* (Granada, 1960-1973) and *The World at War* (Thames TV, 1973-4) were part of Granada's commitment to long-running series in a context where they did not fulfill a commercial function (Potter, 1989: 45, 29). *The World at War* (Thames TV, 1973-4) was also crucial in leveraging Thames Television's sales in America through its prestige and reputation as a quality series, rather than its guarantee of large audiences (Potter, 1989: 66). Bonner and Ashton agreed that programmes such as *The World at War* (Thames TV, 1973-4) helped Thames TV compete with the BBC for market share in the USA (Bonner and Ashton, 1998: 86). This suggests that history documentary was a genre that operated in the context of both PSB and commercial considerations, on both sides of the duopoly. Dillon argued that history documentary on UK television between 1946 and 1986 had gradually undergone a process of commodification, which to some extent lay the foundations for an extension of the same process after 1986 (Dillon, 2007: 12 - unpublished thesis).

Overall, the academic writing about history documentary produced before 1986 indicates that the genre had several aims, some of which were conflicting at times. There was the aim of widening the access of certain social classes to knowledge through the educative role of the history documentary. Simultaneously, the programmes sought to unite people across social boundaries in national commemoration, thus engaging with issues of national heritage and national identity.

Similarly, history documentary functioned both as a central pillar of PSB through its educative aim, but was also capable of acting as a successful commercial product.

## 2.6.2 Aims of History Documentary Since 1986

### 2.6.2.1 Education and National Heritage

One of the main themes in the academic literature on the aims of history documentary after 1986 concerned the relationship between academic history and television history, and whether popular education was still an aim for history documentary.

Kilborn argued that a consequence of the commercialisation of television was the prioritisation of spectacle over thesis in history documentaries. The consequences of that shift were that the audience became familiar with a less rigorous form of historical documentary, a familiarity that eroded the public education purpose of history documentary (Kilborn, 1994: 65). Petersen also noted that growing commercialism shifted the power in history documentary production, from the academic historian towards the television producer. This shift was at the root of the frequent repetition of a small group of subjects that were seen to be successful in gaining high audience ratings, namely the First and Second World Wars, the Tudors, and the Industrial Revolution. The implication was that the educative aim of history documentary was subordinated to commercial imperatives (Petersen, 2001: 270).

The historian Stephen Badsey also argued that the educative aim had been demoted in the history documentary. He detected that the relationship between academic historians and television producers has become more strained in recent years due to commercialisation, with television producers becoming the dominant partner in the

relationship. One consequence was that historical content was treated by television producers without due diligence and care, and thus undermined the educative purpose of history documentaries (cited in Nelson, 2002: 1). Chapman, in his discussion of a cycle of drama-documentaries broadcast in 2004-5<sup>14</sup>, saw a change in the aims of the history programming, away from “mandarin history” to ordinary “people’s recollections” (Chapman, 2007: 23).

However, Corner sought to move away from the binary division of historian versus producer. He noted that the attraction of history programming was a mixture of “understanding ... in informing of present identity and direction”, and “fascination and pleasure” from “contemplation of scenes from the past” (Corner, 2006: 466). This mixing of aims could seem contradictory and confusing as one might militate against the other, but this contradiction was not a new one, and was to some extent unavoidable. For Corner analysis dealing in these opposites wasn’t helpful in finding how historical television worked (Corner, 2006: 466). Agnew argued that the shifts that concerned Kilborn, Petersen, Badsey and Chapman were not restricted to television. Invoking the notion of an ‘affective turn’ in contemporary historiography, Agnew suggested that academic history had shared such a shift (Agnew, 2007: 299). The implication might be here that it was the norms of academic history that were changing, rather than television breaking educational norms.

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<sup>14</sup> Chapman (2007) identified a series of seemingly unconnected productions as a cycle of drama-documentaries unified by two common factors: “a revisionist perspective on the British historical experience of the Second World War, and “a significant new direction for representing history on television” (Chapman, 2007: 13). The programmes he identified were: *Dunkirk* (BBC, 2004), *D-Day* (Dangerous Films for BBC/Telefrance/ProSeiben/Discovery, 2004), *When Hitler Invaded Britain* (Granada Bristol for ITV1, 2004), *D-Day to Berlin* (BBC and the History Channel, 2004) and *Blitz: London’ Firestorm* (Darlow Smithson for Channel 4 and PBS, 2005).

As in the period before 1986, history documentaries in the period after 1986 had a strong connection to notions of heritage and national identity. Andersen has argued that the dominance of certain periods in the history documentary output were evidence of a close link with national repositories of collective memory (Andersen, 2001:20-25). Wilson noted that recent history documentaries had tended to promote Britishness in the contemporary setting, exemplified by the series *Empire* (Channel Four, 2003) (Wilson, 2003: 177). Downing agreed, and claimed that one of the functions of history documentary was to bring together an audience of all races and ages, to wonder at the same canon of national historical events (Downing, 2004:8). Hunt claimed that the content of history documentaries from the late 1990s onwards was, “despite the occasional caveat .... a clear, national narrative of becoming” in the context of the devolution of Scotland and Wales, and a growing English national consciousness (Hunt, 2006: 844).

Chapman (2007) suggested that a distinct group of history drama-documentaries produced in 2004-5, whilst having differing engagements with the war, from the anti-war message of *Blitz: London's Firestorm* (C4 and PBS, 2004), to the commemorative *Dunkirk* (BBC, 2004), were all produced due to an upsurge in collective national identity around the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the end of the Second World War (Chapman, 2007: 20).

In summary, there was a difference of opinion along the lines of the educative purpose of documentary after 1986. Some contended that it had declined, whilst some contended that the nature of academic history had also changed, and that history documentary was merely moving with the prevailing educative tide. The writers

surveyed here agreed that national heritage and the relationship with a national collective memory was still an important function of history documentary since 1986. Indeed the literature suggests that this function grew in significance after 1986.

#### 2.6.2.3 PSB and Commercial Issues

In the mid to late 1990s, Corner noted that history documentary had to some extent been immune from the effects of the commercialisation of PSB that were responsible for documentary hybrids such as the docusoap and lifestyle programming (Corner 1996:189). In contrast, Kilborn believed that history documentary had less interest in public education than in the past, and that commerciality was a more important consideration, especially the potential of overseas sales (Kilborn, 1998:188).

However, by the early 2000s writing on this area was in agreement. Cook suggested that the aims of individual programme makers, due to the increasing profitability of professional television history, became more commercial, as exemplified in the status of David Starkey as the highest paid performer per screen hour on British television in 2002 (Cook, 2002: 375). Whilst, as Hunt argued, some history documentaries of the mid to late 1990s carried on an older tradition of public service, such as *People's Century* (BBC1, 1995-1997), by the late 1990s and early 2000s the commercial imperatives of the television industry had left history programming in a parlous state, exemplified by 'living history' reality formats (Hunt, 2006: 850, 856). There had been a boom in history documentary production, initiated by a series of high selling popular history books (Hunt, 2006: 844). Hunt argued that as a result "the socially committed and politically active" television producer had been deterred from taking



part in history documentary production, and now headed “straight for the world of current affairs and international development broadcasting” (Hunt, 2006: 846).

The writing on the relationship between commercial issues and history documentary production after 1986 showed that the genre had shifted from a position where questions of public service and commerciality were evenly balanced. The situation had arisen where there was a greater expectation that history documentaries attract large audiences, and therefore became more valuable televisual commodities.

Overall, the writing on the aims of history documentaries produced after 1986 suggested that the writers considered that the educative aim had declined, that the relationship with notions of national heritage had been strengthened, and that the commercial aims had become stronger.

This literature therefore suggests that the function of history documentary had changed during a period in which television’s need to attract larger audiences had also grown, which suggests a particular link between history documentary function and the political economy of television. The next section will examine whether a similar shift is apparent in the form of history documentary.

### 2.6.3 History Documentary Form

This section examines the writing on the textuality of history documentary before and after 1986. It will do this by focussing on two areas: firstly the textual characteristics that writers agreed constitute the history documentary genre; and secondly the critical judgments made about the efficacy of those textual characteristics.

### 2.6.3.1 History Documentary Form Before 1986

Writing on the form of history documentary outlines two clear types of history documentary that dominated before 1986. On one hand, there was a type that utilised an onscreen presenter, and on the other a type that eschewed presenters and intercut archive footage with testimony (Downing, 2004: 10, 15). Isaacs challenged the notion that the dual progenitors of history documentary were *The Great War* and *Civilisation*. He claimed that a middle way was plotted by a series of films made by Granada in the 1960s, in which a mix of these approaches was used (Isaacs, 2004: 36). In addition McArthur (1980: 47-48) and Hunt (2006: 854) noted a mix of approaches in history documentary, exemplified by *Culloden* (BBC, 1964) and *Living in the Past* (BBC, 1978) respectively.

In terms of judgements regarding the efficacy of differing techniques, views can be organised into two main positions: firstly, a position largely in favour of the mainstream of history documentary output, and secondly a position highly critical of such material. The next section will deal with these positions in turn.

Kuehl noted that the average length of a script for a history documentary such as *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) was only 1500 words. This meant that television series of this kind were not suited to giving time for reflection, nor in explaining complex narratives. However, they were effective at “telling stories and anecdotes, creating atmosphere and mood, giving diffuse impressions” (Kuehl, 1976:178). Briggs noted that the central focus of a presenter gave the history documentary a greater ability to communicate complex narratives, with *Civilisation* (BBC, 1969) being more effective in this regard than *The Great War* (BBC, 1964). In addition to Kenneth Clark’s on-

screen presence in *Civilisation* (BBC, 1969), this focus and ability to deal with complex notions was due to Clark's role as author of the series (Briggs, 1979: 612-163)<sup>15</sup>. However, Connelly argued that direct comparisons between presenter-led and archive/interview types were of limited use, as the aim of *Civilisation* (BBC, 1969) was different to that of *The Great War* (BBC, 1964), the latter having been an exercise in experiential history, rather than driven by concepts (Connelly, 2002: 22).

While writers raised piecemeal questions regarding the efficacy and significance of different methods, McArthur's *Television and History* (BFI, 1980) took a more generally critical stance towards the deployment of techniques. McArthur described interviews as indicative of an isolation of individual experience at the cost of more collective formulations of historical process (McArthur, 1980: 16). The narrator, either unseen or seen in the form of a presenter, was indicative of the ideological domination of "bourgeois authority" in the often obviously class-bound choices of actors and experts as narrators (McArthur, 1980: 22). The presence or lack of archive footage shaped history documentary form unduly, leading to the absence of whole areas of history (McArthur, 1980: 14). All these criticisms combined to form a general critique of television documentary's inability to deal with the contradictions inherent in historical exploration. McArthur also criticised history documentary's tendency to favour voices from mainstream "social democratic" political positions, and he called for alternative methods and positions to be developed (McArthur, 1980: 24).

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<sup>15</sup> *The Great War* comprised 26 episodes, each lasting 30 minutes. *Civilisation* comprised 13 episodes lasting 50 minutes each.

In summary, the consensus in the academic writing about the form of history documentary before 1986 was that the dominant forms of history documentary were those associated with *The Great War* (BBC, 1964) and *Civilisation* (BBC, 1969). The formal palette used in these types was therefore largely limited to presenters, archive film, interviews, and narration. In terms of a critical assessment of the form there was disagreement between two positions. The first position implied that history documentary forms were appropriate responses to the demands of public history on television. The second rejected the limiting of scope and voice in the dominant forms.

#### 2.6.3.2 History Documentary Form: Changes Since 1986

The academic writing on history documentaries that were produced after 1986 isolated a number of changes to the form of the genre. Ellis claimed that the adoption of video camera technology had made interviewing a “more intimate and relaxed experience”, which in turn had encouraged forms of oral history and greater use of personal testimony (Ellis, 2003: 278). Champion noted that onscreen authority was increasingly guaranteed by presenters, at the expense of interview material (Champion, 2003:154-5). Wilson noted that levels of visual stimuli had grown in the type of images used to accompany the unseen narrative of presenters such as Niall Ferguson (Wilson, 2003:176). Bell and Gray said that the presenter re-emerged, roughly in the middle of the 1990s, after a period in which the presenter had been unfashionable (Bell and Gray, 2007: 125).

Champion noted a significant increase in the use of dramatic reconstruction which also signalled a general move from historical word descriptions, to image descriptions (Champion, 2003:154-5). Ward also noted an increased use of drama codes, and in

increasingly various forms (Ward, 2005: 49-65). Chapman agreed with the increase in the use of dramatic codes, as he described a shift towards large scale history drama-documentaries in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Chapman, 2007: 13-20). Williams noted the emergence of computer generated images (CGI) as a means of recreating historical spectacle in a way previously impossible (Williams, 2007: 130). Cook noted that history doc has become more multi-modal and inter generic (Cook, 2004). Hunt agreed, claiming that history documentary had become much more various in form: "...from presenter-led lantern lecture ... to historically re-enacted dramas, narrated documentaries, re-coloured twentieth-century footage, historical journeying, computer generated graphics (CGI), explorations of ancient and medieval history, and even historical reality shows." (Hunt, 2006: 844).

In terms of judgments on such changes, the writing can be categorised into two main camps. The first tended to view formal changes as militating against an intelligent and thorough examination of the past on television. The second position argued that the development of new forms had brought new possibilities. Wilson feared that a greater emphasis on spectacle was a move away from the authorising structures of academia, leading to a historical discourse which was less questioning of received history (Wilson, 2003:176). Williams added that spectacle, especially that easily generated through CGI was potentially problematic: "CGI and other technical developments may raise questions about the 'ethics' of reproducing 'archive' like scenes and vivid dramatic reconstructions of past event and actors which can blur the understanding of what is 'real' " (Williams, 2007: 130).

Hunt claimed that the history programmes of the latter 1990s had exchanged "the hard grind of archival research for the stock recycling of easy images, lazy ideas and

familiar talking heads”, an had been part of a downgrading of historical discourse on television (Hunt, 2006:846). Bell and Gray suggested that the emergence of the “charismatic presenter” from the mid 1990s onwards had led to a “mindless” form of historical discourse of which *A History of Britain* (BBC, 2000-2002), presented by Simon Schama, was an example. In such programmes presenters stated facts, rather than conducting explorations into contingent and competing historical accounts. In addition, almost all presenters were male, which had the effect of marginalising female historians on television (Bell and Gray, 2007: 127-130). Williams noted that presenters also tended to be drawn from a similar Oxbridge-educated social milieu, and therefore provided a very specific set of values through which the television audience accessed the past (Williams, 2007: 133). Williams also claimed that archive was also prone to the same problem as suggested by McArthur (1980), in that the availability of archive was a determining factor in the selection of historical events for television treatment (Williams, 2007: 136).

However, Schama defended his own programmes, and their use of visual codes. He defended his approach by claiming it was intended to make historical discourse accessible to a mass audience, rather than the powerful tool of the few. He also refuted the claim that visual depictions could not carry the same informational load as spoken words, and that they were inimical to reasoned argument: “So these visual strategies are never meant as mere décor. They are all intended to introduce debate by stealth, in ways that flow naturally from both the storyline and the visual storyboard.” (Schama, 2004: 32).

Ward suggested that the emergence of the use of dramatic codes within the history documentary was clearly enabling a revisionist historical view of familiar events.

Whilst his choice of history documentaries was open to the accusation of not being representative, the proliferation and variety of historical approaches he outlined showed that Wilson and Champion's notion of a uniform deployment of spectacle was simplistic (Ward, 2005: 49-65). Bell and Gray, despite their criticism of Schama, also argued that presenters such as Michael Wood brought a "mindfulness" to history documentaries. Wood's programmes, in particular *In Search of Myths and Heroes* (Maya Vision for BBC, 2005), represented the obverse of Schama's determinism, and allowed for the possibility of contingent and partial conclusions (Bell and Gray, 2007: 127-130)<sup>16</sup>.

In summary, there was agreement that there had been a broad movement towards visually stimulating material, especially dramatic reconstruction, and a revival of the presenter. This in turn had meant a decline in the amount of interview material, as the spoken word had given way to the image as the main method of conveying ideas. In terms of a critical assessment, there were two competing positions. Firstly, that history documentary had declined in quality, as programmes became less questioning, and less well researched. Secondly, that history documentary had become more various, creating a space for alternative views of history, and alternative visual methods for conveying complex ideas.

#### 2.6.4 History Documentary: Conclusion

In terms of the aims of history documentary, the literature suggests that there was some level of continuity between the eras prior to and following 1986. However, the

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<sup>16</sup> As far as can be detected, no mention was made in the critical literature regarding changes in the types of interviews conducted, despite there being potentially significant differences between the power and resonance of interviews given by eye witnesses and experts or academics. Such differences are, however, taken into account in Chapter 8 in the analysis of key programmes.

literature also suggests that notions of national heritage and commercial imperatives became more important in the latter 1990s, to the detriment of an educative public service aim. This general shift was accompanied in terms of form by a diversification of history documentary forms, an increase in visual styling and stimulation, and a decline in research and the use of interview material.

The literature therefore suggests that there could be a link between the rapidly changing political economy of television and the function and form of history documentary. As audience retention and programme making costs became increasingly important considerations for broadcasters through the late 80s and the entirety of the 90s, history documentary was affected in specific functional and formal ways.

Whilst there is a growing body of literature on the development of history documentary, there is a lack of detailed empirical work which explores the extent to which the discourse about changes in historical documentary is accurate or not, during the crucial period of the 1990s.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the academic literature relevant to this thesis' object of study: the development of the history documentary from 1982-2002. In each section the chapter has isolated key questions relevant to the study of history documentary in this period.



The literature on political economy, and in particular the political economy of the media, raised questions of media ownership and governance, and how the macro structures of broadcasting effected the autonomy of producers, and the production and consumption of texts. The literature outlined two main positions, in which the differing cases for commercial and non-commercial governance in broadcasting were debated. The literature on PSB focussed down from wider political economic debates onto a particular historical tradition in the governance of broadcasting, and especially on its application to the UK context. The literature indicated that whilst PSB had always been a contested concept, the period between 1982 and 2002 saw an attempt to radically re-interpret its aims and methods within the wider context of a shift towards neo-liberal market values. This review, however, has also emphasised that such changes were not uniform, and that they varied in terms of the individual development of broadcasters and channels.

However the theoretical issues surrounding political economy and PSB have only been explored very infrequently in discussion of history documentary, this body of literature is relatively slight. The existing work tends in two directions. Firstly, it concentrates on individual programme examples at the expense of a more representative approach (Cook, A, 2004; Champion, 2003; Ward, 2005; Chapman, 2007). Secondly when surveys of change occur, these tend not to have the scope, consistency and detail a longer study can bring (Cannadine, 2004; Bell and Gray, 2007). This thesis therefore aims to bring a historical, systematic and sustained approach to the study of the changing circumstances under which history documentaries were produced for UK terrestrial television.

This broader historical perspective was also a crucial consideration when setting the time span covered by the study. In order to place a discussion of history documentary in a reasonably broad historical perspective, the contours of the topic needed to be established before the gradual cross channel, de-stabilisation that followed on from a number of macro changes to the political economy of television made during the 1980s and early 1990s. A study of practices in the 1980s was therefore essential. The 20 year duration of the study also enabled a sustained examination, in which long term trends and affects could be identified, whilst keeping the scale of the study manageable within the time and resource constraints.

The literature on documentary raised questions about how documentary form was affected by changes in the political economy of television during the period in question. There was a debate as to whether changes could be directly attributed to changes in television's governance, or whether wider societal changes also drove developments in form. The literature also contained three positions concerning the desirability of changes in documentary form over the period, which were: firstly, broadly condemnatory; secondly, broadly appreciative; thirdly, a balance between the first and second positions.

The literature on history documentary raised many of the same questions as the literature on the wider genre of documentary. History documentary was held to be either diverging from its traditional educative purpose due to commercial pressure, or having adapted to a new broadcasting and cultural environment. The literature on both sides of this debate offered the notion of a 'history boom' as evidence for both

positions: on one hand that history documentary had become more numerous due to its commercial advantage over drama and documentary, or on the other hand that the growth in history documentary was indicative of an effective response to a growth in consumer demand. This literature will be useful in structuring the analysis of the development of history documentary as a genre, and in providing a framework for an empirical investigation of the effects of this development on its formal characteristics.

However, whilst there has been work on tracking changes in some key programme genres over the period (e.g., Barnett and Seymour, 1999), none, as far as the author is aware, have engaged systematically with the connection between the political economy of television and the development of history documentary form. Although the writing on the ‘history boom’ did stimulate interest in the development of history documentary at the inception of this study, closer analysis of the literature around the notion revealed a tendency towards largely untested assertions, rather than in-depth research and analysis. In addition, there were questions as to the exact timing of a boom, with accounts in Cannadine et al (2004) tentatively locating it in the late 1990s and early 2000s, while other accounts (Ward, 2005; Chapman, 2007; Bell and Gray, 2007) implying a later date. Due to the imprecise nature of these claims, this study avoided making ‘the history boom’ its main focus. Rather, it sought to trace the development of history documentary over a broader period.

Having examined these areas of writing, and identified the gaps in knowledge, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What were the key developments in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002
2. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and the production of history documentary on UK terrestrial TV?
3. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and changes in history documentary form?

## **Chapter 3: Methods and Sources**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will give an account of the research methods used to answer the research questions outlined at the end of chapter 2. This chapter will begin with an introduction which sets out the research questions to be approached, and a broad indication of the methods used to answer each question, and the sources used across all research questions. Section 3.2 is then subdivided according to research method. Each subsection will then go on to assess the following:

1. A general description of the method
2. The strengths and weaknesses of the method
3. Pilot
4. Implementation

#### 3.1.1 Statement of Research Questions

The thesis examined a tripartite set of research questions:

1. What were the key developments in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002
2. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and the production of history documentary on UK terrestrial TV?
3. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and changes in history documentary form?

The following methods were used to investigate these questions:

1. Archival Research (Research Questions 1 & 2)
2. Documentary Research (Research Questions 1, 2 & 3)
3. Content Analysis (Research Questions 2 & 3)
4. Interview Analysis (Research Questions 2 & 3)
5. Textual Analysis (Research Question 3)

Archival research was used mainly to ascertain the developments in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 (research question 1), particularly with regards to changes in the regulation of television. Content analysis was used to explore both the connections between the changing political economy of television and history documentary production, and the effect of changes in the political economy of television on the form of history documentary (research questions 2 and 3). Documentary research was used to explore all three of the thesis' main research questions: changes in the political economy of UK television between 1982 and 2002; the political economy of history documentary production; the effects of changes in the political economy of television on history documentary form. Textual analysis was used to ascertain in detail the effects of changes in the political economy on the form of history documentary (research question 3).

### 3.1.2 Sources

This thesis uses several sources in order to answer its research questions, and it used various methods to interrogate those sources. Table 1 gives a brief overview of the sources and methods discussed in more detail later in the chapter:

| <b>Method</b>      | <b>Sources</b>   |
|--------------------|--|
| Literature Review  | Academic Literature  |
| Document Research  | Government Reports<br>Broadcaster Reports<br>Industry Literature<br>Production Company Records |
| Content Analysis   | Press Materials<br>Television Listings   |
| Interview Analysis | Practitioner Interviews  |
| Textual Analysis   | Television Programmes  |

Table 3.1: Methods and Sources

## **3.2 Literature Review**

### 3.2.1 Description of Chosen Method

A literature review surveys the available academic literature on a given subject, in order to identify gaps in knowledge and to suggest fruitful avenues for research. By doing this a literature research enables a thesis to attain a high standard of scholarly rigour by enabling the following:

1. Specialisation in scholarship.
2. Making a new contribution to an area of knowledge.
3. Demonstrating a high level of scholarship.
4. Demonstrating Originality.

(Adapted from Hart, 1998: 20)

The literature review is therefore the basis on which the rest of the study is built, and is a fundamental methodological ingredient.

### 3.2.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

The strength of using a literature search was that a coherent field of academic knowledge could be mapped, providing a conceptual framework through which later analysis could be conducted, and analysed. Broadly, the literature developed the direction of the thesis by asking and answering the following questions:

1. What type of research has been done in the area?
2. What has been found in previous studies?
3. What suggestions do other researchers make for further study?
4. What has not been investigated?
5. How can the proposed study add to our knowledge of the area?
6. What research methods are used in previous studies?

(Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 25)

Asking and answering these questions assisted in avoiding the replication of academic work. This ensured originality, but also by ensuring that the thesis was built on the foundations of existing work, its relevance was also emphasised. As Phillips and Pugh (2002) indicate, the ability to demonstrate originality depends to a large extent on a solid and systematic understanding of a subject area (Phillips and Pugh, 2002: 63-64).

The weakness of such an approach was a possible dependence on the work of earlier academic writers on a certain topic or area. If very little has been written about a specific project this could present a challenge in terms of bridging existing fields of work, or applying research conducted in one area to another. Equally, if the area of work was one that had been extensively researched, then an original contribution might become more difficult to conceptualise, and would require considerable time and resources to identify.



### 3.2.3 Implementation

The literature search was conducted through the searching of bibliographies and abstracts of publications through recognized search facilities such as *OCLC First Search*, *Google Scholar*, *Books in Print* and *ISI Web of Knowledge*. The search for literature would involve a cyclical procedure in which a number of stages were repeated in the pattern described below:

1. Search *OCLC First Search*, *Google Scholar*, *Books in Print*, etc
  2. Obtain Books: Skim Read for Relevance
  3. Extract Relevant Items from Bibliographies
  4. Construct Initial Bibliographic Lists
  5. Repeat these steps for journal articles and theses and conference papers
- (Adapted from Hart, 1998: 35)

By implementing this pattern of research, it was possible to expand from a small core of texts to an understanding of the location of current and historical debates on history documentary development. In addition to this process, there was an easily identifiable group of journals whose prime areas of discussion overlapped with the thesis' area of study, and the growing areas of discussion identified by the literature search:

*European Journal of Communication*

*Historical Journal of Radio Film and Television*

*History Workshop Journal*

*Media and Society*

*Media, Culture and Society*

*Media History*

*New Media and Television*

Whilst some articles in these journals were identified through the type of search described above, a thorough research of these journals also identified further sources. This was particularly important in keeping abreast of the most recent writing on the subject, as the length of the study necessitated a constant re-evaluation of the available literature.

In terms of accessing texts, the online resources available through the Aberystwyth University library were utilized. In addition, some texts were accessed through the collections at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth and the British Film Institute Library in London. Additional material, particularly theses, was accessed through interlibrary loan. A key task in the implementation of the literature review was the development of a familiarity with the processes and formats through which information was stored and accessed at such institutions, a task through which essential scholarship skills are developed and honed (Hart, 1998: 13).

#### 3.2.4 Pilot

There was no pilot for this approach, rather a gradual refining of the process. The first searches unearthed very few central texts on history documentary, but found a large amount of texts that could have a bearing on one or more of the areas under discussion. As these areas began to become more concrete in terms of the analysis of the central material, other searches were necessary in order to locate material, and in order to ensure that there was no material being missed.

### 3.2.5 Analysis

The material was to be analysed in two main ways. On one hand the main theoretical debates within the literature were to be identified, and then traced chronologically. This approach was intended to map the field, in order to pinpoint gaps in the literature and formulate research questions. Secondly, the material was also analysed in order to extract key events and dates that could be used to build a coherent and comprehensive historical account of developments. In addition, the material was used to identify key personnel and texts for further study.

As mentioned earlier (p.86, 100) there are dangers associated with relying on previous work, especially in an area of study that is lacking in detailed, large-scale, empirical studies. In the case of this study, much of the literature on the development of history documentary was based around single case studies rather than surveys that examine a long period of time, and around assertion and conjecture rather than rigorous methodologies. As a consequence, whilst inferences could be drawn from the literature, care was taken when applying these inferences to the study of other materials, and in the formulation of conclusions.

## **3.3 Document Research**

### 3.3.1 Description of Chosen Method

Documentary analysis is a method that identifies, accesses and analyses documentation. The processes through which identification and analysis are

conducted are highly rigorous and systematic. This is in order to ensure the validity and reliability of any argument built upon documentary evidence (Scott, 1990: 6).

As Punch suggests, documentation can be used in two main ways. First, documents can be “the focus in their own right”, and in other situations, “in conjunction with other data” (Punch, 1998: 190). The first method can be used to extract useful information from a document, in order to build a chronological account of events grounded in evidence contained in documentation. The second method can offer insight into historical processes. In addition, documentation could also provide a framework through which other methods could be applied, such as practitioner interviews and textual analysis.

### 3.3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

As well as the flexibility mentioned above, one main strength of document analysis as a method is its quality of coverage. As Flick notes, “hardly an institutional activity – from birth to death of people – comes along without producing a record” (Flick, 2006: 245). This suggests that when searching for evidence of activity within the social sphere, documentation could be a fruitful source. A practical strength of documentary analysis is accessibility. Due to the revolution in information technology over the last 15 years many of the problems of accessing documentation have been alleviated (Deacon et al, 1999:18-19).

However, there are also problems to consider with using documentation. The sheer amount of material available can cause great problems in selection. Scott (1990: 14) and Deacon et al (1999: 26-30) suggest various criteria for the selection of material,

invoking the notions of ‘authenticity’, ‘credibility’, ‘representativeness’, and especially for Scott, ‘meaning’. However these judgments can be difficult to sustain in a systematic way. Another problem with documentation is the tendency to regard their contents as being more reliable and objective than information contained in other sources, such as interviews (Wolff, 2004, cited in Flick 2006: 249). Flick suggests that documents should be approached with an open mind: “They should be seen as a way of contextualising information. Rather than using them as “information containers”, they should be seen and analyzed as *methodologically created communicative turns* in constructing versions of events.” (Flick, 2006: 249) (Italics in the original). The nature of a document as a communicative device therefore needs to be borne in mind when selecting, and when analysing.

### 3.3.3 Document Research: Government Policy Documentation

This method involved the collation and analysis of a range of contemporary media and communications policy documents. These documents included acts of parliament, government commissioned reports, or reports by research agencies. These documents, whilst not giving a complete picture, could form a framework within which a study of how policy was negotiated by broadcasters and producers could be conducted.

#### 3.3.3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

The main strength of this method was availability and detail. Government reports were widely available, and due to their status as official documents, they had been compiled with a high degree of attention to detail and methodological integrity. However, great care had to be taken with policy documents for two main reasons. Firstly, even though they were documents prepared in expectation of a high level of

scrutiny, Flick’s note of caution regarding communicative context (noted above) still applied. Secondly, policy documents could be misleading because they deal with policy. As Hansen et al (1998) note, any discussion of policy carries specific hazards of interpretation:

1. Policy is often not made up of a coherent set of statements, nor very often a comprehensive, well thought out set of statements.
2. Sometimes policies are not visible or set down. Inaction is a policy; an absence of a policy is therefore a positive decision in favour of non-intervention in media industries.
3. Policies can often have unintended consequences, and these may be critical for certain media.
4. Policies are often incremental, and may be contradictory in as much as they will deal with some sectors but not with others.
5. Policies may be contradictory because the technology of the medium which they are intended to legislate may span two, or more, government departments.

(Hansen et al, 1998: 67-68)

In addition to these criteria, policy documentation can also be inflexible, as it is based on specific methodologies designed to answer specific research questions. The empirical base of many policy documents did not delve under the surface of events or issues. Additionally, policy documents were unlikely to provide any direct information about history documentary, and required considerable interpretation.

### 3.3.3.2 Implementation

The governmental sources for analysis were identified through the literature discovered through literature review (Crisell, 1997; O’Malley, 1994; Goodwin, 1998; Franklin, 2001). These documents were then analysed in two main ways, as “resources” and “topics” according to Scott’s formulation (Scott, 1999: 36). In terms of “resource” use, documents were consulted in order to “compile a comprehensive set of data” on the changes in broadcasting policy. In addition, the sources were treated as “topics”, in which,

...the researcher's main concern is to explain the nature of the documents themselves: they are regarded as social products and are treated as the objects of sociological analysis. The aim is to elucidate the social processes through which they were produced in order to explain their form and content and perhaps something about their authors and the circumstances in which they were living. (Scott, 1990: 36-7)

An example of how Scott's model was implemented in this thesis is the analysis of *The Report of the Committee on Financing the BBC* (Peacock, 1986). When the report was analysed as a resource, this involved the noting of definitions, arguments, positions, evidences, and propositions, which were assimilated into a general chronology of events in UK Broadcasting between 1982 and 2002. When the report was analysed as topic, the background of the chairman, the composition of the committee, the political circumstances surrounding its constitution and work was examined in order to evaluate the fuller consequences of the committee as a sociological event.

#### 3.3.4 Document Research: Broadcaster Annual Reports

This method involved the analysis of the annual reports of UK broadcasters, namely the BBC and bodies that governed independent television during the period in question.

##### 3.3.4.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

The strengths and weaknesses of this data set were very similar to those of official government documentation. Annual reports could give more detail concerning the impact of policy on broadcasters than official governmental sources. However, this data set did have limitations within the context of the study. The framework produced by the analysis of policy documentation dealt with the political economy of television

on a macro level. The analysis of annual reports meshed with the analysis of policy documentation on three levels. First, the analysis of broadcaster reports suggested how policy on a governmental level had been interpreted by broadcasters. Secondly, this layer also suggested what some of the results were of the implementation of government policy. Thirdly, these reports also hinted at the cultural changes within broadcasting institutions.

However, there were also problems. In general such reports were similar to government reports, in that they should be read as both resource and topic. However, to invoke Deacon and Scott's notion of 'credibility', broadcaster reports tend to overtly "reflect the organisation and interests of state agencies" (Scott, 1990: 59). This meant that broadcaster reports omitted several types of account. Questions of producer practice were only dealt with by broadcaster reports in broad terms, and often with regards to future structural changes.

Due to this distance from practice, the data set was limited in its ability to offer answers to the exact dynamics of the changes within the industry, particularly when interrogated from the perspective of history documentary programming. These sources were of limited use in tracing the developments in the everyday work situation of production, but were fundamental in establishing the market situation of the industry as a whole.

#### 3.3.4.2 Implementation

A form of sampling was used for the analysis of the broadcaster annual reports. All UK broadcaster reports were examined for the period in question, but information was



sampled from within the reports. This approach was informed by Flick's suggestion that "questions of layout" should be taken into account when analysing documents (Flick, 2006: 250). The layout and structure of the annual reports were therefore taken into consideration. Three sections were targeted as being the most useful source of relevant information for this thesis. Firstly the review section at the beginning of each report in which the BBC and IBA/ITC governing bodies described challenges, successes and failures, were annotated in order to build a narrative of key events, programmes and developments. Secondly, data concerning programme output by genre was collected as part of a more detailed content analysis. Thirdly, the financial information included in the reports, namely the definitive figures regarding income and expenditure, were collated in order to track the financial footing of television in the UK over this period.

### 3.3.5 Document Research: Archives

#### 3.3.5.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the key strengths of this approach lay in gaining information concerning historical events that were no longer possible to observe. The pre-existing nature of archive material also makes it possible to examine the material at length and in detail (Deacon et al, 1999: 15). It is also possible to use such official documentation as a supplementary source of information to work along with other sources such as interviews (Deacon et al, 1999: 15). However, access to such archives is often limited. This could involve the need to physically visit a certain location, with limits placed on research time, and often charges levied for research facilities or services. The deterioration over time of materials within an archive can also lead to some items being unavailable. Collections can sometimes be incomplete, and the cataloguing can

pose interpretive problems. In addition, the material in any archive only represents part of the communicative behaviour in an institution. Such records require a large degree of interpretation, which might include cross-referencing with other methods.

#### 3.3.5.2 Implementation

The thesis required access to archives in order to track decisions regarding the connection between policy and programming. The main targets were the archives of broadcasters, those of broadcasting institutions and associations, and those of independent production companies.

The BBC, Channel Four, and ITV were all approached with a view to accessing their archive from between 1982 and 2002. Due to the period in question, between 1982 and 2002, there were immediate difficulties with accessing *BBC*'s written archive, which has an embargo of 25 years<sup>17</sup>. Therefore a systematic approach to the study of the BBC's written archive was not possible. However, it was still possible to access information already in the public realm, such as cast lists, copyright information, audience figures, and some 'special' audience research reports from the mid 1990s. The main problem was that sources had to be identified prior to request, and that identification would therefore have to be based on other sources of information.

Similarly, the archives of Channel Four were impossible to access, despite ongoing discussions with the relevant departments between 2004 and 2007. Channel Four's documentation was inaccessible partly due to its publishing house structure, much of their records being distributed amongst the independent producers that provided its

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<sup>17</sup>The conditions of access are noted on the BBC website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/more/wac2.shtml>, accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2008.

programming. What material Channel Four did retain, comprising mainly of press releases and annual reports, was published on the broadcaster's website as part of its compliance with the freedom of information act (Channel Four, 2000-).

Johnson and Turnock testified to the disruption of the audio visual archives of ITV franchises after either losing their licenses, or being taken over by other licensees (Johnson and Turnock, 2005: 5). The written archives of ITV were similarly disrupted by the company's history of license transfer and consolidation. Despite thorough checks, conducted at regular intervals throughout the period of study, with librarians at the British Film Institute (BFI), the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC) and enquiries with ITN and Granada, no central, accessible source of written documentation for ITV was located. There was a possibility that some ITV material had been deposited at regional archives with the closure of individual regional franchisees, such as Anglia or Meridian (Angelini, 2006)<sup>18</sup>.

However, due to the scale of the work needed in travelling to, evaluating and gathering such material, it was felt that this was better left to another study<sup>19</sup>. However, the sample taken from the TV listings (described in more detail later in the chapter) confirmed that ITV was a minor broadcaster of history documentaries during the period in question, in comparison with the BBC, Channel Four and Channel Five. Therefore, whilst the difficulty in accessing this material was a setback, its effects on the conclusions of this study were limited.

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<sup>18</sup> The paper archives of the Independent Television Authority, Independent Broadcasting Authority (ITA/IBA) and Cable Authority between 1953 and 1990 were transferred to Bournemouth University in October 2008 (Chigwell, 2009), and whilst this resource was established after the date of the submission of this thesis, it could prove useful for any further research in this area.

<sup>19</sup> At Lincoln University, Barbara Sadler is conducting research towards a PhD, on the "comparative analysis of programming produced in the regions of Britain, and in other European regions and nations", (University of Lincoln, <http://tvhistory.lincoln.ac.uk/>, accessed 03.09.08).

The archives of other broadcasting organisations were also consulted, namely that of the Royal Television Society (RTS), the Producer's Alliance for Cinema and Television (PACT), and the Research Centre for Television and New Media (TRC). The RTS was able to give access to their library in London, but after negotiations with their librarian it was ascertained that their collection was limited and did not contain any material that would be of use. PACT only allowed access to their library for those with a PACT membership, which was available for a substantial fee. However, PACT did allow access to their online documentation for this thesis. The TRC were unable to allow access to its BARB ratings archive and VHS library of Channel Four programmes, because the collection had been discontinued and sent back to Channel Four in 2003.

The BECTU history project was another collection which was considered, as it included taped interviews with over 500 practitioners in film radio and television (BECTU, 2009). However, there were several limits and constraints to the use of this collection. Firstly, the collection did not include a large number of producers or commissioners who would have had first hand knowledge of history documentary production. Secondly, the interviews would have been conducted on a very different basis to those made for this study, and would therefore have carried the same reliability questions, without the structure of pre-interview questions based on research questions (see section 3.5 for more details). In addition, the collection was permanently housed in London, and the majority of the interviews were not transcribed, both factors requiring a substantial investment of time for possibly little return.

A number of independent production companies were approached, with regards to having access to their written document archives. However, there were difficulties. Many independent companies had not kept a written documentary record of their business dealings. Many of those approached did not want to give any form of access to their records. There were two main reasons for such refusals. On one hand there was a lack of manpower at such companies to manage the process, and on the other there was a high degree of anxiety about giving access to an outside researcher. Although assurances of anonymity were given, no company agreed to give access to its documentary archive.

The exploration into the availability of archive material was a pilot for this method, one that confirmed there were substantial obstacles to the implementation of this method in this thesis. This result had an effect on the methodological thinking behind the thesis. If accessing archive material was not going to be possible in a way that enabled systematic searching, then practitioner interviews would need to be conducted in order to assist in the construction of a historical narrative of the development of programming policies, and the connection between those developments and the development of the political economy of television.

There were significant consequences for the inability to access many of the materials indicated above. Firstly, the inaccessibility of archive material indicates the difficulties of conducting archive research into communications, where access to media organisations' archive "is by no means guaranteed" (Deacon et al, 1999: 24). Secondly, the role of evaluating the effects of policy on history documentary

production is then shifted to other methods. Thirdly, this shift will affect the nature of any conclusions made regarding the development of history documentary production, and the production of specific programme themselves. The notions of ‘credibility’ and ‘authenticity’ in Scott (1990) and Deacon et al (1999) may be stretched by the omission of archive material, which will lead to adjustments to the conception and implementation of other methods, such as content analysis, and interviews. These will be discussed later in the chapter.

### **3.4 Content Analysis**

#### 3.4.1 Description of Chosen Method

Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. (Berelson, 1952, cited in Hansen et al, 1997: 94; Deacon et al, 1999: 115).

Content analysis is a very long-standing method, associated with the study of public opinion (Hansen et al, 1997: 92), and one that is used in a high proportion of mass communication research (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 111). Content analysis uses categories to codify empirical data, in order to reduce material into an interpretable form.

The method was chosen for this thesis because of its ability to deal with large amounts of data. In the context of this thesis, it was useful in interpreting large data sets such as television listings and journalistic sources.

### 3.4.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

Content analysis can be a relatively inexpensive method as long as the material is accessible. It also has the advantage of being an unobtrusive method of research, where the researcher's presence does not change that which is being measured (Berger, 1991: 28-29). Fundamentally, content analysis creates numbers, and through an amassing of numbers, it's possible to "identify trends occurring over long periods of time" (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 113). Due to the systematic nature of such analyses, they can then be verified or contradicted by later studies (Berger, 1991: 29). Content analysis can be used to identify trends, not only in media production (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 114).

However, content analysis cannot be used alone, as it presents a number of interpretive challenges (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 115). Firstly, there is the problem of representation, and the question to what extent any sample can be representative (Berger, 1991: 29-30). This problem has its roots in the notion of objectivity, and the way in which positivist science has attempted to appear value-neutral, whilst embodying specific values and prejudices (Hansen et al, 1997: 95). For example, it is sometimes claimed that this method is be able to track intentions, but as Berger points out defining terms is critical in this respect (Berger, 1991: 27). In particular, the notion of "operational definition" is inevitably used in the sampling, but this risks applying a subjective definition to a term, and then applying that term to a phenomenon (Berger, 1991: 27; Hansen et al, 1997: 94).

The principle of "coder reliability" (Berger, 1991: 28) comes into play, with the question of whether all observers would put the same observed material into the same

category as the researcher. The manner in which the definition of categories are structured will have an effect on what is found, broad definitions identifying many examples, and narrower definitions identifying a smaller amount (Berger, 1991: 27). In addition, finding a “measurable unit” is also difficult (Berger, 27). Television researchers use time units (Berger, 1991: 28), but there may be problems with this when considering different formats and the flow of information within them. Whilst content analysis can give a systematic framework for counting the occurrence of a certain object, there is still a great deal of interpretive work to be done before wider conclusions can be drawn (Hansen et al, 1997: 95; Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 115).

#### 3.4.3 Content Analysis: Press Materials

This was a search of journalistic sources that commented on events and developments in the broadcasting world. This data set was comprised of a number of publications, namely:

1. Broadcast Magazine
2. Television Quarterly
3. RealScreen Magazine
4. UK Broadsheet Newspapers

This method was chosen due to the lack of specific information in more official documentation. Press materials drew on sources which were not official, or which were not included in broadcaster reports. They could also give direct insight into the specifics of programme production. In addition, the resulting data could assist in locating key players for participant interviews, and key programmes for textual



analysis. Although part of the secondary literature search, the large amounts of material encountered in these sources required the use of content analysis techniques to assist in the ordering, easy recovery and analysis of this particular type of material.

#### 3.4.3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

This method can supply a source of information not detailed in governmental reports and in the annual reports of broadcasters. This material could reveal views contrary to the dominant view expressed in more official sources. These sources can also supply material that could give a sense of ethos, intention and mood. Smaller niche areas could also be mentioned in detail, such as history documentary production. However, journalistic discourse can often fail to provide what Scott (1990) and Deacon et al (1999) and refer to as ‘reliability’. The industrial journalism surrounding broadcasting is open to the same selective agendas that effect journalism and news of any kind (Allan, 1999). The information gleaned from these sources cannot therefore be relied upon in the same way in terms of methodology or theoretical rigour as government reports, or even broadcaster reports. In addition, due to the topical nature of journalistic production, the data carried in one article could quite easily be contradicted in a later article. The weakness of this method for this thesis was that it could produce an unmanageable amount of material. The large amount of material could potentially lead to confusion and a substantial over-commitment in terms of time and resources.

### 3.4.2.2 Implementation

#### *Broadcast*

This method included a survey of each weekly edition of *Broadcast* between 1982 and 2002. The survey looked for three broad categories of information, drawn from each of the thesis' three main research questions:

1. The Changing political economy of television production
2. The Changing production circumstances of history documentary
3. The Changing form of history documentary

Notes were taken on all relevant articles, and articles of specific importance were photocopied for later analysis. The notes taken from the search were inputted into a purpose-made database for ease of access and cross-reference. The database was built using Filemaker Pro with several searchable fields, in order to cross reference between articles in four main ways:

1. Article Author
2. Article Title
3. Date of Publication
4. Notes
5. Indication of Existence of Photocopies

These fields were chosen in order to work in conjunction with a set of photocopies, in order that material could be examined in its original published context. This system of fields made it possible to search using dates in field 3, and using key words with fields 1, 2 and 4. Field 5 was linked to a date-ordered filing of significant articles, so that the full text of these articles could be referred to with ease and without confusion. The use of field 5 in conjunction with photocopies was instrumental in processing a large data set in the limited time available.

### RealScreen Magazine, Television, and Broadsheet Newspapers

The remaining sources of industrial journalism were gathered through a variety of methods:

1. *RealScreen*'s online archive was searched for key programmes, people and events, as derived from the search through *Broadcast*. Articles were downloaded and inputted into another database, of similar construction to that used for storing and analyzing *Broadcast*, in which the same fields were used. The decision was taken to create separate databases because of the possibility of confusion during the analysis stage.
2. *Television* was accessed through the collection at the British Film Institute's (BFI) library. The search was conducted through the BFI's database of articles that includes all major articles in *Television*.
3. *Broad Sheet newspapers*: The online database of newspapers 'Lexus Nexus' was used to search the broadsheets through a search for key programmes, people and events, as derived from the search through *Broadcast*.

#### 3.4.2.5 Analysis

The analysis of these sources was conducted in a variety of different ways, and in conjunction with other methods and sources. Firstly, the data was treated as 'resource'; dates, events, and other empirical details were extracted in order to contribute towards the compiling of a chronological account of the development of history documentary production. In this usage, the data was compared against and associated with data gathered from more 'reliable' sources, such as government and broadcaster reports. Secondly, the data was used as a form of 'resource' in order to prepare for the conduct of practitioner interviews. Thirdly, the data was used as a 'resource' to contextualise the textual analysis of key programmes. Fourthly, the data

was also used as ‘topic’, and in conjunction with interview material, to assess the circumstances around certain events.

### 3.4.3 Content Analysis: Television Listings

#### 3.4.3.1 Description of Chosen Method

This method is a form of content analysis, and is designed to answer empirical questions regarding the development of history documentary. As with other forms of content analysis, the method here consists of sampling a large body of evidence. The analysis of this evidence usually involves the categorising of a body of communicative texts according to the message borne within those texts. The variation used in this thesis is closer to that of a generic study, in which a large body of texts are categorised and counted according to generic characteristics.

The method was chosen because of its ability to generate empirical evidence, and to test claims about the frequency and character of history documentary on television. This study would therefore categorise a body of texts (television output as expressed in the television listings) through a study of the frequency of various genres on television, and the changes in these frequencies, tracking these changes over time to reveal television programming trends. Added to a straightforward count of genres, the documentary genre was subdivided into sub genres, one of which was history documentary. In addition, all history documentaries were again subdivided in terms of topic, period and type. This method answered not only whether there had been a change in the frequency and character of history documentary, but it could also begin to describe any changes. This method could also produce data concerning the placing of genres in different schedule slots over a period of time.

### 3.4.3.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

The strength of a content analysis of this type is its ability to generate empirical data, and to form a solid basis for further study. However, its weaknesses lie in the difficulties of categorisation at the outset, and the later analysis of data. In terms of statistical limitations, the study was poised between the probability and non-probability model of content analysis. This study was to some extent a probability study, as it posed a relationship between the sample and the whole of the television schedule. The time and resources needed to conduct a full probability sample, with random generation of numbers, meant that the non-probability method seemed most suitable. However, a degree of systematisation of the sample was needed in this case, and there was no use of the “convenience sample” (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 63) except perhaps in the limiting of the sample to terrestrial television, to the stated years and weeks, and to the hours of 6pm to 12 midnight. Therefore probably the best way to describe the sampling system was as a “stratified sampling” (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 68) which have the following advantages and disadvantages:

#### Stratified Sampling

##### Advantages

1. Representativeness of relevant variable is ensured
2. Comparisons can be made to other populations
3. Selection is made from a homogenous group
4. Sampling error is reduced

##### Disadvantages

1. A knowledge of the population prior to selection is required
2. The Procedure can be costly and time-consuming
3. It can be difficult to find a sample if incidence is low
4. Variables that define strata may well not be relevant

(Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 69)

However, the sample was different to a probabilistic stratified sample because “not everyone [or programme] has an equal chance of being selected” (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997: 74), as channels, years, weeks and hours have been isolated from the

total television listings. Therefore, whilst the sampling system gives the content analysis some credibility and reliability, it is not a probability sample in the sense that it can be tested for sample error, and extrapolated with confidence into the whole of the television listings with a specific error margin attached.

### 3.4.3.3 Implementation

#### 3.4.3.3.1 Sampling

There were several levels involved in the sampling of this data set. As the sample could potentially include the whole of the TV output in the UK over several decades, in order to create a sample that was manageable but still preserved Scott (1990) and Deacon et al's (1999) criteria of being 'representative', the following limits were put in place:

1. Time period of 1982-2002
2. Terrestrial television only (not cable or satellite channels)
3. Sample taken every 5 years: 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002
4. Sample to be taken from 4 key weeks in each sample year
5. The sample to include programmes beginning between 6pm and 12 midnight

As content analysis is a strongly directive method (Deacon et al, 1999: 177), these limits were chosen in order to test certain propositions that had emanated from the literature review. The first proposition was that television had undergone a significant transformation from the 1980s to the present day. Therefore, in order to test the hypothesis that changes in the development of history documentary may have had their origin in the policy changes of the 1980s, the sample needed to represent the

1980s. The year 1982, the year in which the Hunt report was published and Channel Four was launched, offered a good starting point. The closing date of the sample, the end of 2002, also reflected a number of industrial changes that amounted to a paradigm shift in the production of history documentary: the launching of the jointly owned BBC/Crown Castle channel UK History (Holmwood and Revoir, 2002), the coming of OFCOM in 2003, and the radically altered conditions of trade for independent producers it brought with it (Hughes, 2003). Due to these changes, it was felt that history documentary production was entering a new era, and therefore the end of 2002 seemed a suitable place to end the sample.

Even within these limits the sample presented challenges in terms of the volume of material involved. Therefore, the sample was further limited to terrestrial channels. The number of cable and satellite channels grew enormously between 1982 and 2002, from 0 to 90 (ITC, 2002), presenting problems of variability and manageability in the sample. Therefore cable and satellite channels were discounted from the listings sample, despite their significance in terms of co-production. However, whilst the viewership of cable and satellite channels grew through the 1990s, even by 2002 only 50% of homes had multi-channel television (ITC, 2002). Therefore the reach and viewership of terrestrial channels was still more significant than that of cable and satellite channels, especially in terms of factual programming. This more extended reach, and the larger audiences it brought, meant that terrestrial programming drove programme makers' formal agendas to a greater extent than cable and satellite programming, and was the main stage upon which practitioners compared each others

work and competed<sup>20</sup>. Therefore a decision was made, that while the impact of niche channels such as Discovery and The History Channel would be taken into account elsewhere in the thesis, they would be omitted from the content analysis sample.

A further limit was that a sample would be taken every fifth year throughout the sample period. There were several reasons for this choice. Firstly, the volume of programming was too great to manage. Secondly, a random sample across the 20 year period might not have yielded comparable data. Thirdly, that the sampling was not governed by any particular event, and could allow unfamiliar patterns of programming to emerge.

The sample was further limited by the selection of key weeks throughout each year. The selection of the weeks posed a number of questions. A systematic structure was needed, and therefore the television industry structure of seasons was adopted to dictate the choice of sampled weeks in each year. The TV seasons were taken from the model used by the BBC, after consultation with BBC scheduler, Ian Pratt (Pratt, 2006)<sup>21</sup>. In order to get as representative as possible a sample, the year was split into four seasons:

1. Spring: weeks 14-28
2. Summer: weeks 27-39
3. Autumn: weeks 40-52

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<sup>20</sup> The situation began to change to some extent after the arrival of BBC4 in March 2002 (BBC, 2002), and the launch of the digital terrestrial platform 'Freeview' and the history channel 'UKTV History' in October 2002 (OFCOM, 2008: 17).

<sup>21</sup> Mr. Pratt was sure that the system had been unchanged for at least 10 years, and having worked for the BBC for over 20 years in scheduling, could not remember any changes. No other sources of information, including the BBC written records archive had any available documents that countered this pattern.



#### 4. Winter: weeks 1-13

In order to avoid anomalous parts of the annual schedule, such as New Year, Christmas and Easter, the middle week of each season was selected, namely weeks 8, 21, 33, and 47.

By selecting weeks set apart in this way the sample could catch parts of several long running series, such as history documentary series, and would not be confined to one time of the year. In order to further focus and standardise the content analysis, it was decided that the sample would list all terrestrial programmes that commenced between 6pm and 12 midnight. Again in the interest of standardisation, the listings were used as they appeared in the *Radio Times* and *TV Times*.

There were some challenges involved in the use of the *Radio Times* and *TV Times* billings as a means of categorising programmes. Firstly, programmes had to be categorised according to genre purely on the basis of their description in these magazines. In the early part of the period, the descriptions were more explicit and detailed, and it was relatively easy to assign programmes to genres. However, during the latter part of the period, as the channels grew in number, and as *Radio Times* showed both BBC, independent television listings, the information for each programme became less detailed. If it was not clear which genre a programme belonged to, then additional internet searches were conducted. In particular the BFI programme database was consulted, as it often contained brief synopses in its listings of programmes. Due to questions of practicality, the majority of the sampling occurred at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. However that collection

was not complete, and therefore had to be augmented by the use of some editions in the BFI library in London.

This raised the question of how to deal with differences in regional output across the two editions. Because of the possible variation between regions, it was decided that regional programmes would be indicated as such in the database, and discounted from the calculation of numbers and type of history documentary. This was due to the possible imbalance between regions in their history output, and the added complexity such variation would bring to the study. It was felt that these differences, while potentially significant in discussions of regional variation, did not impact on the mainstream body of work viewed by the larger network audience, and were therefore seen as outside the areas addressed by this study. However, due to the generic similarity of regional output at various times in the day (i.e., news programmes in the early evening), regional programmes were counted in the more general calculation of genres. Another consideration in the sampling, although not directly linked to the problem of regional editions, was programme repeats. Two types of repeat were identified as significant for the sampling process. Firstly, repeats of programmes made months or years previously, and secondly weekly repeats of programmes in which a weeknight showing might be repeated on the following weekend. The first type of repeat was counted in all calculations including those on history documentary, in order to fully quantify the broadcast of history documentaries, and to track the relationship between repeated and newly produced programming. Weekly repeats were counted once for each individual programme.

#### 3.4.3.3.2 Coding

Before a comprehensive coding system for the television listings could be designed, the question of generic definitions had to be settled. The definition of documentary is contested, as are definitions of sub-genres of history documentary (Isaacs, 2004; Hunt 2004, 2006; Fernandez-Armesto, 2002). Therefore, in the interest of standardisation, the definition of history documentary for the purposes of this thesis was the broadcasters' use of the category. The litmus test for what was, and was not, a historical documentary in this study was how the programme was advertised and positioned by the broadcaster. Therefore when a programme was advertised as being factual, and its main objects of attention were events in the past, that programme would be categorised as a history documentary.

Once the question of defining documentary and history documentary was accomplished, then a code was developed for the sample. Each programme was codified according to a list of attributes gathered from the *Radio Times* listings (Appendix 1). Each programme was codified in terms of genre, which was adapted from the descriptions given to programmes in the *Radio Times* (Appendix 2). Documentaries were subdivided according to sub-genre, of which history was one (Appendix 2). History documentaries were subdivided according to topic, period, and type (Appendix 2). History documentary periods and topics were based on *Radio Times* billings, but the history types were based on the formal ingredients of history documentary already described in the literature review chapter, with newer categories formulated to describe significant instances of other types in the sample:

1. *Archive and Interview*: uses a mixture of archive and interview, with added commentary.
2. *Presenter and Location*: the second main type mentioned in the literature review chapter. It depends greatly upon a presenter, both as a visual device for linking scenes and locations, and as a charismatic figure who embodies the aims of the programme.
4. *Dramatic Reconstruction*: programmes of the two main types described above, but which have significant amounts of dramatic reconstruction of scene and location, and/or dramatic re-enactment of famous events, or of typical scenes from the past.
5. *Living History*: ordinary members of the public are put into a simulation of a past environment.
6. *Drama-Documentary*: consists of fully scripted and acted production, whose processes resemble that of a fiction film.
7. *Actuality-led*: programmes in which actuality footage features prominently. This category closely resembles what might be termed contemporary documentary.

#### 3.4.3.3.2 Database Construction

In order to collate and then analyse this material, a database was constructed. This database functioned as a catalogue, in which each programme was stored as a separate item with a number of fields describing it. This enabled the cross referencing of programme records across all fields, which in turn enabled searches of the data according to date, channel, genre, documentary subgenre (such as history), historic topic, period, and type. The database was constructed using Filemaker Pro, using a range of fields (Appendix 1), with information gathered from the *Radio Times* and *TV Times*.

#### 3.4.3.3.3 Pilot

Initially a single week of listings was piloted. The data was inputted into two database systems; Microsoft Access and Filemaker Pro. A number of issues regarding sampling were resolved by comparing the flexibility of both databases design packages. The pilot decided a number of points. Firstly, the database was built in Filemaker Pro, rather than Microsoft Access, due to the ease and flexibility of the former's design. Secondly, instead of inputting data from the *Radio Times* in situ, it was found to be beneficial to photocopy material in order to study the context of the schedules, and treat the documents as 'topics' of study. Thirdly, the pilot also assisted in the decision regarding the exclusion of regional programming, as it was only when confronted with the material that the complexity of regional variations, and the difficulty of allowing for them, became apparent.

#### 3.4.3.3.4 Analysis

The analysis followed the 5 stages advised by Deacon et al (1999) for the successful conducting of content analysis:

1. Reflect on statistical analysis
2. Be directive in your result: keep your Research Question Ss in mind
3. Be open minded as to conclusions: counter-intuitive findings can be valuable
4. Do not overstate findings
5. After Addressing main Research Questions, look at other interesting relationships of data

(Adapted form Deacon et al, 1999: 129-130)

In line with the second point above, the planned analysis was to ask two main questions of the data, both of which were closely adapted from the thesis' main Research Questions. The first area of exploration was the relationship between history documentary and other television genres. This inquiry was derived from the thesis'

second main research question which addressed the effects of general changes in the political economy of television on the circumstances in, which history documentaries were made. It was hoped that by looking at history documentary's position in comparison to other genres, changing patterns of production would emerge. The second area of exploration through content analysis was an examination of the dominant topics, periods and formal types deployed in the history documentary produced over the period. This inquiry was derived from the thesis' third main research question, which explored the link between political economic changes in the production of history documentary, and changes in history documentary form.

In response to the first and third of Deacon et al's points, the statistical data was examined a number of times by running several similar searches, looking at different combinations of channel, genre, schedule slot and date. Whilst some of the results were expected, such as a rise in history documentary numbers, others were unusual, such as a sharp reduction in numbers between 1987 and 1992. This was in line with Deacon et al's guidance, and led to an analysis of the findings that had to balance between confirming the hypotheses behind the directing analysis, and a reflection on the possible meaning of unexpected results (Deacon et al, 1999: 130).

## **3.5 Interviews**

### 3.5.1 Description of Chosen Method

This method comprises the gathering of data through interviewing individuals who have personal experience of events that are relevant to the subject of the study. The

official sources mentioned in section 3.6 left gaps in the historical narrative of the development of history documentary production. One way of filling these gaps was to interview practitioners. The official sources also did not take account of the connection between policy and programming, which these interviews could do by asking practitioners about their own engagement with policy. In addition, there was a question of agency implicit in the political economic positions of writers such as Golding and Murdock on one hand (Golding and Murdock, 2005), and Collins (Collins, 1994, 1996), Sawers (Sawers, 1996) and Beesley (1996) on the other. Were producers intent on maximising the audience and therefore giving the audience what they wanted in order to create a system in which the consumer would be sovereign? Or were producers working from a more public service perspective, in which other values were seen to be more important than audience gratification. Whilst practitioner interviews could not claim to unproblematically link producer intention with textual production and audience reaction, interviews could establish whether the core motivations of history documentary producers had shifted in line with the shifts in broadcasting policy.

### 3.5.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

The strengths of interviews as a research method are expressed by Deacon et al through varying types of engagement, which deliver varying levels of performance across a number of values (see table 3.2). This method enables a large amount of information to be collected (Berger, 1991: 59), in areas for which there is very little direct documentary evidence of any other kind (Deacon et al, 1999: 291). Follow-up questions can be used in order to pursue lines of inquiry as they arise, instead of having to stay to the strict limits of a questionnaire (Berger, 1991: 59). “Semi-

structured”, or “non-directing” interviewing (Deacon et al, 1999: 63-71) can even be seen as a variation on Freud’s concept of “free association”, where the content of the interview can give a deeper insight into psyches than merely a surface recollection of past events (Berger, 1991: 59).

| Interview Type   | Value   |
|--|---|
| 1. Self-completion Questionnaires<br>2. Standardised Face to Face Interviews<br>3. Telephone Interviews<br>4. Semi-structured interviews in a free format<br>5. Focus groups/ group interviews<br>6. Non Directing Interviewing in a free format | 1. Convenience<br>2. Comprehension<br>3. Rapport and Response<br>4. Depth<br>5. Control and Comparison<br>6. Elaboration and Digression<br>7. Demands on the Researcher |

Table 3.2: Interview Type and Value (Deacon et al, 1999: 63-71)

However, there are drawbacks to these forms of interview. The strength of each form of inquisitive talk is therefore relative to its weakness in another area, and certain forms are more appropriate for certain situations. Such methods can be inconvenient for the interviewer, and interviewee, demanding a substantial commitment in terms of time (Deacon et al, 1999: 66). Interviews are time-consuming not only for researchers, but also for the interviewees and may be perceived as being a wasteful use of time. For example the interview should not be used for background material (Stokes, 2003: 117). This is due to the “situated and textual” nature of interviews, which never deliver raw material, rather opinions and impressions that require interpretation (Punch, 1998: 182). Transcription of material is also a very time-consuming operation (Berger, 1991: 60). The depth of information accessed by such methods can lead to a large amount of material generated and can be hard to manage (Berger, 1991: 59). Equally, elaboration and digression can lead to a great deal of data



which has little or no relevance to the interviewer's research questions (Deacon et al, 1999: 69).

Whilst interviews generate a large amount of information, they are to some extent more of a record of what the interviewee wanted the interviewer to know about them, than empirically verifiable answers to questions, which can be better achieved through participant-observation (Stokes, 2003: 120). It is not always possible for respondents to give meaningful answers, and an interviewee may not be able to constructively articulate the 'what' of the practice with the 'why' (Berger, 1991: 60). Industry sources are unlikely to criticise their own industry, and this could lead to a distortion in the responses of some interviewees (Stokes, 2003: 118). However, attempts to use probing questions may lead to overly-directed interviews, in which the bias of the interviewer may become apparent in the type of response elicited from the interviewee (Deacon et al, 1997: 289-290).

### 3.5.3 Implementation

In the summer of 2006 and 2007 one to one interviews were conducted with commissioners and producers of history documentaries. They ranged in length from 40 minutes to three hours, and were semi structured around a list of questions sent to the interviewees in advance. These interviews were transcribed, imported into a purpose built computer database, and encoded in order to aid analysis. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the lack of an accessible and coherent archive of documents around the production of history documentary necessitated an extensive reliance on interview material. Not only was interview material used to compare the developing political economy of history documentary production to the official

narratives of political economic development in the wider television ecology, but interviews were also used to trace the development of programme form. This reliance brought with it a significant caveat; that the conclusions drawn from this data set would have to be carefully considered, as interview material is susceptible to numerous problems with reliability.

Most significant was the problem of verifying what was said in interviews against some form of official public record. Whilst such records were hard to locate, attempts were made when possible to strengthen the reliability of interview material. Firstly, in order to ensure that the interview sample included the most informed producers and commissioners, the interview sample was generated systematically though looking at the academic literature, industry literature, and the *Radio Times* and *TV Times* billings in order to arrive at a comprehensive and authoritative list. Secondly, because of the use of pre-prepared questions based on the research questions, it was possible to quantify responses and identify when a consensus existed. When disagreements arose, or when information came from only one interviewee, that data was checked against journalistic sources. When there were individual statements that still required corroboration, they were labelled as such and dealt with more tentatively. By following these precautions, the study sought to minimise the reliability problems of such an extensive use of interview.

The study could possibly have made use of other sources to track changes in the form of history documentary, such as industry audience research data, industry awards and journalistic reviewing, i.e. *The Listener*. But these approaches were rejected for a number of reasons. Due to the long period under question, in order for any of the

approaches above to add to the reliability of this study, their application would have been very time consuming, perhaps to the extent of curtailing the time available to research, conduct and analyse interviews. In addition, these alternative methods were themselves not without drawbacks. As Kerr notes, ratings and appreciation indices (AIs) measured quantities in limited sample areas, but were open to interpretation (Kerr, 1990: 48), and were in any case impossible to access for large parts of the period in question. Industry awards only recognised the significance of history documentary from 2001 onwards when both the Grierson awards and the BAFTAs began to offer special prizes for history documentaries (Grierson Trust, 2008; BAFTA, 2008). Before this date history documentaries were considered together with contemporary documentary and very rarely won awards. Television criticism has traditionally been far lower in detail and analytic quality than cinema criticism (Mulgan, 1990: 9), and they would therefore bring its own problems of interpretation. Whilst there was a risk of relying on producer interviews that any account would be coloured by an attitude that Mulgan called ‘producer quality’ (Mulgan, 1990: 8-10), at least that possible bias could be accounted for, and concentrating on one main source would allow enough time for a long period to be studied consistently.

#### 3.5.3.1 Choosing Interviewees

The selection of interviewees was informed by the other datasets analysed, namely the trawl of *Broadcast Magazine* and the sampling of the television listings. If people were consistently mentioned in *Broadcast*, or particularly significant programmes were made by specific figures; these people were approached for interview. Similarly, if producers’ and commissioners’ names appeared frequently in the *Radio Times* or

*TV Times* billings, these figures were sought out for interview<sup>22</sup>. Because of the longitudinal nature of the study, the interviewees were selected to represent commissioning and producing over all UK terrestrial channels throughout the period<sup>23</sup>.

The strength of the group lay in its coverage of terrestrial broadcasters, and the period, in many different industrial positions such as producers, commissioners and distributors. In order to achieve this spread, experienced professionals were chosen to allow for perspectives over a long period of time. The interviewees therefore tended to be highly successful in the sector, having been active for up to four decades.

However, there were limitations. Several key personnel who were approached for interview did not reply, or refused to take part. Other key figures were unable to take part due to their busy schedules. Whilst 27 interviewees was not an unsuitable number for a research project of this scope, the number fell far behind the numbers used in studies such as that of Tunstall (Tunstall, 1993). Some areas were under represented, for example it was difficult to interview producers who were working within the BBC, whilst it was easier to reach producers in the independent sector.

The sample contained very few interviewees under the age of 50. To some extent this reflected the age of senior professionals in the sample, and to some extent reflected the need for the sample to cover the period in question. However, the opinions of a set of younger less experienced producers may have produced different results. The

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<sup>22</sup> The researcher's previous work experience in this area acted as a resource when considering the evidence thrown up by the listings magazines (see page 8).

<sup>23</sup> Appendix 3 gives a brief biography of each interviewee, with an indication of their roles, and Appendix 4 indicates the spread of interviewees across broadcasters and production bases (i.e., BBC, Independent) during the period.

sample was mostly male, and entirely Caucasian. Whilst this is also a reflection of the researcher's experience of the composition of the higher levels of this producing community, the inclusion of people from other age, gender or race groups may have produced a different conclusion.

#### 3.5.4.2 Interview Types

This thesis used three different interview set ups, all based on the interview formats described above by Deacon et al (1999: 63-71). The first type was a face-to-face 'Semi-structured interview in a free format', used during the pilot with three interviewees, in order to test certain assumptions about the development of history documentary, and assess the type of question that would engender the most fruitful interviewing experience. The second type was a mixture of 'Semi-structured interview in a free format' and 'Standardised Face to Face Interviews', and was the main type used in the main interview sample. The third type of interview was a telephone interview, which was used due to the difficulty of arranging face-to-face meetings with specific individuals. This form was very similar in design and execution to the second type of interview used.

#### 3.5.4.3 Constructing the Questions

The interviews were designed to structure an interpretive path from research question to interview material, and back again, in an adaptation of Wengraf's IM>ATQ>ACS model (Wengraf, 2001: 224-225). In Wengraf's model, a progression is plotted from a thesis' research questions to form the basis for the questions used in the interviews. Then the interview material is used to answer each research question in turn. By using this approach, this thesis' three main research questions were subdivided in order to

structure the interviews for systematic conduct and later ease of analysis (Appendix 6). The responses were later collated as collective answers to the questions posed by the Research Questions.

#### 3.5.4.4 Conduct of interviews

Interviewees were initially approached by email in early 2006. For ethical reasons, it was essential that the interviewees knew that the interviews would be taped, transcribed and analysed, and that the resulting material would be published. It was also necessary that the interviewees understood the study's aims. In order to achieve this, when prospective interviewees were first contacted, they were sent a description of the aims and methods of the study, along with assurances of confidentiality (see Appendix 5), with the option for interviewees to be made anonymous, and to receive a transcript of the interview to check for factual inaccuracies.

#### 3.5.5. Pilot

A pilot was conducted in the summer of 2005, when a small sample of three interviewees were approached, through informal contacts related to the researcher's past career. The interviews were loosely structured using the technique Deacon et al (1999) describe as 'Semi-structured interviews in a free format'. The pilot interviewees were told of the general nature of the project, but were not supplied with a detailed list of questions in advance. The general nature of the project resonated with the interviewees, and suggested that a larger sample would be worth conducting. However, it was also clear that a more structured approach was needed in order to aid analysis (see section 3.5.4.2, above). This was done for the main body of interviews,

by creating a direct link between the research questions and the interview questions (see section 3.5.4.3, above).

### 3.5.6. Analysis

The interview material gathered in 2006 was recorded on audio tape, and then transferred to the digital mp3 format. By doing this the interviews could be replayed without tape damage. The mp3 transfer also assigned timecodes to each interview. The interviews were then transcribed and inputted into a purpose built database, built with Filemaker Pro. The database enabled searches by transcribed text, question, timecode, date and interviewee. This material was encoded in the database according to the pre-arranged list of questions sent to each interviewee (see Appendix 7). The database also included the questions as asked by the interviewer, and the timecode record of the beginning of each answer. The material was then analysed according to the question, in order to ascertain consensus and difference of opinion on issues across the interview sample.

However, there were also limitations to the data gathered. When interviews took place, some interviewees were unclear as to the nature of the questions asked, despite having a detailed set of questions sent in advance. This arose from a significant lack of engagement between practitioners and the changing policy landscape of broadcasting. This occasionally led to the problem of the interviewer having to explain contexts as background to certain questions, which risked causing distortion in the interviewee's responses.

## 3.6 Textual Analysis

### 3.6.1 Description of Chosen Method

Textual analysis is a broad term used to describe a variety of methods aimed at understanding the way in which texts produce meaning. Analyses of this kind can be conducted by application of linguistic theories to the meaning making operation of texts, as in semiotics or critical discourse analysis (Deacon et al, 1999: 135-161), the analysis of narratives (Stokes, 2003: 67), or the analysis of the textual characteristics of different genres, (such as the documentary in Nichols, 1991, 2002; Corner, 1996, 2002, 2007).

### 3.6.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

Interview analysis and content analysis are useful for creating a map of macro changes in broadcasting trends, which Winston argues is essential as a starting point for any discussion of textual change:

Without the 'map', no case can be sustained as to any kind of cultural skewedness except on the basis of one-off examples of misrepresentation or libel, (which are not the norm). And if there is no case to be made, then there is none to answer. (Winston, 1990: 62)

However, whilst content analysis and interview analysis are useful tools for establishing the 'bigger picture', they lack the ability to look at textual changes in detail, focussing rather on broad trends in textual change, using broad definitions. As Deacon et al (1999) argue, this is not ideal for the detailed analysis of texts:

However, the big picture comes at a cost. By looking at aggregated meaning-making across texts, the method tends to skate over complex and varied methods of meaning making across texts... for these reasons, the method is not suited to discussing deep questions about textual and discursive forms. (Deacon et al, 1999: 117)



A detailed analysis of texts can be combined with other methods in two main ways. Firstly, detailed textual analysis can be built out of the result of other methods, for example in the process of sampling texts for analysis. Secondly, the findings of detailed textual analysis can be used to test opinions and positions collated through interview analysis, or trends revealed through content analysis. Therefore the use of detailed textual analysis can relate discussions of policy and practice to actual textual examples of production, which could aid a study to bridge the gap between producer intention and textual result. In a context where there were competing intentions, perhaps in terms of producers and media proprietors and managers, this analysis could also test to what extent which set of intentions has become dominant.

However, there are also two main limitations to the use of detailed textual analysis; firstly, in terms of representation, and secondly in terms of translation. If a study seeks to give a historical account of the development of a certain form of cultural production over time, the sample needs to be representative of that form. However, attempts to be representative can lead to a sample of unmanageable proportions, in which the benefits of detailed analysis are lost. In addition, the act of detailed textual analysis has been likened to a translation of material from one language to another, a process in which some nuance or detail is always lost. Both these considerations require the terms and aims of textual analysis have to be very tightly organised (Bauer et al, 2002: 247).

Section 2.6.3 in the literature review discussed literature that suggested a change in the function and form of history documentary over the last 25 years. The literature

reviewed posed two main sets of proposals. Firstly, proposal set 1 (PS1) concerning a change in function:

1. *That national narratives had become stronger and more noticeable in history documentaries since 1982 (Chapter 2, 'Literature Review', Section 6.2.2).*
2. *That commercial aims of history documentary had become stronger since 1982. (Chapter 2, 'Literature Review', Section 6.2.3)*

And secondly, proposal set 2 (PS2), containing two competing positions on changes in the history documentary form:

1. *History documentary had declined in terms of 'quality': it had become less questioning, and more dependant on visual spectacle to attract audiences.*
2. *History documentary had become more various in style and type, and therefore created a space for alternative historical voices.*

These differing interpretations then formed part of the background to the third Research Question of this thesis, which addressed the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and changes in history documentary form.

To some extent, PS1 was dealt with through the content analysis of the television listings, and practitioner interviews in the context of the changes in television production revealed through literature review and documentary analysis. PS2, regarding history documentary form was also examined to some extent by the content analysis of the television listings, in particular regarding the growing diversity of style, topic and period. However, a crucial component of the claims in PS1 and PS2 involved the communicative operation of history documentaries as texts, and how this communicative operation had changed during the period in question. This

examination would then contextualise claims about quality and diversity in concrete programme examples, rather than broad abstract categories.

### 3.6.4 Implementation

#### 3.6.4.1 Definition of Analysis Method

As mentioned in section 3.6.2 of this chapter, the choice of textual analysis as the appropriate method to explore the connection between political economic and formal change in history documentaries (research question 3), guided by the existence of key claims regarding change in history documentary, discussed in the literature review. Therefore, when designing the textual analysis method, it was crucial that the questions asked of the television programmes were developed from the positions discussed in the literature review. The critiques of changing form, as has already been noted, fell into two clear camps.

#### Decline of History Documentary Quality:

1. Greater spectacle means less questioning of received historical accounts (Wilson, 2003:176).
2. Presenters lead to less questioning of received historical accounts (Bell and Gray, 2007: 127-130).
3. Spectacle is problematic for historical accuracy (Williams, 2007: 130; Hunt, 2006:846).
4. Male, Oxbridge-educated presenters limit alternative historical views (Williams, 2007: 133; Bell and Gray, 2007: 127-130).
5. Archive limits alternative historical views (Williams, 2007: 136).

#### Increase in History Documentary Quality:

1. Visual depictions are not inimical to reasoned argument (Schama, 2004: 32)
2. Dramatic codes enable revisionist historical views (Ward, 2005: 49-65).
3. Visual codes are part of democratising history (Schama, 2004: 32)
4. Presenters are able to question received history, rather than transmit received opinion (Bell and Gray, 2007: 127-130).

These two camps were, in essence, using the terms of the quality debate regarding the development of television programming over the last 20 years (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.4). However, the purpose of this thesis was not to join in that debate, but to test some of its claims. The two lists above therefore represented the questions to be asked of the sampled individual programmes, in order to ascertain the validity of divergent positions.

#### 3.6.4.2 Sampling and Viewing

The next task in this method was to sample the large number of history documentaries broadcast on UK terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002. In order to arrive at a sample small enough to analyse in depth, and which still represented a very substantial number of programmes over a long period of time a number of different tools were used. Firstly, the academic literature was scanned for reference to programmes that were particularly significant in formal terms. Secondly, industrial literature, especially *Broadcast*, was used to identify programmes that the production community felt were of particular significance especially in terms of production circumstance. Thirdly, the significance of specific programmes was ascertained from within the interview sample, by counting the number of times a specific programme

had been identified as significant in an interview. In addition, another filter was placed on the selection, namely, that the programmes chosen represented were:

1. Programmes that innovated in some way
2. Programmes that influenced the making of later programmes
3. Programmes that typified the mainstream, rather than the margin

By doing this, the programme sample tracked the main innovations in the form, and thereby measured the extent to which the mainstream of history documentary conformed to the patterns of change detailed in the literature. This resulted in the selection of six programme examples: *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984); *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985); *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel Four, 1992); *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997); *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000); *Pyramid* (BBC / Discovery / NDR, 2002).

*All Our Working Lives* was chosen as it was near the beginning of the listings sample period, and represented the importation of an approach into the BBC that had been pioneered at Thames Television during the 1970s. This school of production was seen by several interviewees (Interviews: Anon A, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006; Darlow, 2006; Attwell, 2006) as one of the main strands in BBC history documentary production during the 1980s, as it had been during the 1970s at ITV. *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* represented the type of programming made by ex-BBC producers who took advantage of the expressive freedom of the early Channel Four. The series was mentioned in academic literature (Isaacs, 2004; Bell and Gray, 2007) as an example of an experimental formal approach to history documentary. *Secret*

*History: Deep Sleep* was an example of history documentary's turn towards the investigative in the later 1980s and early 1990s. Several interviewees identified this strand as being a major influence in the development of history documentary (Interviews: Rees, 2006; Berthon, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Anon A, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Ware, 2006; Attwell, 2006; Ryan, 2006; Cosgrove, 2006; Fielder, 2006; Edgington, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006). In addition, *Secret History* figured frequently in discussions of history documentary innovation in *Broadcast. The Nazis: A Warning From History*, represented the dominant mode of history film making at the BBC under Laurence Rees throughout the 1990s. As such this choice reflected the importance given by interviewees to the work of Laurence Rees during this period (Interviews: Anon A, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Davidson, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Mykura, 2006; Davies, 2006; Berthon, 2006; Binns, 2006; Fielder, 2006; Temple, 2006; Clay, 2006; Edgington, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006). In addition, *The Nazis: A Warning From History* was the only history documentary to win a BAFTA during the 1990s. *Elizabeth*, along with *A History of Britain*, was widely seen by interviewees as one of the main catalysts for a growing popularity in history documentaries in the early 2000s (Interviews: Davidson, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Darlow, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Mykura, 2006; Ware, 2006; Rees, 2006; Attwell, 2006; Ryan, 2006; Davies, 2006; Berthon, 2006; Cosgrove, 2006; Binns, 2006; Fielder, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006). In addition, the use of reconstruction in *Elizabeth* was identified as being a significant pre-cursor of full-blown drama-documentary (Interviews: Grimsdale, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Fielder, 2006). *Pyramid* represented the most extensive use of dramatic reconstruction and CGI during the period in question. Its producer, Laurence Rees, clearly indicated it as an important formal step towards drama-documentary (Interview, Rees, 2006), a general move in form that was reflected in the academic

literature (Cook, 2004; Chapman, 2007) and in other practitioner interviews (Interviews: Ware, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Darlow, 2006; Davidson, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Anon A, 2006; Carey, 2006; Mykura, 2006; Attwell, 2006; Berthon, 2006; Binns, 2006; Downing, 2007; Fielder, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006).

#### 3.6.4.3 Analysis

The analysis of the critiques cited in the literature (section 6.4.1 above) provided a list of questions to answer. However, a framework was also needed for the viewing and analysis of the chosen programmes. This was done to retain a connection to the questions, without the analysis reviewed in the literature review becoming too determinant. Therefore an adaptation of Corner's modes of documentary model (Corner, 1996: 27-30; 2007: 60-73) was used to structure the viewing and analysis<sup>24</sup>.

In the adaptation of the model to this thesis, the modes are as follows

1. Narration (Including presenters and voice-over)
2. Archive
3. Testimony
4. Actuality
5. Reconstruction
6. Graphics (Including CGI)
7. Music (including sound effects)

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<sup>24</sup> In the classic example of this model, *The Art of Record* (Corner, 1996), Corner analyses documentary texts according to their use of a series of modes. After describing the way in which each mode is deployed and used in conjunction in any one text, he moves on to make wider critical claims about the particular qualities of the text.

This framework therefore served as a means of analysing each sample programme, before then returning to the questions identified in section 6.4.1 of this chapter. The main challenge in this analysis was in accessing programmes. With the exception of *The Nazis: A Warning From History* and *Elizabeth*, none of these recordings was available commercially in the UK. A commercial copy of *Pyramid* was acquired from the USA, but required special NTSE-compatible video equipment to view it. The remaining programmes were sourced by contacting production companies for copies. This sometimes resulted, as in the case of *All Our Working Lives*, in access to only part of a series. In the case of a long-running strand such as *Secret History*, it would in any case have been extremely expensive to source, and time-consuming to view, all the episodes from its 13 series. Therefore, at times there was a problem of representativeness, where a small number of episodes had to speak for a wider body of work. In these cases, which affected *All Our Working Lives*, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* and *Secret History*, other sources such as newspaper reviews, academic wiring and practitioner interviews were used to ascertain the manner in which the part could speak for the whole.

### 3.7 Conclusion

In summary, the lack of archive material in the period between 1982 and 2002, in addition to this study's attempt to reconcile public policy with professional practice and textual form, required the use of a number of different research methods. This chapter has outlined the nature of those methods, their strengths and weaknesses, and the modifications and implementations made to them in the specific context of this study.



Due to the lack of archive material for this area of study over this period, the study has had to rely more heavily on interview material than is usual. However, significant attempts have been made to graft several methods onto each other, in order to ameliorate the reliability problems implicit in the use of interview material. Firstly, interviews were not the only means through which changes in history documentary were charted. They were also charted through the literature review, through secondary sources such as *Broadcast*, through a content analysis, and finally through textual analysis.

Secondly, the interview sample itself was identified through the data found in the literature review, content analysis of the listings and of industry sources such as *Broadcast*. These data sets were also used to form a set of questions through which a systematic conduct and analysis of the interviews was made possible. Thirdly, the thesis takes into account concerns regarding interview reliability when drawing any conclusions. The methods used, and the way in which the methods cohered, was decided upon in the unique context of this area of study, and no other methodology would have answered the same research questions, without also raising serious methodological and resource consequences.

## **Chapter 4: Political Economy of UK Television, 1982-2002**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the development of the political economy of television in the UK between 1982 and 2002. It will do this by looking at three main aspects. Section 4.2 gives an account of the main structural changes in the television sector, looking at changes in the legal framework and economic organisation of the sector, and its institutional organisation. Section 4.3 assesses the factors that drove the changes described in the first section, including political, economic and technical factors. Section 4.4 discusses the consequences of these developments.

### **4.2 Broad Changes to Television Sector**

#### 4.2.1 The Duopoly in 1982

In 1982, the UK television sector comprised three terrestrial channels, BBC1, BBC2 and ITV. The BBC and ITV had fundamental similarities, as well as differences. Whilst the BBC was centrally located in London with regional and national offices, ITV was a ‘federal’ channel, made up of 14 separate regionally based companies, regulated by a small central body, the IBA. Both channels were producer-broadcasters, with large production staffs, and owned considerable assets such as buildings and equipment. Both broadcasters competed with each other over a range of genres.

In 1982, the landscape began to change. The Hunt Report recommended the launch of 13 broadband cable networks (Crisell, 1997: 229). The Cable Authority was then established (1984) with the purpose of fostering new content producers, as well as finding alternatives to the costly terrestrial method of delivering television (Goodwin, 1998: 56). In 1982 Channel Four was launched. The channel's form, namely a commissioning house with no production arm, was a challenge to the broadcaster-producer model of the duopoly, as it encouraged the growth of an independent production sector (Crisell, 1997: 207).

#### 4.2.2 The Peacock Committee

As a public service, the BBC's funding was always under scrutiny, but this scrutiny increased during the early 1980s (O'Malley, 1994:12). In 1985 the Peacock Committee was formed to examine the funding of the BBC. The Peacock Committee sat from March 1985 and reported in July 1986 and had the following remit:

- (i) To assess the effects of the introduction of advertising or sponsorship on the BBC's Home Services, either as an alternative or a supplement to the income now received through the license fee, including
  - (a) the financial and other consequences for the BBC, for independent television and independent radio, for the prospective service of cable, independent national radio and direct broadcasting by satellite, for the press and the advertising industry and for the Exchequer; and
  - (b) the impact on the range and quality of existing broadcasting services; and
- (ii) To identify a range of options for the introduction, in varying amounts and on different conditions of advertising or sponsorship on some or all of the BBC's Home Services, with an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of each option, and
- (iii) To consider any proposals for securing income from the consumer other than through the license fee. (Home Office, 1986: para. 1).

The Peacock Committee's recommendations represented a paradigm shift in media policy, from public service to market values (O'Malley, 1994: 97). To many

observers' surprise the Peacock Committee did not recommend that the BBC took advertising. Instead, Peacock recommended a series of reforms which would in the short term leave the duopoly at the centre of television in the UK, as the system was moved gradually towards what was referred to as a "functioning consumer market" (Peacock, 1986: para. 550). In addition Peacock recommended that ITV franchises be decided by a new form of auction, and that Channel Four should sell its own advertising, rather than have its advertising sold for it by ITV.

The Peacock Report introduced two key notions into the mainstream of UK media policy: the notion of 'consumer sovereignty', and the notion that PSB should be a subordinate element within a broadcasting market, rather than broadcasting's governing paradigm. Consumer sovereignty was presented in the report as the natural mechanism for measuring the value of any service, based upon the principle that greater choice for the consumer was an undisputable good in itself. In the past era of spectrum scarcity, PSB had aided consumer choice by correcting the 'market failures' and distortion an "unregulated advertising-financed broadcasting system" (Home Office, 1986: para. 581) would have produced. The report therefore asserted that "a functioning consumer market" had been successfully "mimicked" (Home Office, 1986: para. 581) by the PSB duopoly in times of spectrum scarcity. However, Peacock took issue with the ideals which underpinned PSB, especially the relationship between broadcaster and viewer. Peacock argued that the PSB duopoly had been built on the assumption that broadcasters were sovereign (Home Office, 1986: para. 577). This position was opposed to the notion of consumer sovereignty. With the disappearance of spectrum scarcity through technical innovation, achieving a "functioning consumer market" could be possible in the future without the help of

PSB structures (Home Office, 1986: paras. 550-552). This would ensure choice driven by consumer sovereignty, rather than producer sovereignty.

However, Peacock admitted that the conditions for a “functioning consumer market” did not yet exist in broadcasting, and would not until subscription technology had been developed more fully (Home Office, 1986: para. 583). Therefore, PSB would be retained in some form to protect specific PSB programming, and to protect programme diversity (Ibid). Peacock sought to re-define PSB programming as “programmes that viewers and listeners might have been willing to pay for in their capacity as taxpayers and voters, but not as consumers” (Home Office, 1986: para. 131). By doing this Peacock positioned PSB as a marginal component in a market system, rather than the organizing principle of broadcasting. He suggested that it was programming of this kind, rather than all television programming, which should come under the control of a publicly funded system (Home Office, 1986: para. 593).

#### 4.2.3 Cable and Satellite

In 1980 the Home Secretary William Whitelaw announced a new series of experimental cable television systems to be trialled in the UK, on the American model (Goodwin, 1998: 54). These trials were prompted by the Thatcher administration to develop the communications industry in the UK. From their beginnings, the reports commissioned to examine the feasibility of cable emphasised the private ownership of future networks (Goodwin, 1998: 56). The trials were followed by the Hunt Report, led to the issuing of the first broadband cable licenses in 1983, and were the cornerstone of 1984 Cable and Broadcasting Act.

Following a study in 1980 on the issue of Direct Broadcasting by Satellite (DBS), the development of Satellite broadcasting progressed slowly during the 1980s due to concerns about the risks associated with allowing broadcasts from outside the UK to be received within the UK, and also because of the lengthy consultative process entered into by the government, the IBA, and the BBC (Goodwin, 1998: 40-48). These processes led to one DBS license being offered in 1986. It was won by the British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB) consortium. However, the UK's first satellite service did emanate from outside the UK. This was in 1989 when the Murdoch-owned Sky TV was launched from the Luxembourg-based ASTRA satellite, a year before the projected launch of the first UK-based DBS service by BSB (Goodwin, 1998: 41). This earlier launch gave Sky a commercial advantage over BSB in terms of winning subscribers. Additionally Sky had a financial advantage as it did not have to launch its own satellite, and was free to show cheaply-acquired American material. BSB, on the other hand, had to launch satellites and originate significant elements of its programming (Crisell, 1997: 231).

BSB lost the competition for subscribers with Sky TV. As a result, a merger was negotiated in 1990, creating one DBS broadcaster, BSkyB. This merger was against BSB's IBA licence conditions, and so the IBA rescinded BSB's licence and ordered it to stop broadcasting by the end of 1992 (Crisell, 1997: 232), allowing time for BSB subscribers to become BSkyB subscribers (Goodwin, 1998: 52). BSkyB remained as the only satellite service, owned and controlled by Murdoch. The circumstances around the merger were highly controversial, with the accusation laid that the Thatcher administration had broken IBA regulations concerning non EU citizen

ownership of a DBS system operating in the UK, and that this had been done for political reasons (Goodwin, 1998: 52).

#### 4.2.4 From Peacock to the 1990 Broadcasting Act

The Peacock Report had made 18 recommendations, but not all of these were incorporated into the 1990 Broadcasting Act. Indeed, not all of Peacock Committee's recommendations survived in the White Paper *Broadcasting in the 1990s: Competition Choice and Quality* (HMSO, 1988). The White Paper agreed with the market philosophy put forward in the Peacock Report, but it diverged from Peacock in two main ways. Firstly, it did not agree to the abolition of censorious controls suggested by Peacock (Goodwin, 1998: 94). The White Paper insisted that programme standards were to be protected, and especially concerns regarding taste and decency (HMSO, 1988: chapter VII). The White Paper proposed to remove the previous exemption of broadcasting from the terms of the 1959 Obscene Publications Act, as Peacock had recommended. But instead of agreeing to Peacock's 'phasing out' of regulation, the White Paper suggested the strengthening of the Broadcasting Standards Council to enforce taste and decency standards in broadcasting (Goodwin, 1998: 94).

Secondly, the White Paper did not adopt Peacock's proposal for subscription on the BBC. The White paper agreed with Peacock that the BBC should remain the central building block of broadcasting, that the license fee would not be abolished, and that advertising would not be introduced to the BBC. But the White Paper rejected a "sudden wholesale switch to subscription" (HMSO, 1988: p.8). This was a noticeable change of emphasis from Peacock's opinion that subscription should replace the

license fee before the end of the 1990s (Home Office, 1986: para. 673). Along the same lines, the White Paper also rejected Peacock's first recommendation, that encryption sockets be made mandatory in new television sets in the UK.

The White Paper did agree with many of Peacock's recommendations regarding ITV and Channel Four. It adopted Peacock's license auction, and Channel Four's self-funding status (Goodwin, 1998: 98). However, there was a difference between the Peacock Report and the White Paper on issues of regulation. Peacock had envisaged a continuing role for the IBA, under the existing regulations laid out in the 1981 Broadcasting Act (Peacock, 1986: 656). The IBA would retain publisher-type controls over content and have the ability to use a yellow and red card system to punish contractors who did not fulfil the requirements of contracts (Peacock, 1986: 657). However, the White Paper proposed a new regulator, the Independent Television Commission (ITC), that no longer had the right to preview, or act as a legal publisher of programming (Goodwin, 1998: 96). Another major proposal in the Peacock Report that underwent revision in its adoption into the White Paper, concerned the quota of BBC and ITV programmes to be produced by independent production companies. Peacock had recommended a 40% quota. However, the White Paper proposed a quota of 25%.

There were further changes between the White Paper's proposals, and those which became law in the 1990 Broadcasting Act. Channel Four did not become an independent company, as had been proposed in the White Paper, but it did become a public trust (Goodwin, 1998: 104). The Channel would be subject to a baseline of 14% of annual terrestrial television advertising revenue. If it fell beneath that point,



ITV would make up the shortfall, but if it went over that amount, the difference would be divided equally between both ITV and Channel Four (Ibid). The White Paper had suggested an auction of ITV licenses. But by the 1990 Broadcasting Act, the license auctions had acquired strengthened ‘quality thresholds’, and allowed the ITC to select a lower bid for programme quality reasons (Goodwin, 1998: 106).

The overall result of the changes between Peacock and the 1990 Broadcasting Act was twofold. Firstly, the changes limited the setting up of a “functioning market system”, by diluting Peacock’s plans for subscription and privatisation of BBC services. Secondly, whilst the re-regulation of ITV transformed the hands-on IBA into the lighter touch ITC, the censorious control of broadcasting was strengthened through the BSC.

#### 4.2.5 Impact of Government Policy: BBC

At the BBC there were organisational changes that had their roots in the early 1980s, before the milestone of the Peacock Committee. The inflation rates of the late 1970s and early 1980s had caused five of the eight licence fee increases in the BBC’s history to be given between 1976 and 1984. Therefore, any increase in the licence fee, such as that asked for in December 1984, was particularly controversial in a new political climate that sought to restrict public spending (Goodwin, 1998: 73). However, there is evidence that the BBC had already begun to change organisationally before the Peacock Committee produced its report (McNicholas, 2004: 492). Another factor impacting on the BBC was the saturation of the colour television market. As the take up of colour televisions slowed down in the early 1980s, so did the gradual increment to the BBC’s income that the take up of colour license had brought in the 1970s. This,

allied to high inflation rates in the early 1980s had the effect of curtailing the BBC's income (Godwin, 1998: 74). Added to this there was a general feeling within the Conservative party that the BBC had a left-wing bias, following controversies surrounding the coverage of the Falklands conflict in 1982, and programmes such as *Panorama: Maggie's Militant Tendency* (BBC, 1984) and *Real Lives: State of the Union* (BBC, 1985), a string of controversies that resulted in the sacking of the BBC's director General, Alistair Milne (Goodwin, 1998: 126).

There was therefore a potent mixture of economic, political and personal forces pressurising the BBC prior to, and contemporary with, the Peacock Report. These pressures led to a series of changes in the leadership of the Board of Governors and of the Corporation's most senior management. This was exemplified by the appointments of Marmaduke Hussey as Chairman in October 1986, Michael Checkland as Director General in January 1987, and John Birt as Deputy Director General in January 1987. In addition, the new ethos was enforced by the dismissal of Alistair Milne, a figure associated with resistance to the imposition of market values in broadcasting (O'Malley, 1994: 60-62).

The BBC was required to adopt new accounting systems and to make expenditure cuts for the sake of efficiency. Under Checkland, the BBC report *Funding the Future* (BBC, 1989) set a target for savings between 1990 and 1993 of £75 million (Goodwin, 1998: 128). In 1990, a Price Waterhouse Coopers report into the new licence fee settlement claimed that an extra £131m savings could be made by 1995-6. In 1991 the BBC unveiled 'Producer Choice'. This proposed the introduction of an

internal market for services in the BBC, and it was intended to be in full operation by 1993 (BBC, 1991/2: 7).

The pressure on the BBC to reform its managerial ethos and accept the shift represented by Peacock and the 1990 Broadcasting Act was also evident in the BBC report *Extending Choice* (BBC, 1992), and the Green Paper *The Future of the BBC* (DNH, 1992). The Green Paper questioned the nature and status of PSB, the BBC's relationship with the commercial world and the BBC's future commitments. It proposed the BBC narrow their point of focus, concentrating on producing programmes Peacock had judged to be appropriate for a PSB, such as news, arts, and science and programmes of specifically British interest. The paper agreed with Peacock's central point that the original justification for PSB, spectrum scarcity, had disappeared, and if PSB was to carry on, there was a question as to how it should be differentiated from commercial services.

During this period, the BBC's commercial enterprises also became more important, both politically, and economically. Before 1992 cost cutting had been the primary way for BBC to meet budget deficits. By the mid 1990s, commercial income was seen by government and BBC as a way to boost revenue for the BBC. In 1992 the BBC launched a cable and satellite channel with Thames TV and US cable operator Cox, called *UK Gold*, which showed programmes from the BBC archives. *Extending Choice* (BBC, 1992) gave "stimulating the communication of cultures and ideas between Britain and abroad" as one of its four main aims for the Corporation, signaling the growing importance of a global outlook (Goodwin, 1998: 130). The White Paper of 1994, *The Future of the BBC*, added "competing worldwide" to

“serving the nation” as core aims for the BBC (Goodwin, 1998: 133). At the completion of the BBC’s Royal Charter renewal in 1996, the National Heritage Secretary Virginia Bottomley celebrated the agreement as one that would develop the BBC’s “commercial service to meet the challenges of the next century” (DNH, 1996). Whilst the proportional amount of revenues brought in by these commercial activities remained relatively low until Gavyn Davies became the Chairman of the BBC’s board of Governors in 2001, these activities were an important part of the transformation of the ethos the BBC from an institution based on public service values, to one which had to justify itself in the terms of a free market philosophy (Born, 2003; Born, 2005: 156-157).

#### 4.2.6 Impact of the 1990 Broadcasting Act: ITV

The effects of the 1990 Broadcasting Act were felt most directly at ITV. ITV was given a new regulator, the ITC, and the franchises were to be awarded by an auction. Furthermore, the independent television sector was to be fractured, with the necessity for independents to produce 25% of ITV programming. New licensees would not have to be producer-publishers, but could act, as Channel Four did, as commissioning houses for the independent sector. The ITC was to have a lighter touch than the IBA, enforcing a code rather than having oversight of ITV schedules. However, when the line up of bidders for ITV licenses emerged in 1991, it looked surprisingly similar to that of 1981. All the incumbents bid in the old style producer-broadcaster formation, although all the challengers were consortia of publisher-contractors, outsourcing their work to independent production companies. In effect the twin regulatory obstacles, the quality threshold and the mechanism deterring bids that were too high, ruled out twelve and three unsuccessful bids respectively (Goodwin, 1998: 115). Of the thirteen

contested franchises, only five went to the highest bidder (Goodwin, 1998: 116). The only real difference between the results of the bidding process in 1981 and 1991 was the successful outbidding of an incumbent, Thames Television, by a newcomer, Carlton Television.

Once the auction had been settled, the regionally-based mechanism of ITV had to adjust to a new, more competitive environment. One key development was the creation of a Network Centre for ITV in 1992 (Johnson and Turnock, 2005: 28), to replace many of the scheduling decisions performed by the IBA. Initially, the smaller ITV franchises could only work through the larger ones to get their programmes commissioned through the network centre. However, this was contested on the grounds of anti-competitiveness, and the rules were changed allowing all the franchises to contract with the ITV Network centre in December 1992 (Johnson & Turnock, 2005: 28). But exactly how the network centre operated, and how it was differentiated from the big five ITV franchises was unclear, especially as the ITC no longer had the power to intervene in scheduling matters (Goodwin, 1998: 118). In November 1993, the rules regulating media ownership of ITV companies were changed. A single company could now own two large franchises, with the exception of owning both London franchises (Johnson & Turnock, 2005: 28). In 1993-1994 ITV's ownership was concentrated significantly and rapidly as *Carlton* took over *Central*, *Granada* took over *LWT* and *MAI* (which already had taken over *Meridian*) took over *Anglia* (Goodwin, 1998: 120).

#### 4.2.7 Impact of The 1990 Broadcasting Act: Channel Four

When given the right to sell its own advertising in the 1990 Broadcasting Act, Channel Four had been given a 14% safety net. If it fell below 14% of advertising revenue share, then a levy would be imposed on ITV to pay the difference. In addition, if Channel Four were to go over 14% of advertising revenue, than it would have to pay ITV 50% of the surplus, and 25% to a Channel Four reserve fund. When Channel Four achieved 18.2% of terrestrial advertising revenue in 1993, the first year of the new arrangement, it paid £38.2 million to ITV (Goodwin, 1998: 121). This caused Channel Four to lobby for a change to the rules, on the grounds that projected figures predicted an average annual payment of £50 million to ITV, “thus greatly weakening the channel’s competitive position” (Channel Four, 1994: 6). This call was resisted until the 1996 Broadcasting Act, due to protests by ITV, who claimed that the levy was part of the conditions of the licenses they had signed.

#### 4.2.8 The 1996 Communications Act

One of the main functions of the 1996 Broadcasting Act was to deal with the onset of digital terrestrial broadcasting which would significantly increase the amount of channels available for broadcasters. This new allocation of broadcasting space was divided into six multiplexes, one of which was given to the BBC. The others would be allocated by the ITC (Crisell, 1996: 264). Prior to the Act’s passing, the BBC released a report, *Extending Choice in the Digital Age* (BBC, 1996), which promised several new services including companion channels to BBC1 and BBC2, and a 24 Hour news service (BBC, 1996: 27-38). In the McTaggart lecture of 1996, John Birt (Director General of the BBC, 1992-2000) signaled a campaign to press for an increase to the license fee, given that it had a new commitment to being an international media

player, and that digitalization required further funding (Franklin, 2005: 197). However, in the Royal Charter of 1996 the BBC license fee was frozen between 1996 and 2002, effectively pushing BBC further into a dependency on commercial earnings (DNH News Release, 18 December, 1996). The BBC had survived for 11 years without a license fee increase above the Retail Price Index (RPI), and was now committed to a funding model which depended on re-investing profits from selling programmes abroad into the production of BBC domestic programming.

For ITV, the 1996 Broadcasting Act aimed to allow mergers as long as they did not affect the quality of what was made (Johnson and Turnock, 2005:29), but the changes in media ownership laws brought about by the 1996 Broadcasting Act quickly led to the consolidation of ITV into two companies, Granada and Carlton, by July 2000 (Johnson and Turnock, 2005: 29). The abolition of the Channel Four levy in 1996 broadcasting act meant that Channel Four had an extra £90 million to spend on programmes. This in turn caused the government to seriously consider the privatisation of Channel Four in 1996 (Horsman, 1996; Franklin, 2001: 65).

#### 4.2.9 New Labour

There was a postponement of media legislation immediately after the 1997 election victory (Freedman, 2003: 172). New Labour did nothing to reverse the measures brought in by both the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the 1996 Broadcasting Act. Freedman calls this “a determination to retain regulatory stability” (Freedman, 2003: 172). However, a series of reports and white papers between 1997 and 2001, showed that New Labour was continuing along a path of applying market systems to broadcasting. In May 1998, the Culture Media and Sport Select Committee report *The*

*Multi-Media Revolution* criticised the feudal nature of media regulation in the UK, and called for a new communications regulator modelled on the FCC in the USA (Freedman, 2003: 173). In July 1998 DCMS and DTI jointly published a Green Paper, *Regulating Communications* (DTI & DCMS, 1998). The joint authorship was a sign of the New Labour administration's attitude towards the media sector being similar to other industrial sectors. In addition, the Green Paper conceived of viewers as consumers, emphasised the need for "market realities" to be distorted as little as possible (DCMS/DTI, 1998: 10), and regulation was to be the exception, and not the rule (DCMS/DTI, 1998: 24). The DTI/DCMS report *The Way Ahead* (1999) confirmed this direction in policy (Freedman, 2003: 174), as did the White Paper, *A New Future for Communications* (DCMS & DTI, 2000).

#### 4.2.9 Future Funding of the BBC: The Davies Report

In this context, Chris Smith, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, announced a review of the BBC's future, and in particular, of its funding in November 1998. The eventual product of this review, chaired by Gavyn Davies, *The Future Funding of the BBC* was published in July 1999. The Committee's remit had not been to re-open the question of the license fee, but to find other means of funding public service output (DCMS, 1999: 8), in the context of the BBC's attempt to raise money in order to pay for new digital services, such as the 24 hour news channel, and a web service (Hutton, 1999). The committee concluded that public service broadcasting was a valued notion, and that the BBC needed more revenue so that public service programming did not suffer in quality. Any increase in the revenues of the BBC would have to be from one of two sources:



1. 'Self-help': as a result of either increased efficiency, or through an expansion of its commercial services.
2. A Digital supplement to the license fee.

(Adapted from Davies, 1999: 6)

ITV's Chief executive rejected the idea of a digital supplement, and accused the BBC of not being honest about its efficiency savings (Jones, 1999). The BBC welcomed the supplement, but argued it would not be enough to deliver the new services (BBC, 1999). In December 1999, the DCMS published a response in the form of a report, *Funding the BBC*. It rejected the digital license fee supplement, and the selling of BBC World Wide and BBC Resources. Instead it suggested: that BBC Online be transferred to BBC Worldwide; the BBC should lose its self-governing status, and its commercial activities should come under the auspices of a regulator; and that there would be no increase in the license fee for 2001-2002 other than that agreed upon in 1996 (DCMS, 1999a: xxxvi-xxxviii).

#### 4.2.10 Towards the Communications Act (2003)

The final significant move of the period in question was undertaken by the DCMS, in 2000, in the publishing of *A New Future for Communications*, the White Paper which prepared the way for the 2003 Communications Act. It proposed the establishment of OFCOM, a new regulatory body, combining all the existing broadcasting and communications regulators. The report re-emphasised the problematic definition of PSB, using the oft cited disappearance of spectrum scarcity, and invoking Peter Jay and Alan Peacock's historical predictions about a functioning market system in which television programmes would be equivalent to magazines; and there were no publicly funded magazines. (DTI and DCMS, 2000: 5.2.5-5.3.12). However, there would still be a key role for PSB, and it would be categorized into three tiers, each of those tiers given specific requirements:

Tier 1:

Minimum content standards according to OFCOM rules  
Rules on advertising and sponsorship  
Provision of fair, impartial and accurate news  
EC Quotas for independent production

Tier 2:

Delivery of public service obligations that are easily quantifiable and measurable:

Compliance with quotas for independent and original productions, targets for regional programming, availability of news and current affairs in peak time.

Tier 3:

BBC, S4C, Channel Four, ITV and Channel Five to be required to produce a mixed and high quality range of programmes. It is up to the Boards of each of the broadcasters to ensure the delivery of these remits.

(Adapted from DTI & DCMS, 2000: 5.4.1-5.8.4)

The regulation surrounding tier 3 would therefore represent a degree of voluntaristic regulation on part of broadcasters themselves. There was also an invitation by the DTI/DCMS to reconsider the regulation of ownership regulation. The restriction prohibiting ownership of licenses which in combination delivered 15% or more of total audience share was up for question (DTI & DCMS, 2000: 4.6.1), as was the restriction on any company owning both ITV licenses in the London area (DTI & DCMS, 2000: 4.6.3). Regulation of cross-media ownership, that prohibited a newspaper owner with a 20% share of the market from controlling more than “20% in a regional or national ITV, service, Channel Five or a national or local radio service” was also to be discussed (DTI & DCMS, 2000: 4.8.1).

### **4.3 Factors That Drove Change**

After outlining the main events in the development of the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002, the next section will examine the main factors that drove these developments.

#### 4.3.1 Technological

One of the driving forces behind the changes to the political economy of television during this period was the changing technology of broadcasting. Cable and satellite technologies were in their infancy in terms of British television in the early 1980s, but the implications of technological development for the structure of broadcasting had already been anticipated (Jay, 1981). These possibilities were taken up by the Peacock Report, which cited technological change as significant in two main areas, in terms of choice, and in terms of allowing the consumer to dictate production agendas (Peacock, 1986: para. 551-552).

Firstly, the introduction of cable and satellite and the improvements in the use of the electromagnetic spectrum made it possible to broadcast a larger amount of programmes simultaneously. This greater capacity for broadcasting material solved the problem of spectrum scarcity, and promised to deliver a “functioning consumer market” (Peacock, 1986: para. 585) in which programmes would be produced according to consumer demand, rather than producer taste. This technological breakthrough challenged the basic assumptions on which PSB had been built. Secondly, encrypted subscription and pay-per-view television systems would allow broadcasters to track the numbers of viewers in a far more precise way than was

possible in the early 1980s. The expanded amount of programmes generated (Home Office, 1986: para. 598), in combination with these tracking systems, would allow broadcasters to gauge the strength of consumer approval through the amount they were willing to pay for a programme (Home Office, 1986: para. 584).

Later in the 1990s, the development of digital broadcasting was a driving factor in the discussion around the level of the license fee, the future positioning of the BBC and of the notion of PSB. Digital broadcasting increased the amount of channels carried on the electromagnetic spectrum used to broadcast analogue terrestrial signals. The possibilities offered by digital terrestrial broadcasting prompted the White Paper *Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting: The Government's Proposals* (August 1995), which raised questions about how digital broadcasting should be managed, and what effect the digital revolution would have on broadcasts via satellite and cable (Goodwin, 1998: 149). The paper claimed that technological advance would bring two main advantages. Firstly, digital terrestrial broadcasting would bring the television viewer closer to the full potential of the information superhighway. Secondly, digital broadcasting would provide the UK with programme production and electronics manufacturing work (Goodwin, 1998: 150).

Changes in camera technology also drove some developments in the political economy of television. The strikes at Thames Television in 1984, at Ulster Television and TV-AM in 1987 showed that new camera technology made it possible for secretarial staff to operate a studio without the aid of specialised professionals (Crisell, 1997: 220). The use of home-made material to produce programmes such as *You've Been Framed* (Granada for ITV, 1990-2006), and *Video Diaries* (BBC, 1990-)

showed that members of the public through the use of basic camcorders could also produce broadcast material (Corner, 1996: 182; Crisell, 1997: 221; Dovey, 2000: 55-77). These were also examples of how technological change pushed the television workforce towards a more casualised, and less unionised status. Innovations such as these forced the costs of programme production downwards, and were therefore eagerly taken up by broadcasters who were put under increased commercial pressure during the 1990s (BFI, 1999).

#### 4.3.2 Economic

In terms of economics, there were several factors that drove the changes described earlier in the chapter. Firstly, broadcasting policy in the 1980s was similar to other policy areas that dealt with public services in the UK at the time. The Thatcher governments (1979-1990) set out to reform the funding mechanisms for public services by exposing them to market forces and mechanisms in order to improve efficiency, and to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 83-86). These policies were part of a broad international change in the dominant paradigm of economic policy, represented by the governments of Thatcher in the UK, and Reagan (1981-88) in the USA. Often referred to as neo-liberal, the new economic paradigm sought to free many areas of human activity from state regulation, and to apply market principles to their organisation in the belief that such reorganisation was desirable in terms of efficiency, and greater consumer freedom through increased choice (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 83-86). Whilst the origin and efficacy of these policies were, and still are, disputed, they stemmed, in part, from a structural economic trend referred to as ‘the long downturn’, in which industrialised

societies had seen economic growth steadily decline since the 1960s (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 83-86).

Broadcasting was not immune from the neo-liberal re-assessment of economic and organisational management. During the 1960s and 1970s the duopoly broadcasters enjoyed a steady growth in income due to rising advertising spending and the growing take-up of colour TV licences, which had to some extent contradicted the other effects of 'the long downturn'. However, by the beginning of the 1980s, this growth was stagnating, putting pressure on the BBC and ITV in terms of income (Crisell, 1997: 234). The funding of PSB programming on both sides of the duopoly therefore came under scrutiny.

In 1984, several reports were released by organisations from a neo-liberal perspective: the right-wing think tank The Adam Smith Institute (ASI, 1984), and advertising agencies Darcy, McManius, Massius (DMM, 1984) and Saatchi & Saatchi (S&S, 1984). The broad thrust of these reports was that the BBC was monopolistic, and should be forced to take advertising in the interest of competition and market efficiency<sup>25</sup>. In the same year Home Secretary Leon Brittain insisted that the

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<sup>25</sup> *The Omega File: Communications* disagreed with the license fee, argued that the BBC was engaged in commercial practices that put it into direct competition with ITV, but with no regulation; a more commercial system would allow broadcasters to be more like the press, serving the public through choice. Arguments against commercialisation were elitist. The BBC should be a collection of independently financed operations, under the control of the BBC board of governors, who would play a similar role to the IBA (O'Malley, 1994: 20-1).

*Funding the BBC From Advertising* recommended the BBC take 15 seconds per hour of advertising in 1985, and 30 seconds per hour in 1986, then £60 million would be raised, enough to cover the BBC's requested rise in the license fee. The BBC's reluctance to take advertising was evidence of a cultural establishment that disapproved of the mercantile classes, and was defended by a bogus counter-argument concerning a possible lowering of standards (O'Malley, 1994: 24-5).

*Funding the BBC – The Case For Allowing Advertising* argued that advertising would enable the BBC to develop its services without adding an additional burden on the public (O'Malley, 1994: 26-7).

management consultants Peat Marwick Mitchell (PMM) were used by the BBC to assess the Corporation's efficiency, in advance of a bid by the BBC for a rise in the license fee. When the BBC eventually published its requests for a 41% increase in the colour license (from £46 to £65) and a 20% increase in black and white (from £15 to £18) (Crisell, 1997: 234) there was substantial criticism from the government, and the Murdoch press. The BBC was labelled as financially unaccountable, elitist, and anti-competitive.

This economic background informed the formation of the Peacock Committee, whose findings were crucial in bringing broadcasting aims and structures into line with neo-liberal thought (O'Malley, 1994: 97; Peacock, 2000). The Report cited a 29% broadcasting inflation rate, which was in part responsible for the large license fee increase which had triggered the Peacock committee in the first instance. Peacock claimed that this high inflation rate was caused by the inflated prices of both BBC and ITV productions, especially in comparison to the independent sector.

The neo-liberal economic perspective of the Peacock Report had a great influence on other developments during the 1982-2002 period. As has been discussed, the 1990 Broadcasting Act implemented many of Peacock's recommendations. Peacock's concentration on the financial efficiency of broadcasters had far reaching effects. For the BBC, reports such as *Funding the Future* (1990) set high savings targets (Goodwin, 1998: 128). The BBC's management structure was also reformed, through the internal services market referred to as *Producer Choice* (BBC, 1992: 7). The same aims of efficiency were applied to ITV through the auction bidding system for ITV franchises in 1991. Peacock's advocacy of competition as a driver of choice was taken

up and adapted by a series of government and broadcaster initiatives as discussed in section 4.2 of this chapter.

However, whilst the neo-liberal economic perspective drove many of the changes within broadcasting during the period of 1982-2002, the influence of this imperative was not always straightforward. The onset of digital technology, and the proliferation of choice that it would provide, was used by the BBC as an argument for increasing the license fee, not decreasing it (BBC, 1996: 27-38). In addition the neo-liberal belief that the media sector could be an area of economic growth and profitability, and that the BBC should raise more of its revenue through commercial activities, grew stronger through the period. In the Royal Charter of 1996 the license fee was frozen between 1996 and 2002, effectively pushing BBC further into a dependency on commercial earnings (DNH, 1996a). However, this also had the effect of creating a powerful broadcasting entity that was both state sponsored and commercially active, therefore contradicting the aims of a free market mechanism. Peacock's plan for the auctioning of ITV licenses and the introduction of competition into the management of ITV also resulted in the opposite of its intended outcome: instead of creating a plurality of competitive voices, ITV underwent a process of ownership concentration throughout the 1990s (Johnson & Turnock, 2005: 28; Goodwin, 1998: 120).

Another factor that drove some of the changes in the political economy of television during the period was the increasing globalisation of the television market. This was to be seen in the efforts of companies such as News International or Pearson to establish multi-national and cross-media holdings, moves that threatened the state-specific nature of PSB. In terms of the UK terrestrial television channels, this pressure



was present in terms of ownership, co-production and joint-ventures. Especially in the case of ITV, where ownership rules were relaxed throughout the 1990s, the partial ownership of franchises by multinational media conglomerates was an issue of public debate (Mullin, 1995).

However, one of the main consequences of globalisation during the 1990s for the UK broadcasters whose ownership was not subject to share dealing, the BBC and Channel Four, was that of co-production. Co-production had existed as a practice for decades between broadcasters in the UK and the USA (Comely, 1984; Walsh, 1984; Paget, 1998: 174-8; Neale, 2005), and had been a feature of the early Channel Four (Monteith, 1987). Co-productions had been a means through which large production budgets could be shared between broadcasters and independent producers, and were therefore a commercially expedient way of boosting production values. Therefore, in some circles, co-production was synonymous with a lower quality of television. However, co-productions were also the site of creative collaboration, and were a mechanism through which high production value programmes could be made for niche audiences distributed across different broadcasting territories. There is evidence that these programmes were considered to be worthwhile artistically, even when there were no great financial gains involved (Hoskins et al, 1993; 1997). However, by the middle of the 1990s co-production was beginning to account for more substantial proportions of production budgets as PSB broadcasters were encouraged to become more commercially active. Such practices often increased due to cuts in broadcasters' programme budgets, and had varying effects on the texts produced (Paget, 1998: 174-8; Born, 2005: 167-8).

An extension of the increasing practice of co-production was the output deal or the joint venture. In the former, broadcasters and independent producers joined together to increase the potential economies of scale and scope of co-production and programme acquisition, such as the deal in 1998 between the BBC and the Discovery Channel to co-produce science and history programming (Deans, 1998), and between Channel Four and Gedeon in 2001 (Hughes, 2001). In a joint venture, broadcasters could also join together to create a channel in which an archive of existing programmes could be exploited commercially, for example the deal made in 1997 between Flextech and BBC Worldwide to form UKTV (BBC, 1998), and between the BBC and Discovery to form Animal Planet and BBC America (BBC, 1998).

#### 4.3.3 Political: The Thatcher (1979-90) and Major (1990-97) Administrations

From 1979 onwards the Thatcher government mounted what O'Malley refers to as "an attack on the BBC" (O'Malley, 1994:12). This attack culminated in the formation in 1985 of the Peacock Committee. The pressures brought to bear on the BBC in the years preceding the Peacock Report seem to have emanated from two main sources: an ideological disagreement with public ownership, and a dislike for some of the content of the BBC. From a Thatcherian perspective, public ownership was monopolistic, and threatened consumer choice. In addition, industries dominated by monopolies tended to become a breeding ground for the "restrictive practices" that blighted British industry, and stood in the way of commercial competitiveness (Thatcher, 1993: 634-638). On the other hand, much of the programming offered by the BBC and ITV, especially in terms of the coverage of News and Current Affairs, seemed intent on challenging the monetarist and foreign policies the Thatcher government were pursuing (Ibid).

For Thatcher, the BBC was “paternalistic” and “failed to reflect public demand, and was too often at odds with public standards of taste and decency” (Thatcher, 1993: 634-638). In terms of economics, broadcasting was a major target for Thatcherite reforms “along with a number of other areas – the professions such as teaching, medicine and the law were others” (Thatcher, 1993: 634-638). Part of the Thatcher governments’ mission was to reduce public borrowing and the tax burden, and to open up all areas of society to the competitive processes of the market. The basis on which the BBC and ITV structures were given legal assent was challenged as being a system “in which special pleading by powerful interest groups was disguised as high-minded commitment to some greater good” (Thatcher, 1993: 634-638).

By 1982 Channel Four had been formed, following the recommendations of the Annan Committee (Home Office, 1977). The fourth channel was a mix of ideological positions. On one hand, Channel Four represented a flourishing of marginal voices on television that challenged the orthodoxy of the duopoly schedule. The channel had been fought for by left-wing interests such as the Independent Film Association (IFA) in the name of increased democracy, and as a challenge to the establishment dominance of the BBC, and the commerciality of ITV (Darlow, 2004; Freedman, 2003). The channel was also supported by the Association of Cinematograph and Television Technicians Union (ACTT), notably in that the union’s co-operation with the film workshop movement, smoothed the way for a new mode of freelance production in UK television (Darlow, 2004: 276-278). On the other hand, the structure of Channel Four militated against the power base of the ACTT, in that it was a commissioning house with no production arm. As such it was viewed by the Right as being a counter balance to power of the ACTT, which had during the 1970s

disrupted programme production and broadcasting in order to protest on a variety of industrial and political issues (Darlow, 2004: 85; Freedman, 2003: 122).

Part of the Thatcher administration's assault on the BBC and the vested interests in broadcasting was the Peacock Committee. The ground for Peacock was prepared by a pressure applied to the BBC from the press, and from right-wing think tanks and corporations. They were accompanied by a campaign in the papers of Thatcher's "close political supporter" (O'Malley, 1994: 8) Rupert Murdoch, exemplified by a series of editorials in *The Times*, 'Whither The BBC?' in 1985. These accused the BBC of "inefficiency, unaccountability, self-aggrandisement, feather bedding its employees" (Anon, 1985: 9). In addition to the profligacy of the BBC, the editorial line of the BBC was criticised, both directly by the government and through the press. The battle between the Conservative Party and the BBC had begun in 1979 over the coverage of Northern Ireland, and then grew in intensity during the Falklands War (O'Malley, 1994: 7), and was to culminate in the dismissal of the BBC's Director General Alistair Milne, in 1987 (O'Malley, 1994; Goodwin, 1998).

Thatcher's attitudes were not always shared by her cabinet colleagues, some of whom, notably William Whitelaw, sought to block a number of her initiatives. At the inception of Channel Four, Whitelaw championed a channel that was in the spirit of Labour's proposed Open Broadcasting Authority, in which experimentation and catering for minorities would be emphasised, rather than orthodox commercial broadcasting (Freedman, 2003: 121). It is argued by Goodwin that Whitelaw's presence in the Home Office, his well known support for the duopoly and his opposition to advertising on the BBC were the reasons why existing domestic

broadcasting was left untouched in Thatcher's first term in office (Goodwin, 1998: 76). Changes between Peacock's recommendations and the 1990 Broadcasting Act were significant. Due to splits in the Cabinet many of the Peacock recommendations were diluted (O'Malley, 1994: 122-126). While the DTI viewed broadcasting as merely another industry to be run as economically and efficiently as possible, the Home Office sought to protect the interests of the broadcasting status quo (Goodwin, 1998: 87). As a result, the independent programming quota was lowered to 25% from Peacock's recommended 40%, because it was more realistic, but with the proviso that it would be achieved quicker than Peacock's 10 year target (Goodwin, 1998: 89). The de-regulation of ITV was watered down to a large extent (Goodwin, 1998: 96). The franchise auction became less a way to extract surplus profits from the ITV monopoly, and resembled more closely the beauty pageant of previous franchise awarding rounds (Thatcher, 1993: 638).

The government's plans for a loosely-regulating ITC were in part frustrated by the House of Lords, and by the ITC itself. There were amendments in the House of Lords to the 1990 Broadcasting Act, specifying that "educational and social action programming" were to be ITC license requirements. These amendments were quashed by David Mellor as secretary for the Department of National Heritage. However a list of similar programme specifications did appear on the ITC's requirements when it came to the license auction, with no complaint from the government (Goodwin, 1998: 110). The licenses for Breakfast TV were similar, in that they contained specified programme sub strands which had to be accounted for by the bidders (Goodwin, 1998: 110). Regional programming would also be regulated by very similar requirements to those which existed before the ITC was established (Goodwin, 1998:

111). The ITC lowered the quota of domestic programming from the EU from 75% to 50% (ITC, 1990a: 26), after lobbying from the American Embassy (Goodwin, 1998: 111) with almost all of this extra programming originating from America. However, the ITC also brought in a new quota, ruling that 65% of programmes had to be newly commissioned for Channel 3, which effectively meant a return to the 75% proportion. The ITC was, thus at the outset an effective upholder of the status quo.

Another factor in the development of the political economy of television during this period was the inefficacy of the Labour Party in proposing and promoting a coherent alternative to the Conservative government's proposals. The development of communication policy in the Labour opposition during the 1980s was hampered by the party's internal divisions. Losing three general elections between 1979 and 1987 caused indecision within the Labour party as to how to deal with the Conservative government's liberalising agenda. The losses also meant a lack of continuity in the party's policy and executive structures regarding communications policy (Freedman, 2003: 126). Some voices within the party called for the PSB duopoly to be protected, whilst others condemned it as elitist and dominated by establishment interests (Freedman, 2003: 127).

This ambivalence was exemplified by the Party's attitude towards independent production, which was seen as both the deliverer of programming that would challenge the elitism of the duopoly, and a threat to PSB (Freedman, 2003: 132). This ambivalence towards media liberalisation, and marketisation altogether was evident in the internal party reaction to the Labour Party's official submission to the Peacock Committee. Norman Buchan's strongly anti-liberal submission, in which a means

adjusted license fee and the abolishing of advertising were suggested, did not find favour with a Labour leadership that was moving to the right (Freedman, 2003: 139)<sup>26</sup>. This ambivalence within the party was expressed in a growing division between leadership and activists on a number of the facets of 1990 Broadcasting Act. One example was the license auctions of which the leadership were in favour whilst activists opposed (Freedman, 2003: 142).

The Major administration oversaw a softening of the liberalisation policies of the Thatcher administration in the sphere of the media. The Major administration was less antagonistic towards the BBC than the previous administration, with privatisation and advertising no longer on the agenda (Freedman, 2003: 159). However, media ownership became an ever important issue during the 1990s, as the ownership of ITV in particular began to concentrate into the hands of fewer owners. By 1995, the concentration of media ownership in broadcasting had, in the opinion of figures such as Chris Mullin MP, become a threat to media diversity. At this point in time, Murdoch owned five national newspapers, and had a controlling stake in satellite TV.

Added to this, Michael Green of Carlton had bought Central Television, and with it a 36% stake in ITN, and in ITN's radio operation, IRN (Mullin, 1995: cols 153-155). While Mullin, and organizations such as the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom were asking for more control (CPBF, 1996) industry voices were asking for less controls, arguing that the existing regulation provided a handicap to their businesses in the open market. The government's response to requests to change the burden of regulation, in either direction was a Green Paper published in 1995. This

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<sup>26</sup> Buchan was sacked shortly after over the issue of a separate 'Arts Ministry' (Freedman, 2003: 140).

offered a two stage approach. Radio regulations would be changed within a month of the Green Paper's publication. The new regulations regarding television would be enshrined in the Broadcasting Act 1996, and included the following main measures:

1. Newspapers with less than 20% of the market to own two terrestrial channels.
  2. No Company to own more than 10% of the media market, or 20% of any media sector.
  3. The Creation of an independent regulator to govern media ownership.
- (Adapted from DNH, 1995).

At the same time, the development of television was being influenced by a new political force, *New Labour*. After Labour's fourth consecutive general election defeat in 1992, the party set out to win the next election by courting big business, and neutralising a hostile media (Freedman, 2003: 158). The left-wing and anti-commercial stance of the Labour Party's official response to the 1992 Green Paper on broadcasting, *Putting the Citizen At the Centre of British Broadcasting*, which defended the license fee and criticised the commercialisation of the media was not developed (Freedman, 2003: 161). One of the authors, Ann Clwyd the shadow broadcasting spokesperson, was later dismissed from her post after her attack on Rupert Murdoch (Freedman, 2003: 161). Her replacement, Mo Mowlam courted Murdoch's company, News International, and aligned the Labour Party with powerful media industry figures, whilst distancing the party from groups who had traditionally contributed to Labour Party communications policy, such as consumer groups and trades unions (Freedman, 2003: 162).

In 1995 clause IV, which related to the aspiration to public ownership of industrial capacity, was dropped from the Labour Party's constitution. The result was that Labour's commitment to the notion of the public control of production, including



media production, was weakened (Freedman, 2003: 156). New Labour built on a traditional right-wing belief in the egalitarian possibilities of markets, and of the economic benefits of globalised markets in particular (Freedman, 2003: 156). An enthusiasm for convergence and the flexible regulation that would need to accompany marketisation was in evidence at the same Labour Party conference in 1995, when Tony Blair announced a deal with BT to connect all schools, colleges, hospitals and public libraries for free in return for BT's right to offer entertainment services down its phone lines (Freedman, 2003: 167). In party documents such as *Create the Future* (Labour Party, 1996), which outlined policies on Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT), entrepreneurial notions such as commercial success, innovation, creativity were present alongside the more traditional media policy aims such as diversity and equality of access (Freedman, 2003: 169).

When in power, after May 1997, New Labour employed the concept of 'the third way' as a means of justifying the reconciling of public service and commercial models of economic and cultural organisation<sup>27</sup>. Key to this concept was another concept, that of 'creativity'. The creative force of the UK, referred to as 'Cool Britannia' would be harnessed economically to improve the country's balance of payments, an aim embodied in the creation of a new department, Department of Culture, Media and Sport (Freedman, 2003: 171). The Labour government would continue to liberalise media ownership during this period, with a view to maximising the profit making capacity of the UK's cultural industries. It could be said that whilst internal division within the Conservative party during the 1980s and 1990s had saved

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<sup>27</sup> The 'third way' consisted of an attempt to create an alternative to the poles of socialism and capitalism. In this 'third way', "values of social justice, opportunity, responsibility and community are (sic) not antagonistic to market imperatives but indeed can only be delivered through market mechanisms" (Freedman, 2003: 170).

the BBC from being exposed to the full effects of marketisation, no such divisions stood in the way of the Labour party's approach to broadcasting.

## **4.4 Consequences**

The following section reviews the consequences of the events described in the sections above.

### 4.4.1 Organisational

#### 4.4.1.1 BBC

The BBC's management structures were altered by the pressure exerted upon them in the 1980s, and in the more competitive environment of the 1990s. Curran and Seaton argued that the BBC entered a period of accelerated radical change in their working practices in the 1990s in order to improve the programmes made, and stay in step with government policy (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 217-8). A radical change in power structure in the BBC during the 1990s, transformed the Corporation from "what had been a producer's programme-led hierarchy" to a "management led power structure" (Curran and Seaton, 2003: 221). 'Producer Choice', the BBC's internal market, was intended to replace the old command economy of the BBC with "a more articulated organic structure" (Harris and Wegg-Prosser, 1998: 137), but did not entirely change the ethos of the BBC, and the "closure and confidentiality" of the senior echelons of the corporation persisted (Harris and Wegg-Prosser, 1998:140). But 'Producer Choice' fulfilled a political role in preparing the BBC for a globalised market, by

showing that the BBC could be more market oriented, without entirely destroying the Corporation's traditional collegiality.

In 1996 there was a re-structuring of the BBC's resources arm, and the creation of two separate directorates for 'Broadcast' and 'Production' (Harris and Wegg-Prosser, 1998: 141). This re-organisation of the BBC was meant to enable controllers to prioritise market analysis over personal loyalty, allowing them to commission independent companies as easily as BBC in-house productions. Under the older model of the 1980s, programmes would be commissioned by commissioners through with different production units. The new system broke apart the traditional complex of relationships and networks that had structured commissioning since the 1970s, and replaced them with an oppositional management system (Born, 2003a: 66). Channel controllers micro-managed all levels of production, which led to an increase in the amount of programmes that were directly commissioned for a specific scheduling purpose, a process driven by audience analysts and marketing staff (Born, 2005: 306-308).

#### 4.4.1.2 ITV

For ITV, the product of increased competition in the ITV system, a relaxing of media ownership regulation, and a downturn in television advertising revenue led to thirteen ITV franchises contracting into four between 1992 and 2004 (Darlow, 2004: 542; Johnson and Turnock, 2005: 29). During this period ITV's audience share diminished from 49% in 1980 (Goodwin, 1998: 156) to 29.5% in 2002-3 (BBC, 2003). As part of this process, the nature of the management at in the ITV franchises also changed, with the shift from management of companies such as Granada from producers such as

David Plowright<sup>28</sup>, to businessmen such as Gerry Robinson (Tracey, 1998: viii; Currie, 2004: 96).

#### 4.4.1.3 Channel Four

According to Harvey, Channel Four's programming improved the diversity and quality of television in the UK by influencing programmes on other channels, and by "extending the range of subjects that might be dealt with by television" (Harvey, 1996: 206). For Harvey, such programmes were part of a process whereby "entrenched and established views were challenged for the first time on television". (Harvey, 1996: 206-7). Crucially, all Harvey's examples belonged to the first ten years of Channel Four's history.

Born characterised Channel Four's history in three stages: difference, mainstream and fragmentation. The first stage alluded to Channel Four's early anarchic period under the stewardship of Jeremy Isaacs, of which Harvey spoke so highly. The second stage, 'mainstream' under Michael Grade, indicated how changes in the political economy of television in the 1980s focussed the channel's representational and formal scope, greatly lessening the diversity of expression and plurality of views expressed on the Channel. One of the consequences of that shift was that the independent production model, made up of a constellation of small production units, which gave Channel Four some of its PSB justification through plurality and diversity in the early 1980s, had by the mid 1990s been replaced by a smaller number of larger, more commercially hard-headed production companies (Born, 2003: 779).

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<sup>28</sup> David Plowright was a career programme maker within Granada, which he joined as a researcher in 1957. He rose to become its Chairman from 1987 to 1992, when he resigned over cuts to programme budgets at Granada imposed by Gerry Robinson (Fitzwalter, 2008: 132-146).

The third era, under the command of Michael Jackson, involved the diversification of Channel Four through the power of its substantial advertising revenues, a period of growth which was brought to an end with the advertising downturn, budgets freezes and job losses of 2001 (Born, 2003: 789; Brown, 2007: 263). Born saw this third period as being propelled by financial stability and entrepreneurialism, rather than notions that still propelled the BBC, such as “social and cultural utility, universality and particular minority needs” (Born, 2003: 789).

#### 4.4.1.4 Independent Production

By the year 2000 the independent sector had grown substantially from its beginnings in the Independent Film Association (IFA) during the 1960s. It was supplying more than three times as many programmes to Channel Four as the ITV companies, supplying 30% of ITV’s non-news network programming, 25% of the BBC’s, and 20% of all programmes shown on all the available channels in the UK (Darlow, 2004: 557). Independents also won awards for their programmes, winning 40% of the American International Emmy awards in 1999 (Darlow, 2004: 557). The founders of the independent sector such as Alex Graham, Phil Redmond and Tom Gutteridge had become millionaires (Darlow, 2004: 558).

Darlow, however, has questioned whether these achievements were in line with the original anti-establishment project of the independent film movement in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. He suggested that rather than delivering the original aims of widening access to mass media production, the independent sector had become a sector of entrepreneurial activity (Darlow, 2004: 559-560). Behind this change of focus, was a structural bifurcation of the sector. From the mid 1990 onwards

independent producers either became large profitable businesses, or remained small boutique production houses, usually built around a small creative team or individual (TRC, 2000). The large independents had direct access to broadcasters due to their extensive programme-making track record, their established personal relationships with commissioners, and the available resources to conduct effective market research (TRC, 2002). These companies were able to dictate terms with commissioners, especially if they controlled access to key onscreen talent (TRC, 2003). But a substantial amount of their work was involved in business activity rather than programme making.

The second group comprised a much larger number of smaller independent production companies, which did not have the resources to effectively plan their output. The result was that these companies' employment tended to continuously expand and contract, leading to the casualisation of the workforce. As the economies of scale and scope in the independent sector developed, mergers such as that of independent producers Barraclough Carey and Mentorn in 1997 became common (Littlejohn, 1997). Consequently the number of independent producers peaked in 1995 at 1,104, decreasing by 18% over the next four years (Slater, 1997). Whilst entry conditions for the smaller companies were difficult, the larger companies had to concentrate on models of production that militated against individual productions, such as single plays or documentaries, due to the economies of scale and the cost of running a large company (TRC, 2002: 2003). This left the independent sector less free to break the boundaries of the duopoly, as its founders had hoped, and was instead in thrall to the concentration of editorial control that had occurred at the terrestrial broadcasters. The compensation was that for the founders and shareholders of the

larger independents, there was the possibility of substantial financial reward previously not available to independent television producers.

#### 4.4.2 Programming

Many of these consequences were reflected in changes to the programming produced by television broadcasters during the period. The following sections will look at some of the consequences of the changes in the political economy of television claimed for Children's TV, Drama, News and Documentary.

##### 4.4.2.2 Children's Television

In 1998 Blumler and Biltereyst (Blumler and Biltereyst, 1998) conducted a study for the Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC) on the state of children's programming by public broadcasters in 39 countries in 1991 and 1993. The study found that there was an increasing reliance on imported programmes from the USA, and that there was a decline in factual programming, and an increase in animation. This was due to the financing of broadcasters, where the trends in the increase in broadcaster's revenues derived from advertising and sponsorship matched the trends of an increase in children's programming, an increase in USA imports and a decline in indigenous production. The implications were that children's programmes were a means of attracting an audience that advertisers wanted, and that specific forms of children's programming had been commissioned or acquired that would maximize advertiser income. The clear message of this study was that commercialization, international cross-media ownership, and the decline in PSB had a detrimental effect on children's programmes. Indeed, children's programmes had become a vehicle for the

commodification of children as an audience to be delivered to advertisers in the search for profit.

#### 4.4.2.3 Drama

This discussion of the changes to drama over the period is typified by claims that there had been a decline in standards. The implication of such claims was that formulas had replaced hand-made and one-off productions. Dennis Potter the playwright blamed the shift of BBC drama production from a creative culture to a management culture, in which cost accountants decided all elements of commissioning. As a result, the sense of vocation Potter shared with other writers and producers towards broadcasting had been replaced by the profit motive. Potter lamented this shift, as television had the ability of television to improve society (Potter, 1993: 165-173).

Seymour and Barnett's study into the attitudes of drama producers across the broadcasting spectrum gathered similar results, covering two four week periods in 1977/8, 1987/8 and 1997/8. Drama production had been exposed to intense competition and the need to maximise audiences. The television schedule has come to dictate the content, rather than the content springing from creativity. Budgets were cut, which had increased the use of the studio and lessened location filming. The expensive nature of drama naturally militated against taking risks in a more competitive environment, which led to safe and formulaic productions. New actors and directors were not given chances, as they were seen as risky. The fact that less new talent was being fostered raised fears about the future of the industry. New



technology had brought costs down, but this was not passed onto the production (Seymour and Barnett, 1999: 72).

Born's study of the BBC drama department revealed processes where commissioning briefs, pre-fabricated by statisticians and marketers to ensure certain audiences, dominated creative processes. The only exceptions to these rules were large independents that resisted these formulas through their control of key talent, which in itself enforced safe and standard options. (Born, 2005: 310-312).

#### 4.4.2.4 News and Current Affairs

Barnett and Seymour's 1999 study examined current affairs output on UK television in samples from 1977/87, 1987/8 and 1997/8. Foreign affairs coverage was found to be almost exclusive to BBC2. Commercial TV had "effectively vacated political and economic current affairs" (Barnett and Seymour, 1999: 8) and there had been a rise in the coverage of crime and consumer issues on all channels. The drive for ratings in peak time has increased since 1989, the biggest impact being on ITV, but with the BBC and Channel Four almost similarly pressured. The report also found that this push towards ratings dictated programme content in several ways, most notably: a decline in foreign affairs; a shift towards responding to audience requirements; commissioning and editorial decisions made on a commercial basis and often by commercial management staff; pressure to find international co-funding; the practice of journalism made more difficult because of a public loss of trust in established brand names (Barnett and Seymour, 1999: 6).

Competitive practices within the BBC had curtailed the variety of programming on offer from the Corporation, whilst increasing the amount of programming in key popular genres (Seymour and Barnett, 1999:5). However, there are positions opposed to this dark view of the decline in news standards. Commentators such as McDonald (2000) and Holland (2001) assert that there was a dispersal of current affairs investigation in the schedule, not a decrease. This dispersal itself had advantages, for example in the way the discussion of current affairs was wrested away from a male perspective.

In Barnett, Seymour and Gaber's study, news seemed to have escaped the fate of current affairs. UK news was found to possess a wide variety of news sources, especially in comparison to the USA. This diversity was in stark contrast to the news services available on UK television at the start of the study in 1975. This new diversity was driven by a more nuanced appreciation of the audience, in which news was pitched to specific audiences in specific ways. However, there was also evidence of a tabloidisation of the news, which involved the simplification and sensationalisation of material. On balance, the news offering in the UK had retained diversity and quality surprisingly well, which was probably due to the public funding of the BBC, and the strict regulation of news media in the UK (Barnett, Seymour and Gaber: 12).

However, these conclusions were challenged by the 3WE research groups' three reports on the levels of foreign coverage on UK PSB channels. The reports showed a dramatic decrease in the representation of countries outside Britain, especially in the third world, between 1989 and 2005, posing further questions about whether news and

current affairs had become overly dictated by the need to maximise audiences (Dover and Barnett, 2004).

#### 4.4.2.5 Documentaries

The injection of commercial values into the PSB system, led to a decrease in the seriousness and commitment of documentary makers towards challenging and politically engaged material (Kilborn, 1998; Dovey, 2000; Winston, 2000). The ITC also criticised broadcasters for their failure to deliver quality documentary in several programme reviews during the 1990s, particularly those of 1996 and 1997. The 1997 programme review criticised the lack of documentary in primetime, a problem which was partly amended in 1998, but with programmes of a significantly more entertaining, softer nature such as *Neighbours From Hell* (Central/Carlton for ITV, 1998-), *Police Camera Action* (Carlton, for ITV 1994-), and *The Sex Trade* (LWT for ITV, 1998) (ITC, 1998a).

The faking scandals of the late 1990s were also variously attributed to a change in the political economy of television (Winston, 2000: 10-11)<sup>29</sup>. In 1998, the Campaign for Quality Television published the pamphlet *Serious Documentaries on ITV*, that catalogued a decline in serious documentary on ITV over 20 years. The report detailed a decline in the number of hours transmitted, a lightening of the nature of documentaries shown, a lessening in the budgets for documentary production, the dominance of factual entertainment forms such as the Docusoap, and the movement of documentary to the edge of peak time (CQT, 1998: 17). Ellis indicated that a drop in the diversity of the schedule went hand in hand with the decline of the standards of

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<sup>29</sup> See footnote on the documentary faking scandals of the late 1990s at p.72.

the programmes shown, as in his example of the replacing of “outspoken documentaries” on Channel Four with “fly on the wall documentaries”. The latter category was for Ellis a move towards entertainment, and away from explicit social commentary, leaving the work of social comment to the viewer (Ellis, 2000: 159). However these criticisms were themselves criticised. As was discussed in the literature review, the notion of a documentary model in which objectivity was purported to be guaranteed through observation, was challenged by a number of critics (Winston, 1995; Dovey, 2000; Bruzzi, 2000).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In the period between 1982 and 2002 the political economy of broadcasting in the UK underwent a significant amount of change. The political shift in the late 1970s towards marketisation as a means of organizing public services affected the way in which the aims and methods of broadcasting were viewed. This led to a challenge of the principles and structures of public service broadcasting (PSB) in the UK during the period. However, despite a number of attempts to replace the public funding of broadcasting with a “functioning market system” (Home Office, 1986), the notion of PSB survived, as did the license fee on which it depended. But it survived in an altered form, as by 2002 PSB was only one competing conception of the structure, aims and methods of broadcasting, in a media ecology that was becoming increasingly competitive, commercial and crowded.

Three main factors drove the changes discussed in section 2: technology, economics and politics. In terms of the technological, a series of new technologies were adopted and developed that changed the way in which broadcasting operated. However, the adoption of the technologies did not always follow a predictable pattern, and the speed and success of adoption was often reliant on other factors. In terms of economic factors, the market-inspired ideology of the Thatcher governments was responsible for a shift away from the structures and practices of broadcasting before 1979. These included a greater emphasis on commercial competition, corporate efficiency, and consumer sovereignty. However, the economic development of broadcasting over the period was never divorced from events in the political sphere. The political sphere was contested throughout the period, with the consequence that it was only on rare occasions that single, coherent, political positions was able to dictate changes in broadcasting.

The consequences of the changes to the political economy of broadcasting between 1982 and 2002 were reflected in both the organisational structures and practices of the broadcasters, and their programme output. In terms of organisational structures, the “new managerialism” (Born, 2003a) represented by initiatives such as ‘Producer Choice’ shifted the power within broadcasters from producers towards strategic managers and accountants. Simultaneously, these strategic managers had to deal with an increasingly competitive environment in which all the terrestrial channels lost audience share to cable and satellite channels. ITV underwent a transformation of structure, ownership and ethos during the period, as it became increasingly commercial in its outlook. The independent production sector grew rapidly over the first half of the period, and then began to consolidate into a smaller number of

companies. In terms of programming, there was an increase in the hours transmitted, and a series of debates around whether programme quality had declined.

This chapter has therefore outlined the way in which the UK broadcasting landscape was transformed from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. This transformation took many forms, and varied in its manifestation on different channels, in the work of different producers and across programme genres. However, common to all these sectors was a connection between the organisation and management of broadcasting and the form and content of the programmes produced. The next chapter will build on this chapter's outline and assess how history documentary production was affected by the structural changes in UK television between 1982 and 2002.

## Chapter 5: Changes in History Documentary Production

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the effect that changes to the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 had on the production of history documentary. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section 5.2 discusses changes in the production of history documentary in several areas: institutional management; commissioning; audiences; production budgets; and production schedules. Section 5.3 comprises an extended conclusion, in which these areas are revisited in close relation to the second research question of the thesis, which explores the relationship between changes in the political economy of television from 1982 to 2002, and the production of history documentary on terrestrial television during the same period:

*What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and the production of history documentary on UK terrestrial TV?*

This chapter is based mainly on interviews conducted with commissioners and producers of history documentary. Each sub-section is structured in the following manner. A brief introduction outlines the area of agreement, in academic and journalistic sources, regarding the events in each sub-section. Then, the views of the interviewees will be reviewed, taking into account where interviewees agree, disagree, or depart from and add to previous accounts. This interview material will also be stratified in terms of the roles of the interviewees, depending on their position

within the professional hierarchies of television production. Due to the career paths of many interviewees, this stratification does not always produce a clear distinction between views. But by attempting such differentiation important differences between the understandings of interviewees who worked on strategic and production levels can be identified.

## **5.2 Changes in the Production of History Documentary**

### 5.2.1.The BBC

#### 5.2.1.1 BBC: Institutional Management

In response to a combination of economic and political pressures (see Chapter 4), the BBC underwent several institutional changes during the 1980s and 1990s (O'Malley, 1994; Crisell, 1997; Goodwin, 1998). Board level changes, and changes in Director General and Deputy Director General, led to a situation in which the ethos of the BBC came into line with a “new managerialism”, in which old systems of patronage and hierarchy were revised and replaced through a series of management reports and structural changes (Born, 2003: 67-68). As part of these changes, there were budget cuts and job losses in production staff (Goodwin, 1998: 160-162). Market values were introduced into the Corporation's day to day processes through mechanisms such as the ‘Producer Choice’ (Wegg-Prosser and Harris, 1998, 2007). The restructuring of the BBC in 1996 into two main departments, ‘Broadcast’ and ‘Production’, was designed to allow independents easier access to BBC commissioners (Born, 2005: 175).



### 5.2.1.2 Economy Drive

In terms of the economy drive within the BBC in the late 1980s and 1990s, interviewees felt the effects to be largely negative. According to a highly experienced executive producer of several landmark BBC history series in the 1980s and 1990s, cuts led to a standardisation of budgets and programming, the beginning of a process in which power was taken away from producers and given to accountants within the Corporation (Interview, Anon A, 2006).

It was crass and mindless; it was bad news for viewer and producer. It was no longer possible to have some programmes done to high specification, and some done with a lighter touch. There were a few exceptions ... but on the whole ... there was a going rate regardless of the idea. It made it much easier for the accountants and the channels, but less easy for the producer. (Interview, Anon A)

According to another in-house producer of 30 years standing in the BBC, the cuts affected the collegial working atmosphere within the Corporation generally, including the staff producing history documentary:

Oh terrible ... the same as it had anywhere in the BBC. It was absolutely ghastly. The whole of this management culture thing... I can't say what the effect was on history documentaries, but I've never known the feeling in the BBC to be lower than it was then. (Interview, Anon B, 2006).

From outside the Corporation, the independent producer Michael Darlow saw budget cuts as the beginning of a process in which the creativity of producers was curtailed in favour of commercial expediency. However, Darlow was unsure as to exact points in time, seeing it rather as an unfolding process over the whole period (Interview, Darlow, 2006).

### 5.2.1.3 Producer Choice

Another feature of the institutional change within the BBC during the early 1990s was the introduction of the internal market for services and resources, referred to as 'Producer Choice'. Several interviewees on several levels saw the introduction of the system as damaging to the traditional production practices of history documentary making. Roy Davies was the main commissioner of history documentaries at the BBC between 1985 and 1992, mainly through the strands *Timewatch* and *Chronicle*, and he felt that 'Producer Choice' had the effect of reducing the amount of money producers had to spend on programmes:

Suddenly I had to pay for my chair my desk, my office and everybody else's chairs and desks that I used, and they literally dropped my budget from £160k to £120k. Producer Choice meant that you had to pay the overhead, but in cash! These things [chairs and desks] had been bought years ago, and suddenly my budgets became so low that you couldn't make programmes with them at all. (Interview, Davies, 2006)

Davies also felt that the development of the independent production sector was partly responsible for both 'Producer Choice' and the reduction of history documentary production budgets in the early 1990s. Their introduction was influenced by the notion that the independent sector was a more efficient producer of television programmes than the BBC (Interview, Davies, 2006).

For producers working on programmes every day, the effects were similar. Anon B, who worked extensively with archive material, saw the internal market as a hindrance:

'Producer Choice' meant that you had to pay to take a video out of the BBC library, even though you were in the BBC and all that kind of stuff. It also affected lots of the departments of the BBC which have now

disappeared, like the telecine guys. The technical side has changed. It affected you in silly ways, like having to pay to get material out of the BBC library which was absolutely ridiculous. And it cost you, was more difficult to find machinery to copy films on, you had to go outside. It was annoying rather than anything else. (Interview, Anon B, 2006)

Another experienced documentary and history documentary producer, Catrine Clay, testified to the way in which ‘Producer Choice’ was seen as a cynical exercise, which did not deliver the choice it promised:

Most people felt they had less choice after Producer Choice, not more ... It was derided up and down the corridors, it was the big joke of the corridors, 'so we have Producer Choice now do we, that's a joke'. (Interview, Clay, 2006)

There were also those who viewed ‘Producer Choice’ in a less negative light. Martin Davidson, a highly experienced producer and executive producer within the BBC Arts department and the History Unit asserted that ‘Producer Choice’ had no effect on the production of history documentaries in the BBC: “It made no difference - it just made a difference to how it got made, rather than what got made.” (Interview, Davidson, 2006).

Peter Grimdsdale however made no reservations about ‘Producer Choice’. Grimdsdale had been a researcher and assistant producer in the BBC during the 1980s, and in the early 1990s was beginning his career as an executive producer at BBC Bristol, before he became a commission editor at Channel Four in 1998 (Gibson, 1998). For him, ‘Producer Choice’ was an element of the visionary managerial leadership given to the BBC by John Birt in the early 1990s:

Bizzarely, I am a closet Birtist. Birt was a terrible kind of manager, he made everyone feel very gloomy, but he saved the BBC from Margaret Thatcher ... he also introduced ‘Producer Choice’, which liberated us from “oh if you’re going to make a programme you’ll have to use these people,

you don't have any say over that", which was ludicrous. We knew there were lots of capable people inside the BBC, but we wanted to choose who we worked with to make our programmes as good as they could be. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

Grimsdale was also the only interviewee to mention the split made between the 'broadcast' and 'production' arms of the BBC in 1996, which he also argued was a "fantastic move", as it opened up BBC in-house producers to competition from independent producers. Grimsdale's advocacy of 'Producer Choice' and the split between broadcast and production may have been accentuated by his role as head of the Independent Commissioning Group (ICG) at the BBC between 1999 and 2000 (Conlan, 2000a)<sup>30</sup>.

### 5.2.2 Changes BBC in Commissioning: Overview

In 1989, the first official BBC history department<sup>31</sup> was set up in Elstree Studios, alongside a documentary unit under Paul Watson (Anon, 1989). In 1991, the History Unit was moved to Kensington House from Elstree Studios<sup>32</sup>, and became part of the new Documentary and History Department (Powell, 1991). This move was part of a cost-cutting drive that caused a number of departments to move their bases across the country, such as Paul Watson's documentary unit, which was moved to Bristol (Stokes, 1991).

Paul Hamann became the head of the new documentary department in Kensington House in 1992, and also effectively became the new head of history documentary

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<sup>30</sup> The ICG was a commissioning department within the BBC that dealt specifically with independent producers.

<sup>31</sup> Neither Burns (1977) nor Briggs (1995) mention a history department in the BBC prior to 1991.

<sup>32</sup> The move came as a surprise to Elstree Staff and was criticized by Paul Watson as indicative of the BBC's prioritization of logistical matters over the feelings of its staff. Paul Watson and John Slater were part of a failed attempt to buy out the Elstree Studio by its 100 employees, with the intention of starting their own independent production company (Powell, 1992).

production at the BBC (Powell, 1992a). On his appointment Hamann was quoted in *Broadcast* as stating that there should be no delineation between in house production and independent production in the new department, and that the department would seek out “the best people with the best ideas” (Anon, 1992). Hamann’s predecessor as head of history, Roy Davies, soon moved to BBC Wales and Paul Hamann appointed Laurence Rees series editor of *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-), and therefore effectively head of history (Powell, 1992b).

Between 1992 and 1994 history production remained under the control of Laurence Rees in London. Michael Jackson became the controller of BBC2 in 1993, and was a well-known advocate of history documentaries (Frean, 1993). In 1994, Janice Hadlow, the commissioning editor of *Reputations* (BBC/A&E, 1994-2004) and *A History of Britain* (BBC/THC, 2000-2002) was made joint head of a new history department with Laurence Rees (Baker, 1994). In 1998, the BBC and Discovery entered into a co-production agreement, which gave the BBC access to a minimum of \$175 million (£108.7 million) over the next five years in exchange for giving Discovery the first option of being the co-funder on any factual programming proposal (Deans, 1998). The overall affect of this move was to bring History, Science and Natural History production under the aegis of a new department, named ‘Specialist Factual’, in 2000 (Conlan, 2000).

#### 5.2.2.1 Changes in BBC Commissioning: Interviewees’ Views

Many interviewees agreed that a feature of the commissioning of history documentaries at the BBC during the 1980s was the lack of a department or recognizable home for the genre (Interviews: Rees, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Anon B,

2006; Dugan, 2006). Instead, history documentary production in the 1980s was split across several departments, namely the ‘Documentary Features’, ‘Science’ and ‘Arts’ departments (Interviews: Anon B, 2006; Dugan, 2006).

There were a number of individual accounts in the interview material, that detailed the development of history documentary commissioning at the BBC in the 1980s and into the early 1990s: those of Roy Davies, Anon A, and Laurence Rees.

Roy Davies was the commissioning editor of both *Chronicle* (BBC, 1966-1991) and *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) between 1985 and 1992. He described the development of commissioning at the BBC in three stages. The first stage was the creation and administration of the history documentary strand *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) in 1982. Previous to *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-), history documentary production at the BBC was most recognizably concentrated in the Arts department, in the *Chronicle* (BBC, 1966-91) strand (Interview, Davies, 2006). The commissioning system for *Chronicle* (BBC, 1966-91) was characterized by a producer-led approach, in which a group of producers formed a team along with an executive producer<sup>33</sup>. According to Roy Davies, it was a co-operative and collegial working environment:

They saw it as a step process - when is your show going to be ready, I'll put it out in August - yours? I'll put it out in December. We all hit the right dates, and that's how it worked. It was very laid back and gentlemanly (Interview, Davies, 2006).

*Timewatch*'s (BBC, 1982-) commissioning structure was much more centralized than that of *Chronicle* (BBC, 1966-1991), and had an editorial system in which junior staff

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<sup>33</sup> *Chronicle*'s overarching concern was with ancient history and archaeology. Each producer originated ideas in separate areas of history, which were decided upon through a combination of individual broadcasting experience and area of historical interest, and the overall strand editor's preferences. Roy Davies was in charge of Greek history, David Collison on British ancient history, Ken Sheppard on Roman history, and Ray Sutcliffe on maritime and industrial history (Davies, 2006).

from the current affairs department were in a more subservient role to their series editor than was the case in *Chronicle* (BBC, 1966-1991) (Interview, Davies, 2006). The reason for this form of centralization was, according to Davies, the BBC's internal mechanisms of departmental competitiveness<sup>34</sup>. There was no pressure external to the BBC causing this move. (Interview, Davies, 2006).

The second stage was the centralization of all history documentary production at Elstree in 1987. The move brought together Paul Watson's documentary unit, and a history unit run by John Slater, and had been driven by the need to increase the BBC's regional quota, as Elstree, which was 12 miles from the BBC's central London offices in Kensington House, counted as a regional production centre (Anon, 1998). The move distanced history documentary production from the political heart of the BBC, and led to staff losses and a loss of morale (Interview, Davies, 2006).

The third stage occurred when, in 1991, the BBC dissolved Paul Watson and John Slater's unit at Elstree, and amalgamated history into a new BBC department, named 'Documentary and History'. Paul Hamann was the head of the new dept, was intent on making the department a success, and was critical of the working ethos and methods of the *Chronicle* (BBC, 1966-1991) strand, which he cancelled in 1991 (Interview, Davies, 2006). Roy Davies felt that this change was indicative of a wider mistrust of pre-scripted factual programming amongst documentary producers like Hamann (Interview, Davies, 2006). Whilst the first and second stages had been motivated by departmental competitiveness and regional quotas, the third stage was a

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<sup>34</sup> *Timewatch* series editor Tim Gardam had arrived in the Arts department because his superior, Huw Williams, had moved from the Current Affairs department to the Arts department, and had brought Gardam with him. In 1985, Gardam returned to the Arts department, *Timewatch* reverted to the control of Roy Davies, and its commissioning style reverted to that of *Chronicle* (Davies, 2006).

direct result of the budget cuts and re-organisations taking place within the BBC at the time, and therefore had a much closer relationship to the wider political economy of broadcasting.

Laurence Rees was the commissioner of *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) from 1992 to 2003, and creative director of history at the BBC from 2000 onwards (BBC, 2002). Rees was appointed by Hamann to be the new series editor of *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) in order to improve the strand's performance:

It was a big shift when I took over *Timewatch* in 1992, because it was mirrored by a big structural shift in the BBC ... and the new head of documentary, a very powerful and charismatic man called Paul Hamann, he wanted radical change, he wanted it now ... he wanted change, improvement, success. He himself is one of the most distinguished documentary makers Britain has ever seen ... and under Paul Hamann, documentaries won the BAFTA for either best documentary or best factual series seven years in a row I think. An achievement never equalled. (Interview, Rees, 2006)

In order to do this, Rees brought a different sensibility from the documentary department of the BBC, for example in the form of producers such as Catrine Clay who had produced programmes for the BBC documentary anthology series *40 Minutes* (BBC, 1981-94), who eschewed experts and made films which focused on individual personal stories rather than epic historical narratives (Interview, Clay, 2006). In the first year of Laurence Rees' editorship, the series won a BAFTA for editing, and improved its audience figures and appreciation index with a mix of popular and acclaimed programmes (Interview, Rees, 2006)<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> *Timewatch: The Stolen Child* (BBC, 1993) won the BAFTA in 1993 for 'Best Film or Video Editor', and *Timewatch: The Mysterious Career Of Lee Harvey Oswald* (BBC, 1993) was nominated for the Flaherty Documentary category of the BAFTAS in 1993 (BAFTA, 2008).



Anon A saw the development of history commissioning through the prism of his experience of being involved in a number of landmark series for the BBC between 1984 and 1997. In the 1980s the BBC produced occasional history documentary series through the documentary features department (Interview, Anon A, 2006). This followed the move of Peter Pagnamenta from Thames Television to produce the series *All Our Working Lives* (BBC2, 1984). *All Our Working Lives* was a template for several successive productions such as *Now the War is Over* (BBC, 1985), *Out of the Doll's House* (BBC, 1988), *An Ocean Apart* (BBC2, 1988), *Nippon* (BBC2, 1990) and *Pandora's Box* (BBC, 1992). Previously, these series had been few in number, due to the reluctance of channel controllers to run ten or thirteen part series such as those pioneered at ITV. Anon A felt that the commissioning of these series was influenced more by the identity of the controller of BBC2 than the controller of a department:

The key thing was who was running BBC2. Not much was happening on BBC1. There were a number of controllers of BBC2 like Brian Wenham, who liked history, and I sold *All Our Working Lives* to Brian Wenham, and that's all that needed to be done. The commissioning system was much simpler then. On the other hand, when Alan Yentob was running BBC2, he was less interested in it, and was more interested in arts and other things (Interview, Anon A, 2006).

However, Anon A, agreed to some extent with Roy Davies' account of the centralisation of commissioning during the 1980s and early 1990s. He saw it as the beginning of a process that carried on through out the 1990s:

It used to be the case that producers talked to controllers. As a senior producer I could go and talk to the controller, explain the content, justify it on novelty, and significance. It was argued out with him or her, and a deal was done. Now there are commissioning genres, assistant commissioners, pieces of paper before you get to a commissioner of genre, never mind the

commissioner of a channel. There are four or five extra steps between producer and channel. (Interview, Anon A, 2006).

These three accounts reveal that there was a change in the commissioning structure and ethos of history documentary production within the BBC between the early 1980s and the early 1990s, driven by a need to perform in a more competitive arena. However, the accounts disagree on the desirability and extent of the change. Davies lamented the passing of collegial working practices, brought on by a strategic requirement to improve performance. Rees saw such targets as useful tools in the rejuvenation of BBC history documentary from 1992 onwards. Anon A, operating at a different level, suggested that a shift in ethos had occurred, in which an organisational emphasis on personality had been replaced by strategy.

Whilst Laurence Rees continued to produce popular and critically well received history documentary series on the Second World War<sup>36</sup> during the 1990s, over the same period, history documentary started to be commissioned under Peter Salmon in Bristol. Peter Grimsdale, who had been based in London as a researcher, assistant producer and producer throughout most of the 1980s on history documentary series for the BBC, had become an executive producer in Bristol by the early 1990s. He confirmed Rees' view that there was a greater pressure to perform driving the changing nature of history documentary commissioning at the BBC:

Alan Yentob was head of BBC2; Peter Salmon was head of the factual department at Bristol. I think Peter ... was keen to break the mould and

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<sup>36</sup> During this period, Laurence Rees produce *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997), *War of The Century* (BBC/THC/NDR, 1999), *Horror in the East* (BBC, 2000). *Nazis: A Warning from History* won the BAFTA for best documentary in 1997, the only history documentary to do so in the 1990s.

encourage innovation, Yentob was keen to commission innovation, he had taken over BBC2 in 1989 and he set up the *Late Show* [BBC, 1986-95], *Def II* [BBC, 1988-92], *Reportage* [BBC, 1988-94] ... and all of us felt we were under great pressure from Channel Four, which had marched forwards in terms of new ways of doing established programming. So there was a real pressure to innovate. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

This innovation was driven by several pressures. Firstly, Channel Four's programming had changed the expectation around "established programming" (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006) such as history documentaries. Secondly, Laurence Rees dominated large budget BBC history documentary production in London, so producers such as Grimsdale had to innovate: "we could never get big budgets, so we just did small things really well" (Ibid). Thirdly, Bristol was an easier point of contact between BBC commissioners and the independent sector (Ibid).

Mark Fielder, also a producer at Bristol in the 1990s, agreed with Grimsdale's assertion that history at the BBC throughout the 1990s was controlled centrally by Laurence Rees:

There was a fierce stranglehold over all history commissioning by Laurence Rees. It was a stranglehold in the sense that ... virtually all history production was done in London, with no question that you could do history in the regions ... most BBC commissioning went through that dept, not from people like me, so Bristol would have been seen as a rival production centre by London. (Interview, Fielder, 2006)

This dominance eventually led Fielder to leave the BBC in 1999 in order to join the independent production company, United Productions, where he produced *Elizabeth* (Channel Four, 2000) (Interview, Fielder, 2006).

According to the interviewees, developments in history documentary commissioning at the BBC during the mid and late 1990s were also influenced by the change in the

controller of BBC2. Several interviewees also indicated that the influence of Michael Jackson (BBC Controller, 1993-1996) and Jane Root (BBC2 Controller, 1998-2004) had changed the nature of history documentary commissioning at the BBC. Laurence Rees described how Michael Jackson initiated discussions on projects such as *A History of Britain* (BBC, 2000-2002):

What you mustn't underestimate is the individual character and enthusiasm of individual people who are in place at any one time. If I look around, that's almost the biggest driving force that has been. *A History of Britain* happened to a large extent due to Michael Jackson, who was then controller, who wanted to do something big. (Interview, Rees, 2006)

From an executive producer's perspective, Anon A said that Michael Jackson had a hand in commissioning *People's Century* (BBC, 1995-1997), and was supportive of the use of archive in history documentaries. Anon A also claimed that when Jane Root took control of BBC2 in 1998, the attitude to history at the BBC2 changed. The experienced BBC producer Martin Davidson confirmed that Jackson had taken a direct hand in commissioning *A History of Britain* (BBC/THC, 2000-2002), and agreed that Jane Root had a different attitude towards history documentaries: "Famously, Jane Root, when at BBC2, was not a fan of history - unless it was big, marketing-led, popular, like *Great Britons* [BBC, 2002]" (Interview, Davidson, 2006).

The interviewees noted one last stage in the development of the commissioning of history documentaries at the BBC, the influence of the Discovery co-production deal in 1998. Laurence Rees says the deal led to a "revolutionary leap" in the history documentaries made by the BBC, in terms of form and scope. Alan Hayling, who had

been a commissioning editor at Channel Four (1989-2001), an independent producer (2001-2004) and was head of documentaries at the BBC (2004-2006), claimed that Discovery's commissioning imperatives had changed the type of programming commissioned at the BBC:

The BBC deal with Discovery effects the BBC output because Discovery really like 'big history', they like Pompeii and stuff like that, with big CGI and big production values and fairly bland. There are these huge amounts of money spent on co-production, there's no question that that shapes.... I don't think it's a problem, but it's an effect. (Interview, Hayling, 2006)

From a producer level, Anon B agreed that the deal with Discovery had affected the way in which the BBC commissioned programmes, in that the interests of Discovery were now far more important than had been the case previously (Interview, Anon B, 2006).

#### 5.2.1.3 BBC: Audiences

There is very little academic writing about the changes in the conception of the audience by the BBC in the specific case of history documentary. There is literature, as discussed in the chapter 2 (section 2.6), that focuses on the apparent growth in the viewership of history documentaries on UK television (Downing, 2004; Hunt, 2006; Bell and Gray, 2007; Chapman, 2007). Born also gives an account of the growing importance of audience research in the commissioning of BBC programming in the 1990s (Born, 2005: 254-301), but gives no specific information about history documentary audiences.

According to interviewees, during the 1980s, producers were either oblivious to the audience appreciation figures and audience ratings or those ratings were a relatively unimportant part of the measure of a programme's success. Roy Davies described

how ratings were not an important consideration in the production of history documentaries in the 1980s, in fact they were actively ignored:

I knew, and the execs before me knew, that here wasn't much you could do about ratings for history on television. We didn't move to telling stories in a different way for ratings; that released us to tell stories in the way we wanted to. We knew that if we were expecting big ratings, you would be very disappointed ... Ratings didn't impress us, and nobody said 'unless your ratings increase we'll take you off the air'. The budgets were there every year for *Chronicle* [BBC, 1966-91]. There wasn't a great deal of pressure, except self-pressure on the whole system. You had to battle to tell stories better. (Interview, Davies, 2006)

Although the pursuit of audiences was always a factor in the production of programmes at the BBC, for one producer in particular, this did not appear to have been a very strong factor. Stewart Binns, the executive producer of the ...*In Colour* (TWI/Carlton, 1999-2004) history documentary series with TWI, produced history documentaries in the BBC during the mid 1980s:

This is fairly impressionistic of the BBC; the doyens felt that the audience was a given. I am not conscious of people thinking we have to get 6 million for this, 8 million for that. It was assumed that if it was the BBC, people would watch. (Interview, Binns, 2006)

But the importance of audience size changed significantly over the period 1982-2002. Laurence Rees states that as early as 1992 audience figures had become one of the criteria by which a successful history documentary was judged. When Rees took over *Timewatch* in 1992, audience size was one aspect amongst a number that he had to address:

In the BBC, unlike the commercial environment, where it's very easy to judge success - numbers - there are many criteria that we use to judge success. And frankly, by quite a few criteria *Timewatch* [BBC, 1982-] wasn't working well at that point ... it was making little impact, audiences were low, but that wouldn't have mattered if it was winning awards and people had been saying, my goodness, this is brilliant. But it wasn't being noticed. (Interview, Rees, 2006).

Catrine Clay, one of Rees' producers in his first year in charge of *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-), recalled that production teams were made aware of the 'overnight' figures as part of an assessment of a programme's success as early as 1993 (Interview, Catrine Clay, 2006). John Edgington, another producer who made programmes for *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) in 1993, remembered clearly receiving 'overnight' figures the day after his programme was broadcast (Interview, Edgington, 2006).

However, several other voices located a change in attitudes towards audience figures far later in the 1990s. The producers Martin Davidson and Anon B placed this shift in the late 1990s:

Television wasn't as competitive back then. We didn't get Starkey sized audiences, but in a sense it didn't matter. Only four channels, and in my first few years at the BBC I wasn't even told what the ratings were, whereas now, every morning the ratings are examined. The ratings obsession began from the late 1990s onwards. It was the rise of the independent sector, and the growth in channels that fostered this attitude. (Interview, Davidson, 2006)

Anon B heard it for the first time after leaving the BBC, and when working for the BBC as an independent:

I can remember the first time I heard this, around 1999-2000, after leaving the BBC. I shared an office with someone, and they mentioned 'the programmes did very well', meaning that it had got so many millions, and I'd never heard the phrase used in that way before. It was a lot later than the late 80s, it was the late 90s. They were obviously aiming at a different audience by then, and that had to do with the people running the channel. (Interview, Anon B)

Independent producer Simon Berthon, and managing director of the independent production company 3BM, cited Jane Root as responsible for the increased awareness of audience size at the BBC, after she became controller of BBC2 in 1998 (Interview, Berthon, 2006). Mark Fielder, a producer at the BBC suggested that it was as late as

2002 that high audience ratings had become essential for a producer either within or outside of the BBC in getting their next commission from the BBC (Interview, Fielder, 2006).

In terms of audience profiling, the views of interviewees were similar. The BBC did conduct research about audiences for programmes in this period and an awareness of the audience did figure in the calculations of producers. However, this wasn't necessarily as important as it was to be later in the 1990s. For example, Peter Grimsdale, a researcher on *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984), noted that although the series was not designed to reach a specific social demographic, the producers did utilise assumptions about the likely composition of the audience, but not in the more systematic manner that was to be common in the 1990s:

We knew that the audience for *All Our Working Lives* [BBC, 1984] – if some of the workers who had been part of those industries had watched those programmes, that would have been great, but we didn't expect a lot of them, because the presentation was classic archive and talking heads, BBC2, lots of words, quite complicated, you had to sit forward and think about what you were watching. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

Rees's drive to improve the performance of *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) had led to attention being paid to audience appreciation indexes<sup>37</sup>, as part of a mix of criteria for success in the strands first year under his control: "We increased the audience, we increased the appreciation index, and we got better reviews. So at the end of it was demonstrable that it was different to what it had been." (Interview, Rees, 2006).

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<sup>37</sup> The Appreciation Index, or AI, was a measure of the appreciation of a programme by its sample viewers, rather than merely an indication of the numbers watching. It ran on a scale from 0 to 100, and was "useful in assessing the response to programmes made for small or specialist audiences, where viewing figures alone would be an unreliable guide, and to new series" (ITC, 2003).



Martin Davidson and Anon B stated that an emphasis on audience profiling came later at the BBC. Davidson claimed that programmes like *Decisive Weapons of World War Two* (BB2, 1996-1997) were made consciously as a male equivalent of highly popular leisure series of the period (Interview, Davidson, 2006). Anon B claimed that Jane Root had introduced a more specific targeting of younger viewers when she took control of BBC2 in 1998 (Interview, Anon B, 2006). Hamish Mykura, a producer at the BBC and at independent production company Mentorn in the 1990s, claimed that Jane Root would use focus groups extensively to guide commissioning decisions, although they were treated with suspicion by producers, and seldom contributed greatly to commissioning decisions (Interview, Mykura, 2006).

#### 5.2.1.4 BBC Production Budgets: Standardisation and Bifurcation

As has already been discussed, the changes in the institutional management of the BBC during the 1980s had an effect on the way in which budgets were arrived at, and managed. Roy Davies described how, at the beginning of the 1980s, the management of production budgets was more relaxed and informal than the norm during the 1990s. If individual programme budgets were exceeded, it was possible to adjust the overall budget of a department, strand or series at the end of a year in order to cope with overspend. It would also be possible to move resources from one programme to another at the end of a run of programmes in order to avoid an overall deficit. However, new management systems within the BBC changed this method of budget management, and budgets became more standardised (Interview, Davies, 2006).

Several interviewees testified to how the managerial changes within the BBC had affected the levels of funding for history documentaries. Anon A described how budgets became standardised:

... they went down, and they ceased to be tailor-made to the project. The question used to be 'how much will this programme cost' - it's all in England, doesn't require much research, so it costs £80k. It's all in Asia, and it has to find all these very difficult things, so its £150k'. In this period it began to come off a rate card, '60 minutes of history must cost this', regardless of what it was. (Interview, Anon A, 2006)

Michael Darlow noted that throughout the 1990s there was a trend for fewer and fewer history documentaries to occupy the middle ground, which had come to cost around £150,000 per hour (Interview, Darlow, 2006). Laurence Rees agreed that by the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, a bifurcation in budgets developed, as low and high cost models were established:

Essentially, where history had gone under my leadership was high cost, low volume. We did do some low cost stuff, but as a general rule these huge things tended to be high cost low volume. What that means is that the vacuum of the low cost high volume market was filled by independents, which fitted into the kind of more attractive model for them anyway, because of the way they wanted to operate. (Interview, Rees, 2006)

Anon B agreed that independent production companies were producing large-scale, long-running series which could have very low budgets by exploiting specific resources, such as copyright-free film archives based in the USA, to mass produce archive based programmes for as little as £4,000 per half hour (Interview, Anon B, 2006). David Dugan, an independent producer and founder of the independent production company Windfall Films in 1989, claimed that the budgets for the more expensive model of production approached £1 million for a single film, but that

budgets of this magnitude were only made possible by the co-production agreement between BBC and Discovery in 1998 (Interview, Dugan, 2006).

#### 5.2.1.5 BBC Production Budgets: Co-production

There were a number of changes in the management of co-production at the BBC that affected the production of history documentaries. In the early 1980s, the rights to the BBC catalogue in the USA were owned by the Arts & Entertainment Network (A&E), with which the BBC also co-produced some programming, such as *Timewatch* (Comely, 1984). In 1990, the BBC and the American Public Broadcasting System (PBS) discussed creating a joint venture, in the context of a tightening of the existing co-production agreements between them. Previous arrangements between the BBC and PBS had been ad hoc, which, in the words of then BBC2 controller Aubrey Singer involved “throwing ideas at each other and asking for finance” (Burnett, 1990). But the situation changed in the late 1980s, and by 1990, Colin Cameron, head of the documentary features department, was calling for a tighter arrangement between the broadcasters. Instead of having to “water down” BBC programming for the American audience, a more co-operative arrangement was needed: “the BBC can no longer take the moral high ground and assume we make the best programmes. We need to co-operate more closely at all levels of co-production.” (Burnett, 1990).

In the mid 1990s the co-production market became more competitive. Discovery Inc. launched four niche channels in 1994, one of which exclusively broadcast history documentaries (McElvogue, 1994), and The History Channel (THC) was launched in 1995 (Anon, 1995). By the late 1990s, the importance of co-production to history documentary production at the BBC was emphasised in the 1998 deal between BBC

and Discovery to co-produce several factual sub-genres, including history. The deal had two main consequences. Firstly, the BBC was to receive \$175 million (£108 million) over five years in guaranteed co-production funding. In return, Discovery was given first option on any BBC idea in the areas of History, Science, Wildlife and Documentary (Deans, 1998).

Roy Davies described how *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) was funded by a deal with A&E:

I had 28 slots a year to fill, and for 10 of my slots I had an injection of £300k from A&E in America, but that meant that 10 of the programmes had to appeal to America ... It came because we needed money to make them for the BBC, we didn't have enough money. Nobody did, so if you were running a strand, you had a co-pro connection, and the one we had was A&E. (Interview, Davies, 2006)

Therefore, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, co-production money was already essential for history documentaries at the BBC. During the early 1990s, producers such as Peter Grimsdale began to conceive of specific projects with co-production funding in mind. One instance was *Locomotion* (BBC2/A&E, 1993), a history of the world examined through its rail system:

When it came to *Locomotion*, I thought of it with an eye to co-production. At about that time, I saw that A&E in the States had started to get interested in history. As one of them said to me, "this is great stuff; this is drama without the budget". (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

Programmes like *Locomotion* cost around £220,000 an episode to produce. The series exemplified a substantial cost saving for the BBC at a time when cost savings were being pushed by BBC management. The series was co-produced by A&E (50%), BBC2 (25%) and BBC Enterprises (25%), giving BBC2 a programme worth around £220,000 per episode for a quarter of the price. *Locomotion* was a landmark

production in terms of the low proportion the BBC2 would invest in a major series of this kind (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006).

According to Sue Temple, a documentary co-financer since 1989, co-production deals between the BBC and other companies, including independent production companies, became increasingly frequent during the 1990s. Sue Temple left her job in Granada International as a programme distributor, and set up her own company dealing with the co-financing of television productions for independent production companies. One of her main clients was Brook Lapping, who produced a series of high budget history documentary series for BBC and PBS between 1990 and 1995 (Interview, Temple, 2006). During this period, the proportion of BBC funding for history documentary series dropped as other sources of funding became available:

For *The Second Russian Revolution* (BBC, 1991) they [BBC2] put in 80%, for *Watergate* (BBC, 1994) they put in 65%, and the *Death of Yugoslavia* (BBC, 1995) ... they [BBC] offered us 40% of the budget. We said we couldn't possibly find the other 60%, and in the end they ended up with 48-49% of the budget. So we had to go and get the half of the budget. (Interview, Temple, 2006).

As the co-production market became more competitive in the mid 1990s, "co-producing things with America became the rule, not the exception" (Interview, Davidson, 2006). The 1998 deal between the BBC and Discovery increased the dependence on co-production, which Anon A remembers was a cause of worry:

The argument was that there would be 'marvellous' budgets now for some programmes, but there was also a feeling that these programmes would be the blander ones ... The sort of thing Brook Lapping were doing would never have got Discovery money because they were steelier, and rather more difficult ideas. (Interview, Anon A, 2006)

However, the use of co-production money was not simply a matter of survival in the face of reducing budgets. Roy Davies had entered the deal in order to take *Timewatch* from its original magazine format, into a more expensive single film format, when he took over its control from Tim Gardam in 1987 (Interview, Davies, 2006). Peter Grimsdale used co-production money to experiment with form, in *Locomotion* (BBC/A&E, 1993) which broke new ground in its geographically wide-ranging and photographically sumptuous style, as had Laurence Rees's *Pyramid* in 2002 with money from the Discovery deal:

...the BBC did a big output deal with Discovery channel. There was a perception amongst some people that that would result in dumbing down or some negative things. But what happened was, because there was money available from Discovery, instead of doing an evolutionary leap, what we did was a completely revolutionary leap (Interview, Rees, 2006).

## 5.2.2 Channel Four

### 5.2.2.1 Channel Four: Changes in Institutional Management

There were several changes to the institutional management of Channel Four that had an effect on the production of history documentary. The Channel was first led by Jeremy Isaacs, who fostered a spirit of adventurous and innovative programme making, that encouraged risk taking, and gave both producers and commissioners high degrees of autonomy (Hobson, 2008: 190-191; Brown, 2007: 25-52).

The arrival of Michael Grade as Jeremy Isaacs' successor in 1987 affected history documentary production in two main ways. The change signalled an end to an era of experimentation, in which producers' tastes had been prioritised over the channel's overall output (Brown, 2007: 134). Grade immediately cancelled planned commissions across all genres, acquired American programmes to fill gaps in the

schedule, and re-centralised the channel's commissioning structure (Ibid). Grade's chairmanship presided over a period in which Channel Four, was given the responsibility to sell its own advertising which led to the setting up of advertising and marketing departments within the channel (Brown, 2007: 158-161).

When Michael Jackson took over from Michael Grade as Chief Executive in 1997, this also affected history documentary. Jackson brought in key editorial staff from the BBC, in order to re-shape Channel Four (Brown, 2007: 225). Jackson also brought the centralisation of editorial control that was a feature of the BBC under John Birt (Brown, 2007: 227), which was considered by some to be to the detriment of producer autonomy and Channel Four's traditional anti-establishment ethos (Brown, 2007: 224).

The interviewees were agreed that the early Channel Four had promoted innovation and experimentation in programme making. One of the reasons the producer and director Colin Thomas had moved from the BBC to become a freelancer in 1987 was in expectation of the expressive freedoms that Channel Four promised:

Yes, it was very much in the air that you could be more adventurous stuff with Channel Four ... for me, I was on the BBC staff until 1987, and there was definitely a feeling of boundaries being stretched, and possibilities being opened up, both in terms of subject matter, and treatment of the subject matter. (Interview, Thomas, 2006)

But the results of programming experimentations did not always live up to expectations. David Dugan was another producer/director who had left the BBC in the 1980s to pursue independent production. He felt that experimentation didn't always produce better results: "If you look at some of the programmes of that era, there was

certainly a lot of experimentation going on, and a lot of it was pretty off the wall, and not very good.” (Interview, Dugan, 2006).

The producer and director Michael Darlow said that while programming experimentation had achieved stylistic breakthroughs it had its limits in terms of history documentary. As Isaacs’ period drew to a close, the space for experimentation seemed to be shrinking:

They did some interesting stuff; but their budgets were small, and as the price of film went up, of course it became harder. Jeremy Isaacs tried to find room ... but the climate was getting more difficult - not Jeremy changing. (Interview, Darlow, 2006)

The change in institutional management brought by Grade signalled an end to experimentation. Alan Hayling, a commissioning editor at Channel Four between 1991 and 2001 cited the establishing of Channel Four’s first advertising department in 1991, as a key moment in the channel’s organisational change: “This led to a gradual move away from producer-led editorial agendas to audience research-led agendas” (Interview, Hayling, 2006). Taylor Downing had been one of the first producers to leave ITV to set up an independent company to service Channel Four, and he described the effect of the shift on history documentary as a move from experiment to more established programme formats:

The willingness to experiment changed in the Grade era; in terms of history Channel Four became obsessed with the strand *Secret History*, which was a series of one-offs, which claimed to have a new revelation, piece of info on otherwise well-established story lines. (Interview, Downing, 2006)



David Dugan disagreed with the negative appraisal of Channel Four under the control of Michael Grade, and did not accept that producer autonomy and experimentation had been abandoned:

I don't think Michael Grade had as negative an impact in terms of the intellectual content as some people have said. It wasn't my perception at all. I saw Michael Grade as a hands off character, who let people get on with things. (Interview, Dugan, 2006)

Alan Hayling had been a commissioning editor for *Secret History* and other history series at Channel for eight years when Michael Jackson arrived as Channel Four's chief executive. From his perspective there were a number of changes that affected the production of history documentary. Firstly, Jackson was interested in history documentary, and consequently, "when Michael Jackson came, we just started doing more and more history" (Hayling, 2006). Jackson also brought management systems and staff from the BBC, where he had previously been Controller of BBC One and Director of Television at the BBC. Firstly, Jackson brought in personnel from the BBC:

The effect of appointing Michael Jackson was to bring the BBC to Channel Four. Look at the appointments; Peter Dale as head of docs; Janice Hadlow as head of history; Steve Hewlett as head of factual programmes; these are all BBC people. (Interview, Hayling, 2006)

As has been discussed, Jackson also centralised editorial mechanisms (Interview, Hayling, 2006). However, as an independent producer, David Dugan saw Jackson's influence differently:

I think Channel Four has always tried to stand outside; the thing it's been most paranoid about is being different to the BBC. That's almost the starting point for them. As it's gone on from Grade to the current, I think Tim Gardam was always uneasy about the popular stuff. (Interview, Dugan, 2006)

### 5.2.2.2 Channel Four: Changes in Commissioning

The eras of Isaacs, Grade and Jackson were also important in the interviewees' understanding of the development of history documentary commissioning at Channel Four. In the early 1980s, the commissioning of history documentary was distributed across the Channel's commissioning editors, with no one commissioner in charge of history documentaries (Hobson, 2008: 53-77)<sup>38</sup>. However, the channel's first chief executive, Jeremy Isaacs, was an eminent producer of history documentaries, having produced *The World at War* (Thames TV for ITV, 1973-4) widely considered to be a seminal work. Colin Thomas was a freelance producer/director in 1982<sup>39</sup>, and felt that Isaacs had a specific interest in history that gave the genre status on the channel. Thomas describes how Isaacs' track record in, and enthusiasm for, history documentary led him to directly commission *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985), which Thomas produced and directed:

Jeremy Isaacs came to Cardiff, had lunch with HTV, Wynford [Vaughan Thomas] was on the Board of HTV. Apparently Isaacs said he wanted a series, 13 programmes, something like that. The next day, Wynford had sent Jeremy Isaacs an outline of 13 programmes. Jeremy Isaacs said yes, ok, and commissioned it like that. (Interview, Thomas, 2006)

Taylor Downing, another independent producer of history documentaries for Channel Four, described how Isaacs's track record in history documentary production inspired him to seek new ways of producing history documentaries:

The key factor to opening up television history to new ways of making programmes was not only the creation of Channel Four, but also Jeremy Isaacs's interest – he made *The World at War* and *Ireland: A Television History* as a freelance for the BBC - I knew he had a passion for history when I worked with him at Thames ... I was inspired by what I thought

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<sup>38</sup> History documentaries commissioning was split between 'Actuality' under Liz Forgan, 'Education' under Naomi Sargeant, 'Multi-cultural' under Sue Woodford, 'Arts' under Michael Kustow and 'Workshops' under Alan Fountain (Hobson, 2008: 63-76).

<sup>39</sup> Colin Thomas left the BBC to become a freelance producer and director in 1978 due to a dispute over the censorship of a documentary about Northern Ireland (Flynn, 2008).

would be Jeremy's vision of history, the new structure at Channel Four, and Jeremy's personality enabled us to play around with ideas. (Interview, Downing, 2006).

In addition to Isaacs' leadership in terms of experimentation and creative autonomy, Channel Four also commissioned new history documentary makers through the Independent Film and Video department (IFV), and the film workshop scheme (Lanning, 1981; Hobson, 2008: 75). The IFV department fostered community access and regionalisation of independent production, and trained new entrants in television production as part of Channel Four's remit to serve minorities and find new voices. Michelle Ryan was a member of one of the regional workshops set up through the IFV:

John Fountain and Rod Stoneman, the first two commissioners of IFV, had come out of the IFA, and there had been huge amounts of work put in for a more diverse cultural representation on the TV screen, and the importance of de-centralising television, so regional voices could be heard. That tied in with campaigns to have voices outside of estuary English used. All of those debates were happening. Certainly in IFA in Wales, there were papers written, conferences, and Jeremy Isaacs would attend, and Channel Four was founded on that. (Interview, Ryan, 2006).

The assessment of the Michael Grade era was less clear across the interview sample. On one hand, some interviewees suggested that Grade had stifled creativity and alternative voices, by centralizing commissioning and cancelling Channel Four's more adventurous projects. On the other hand Grade had ended a period of formal experimentation that had been perceived as disastrous by some history documentary producers (Interview, Ware, 2006), without destroying the autonomy of producers and the individual identity of the channel (Interview, Dugan, 2006).

Michelle Ryan felt that commercial reasons had led to the phasing out of the film and video workshops (Interview, Ryan, 2006). Downing felt that the alternative programming of the Isaacs era had been abandoned for more established televisual forms (Interview, Downing, 2006). Alan Hayling felt that Michael Grade had bowed to the pressure of Channel Four's new status after the 1990 Broadcasting Act as "a coherent commercial body". Channel Four created a new advertising department in 1991, and Hayling felt that Grade placed it at the heart of the commissioning mechanism. To begin with, Grade had promised that the advertising department would be in a different building, and would not have a direct influence on programming, however this arrangement did not last:

We were in separate buildings to start with, they were in Whitfield Street, and we were in Charlotte Street, only 50 yards apart. You didn't know who the ads people were at first. Then you'd have things like the senior research person within the ads dept happened to become the deputy chief scheduler. Things like that began to happen. Schedulers began to have more and more impact on commissioning. There's no question that after 1990 Channel Four became much much more ratings conscious, and much more commercial. (Interview, Hayling, 2006)

Grade also made a series of appointments that systematized the commissioning of history and documentary programmes at the channel. The first of these was John Willis (Controller of Factual programmes, Channel Four, 1989-1993; Director of programmes, Channel Four, 1993-1997), followed by Peter Moore (Head of Documentaries, 1990-1998) and Alan Hayling (Commissioning Editor, *Secret History*, 1990-1997). Alan Hayling admitted that he and his colleagues were more commercially minded than their predecessors:

Many of the early commissioning editors at Channel Four didn't have broadcasting backgrounds. They were concerned about experimentation, not concerned about ratings, primarily about innovating in broadcasting. The second wave, which included me, and Peter Moore, were more

commercially minded. We cared about audience bulk, volumes.  
(Interview, Hayling, 2006)

Despite making appointments that seemed more commercial than in the previous management era, Grade did not abandon Isaacs' approach to producer autonomy. David Dugan remembered grade as being a non-interventionist chief executive (Interview, Dugan, 2006).

In terms of concentration, Grade's controller of factual and later director of programmes, John Willis, created a history documentary strand in 1989, the first time history programming had been gathered under one banner at Channel Four. *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2004) not only innovated but was also positioned as a direct competitor to BBC's *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-). In 1990, Willis also instituted a specific commissioning department for history documentary, the 'Documentary and History Department' headed by Peter Moore (Interview, Hayling, 2006). In order build on the success of *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2004), and to challenge the BBC's *Reputations* (BBC, 1994-2002) strand, Willis later commissioned the contemporary history biography strand *Secret Lives* (Channel Four, 1995-1997).

Although Willis' changes involved a degree of standardisation and centralisation of editorial control in the production of history documentary, Willis still gave the commissioning editors beneath him autonomy over their strands: "Then John [Willis] came in and put strands in ... so people could find it in the schedule. But he gave his commissioning editors tremendous autonomy." (Interview, Ware, 2006). To some extent Willis' innovations were a continuation of the early Channel Four tradition of fostering alternative historical accounts. Michael Attwell, a commissioner at Channel Four during the early 1990s recalled how the subversive intentions behind *Secret*

*History* (Channel Four, 1991-2002) affected the overall climate in history documentary production:

...as the title suggests, they [*Secret History*] felt that *Timewatch* would do the mainstream, definitive classical version, and they [*Secret History*] would be doing the revelatory, the non official version, or unearthing little gems, that people didn't know about. What is fascinating, is that *Timewatch*, then, because of the success of *Secret History* started to develop its self becoming more revelatory, rather than just taking a subject and doing it. (Interview, Attwell, 2006).

The investigative impulse of *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2002) was similar to the alternative history encouraged at Channel Four under Isaacs. However, Simon Berthon, an independent producer who produced several editions of *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2002), and the later biographical sister strand *Secret Lives* (Channel Four, 1995-1997), recalls that they were intended to attract attention as much as to revise established history:

They were fun, scurrilous, naughty, to create trouble - part of this was attracting attention to get viewers, so here was a deliberate attempt to get audience. The ratings for *Secret History* and *Secret Lives* was good - when they did Edward the VIIIth was a Nazi, it was absurd, completely one-sided - Alan Hayling would probably disagree - hanging on one or two pieces of evidence trying to create a case, but bloody good fun. People watched, it was good sensational stuff. They were successful and were trying to pick what people wanted to watch, what would excite people and make waves. (Interview, Berthon, 2006)

If there was debate as to whether commissioning had been centralised, under Grade, there was a consensus that it had been centralised under Michael Jackson after 1997. There was a perception that Jackson had brought the BBC ethos to Channel Four, in terms of personnel and commissioning practice. Alan Hayling recalls a change of regime at Channel Four, which brought with it swing away from the revisionist history of *Secret History*, and towards the more establishment practices of the BBC:

Total regime change. In 1997 I ceased to commission *Secret History*. They split the history department from the doc department. They created a history department, and I had a choice as to whether I went for a job within history, or doc departments. I chose the documentary department because I didn't do just history - history was maybe a third of what I did. History was then commissioned by a guy called Peter Grimsdale, but then he left for the BBC. And then Janice Hadlow came from the BBC to take over the history department (1999). Her view was very BBC, very different. (Interview, Hayling, 2006)

In terms of personnel, Jackson brought several commissioning editors to Channel Four directly from the BBC, including Tim Gardam as director of programmes (Methven, 1998), Peter Dale as head of documentaries (Handley, 1998), and Janice Hadlow as head of history (Azeez, 1999). According to Alan Hayling, the commissioner for *Secret History* (Channel 4, 1991-2002), *Secret Lives* (Channel Four, 1995-97) and other history series at the time of Jackson's arrival, Jackson imported a Birtist, centralised editorial control to Channel Four. This control was introduced in the form of a veto that the director of programmes could use on any commission, taking away commissioning editors' ability to commission projects from an allotted budget. In addition, Channel Four's first audience research department was created, pushing the editorial agenda away from producers and towards marketing. As part of a new awareness of the audience, producers were instructed to target younger demographics for history programmes (Interview, Hayling, 2006).

However, in terms of volume and status history documentary flourished at Channel Four under Jackson. More history documentaries were commissioned than before, in line with the enthusiasm Michael Jackson and Tim Gardam had for history (Interview, Hayling, 2006; Dugan, 2006). There was also a distinct editorial change. *Secret Lives* was cancelled as a strand, and replaced by the more celebratory *The Real...* (Channel

Four, 1998-2004) due to the former's reputation for challenging the reputations of the famous and privileged in a highly controversial manner (Interviews: Hayling, 2006; Berthon, 2006). These changes were to some extent a consequence of decisions made by Jackson, but Alan Hayling admits that had John Willis replaced Michael Grade in 1997, he would have faced the same limitations and challenges: "the pressures on John [Willis] to increase ratings and to diversify into other channels and make an impression on the internet ... would have still been there." (Interview, Hayling, 2006).

With the launch of digital broadcasting in 1998, Channel Four had to change the way programmes were packaged. Strands were gradually cancelled after 2000<sup>40</sup> due to the way in which strand titles hid the content of programmes in the electronic programme guide (EPG) digital listings system (Interview, Cosgrove, 2006). At the end of the period in question, in 2002, Channel Four mirrored the BBC's creation of a Specialist Factual department, which effectively aligned history documentaries more closely with other factual sub genres. This re-structuring also distanced history from documentary, which kept its own department (Hughes, 2002).

#### 5.2.2.3 Channel Four: Audiences

As has been discussed in the section above, during Jeremy Isaacs' era, Channel Four's producers of history documentary did not need to worry about the size of the audience. However, producer Colin Thomas suggests that Isaacs was at least aware of the potential for history documentaries to deliver high audiences:

Isaacs obviously regarded history with some importance; he was responsible for *The World at War*. *The World at War* also attracted a big

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<sup>40</sup> *Secret History* and *Secrets of the Dead* were cancelled in 2004 (BFI Programme Database).



audience ... he thought history was important, but he also saw that it got good audiences. (Interview, Thomas, 2006)

Alan Hayling and Simon Berthon both cited the appearance of *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2004) as the first history programme designed partially to attract attention, and larger audiences (Interviews: Berthon, 2006; Hayling, 2006). John Edgington produced and directed the first *Secret History* in the strand's second season, in 1992. In discussions over the structure of his documentary, *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel Four, 1992), he encountered early tensions between traditional documentary storytelling practices, and the need to maximise audience impact:

... this rather strident green assistant came to the first viewing as John [Willis] couldn't come, and she said 'oh you know you should put the shock stuff at the beginning, give us a taster, give us a teaser', and I said I don't think that's the right way to go because it's spilling the beans, you want people to hang onto the 'what's going to happen', the story is taking you on relentlessly. And she says, 'oh no, put in some stuff about what he did and get that drama stuff up there right at the top'. We went down that route, had a second viewing, which John Willis came along with her, and he said 'why have you done that? You are throwing it away', and I said 'glad you agree'. (Interview, Edgington, 2006)

After Channel Four became self-funding in 1993, it began to appreciate the commercial possibilities of history documentaries. Stuart Cosgrove, a commissioning editor at Channel Four at the time (Head of IFV, 1994-996, Head of Arts and Entertainment, 1996-998, Head of the Channel Four Nations and Regions, 1998-) described how commissioning had related to audience research before Channel Four became self-funding:

To some extent it stumbled about a bit. Commissioning lots and lots of things, hoping they would happen. Now it is more streamlined and planned and strategic. In those days it was pre-strategy. It was groups of individual editors making choices, and those choices might be informed by taste or values, or the desire to make a splash or whatever. (Interview,

Cosgrove, 2006)

But after 1993, this relationship between audiences and history documentary changed at the channel (Interview, Cosgrove, 2006). It was in this period that Channel Four had instituted its first advertising department (in 1991) creating a more direct relationship between audience size and programme commissioning than had existed previously (Interview, Hayling, 2006).

Despite this development, it was not until the late 1990s that Channel Four insisted that its history documentaries gained high audiences, a stage that the BBC had reached much earlier (Interviews: Ware, 2006; Berthon, 2006). However, by around 2002, the high ratings gained by series such as *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) and the BBC's *A History of Britain* (BBC, 2000-2002) raised expectations, and ratings had become essential for a producer or production company in securing their next commission (Interview, Fielder, 2006).

I think it has got continuously more important. *Elizabeth* [broadcast 2000] got 3 million, and everyone was knocked off their perches by that. I think *Secret History* at that time would get 2-2.3 million, but when *Elizabeth* got over 3 continuously ... that was seen as fantastic. They [commissioners] thought they could make quality serious programming and get great audiences (Interview, Fielder, 2006)

Independent producer Simon Berthon claimed, that by 2004, producers were told that their programmes were expected to deliver certain audiences: "I would say that the history team made those target audience figures overt 18 month to two years ago [therefore 2004]. When they were actually saying, it's no good unless you are delivering these audiences." (Interview, Berthon, 2006).

The situation also changed in terms of audience profiling. In the early 1980s, there

was a mission at Channel Four to reach new audiences, and to break free from the stereotypical representations offered by the duopoly (Hobson, 2007: 192). But this was mostly done through giving experienced producers the opportunity to express themselves in new ways, or through giving new broadcasting voices access to the airwaves. Existing producers from BBC and ITV began to experiment with form, and television producers emanated from new areas of society, bringing with them new perspectives. After Channel Four became self-funding in 1993, it became clear that history was useful at reaching an audience demographic that was valuable commercially:

By the early 90s, we had to sell our own advertising and find our own income, we began to have departments that would analyse successful programmes and why they were successful, and once we began to do that it was evident that there was another value to history, other than merely public service. It could be commercially viable for us particularly with an upper class and high end male audience. (Interview, Cosgrove, 2006)<sup>41</sup>

According to Alan Hayling, Michael Jackson brought a more concerted approach to assessing the audience to Channel Four from the BBC in 1997, and he also laid down requirements for history documentaries which targeted a young and male demographic (Interview, Hayling, 2006). However, according to Hamish Mykura, an independent producer who became commissioning editor for Channel Four in 2001 (Commissioning Editor of History, 2001-2003; Head of History, Science and Religion, 2003-2008; Head of More4, 2008-) the targeting of demographic groups did not extend to the use of focus groups, as it had done at the BBC (Interview, Mykura, 2006).

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<sup>41</sup> The effects of this requirement to sell advertising on programme content and form was anticipated by Garnham, when he noted that the independent sector servicing Channel Four would inevitably become ambassadors for the free market model of production, due to the need for financial survival (Garnham, 1990: 132).

#### 5.2.2.4 Channel Four: Budgets and Co-production

Gauging the changes in programme budgets was difficult over such a long period, and such a variable output. However *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel Four, 1992), which was a fully-funded Channel Four production without reconstruction, very little archive and no CGI, cost £150,000 for an hour in 1992 (Edgington, 2006). Hamish Mykura estimated the price of an hour of fully-funded Channel Four history documentary in 2006 was between £100,000 and £200,000, but closer to the former than the latter. A good example for the period in question was *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) which was fully-funded by Channel Four, for £175,000 per episode (Fielder, 2006). Significantly, *Elizabeth* had high production values, incorporating a highly paid presenter and lavish dramatic reconstruction, whilst *Deep Sleep* was austere in style, and comprised of interviews, actuality, rostrumed stills and a small amount of archive. Overall, this might indicate a slight decline in real terms between 1992 and 2000. However, if co-produced programmes were included in the calculation, then budgets seemingly rose over the period, as some Channel Four programmes such as *Secret History: The Charge of the Light Brigade* (SMG / Red Vision for Channel Four, 2002) had a budget approaching £750,000 an hour (Pishiris, 2002).

According to Hamish Mykura, Channel Four had always taken part in co-productions, and its history documentaries were no exception (Interview, Mykura, 2006). However, according to Alan Hayling, the commissioner of *Secret History*, Channel Four's challenging material made co-production difficult. In the mid 1990s, Channel Four attempted to co-produce a biography strand with A&E. But Channel Four's approach was too investigative, and A&E formed a partnership with the BBC instead

to produce *Reputations* (BBC2, 1994-1998) (Interview, Hayling, 2006). Channel Four later funded their own biography series, *Secret Lives* (Channel Four, 1995-7), without backing from an American broadcaster. This allowed the series to produce programmes such as *Secret Lives: L. Ron Hubbard* (3BM for Channel Four, 1997) which would never have been shown in the USA, due to the programme's controversial nature, and the litigiousness of the Church of Scientology.

Co-production agreements with other broadcasters were more piece-meal than they were at the BBC. Commissioning editor Alan Hayling noted that whilst *1900 House* (Wall to Wall for Channel Four, 1999) and *1940 House* (Wall to Wall for Channel Four, 2001) were fully funded by Channel Four, they were developed into a format that was then sold to other broadcasters (Interview, Hayling, 2006). The independent producer Julian Ware noted that Channel Four made a long-standing co-production deal with PBS in the USA to produce *Secrets of the Dead* (Channel Four, 1999-2003), which was integrated with PBS's *NOVA* strand (PBS, 1974-) (Interview, Ware, 2006). By 2002, Channel Four was entering into co-productions in order to fund programmes including substantial dramatisation and CGI, with substantial budgets, such as *Ancient Egyptians* (Wall to Wall for Channel Four / TLC, 2003) (Robertson, 2001). However, even as late as 2002 Channel Four were still commissioning lavish programmes such as *Secret History: the Charge of the Light Brigade* (SMG/Red Vision for Channel Four, 2002) for a cost of £750,000 without a co-producer in place in advance (Pishiris, 2002).

### 5.2.3 ITV

#### 5.2.3.1 Institutional Management and Structure

Two main regulatory and organisational factors at ITV impacted on the production of history documentaries: the inception of Channel Four, and the substantial changes made to ITV by the 1990 Broadcasting Act.

Firstly, the inception of Channel Four led to a migration of history documentaries from ITV to Channel Four. According to Anon A, who had worked as a history documentary producer in the ITV system in the 1970s before moving to BBC in the early 1980s, ITV had been the major broadcaster of history documentary series in the 1970s (Interview, Anon A, 2006). However, several history documentary makers stopped making programmes for ITV after the inception of Channel Four. For example, Anon A left Thames TV for the BBC (Interview, Anon A, 2006); Brian Lapping and Norma Percy left Granada to set up their own companies and produce programmes for the BBC (Interview, Anon A, 2006); and Taylor Downing left Thames TV to set up his own production company, Flashback TV, which made programmes for Channel Four (Interview, Downing, 2006).

Secondly, the 1990 Broadcasting Act had a long-term affect in several ways. The IBA's regulations concerning documentaries in prime time had meant that large scale productions such as *The Nuclear Age* (Central TV for ITV and WGBH, 1989), were still shown on ITV: "The reason why *The Nuclear Age* got done was that it ticked off a box under the regulator; that's 12 hours taken care of" (Interview, Ware, 2006). However, when the ITC was formed, the looser regulations regarding the numbers of

serious documentaries in prime time meant that such programming disappeared from ITV's schedule (Ibid).

In addition, after the ITV franchise auctions of 1991 and 1992, the operational budgets of some of the licensees were restricted due to the money that had been spent on the bidding process:

I think the biggest death-knell of the doc and history documentary at ITV was Thatcher's broadcasting act ... lots of people paid huge amounts of money for their licenses, so they were tied with debt for years, and there was no doubt, and as soon as the new franchises came in ... that's when we began to feel the pinch in terms of money. (Interview, Nelmes, 2006).

Thirdly, the management culture of ITV changed after the auctions, whether it was through internal appointments such as Gerry Robinson at Granada, or through the arrival of new ITV franchisees such as Michael Green's Carlton Communications. As a result ITV companies began to be driven by a need to maximise the profit making aspects of the business to the detriment of the traditional production values of licensees such as London Weekend Television or Granada (Tracey, 1998: vii; Holland, 2006: 192).

#### 5.2.3.2 ITV: Changes in Commissioning

ITV, unlike the BBC and Channel Four never had a department or commissioning editor responsible for history documentaries (Interview, Davidson, 2006). In addition, it was a federation, in a sense, a number of separate companies. The range of factual programming on ITV in the 1980s depended both on the IBA's quota system, and on the large number of commissioners in place at ITV, due to its federal nature. But the consolidation of ITV companies in the late 1990s reduced the number of gatekeepers

to ITV commissions. Julian Ware, formerly an executive producer of history documentaries and documentaries at Central TV, explained the significance of this change:

Pre 1992, you had Granada, Central, Yorkshire, Thames, LWT. Each had a head of docs. So if you pitched it to us, and we didn't like it, you could go to LWT. If they didn't like it you could go to Granada. And you stood a chance of getting it on the air. Now [2006], there is one head of history at Channel Four, Hamish Mykura; one head of docs at ITV. So the decision making is now dependent on far fewer people's tastes. (Interview, Ware, 2006)

According to Dianne Nelmes, (Executive Producer, *World in Action* 1992-1994; Head of Factual, Granada, 1994-1998; ITV Network Centre controller of Documentaries and Features, 2000-2002) history documentary on ITV was therefore reduced to a very small amount of projects that could satisfy ITV's requirements for high audience figures (Interview, Nelmes, 2006).

#### 5.2.3.3 ITV: Audiences

After the 1990 Broadcasting Act the network turned towards commercial managers such as Gerry Robinson and Michael Green. In addition, the lightening of the regulation of factual programmes led to a situation in which audience figures were an important consideration across the whole schedule, with no protected areas for PSB material to inhabit (Harrison, 2005: 128). Additionally, there was a downward pressure on audience numbers due to the proliferation of channels (Ibid). By 1994 the pressure to deliver large audiences had raised the threshold for a successful audience for a history documentary on ITV to 7 million (Interview, Nelmes, 2006). This expectation seriously curtailed the possibility of having history documentaries on ITV. The series *The Sexual Century* (Carlton/ Barna-Alper ITV, 1999) was withdrawn from broadcast in the middle of its run due to a disappointing audience of 3.7 million



(Deans, 1999), an audience that would have been considered excellent for BBC2 or Channel Four (Interview, Nelmes, 2006). This in turn had an affect on the amount of programmes made, and their topics. There were very few historical subjects that could sustain such high audiences, numbers that were very rare for history programmes on any other terrestrial channel in the mid 1990s (Interviews: Nelmes, 2006; Rees, 2006; Edgington, 2006).

#### 5.2.3.5 ITV: Production Budgets and Co-production

Taylor Downing, a producer and director at Thames Television in the 1980s, recalls that history documentary producers at ITV were not required to manage their own budgets and were often unaware of budgetary constraints:

The stuff I did as a younger man at Thames was different; I don't recall anybody at Thames talking about a budget. I never remember the word being used. If you needed to do some filming in Paris, you went to the film office, booked a crew for Paris on Tuesday 20th and they turned up. If you wanted to do something, you told people and resources were made available to you. (Interview, Downing, 2006).

During this period ITV history documentaries were well funded in comparison to those on Channel Four and BBC. For example, *The Nuclear Age* had a budget of £4.5 million over 12 episodes, equating to £375,000 per hour (Interview, Ware, 2006). Budgets became tighter at ITV after the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the ITV franchise auctions of 1991 (Interview, Nelmes, 2006). However, whilst ITV history documentary budgets declined in the 1990s, they still remained higher than budgets for equivalent BBC and Channel Four productions. *Nicholas and Alexandria* (Granada for ITV, 1994) was over £500,000 per hour (Nelmes, 2006), and the *Second World War in Colour* (Carlton/TWI for ITV, 1999) was around £220,000 per hour (Interview, Binns, 2006). ITV entered into co-productions with USA broadcasters in

the 1980s, such as *Mengele* (Central Television for ITV and HBO, 1985) and *The Nuclear Age* (Central Television for WGBH, NHK and ITV, 1989) but these opportunities became rarer during the 1990s (Interview, Ware, 2006).

The examples of *Nicholas and Alexandria* (Granada for ITV, 1994) and *The Second World War in Colour* (TWI / Carlton for ITV, 1999) showed how history documentaries on ITV after 1990 had to gain access to material that could guarantee large audiences in order to attain substantial co-funding. It took Diane Nelmes 18 months to persuade ITV and A&E to commission the two-part series *Nicholas and Alexandria* (Granada for ITV / A&E, 1994), even though it had several ingredients that should have guaranteed a large UK and USA audience<sup>42</sup>. Even if production could access narratives that promised large audiences, the commissioning of *Nicholas and Alexandria* (Granada for ITV, 1994) was precarious; a month after its commissioning a similar series was offered to ITV by an American broadcaster for a very low acquisition fee. Had this been offered a month earlier, it would probably have caused Nelmes' production to be cancelled (Interview, Nelmes, 2006).

*The Second World War in Colour* was offered by its executive producer Stewart Binns to the BBC and Channel Four before it was eventually commissioned by Steve Hewlett at Carlton, after Hewlett had fortuitously seen a taster tape (Interview, Binns, 2006):

We could not get 'in colour' away. BBC turned it down twice, and it was only through Alastair Waddington's friendship with Steve Hewlett that we go it anywhere. Hewlett recognized it within 30 seconds of seeing it.

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<sup>42</sup> *Nicholas and Alexandria* was presented by Prince Michael of Kent, and coincided with the discovery of the graves of the Romanov family and the Queen's first visit to Russia since 1917 (Interview, Nelmes, 2006).

Nobody else recognized it, other than Adrian<sup>43</sup> and myself. Steve was at Carlton, and they became our co-producers, and he took it instantly to Grant Mansfield at Network centre, and I'm certain that Mansfield knew it would be ground breaking for ITV. (Interview, Binns, 2006).

#### 5.2.4 Channel Five

Channel Five produced very few history documentaries in its first year of broadcasting, 1997. However, by 2002 it broadcast 20% of the history documentaries in this study's sample for the year. In the intervening period, Channel Five's commissioning of history documentaries developed partly due to the appointment of staff who had a background in that area of programming, and partly due to Channel Five's need to move up market. In 1998 the ITC heavily criticized Channel Five's factual output with regards to the channel's PSB commitments, and with particular attention paid to the sexually explicit and exploitative nature of programmes such as *Sex and Shopping* (Douglas Churnside Productions for Channel Five, 1998-2001) (ITC, 1998). The first mentions in official sources of Channel Five's history documentary output were of *The Moors Murderers* (Chameleon Productions for Channel Five, 1999) and *The Most Evil Men in History* (Uden Associates for Channel Five, 2001) in the ITC annual performance reviews for 2000 and 2001. But both reports mentioned these programmes as rare examples of history documentaries in a factual landscape dominated by acquired wildlife programming (ITC, 2000; ITC, 2001). However, in 2001, Channel Five was praised by the ITC for including social history, along with the history of the Second World War, in its peak hours (ITC, 2001). In the same year it was also praised for its art history series *The Great Artists* (Seventh Art Productions for Channel Five, 2001) (Ibid).

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<sup>43</sup> Adrian wood was the film archivist who discovered the colour footage on which the series were based (Wood, 2001).

In 2001 Kevin Lygo arrived from Channel Four, and was appointed Channel Five's director of programmes. He was given an enlarged production budget, and the mission to win new audiences and forge a new identity for the channel (Rouse, 2001). He appointed Dan Chambers as Channel Five's controller of factual, who had previously been the commissioner of the history documentary strand *Secrets of the Dead* (Channel Four/PBS, 1999- 2004) at Channel Four (Lipscomb, 2001). On his arrival at Channel Five, Dan Chambers announced his intention to increase the public service content on Channel Five, and take the channel up market (Holmwood, 2002). One of the results of this project was the launch of the history documentary strand *Revealed* (Channel Five, 2002-), as well as a number of other history documentary projects.

From the outset, Channel Five showed either acquired history documentaries such as *Hitler's Henchmen* (ZDF/Arte/SBS and reversioned<sup>44</sup> by Flashback Television for Channel Five, 2000) or made their history documentaries through co-production. The *Revealed* strand typically had budgets of around £220,000 an hour, of which Channel Five contributed £80,000, with the remainder usually coming from The National Geographic Channel (Interview, Dugan, 2006; Chambers, 2003; Sutherland, 2004). Channel five also produced some documentaries with larger budgets such as *Revealed: Who Killed Tutankhamun* (Atlantic Productions for Channel Five / Discovery, 2002) which had a budget of around £630,000, £500,000 of which was from Discovery (Chambers, 2003). Even at this high cost the programme's audience of 2 million was described as high by Chambers (Chambers, 2003), which set

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<sup>44</sup> 'Reversioning' refers to the practise of re-editing a programme in order to adapt it for broadcast in a new territory.

Channel Five's level of acceptable viewership for history documentaries at a lower level than the other terrestrial channels.

### 5.2.6 Independent Producers

#### 5.2.6.1 Institutional Management

During the period 1982-2002, the independent sector grew from being a small group of semi-professional production companies (Interview, Darlow, 2004) to a large number of profit-making organisations working across several media, with some making profits in excess of £14 million by 2000 (Keighron, 2001). However the number of independents rose sharply in the 1980s, and then declined during the 1990s, from a high point in 1991. As a gauge, 150 independent companies were used by Channel Four between the inception of the Channel in November 1982, and the first annual report at the end of May 1983 (Channel Four, 1983: 12). In 1985 this had grown to 332, and rose further to a high mark of 668 in 1991. This number then declined steadily until in 2002, only 300 independent companies were being used by Channel Four (Appendix 8). Whilst the amount of companies was similar in 1982 and in 2002, the amount of hours had grown substantially over the period. In 1986 there was a total of 236 Independent production companies supplying all broadcasters with 974 hours of programming. In 2000 there were 391 independent production companies supplying 3,638 hours of programming (Keighron, 2001).

By 2001, there was a concentration of programming production with a few large companies. Of the 391 companies trading in 2001, only 100 of them made 90% of programming, and only 20 companies produced two thirds of the independent sector's total television programming (Keighron, 2001). This meant that by 2001 there was a

bifurcation between two types of independent producer: a substantial number of small independents fighting for a small amount of business, and a small number of large independents getting most of the commissions. By 2002, there had been a sharp decline in the number of independents, as companies gave up their independence. This occurred when a production company became a subsidiary of a company that owned more than 25% of a broadcaster, such as ITV or Channel Five, or having more than 25% of their shares owned by a broadcaster (Conlan, 2000). In terms of history documentary production, the companies that produced history documentaries in the period fell into both categories.

The constitutional development of these companies followed a particular pattern. Most of the independent producers founded during the 1980s came about when producers left the BBC to set up their own companies (Interview, Rees, 2006), or when they left the ITV companies to set up independents (Interview, Hayling, 2006). Some companies combined the talents of producers from both sides of the duopoly, as in the example of Flashback Television, whose founders were from the in-house workforce of ITV (Taylor Downing) and the BBC (Vicky Wegg-Prosser) (Interview, Downing, 2006). Companies such as Flashback Television were formed to deliver a single commission from Channel Four, but then were successful in being recommissioned on successive occasions (Interview, Downing, 2006). Others companies, such as Windfall Films, depended initially on contacts at the BBC, and sometimes with broadcasters in the USA, made during former careers (Interview, Dugan, 2006). Others were formed through the workshop agreement between Channel Four and the ACTT to train new entrants to the television industry and to make

community-based films from new, non-professional perspectives (Interview, Ryan, 2006).

The business model which independent producers operated initially was controversial, and, as a result changed throughout the period. When Channel Four announced its terms of trade in 1982, Channel Four was to receive 70% of backend<sup>45</sup>, whilst the Channel also shouldered 50% of programme overspend (Anon, 1982). While this deal did give producers an incentive to make programmes in order to exploit them in overseas markets and make profits, the deal also expected independents to be responsible for any losses. The early model led to a situation where companies were “dependent” on either Channel Four or the BBC, rather than being independent (Darlow, 2004: 326). But this relationship gradually changed due to the effect of the 25% quota imposed on the BBC and ITV by the 1990 Broadcasting Act.

These changes also affected independents whose output was partially or mostly made up of history documentaries. According to David Dugan, by 1990 the possibilities for independents had grown due mainly to the BBC and ITV’s independent production quotas. However, these possibilities were not always taken up instantly, as many companies remained tied to their contacts in the main terrestrial broadcasters with which they had established relations:

A year after we set up the company it was announced that there would be a quota, and it meant that there would be more markets available in theory. It didn't change the way we looked at things, I suppose it gave us a bit more freedom, and if someone didn't like what we were doing, we could go to someone else. So there was always that possibility. But the pattern of our company, and I suspect others, was that we came out of the

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Backend’ refers to the revenue made from selling a programme to be shown in a territory other than those covered by the original commission (Interview, Temple, 2006).

BBC, and our contacts were still in the BBC, and our business was primarily BBC, and primarily with the science department. (Interview, Dugan, 2006).

However, during the 1990s, this situation began to change:

We gradually moved more and more towards Channel Four, and because I'd worked in America we had good contacts in PBS, so we do a lot of stuff for PBS, National Geographic, Discovery, and now [2006] we do more stuff for Channel Five. (Interview, Dugan, 2006).

The instances of co-production between independent production companies and multiple broadcasters grew during the early 1990s. This activity had become frequent enough for a specialist distributor, Sue Temple, to leave a large ITV company such as Granada, to form her own company (Temple International, 1990) aimed at serving the distribution and financial management needs of the new independent production sector, many of which produced history documentaries. This company was set up as a response to the numerous independent production companies formed when the BBC and ITV quotas led to an exodus of producers from the BBC and ITV to the independents in the late 1980s. Many producers left with the understanding that their erstwhile employers would continue to commission them in the same manner:

Well, obviously Thatcher had this idea, and so the BBC and ITV companies said to their main producers, why don't we give you large payments to be made redundant, you come back, everything will be as it was. (Interview, Temple, 2006)

But this did not prove to be the case, as independent production was used by broadcasters to lower their production budgets, balanced against the use of co-production funding. Temple described the process from her perspective:

But it wasn't. The producers would come back and the BBC or Granada or whoever said they would give you 80% and they [the independents]



had to raise the other 20%. Co-pros in those days [late 1980s] were really no more than pre-sales, top up money. But gradually as time went on it changed. Before the recent broadcast act [2003 Communications Act], BBC or ITV would put in 80% then it was 75%, then 60%, getting to 50%, 45%. The percentages went down and the budgets stayed the same or went up, and the deficits got bigger. (Interview, Temple, 2006).

The changing funding model of independents had several effects. History producing independents were increasingly involved in commercial activity. The Producer's Alliance For Cinema and Television (PACT) was formed in 1991, and marked a new era in the commercialisation of independent production companies, which led to independents getting equal access to all commissions at the BBC in 1991, and ITV in 1993 (Pact, 2007). This shift added to the changing attitude of Channel Four under Grade, led to a climate that was less supportive of the production workshop independents of the early 1990s, and eventually to their demise (Interview, Ryan, 2006).

There was disagreement between interviewees as to the effects of these structural changes in the funding of the independent sector. Independent producers like David Dugan saw the process of liberalising access to BBC and ITV commissions, and the growing use of co-production, as beneficial to independents, in that they could choose where to place their programmes, and therefore be freed from the strictures of commissioning editors and channel controllers (Interview, Dugan, 2006). However, other independent producers saw these structural changes to the independent production sector as departing from the notion of diversity and minority access that had formed the basis of the IFA and early Channel Four. The shift to independence had caused unforeseen consequences:

Perhaps we should have anticipated that in effect this was privatisation of broadcasting that was going on ... People who make a lot of money out of the system tend not to be aggrieved about the system. Whereas there was a lot more sense of challenging the system in the early days [of the independent sector] than there were in the latter days. (Interview, Thomas, 2006)

From the mid 1990s onwards the number of independent companies began to decrease. In 1995, an amendment to the 1990 Broadcasting Act, *The Broadcasting (Independent Productions) (Amendment) Order 1995* (HMSO, 1995), changed the definition of an independent producer. The ownership threshold reduced to 15%, encouraging more broadcaster ownership (HMSO, 1995)<sup>46</sup>, which would later lead to companies losing their independent status. Major independent producers of history documentaries were also merging, for example Mentorn and Barraclough Carey who merged in 1997 to form Mentorn Barraclough Carey (MBC) (Littlejohn, 1997). The merger made it possible for millions of pounds to be invested in programme development (Ibid). Specifically for MBC, this meant a combination of the high cost, low volume approach of Barraclough Carey, with the high volume, low cost portfolio of Mentorn (Ibid).

Mergers became more common towards the end of the 1990s. As independents became bigger, they could therefore invest more money in programme development, and so operate more successfully in international markets than before (Shelton, 2001). By 2001, the financial power of independents was such that broadcasters like Channel Four were offering to buy stakes in independent production companies (Rose, 2001), or give output deals to “key supplier” independents (Keighron, 2002). However, the profits generated by mergers in the late 1990 had begun to disappear by 2002, as

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<sup>46</sup> The ownership threshold indicated the level at which an independent producer could be owned by a broadcaster before losing their independent status.

independent companies were beginning to make losses or experience small profits of around 1-3%, triggering a further round of consolidation (Carter, 2002).

#### 5.2.4 Production Schedules and Emerging Technologies

The next section assesses the effect of political economic developments on the three phases of media: production, pre-production, and post-production (Birkmaier, 1994). In the case of history documentary production, the three production phases can be more clearly labelled as 'Research', 'Filming/Videotaping' and 'Editing'. This section discusses developments across all channels, rather than per channel. This is done for three reasons. Firstly, because of the similarity in deployment of technology and techniques across all terrestrial broadcasters and independents. Secondly, all productions varied to some extent in the application of production methods, whatever the source of the broadcast. Thirdly, due to the nature of these similarities and variations in deployment, the interviewees did not tend to recollect changes in the deployment of technology over time in detailed channel-based terms. This impressionistic quality was emphasised by the nature of several interviewee's individual careers, which spanned various broadcasters, independent production companies, and roles.

As a consequence of the budgetary changes described earlier in the chapter, many interviewees claimed that production schedules had changed between 1982 and 2002. Whilst some interviewees claimed that such changes were indicative of a lowering in standards (Interviews: Thomas, 2006: Anon A, 2006: Anon B, 2006), others felt that production schedules had changed due to increases in efficiency and the adoption of new technology such as the internet, digital cameras, and digital editing. Different

interviewees saw different processes and results in each of the three categories ‘Research’, ‘Filming/Videotaping’ and ‘Editing’. The following sections discuss claims made about the effect of political economic changes on each of these three categories of production.

#### 5.2.4.1 Research

Research was mentioned by interviewees as one of the casualties of changing production practices, in a number of different ways. Firstly, research was seen as the phase of production most affected during the period in terms of the time and resources devoted to it. Between 1982 and 2002, there was agreement that production schedules, in terms of both in-house and independent production, had shortened. Roy Davies recollected that during the early 1980s at the BBC, the typical research period was 16 weeks for the most complex documentary, 8 weeks for “a mid-term doc, with some set up, some background investigations, some overall look at and discussion”, and 4 weeks for “an ordinary doc which you could just make by going out and shooting” (Interview, Davies, 2006). As budgets were standardized and performance targets in the BBC became more explicit in the early 1990s, the amount of time devoted to research was brought in line with the time taken by independents working for the BBC. This resulted in a sharp decline in the time allotted for a programme’s production:

They took the indies research time which was niggardly, and imposed it on the BBC. These were independents producing documentaries for the BBC, and when they looked at the amount of time they spent on research, and how much the BBC spent, which had always governed the BBC's ability to produce well crafted, well researched programmes, suddenly you were going to get as much time as the independents. (Interview, Davies, 2006)

Anon A, as an executive producer at the BBC, estimated the decline as 12 weeks (1980s) to 4 weeks (2000s) of research per hour long programme (Interview, Anon A, 2006). Martin Davidson, as an executive producer at the BBC, claimed that the entire research period for an hour long programme could be as little as four weeks by the early 2000s (Interview, Davidson, 2006). Independent producers Colin Thomas and Simon Berthon also claimed that the total production schedules, including research, decreased during the 1990s<sup>47</sup>.

The decline in research time within the production schedule had several effects. Martin Davidson noted that it became increasingly common for junior members of staff to undertake research, rather than experienced researchers, and that this led to a duplication of existing research or the re-use of formulaic locations, rather than new material being found (Interview, Davidson, 2006). For independent producers, Simon Berthon and Colin Thomas asserted that the shortfall in research was made up by independent producers in their own time (Interviews: Thomas, 2006; Berthon, 2006).

Peter Grimsdale argued that the reduction in research time was to some extent mitigated by improvements in information technology, such as the internet and email, which had sped up the production process, including the researching process (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006).

Don't listen to anybody who says, 'it's all gone to hell, smaller budgets, no time to do anything anymore', I don't sign up to that. Programmes are better than they used to be. One of the reasons that they are more successful is that they are better. Better made, cleverer, more inventive. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006).

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<sup>47</sup> Colin Thomas estimated a decline in the total production time of a programme from 12 to 8 weeks during the 1990s (Interview, Thomas, 2006). Simon Berthon estimated the same change as from 18 to 14 weeks during between 1993 and 2002 (Interview, Berthon, 2006).

Simon Berthon agreed that there could be a benefit from the speed brought to research through technology. However, Berthon also considered the use of new media technology in research to have its dangers: “But there are perils with internet research, with fact checking. Broadcasters argue you can do your work faster, and there is an element of truth in that. I haven’t heard them make that argument, but it is a subtext.” (Interview, Berthon, 2006). Anon B, a film archivist at the BBC for 30 years, agreed, and claimed that the speeding up of research through the use of new technology had mixed blessings. The increasing use of first VHS, and then streamed video, made the process of researching archives easier and quicker. The speed of these searches however, could lead to an archivist missing rare undiscovered footage, relying instead on the well-trodden paths of previous researchers (Interview, Anon B, 2006). In addition, the move to digitize archive holdings has also endangered the precision with which archives could be researched, as important paper records were often not included with the visual material:

I used to go all over the world to archive. Now it’s done all over the web. Some of it, Pathe, they are aiming to have it all online. But, even the BBC's own archive is not shot listed, and they'll never have the money to do it. It doesn’t just apply to the BBC, but also to other places, the BFI or whatever. (Interview, Anon B, 2006)

#### 5.2.4.2 Filming/Video Taping

Very few interviewees discussed the impact of political economic changes on the ‘filming’ phase of the production of history documentaries. The majority of interviewees’ responses concerning this phase in production were centred on techniques and form, which are discussed in Chapter 7. However, amongst the few to

give an opinion, there was a consensus that technological advance had brought advantages to the production of history documentary.

Peter Grimsdale claimed that the move from filming on film to video tape was a great help to the makers of history documentaries, especially those who made extensive use of interviews. When interviews were shot on film during the 1980s and early 1990s, ten minute reels cost around £55 (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006). Whilst *Vérité*<sup>48</sup> productions such as *40 Minutes* (BBC2, 1981-1994) could be made at an acceptable cost, at a filming ratio of 10 minutes filmed to one minute broadcast, interview based history documentaries could not possibly achieve such a low ratio, and were consequently expensive to make (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006). The cost of video tape, which gradually replaced film as the dominant format throughout the 1990s, could be as cheap as one penny a minute (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006). This therefore caused a shift: interview-based history documentary had been an expensive genre in the 1980s and early 1990s, but became increasingly less so during the 1990s (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006).

Grimsdale also claimed that experimentation with new video formats during the early 1990s, including those which had previously been considered for domestic use only, liberated programme makers from their dependence on professional crews. They were still used, but only when needed. This contributed to a flourishing of various approaches to history on television (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006). The technology facilitated intimate and informal documentary making practices, such as those used in

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<sup>48</sup> 'Vérité' is a term used by Brian Winston to describe the prevalent form of observational film making in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s, before the appearance of docusoap. It comprises a combination of the generic characteristics usually associated with both 'Direct Cinema' and 'Cinema Vérité' (Winston, 1995: 210-211).

observational documentary making (Interview, Dugan, 2006). Hamish Mykura recalled that in the late 1990s a generation of miniature digital cameras with enhanced features, such as the capacity to record in low light, led to a change in the visual conventions used in history documentaries:

Five years ago, if I wanted to do an interview with you in this room, I would have had to light it, taking a team of two guys, and 25 minutes. This was because cameras were not sophisticated enough to film in a good way unless you were lit. Plus there was an expectation that you were lit; it was the way things were done. Nowadays, somebody will turn up - one person - with a DV camera, set the DV camera up, do the interview, pack it up and go away. There might be a single light, there might be no light, the way the digital cameras can capture images is so much more sophisticated and better than what film cameras could do. (Interview, Mykura, 2006)

These developments also changed the expectations of the audience:

There is also an expectation now that not everything will be lit like a film. When you see stuff shot on wobble cam following someone round a hospital where a cameraman bumps into a door, and a cameraman goes flying, filming their feet for ten seconds and then coming back up, whilst someone was wheeled into the operating theatre. Because people have their own video cameras at home, because in a way everyone is a film maker, everyone understands that that is what the stuff you shoot ends up looking like. So people are much more prepared to accept those kinds of sequences. All that has allowed more to be made for less. (Interview, Mykura, 2006).

In addition the convergence of miniature digital cameras and new media technology came together with the low price and high performance of video tape to create series *1900 House* (Channel Four, 1999) or *The Edwardian Country House* (Channel Four, 2002) in which several miniature cameras with enhanced exposure were able to capture every moment of the life of its participants (Interview, Mykura, 2006).



#### 5.2.4.3 Editing

There was a consensus amongst the interviewees that editing periods had declined. As a producer and archivist, Anon B, estimated the decline in editing time between the 1980s and the early 2000s as from 12 weeks to 2 weeks at the BBC (Interview, Anon B, 2006). From the perspective of an executive producer of landmark history series throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Anon A witnessed a decline from 12 weeks of editing in the 1980s, to 4 weeks in the early 2000s. Although this could be explained by technological advance, it was associated with detrimental effects on the editing process: “Some of that is in efficiency in editing. But on the whole things are less well researched and less lovingly edited now than they were then.” (Interview, Anon A, 2006).

From the perspective of an independent producer, David Dugan claimed that editing periods had decreased since his company began in 1988. But they had not fallen below an acceptable position: he had been able to maintain acceptable editing periods through increased levels of co-production funding:

Not for us, but we might be slightly odd. We make more blue chip higher end stuff, so we never edit a single film in less than seven weeks, and that's what we stick to. If they can't afford it, our approach is to get more co-production money. It hasn't affected us, but I know that shooting periods and editing periods have come down a bit. (Interview, Dugan, 2006)

Hamish Mykura, as an independent producer in the mid 1990s and a commissioning editor in the early 2000s, was confident that any decline in editing periods had been the product of time savings through new technology (Interview, Mykura, 2006).

Programmes such as *1900 House* (Channel Four, 1999) or *The Edwardian Country House* (Channel Four, 2002) not only needed innovations in camera technology, but also the ability to deal with enormous amounts of material quickly, which was a feature of the new digital editing systems (Ibid).

However, whilst David Dugan agreed that the technology of editing had become cheaper during the 1990s, the cost of the human technicians had also risen steadily, and therefore digital editing systems such as AVID had not necessarily made the process of post production less expensive (Interview, Dugan, 2006). In fact David Dugan was still implementing linear methods of editing, especially in the last stages of the post-production process, because of fears over the quality of the finish delivered by digital editing systems (Interview, Dugan, 2006)

The other main aspect of the impact of emergent technologies on editing was the use of computer generated imagery (CGI). There was a consensus regarding the growing uses of this technology. From the perspective of a commissioning editor, Laurence Rees argued that CGI, especially following the example of *Walking With Dinosaurs* (BBC and Discovery, 1999) had transformed history documentaries in terms of reach, scale and price. Another commissioner, Alan Hayling, believed that *Walking With Dinosaurs* (BBC / Discovery, 1999) was a key moment, because it was the first time such technology had been possible on documentary budgets, as the decreasing price of the technology met the increasing history documentary budgets (Interview, Hayling, 2006). From a BBC producer's point of view, Martin Davidson claimed that CGI had become indispensable for certain subjects (Interview, Davidson, 2006). From an independent producer's view, David Dugan claimed that while CGI allowed stories

to be told that otherwise would not be televisual enough to be commissioned, the price of CGI meant that any programme using it well had to be co-produced (Interview, Dugan, 2006). Anon A added that CGI had changed the priorities of history documentary makers, demanding that more time be spent on “the visual processing of the programme” (Interview, Anon A, 2006). This had the effect of lowering the concentration span of the audience (Ibid).

### **5.3 Causes of the Changes in History Documentary Production**

The chapter has outlined a number of changes to the institutional setting, aims and management of history documentary between 1982 and 2002. The next section outlines the main causes of these changes.

Very few interviewees made any explicit connections between the changing production environment for history documentaries, and political or economic changes. Those who did fell into one of two groups. Firstly, there were those who felt the policies of Margaret Thatcher (Prime minister 1979-1990) had damaged the production culture of the 1980s, and had introduced competitive forces that had a damaging effect on collegial working practices, and programme quality (Interviews: Anon B, 2006; Nelmes, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Ware, 2006; Ryan, 2006). Others viewed changes more dispassionately (Interviews: Carey, 2006; Attwell, 2006). Similarly, very few interviewees cited emerging technology as a driving force behind the changing production environment for history documentary.

Most interviewees felt that the development of history documentary was driven by individuals, and not by policy. It was claimed that although television seemed market driven during the 1990s, it was in fact personality led (Interview, Carey, 2006). A significant amount of market research was done into history documentary output, but this market research was seldom utilized in the commissioning decisions (Interview, Mykura, 2006). It was posited that this dependence on individual taste was due to the unpredictable nature of successful television production, whether it was measured by critical acclaim or viewing figures (Interview, Hayling, 2006).

However, individuals only had a limited amount of power over events, and could only exercise their personal taste within the economically and institutionally determined confines of their remits. Even John Willis, a controller who was consistently praised by interviewees for the editorial autonomy he gave producers in the early 1990s, would have found it difficult to do so in the more competitive television environment of the late 1990s. Whatever John Willis might have done differently to Michael Jackson had he been appointed chief executive of Channel Four in 1997, interviewees felt that he would have had to contend with the same pressures brought on by external factors such as increasing channel choice, the internet and digitalisation (Interviews: Hayling, 2006; Ware, 2006).

In addition, the power of key individuals could not be easily divorced from the context which gave them that power. Laurence Rees had been a central and powerful figure in the commissioning of history documentaries from 1992 until the end of the period under study here. Rees' commissioning choices, and particularly his interest in the Second World War, not only steered the BBC's editorial direction in terms of

history documentary, but also influenced those of other terrestrial channels (Interview, Mykura, 2006). However, a figure such as Laurence Rees remained in a powerful and influential position because of a complex interplay of factors. Rees was a capable institutional power broker who knew how to retain power through the skilful manipulation of institutional discourses (Interview, Clay, 2006).

However, Rees' might have also benefited from the concurrence of his editorial interests with a historical area with mass audience appeal, the Second World War. Rees was also able to compromise on editorial approach if his survival in a position of power required it, but was able to do this without losing the confidence of other key power brokers in the BBC (Interview, Anon A, 2006). Rees was therefore able to retain power and make compromises, whilst still retaining the credibility to influence practice in other part of the industry:

He does kick off wave after wave of World War Two programming, because he inspires others to do the same, so you find just because Laurence Rees exists, there will probably be 15 years of World War Two programming. If he didn't exist, there would probably still be some World War Two programming, but it wouldn't be quite the same. (Interview, Mykura, 2006)

Although Rees was an outstanding example, the same mix of factors were in play with several other commissioners of history documentary during the period such as Roy Davies (BBC, 1982-1992), Peter Moore (Channel Four 1988-1995), Peter Grimsdale (Channel Four, 1994-1999). However, for whatever reason, Rees managed to remain in his post for longer than any of these individuals.

## 5.4 Conclusion

The interview material gathered in this study has indicated a number of developments in the conditions in which history documentaries were produced for UK terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002. The economy drive and management revolution at the BBC in the late 1980s led to the standardisation of management practices driven by a power shift from producers to accountants. At Channel Four, there was a shift from experimentation in programming under Jeremy Isaacs to a more commercial outlook under Michael Grade, and a centralisation of management under Michael Jackson. For Independents, the 1980s and early 1990s was a period of growth, as staff left both ITV and BBC to set up new production companies. However, the late 1990s and early 2000s was a period of consolidation, as the number of independent production companies shrank, and their size increased. For ITV, the effects of the inception of Channel Four and the 1990 Broadcasting Act led to a commercialisation and eventual consolidation of the network.

In terms of changes in commissioning at the BBC, there was a standardisation of commissioning structures in the early 1990s, in comparison to the more fluid situation in the 1980s. The standardisation also brought a greater emphasis on measured performance, and a less collegial working atmosphere. Competition within the BBC fostered innovation in regional centres like Bristol in the mid 1990s. In 1998 the Discovery co-production deal altered the requirements of controllers, and brought them in line with those of the market in the USA. For Channel Four, commissioning was centralised under Willis, and then again under Gardam, but there were debates as to the effect on producer autonomy. For ITV, the changes in regulator guidelines

about serious documentary led to a migration of history documentaries made by ITV companies to Channel Four.

At the BBC, the changes in commissioning led to the growing importance of audience size and audience profile from the early 1990s onwards, and a bifurcation of budgets into high cost / low volume, and high volume / low cost models. The former was driven by an increasing dependence on co-production funding. Whilst co-production had always existed as a practice within the BBC, it grew in editorial significance during the late 1990s. However, this increase was not driven exclusively by the need to bolster shrinking budgets, but also to extend the expressive possibilities of history documentaries.

At Channel Four, the size and nature of the audience became more important to history documentary production in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the requirement for history documentaries to deliver certain audiences was made explicit later than at the BBC. Budgets neither rose nor declined over the period, nor did they standardise or bifurcate to the same extent as at the BBC. Co-production had always been a part of Channel Four commissioning practice, and had not been standardised during the 1990s to the same extent as at the BBC. However, independent producers debated whether co-production was a release from commissioner centrality, or an abandonment of the principles of diversity and minority access that had initially motivated independent film making in the UK.

Before 1990, history documentary was protected on ITV by IBA regulations governing programme quotas, together with the comfortable financial status of ITV

during a period of high advertising revenues and little commercial competition for audience share. Consequently, in the 1980s, ITV producers were often not aware of the budgets of their programmes, nor of any requirement to attract an audience as a condition for re-commission. However, after 1990, few history documentary topics could ensure a large enough audience for ITV. However, when awarded, programme budgets during the 1990s were still competitive, if not higher, than those normally seen at Channel Four or the BBC. For Channel Five, changes in commissioning personnel led to the pursuit of an up-market audience. This was partly led by history documentaries whose production was entirely dependent on substantial co-production funding.

In terms of the time given to research within a production schedule, and the role technology played in 'Research', there was a division between those who noted a decline in research time and research quality, those who believed that new technology had improved research and those that noted benefits and possible pitfalls for the use of technology. There was a consensus that there had been a decline in editing times. Some producers questioned the improvement gained through quicker editing processes and the use of CGI, whilst others were complimentary regarding the effect on digital editing systems and graphics techniques on the production of history documentary.

This chapter has argued that while general changes to the political economy of UK television between 1982 and 2002 were reflected to some extent in the changing practices underpinning history documentary production, history documentary was affected by the general changes in a unique way. In addition, changes to the ways



history documentaries were produced varied between broadcasters, as did the views about the nature and reasons for change expressed by the interviewees. The next chapter will build on these indicative findings by using content analysis to open up the thesis' third main area of discussion: what were the effects of changes in the political economy of television, and of the production of history documentary, on the form and content of the genre.

## Chapter 6: History Documentary on Television

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents results from the analysis of television listings between 1982 and 2002. The analysis was conducted to answer questions associated with the second and third research questions of the thesis. The thesis' second main research question addressed the relationship between changes in the political economy of television and the production of history documentaries. This research question addressed the relationship between the amounts of programmes in different genres across the sample over time, in order to address four main concerns to do with television's changing political economy. Firstly the question of the growth of factual television relative to other genres (Corner, 1996; Dovey, 2000; Winston, 2000) was examined by comparing the number of programmes of different genres across the schedule over time.

Secondly, the amount of history documentary was compared to the occurrence of other sub-genres of factual programming in order to evaluate the relationship between history documentary and factual programming on television. Thirdly, the position of history documentary in the broadcast schedule was examined and compared to the position of other genres in the schedule. This was done by looking at the position of history documentary in 'peak time'. Fourthly, the amount of co-production in history documentary was calculated in order to test assertions in the literature regarding the globalisation of history documentary commissioning, in the context of a squeeze on history documentary budgets as a result of the intensification of the commercialisation

of television, and the quest for higher budgets to fulfil the expressive aspirations of history producers.

The analysis was also conducted to answer questions in association with the thesis' third main research question, which explored the connection between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002, and changes in history documentary form over the same period. This was done in three main ways. Firstly, history documentaries were counted in terms of the period they covered. Secondly, they were counted in terms of the topics covered. Thirdly, history documentaries were counted according to the type of documentary form employed. This allowed for the content and style of history documentary to be described in a general, but systematic manner.

Each sub-section within sections 6.2-6.4 begins by presenting the analysis of a specific set of data, followed by an evaluation. Section 6.5 concludes the chapter. It is important to emphasise at the outset that the figures discussed here are indicative, due to the necessarily selective nature of the sampling. However, no other study has attempted to produce empirical data of this kind, on this genre, over this period.

## 6.2 Total Numbers of History documentary

### 6.2.1 Total number of history documentaries across the period

The first question to be answered was whether the total number of history documentaries<sup>49</sup> broadcast in the UK had increased during the period 1982-2002.

|              | Number of History Documentaries | Total Programmes in Sample | History Documentaries as % of Total Sample |
|--------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1982         | 23                              | 807                        | 2.85%                                      |
| 1987         | 38                              | 990                        | 3.8%                                       |
| 1992         | 14                              | 989                        | 1.4%                                       |
| 1997         | 34                              | 1206                       | 2.8%                                       |
| 2002         | 62                              | 1243                       | 4.98%                                      |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>171</i>                      | <i>5235</i>                | <i>3.36%</i>                               |

Table 6.1: Total History Documentaries on UK Terrestrial TV Channels, 1982-2002. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002)

Firstly, Table 6.1 indicates that there was an increase in history documentaries on terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002. Secondly, Table 6.1 suggests a less than simple rate of growth. It indicates that whilst the absolute amount of history documentary had risen considerably between 1982 and 2002 (23-62), there was a more modest rise in the proportion of history documentary as a % of all programmes within the sample between 1982 and 2002 (2.85%-4.98%). Part of the rise in the number of individual history documentaries in the sample might therefore be accounted for by the general rise in programme numbers between 1982 and 2002. Table 6.1 also shows an increase in history documentaries broadcast between 1982 and 1987 (22-38), a steep decline between 1982 and 1992 (38-14), and then a steep increase between 1992 and 1997 (14-34), and 1997 and 2002 (33-62).

<sup>49</sup> For the working definition of a history documentary, see Chapter 2 ('Literature Review'), Section 6.

The pattern initially indicated by these figures does support the claims of an increase in history documentary on UK terrestrial television in the late 1990s, as discussed in the literature review. However, these initial figures suggest that it might be as accurate to describe the late 1990s increase as ‘resurgence’, as it would be to describe it as a ‘boom’.

#### 6.2.2 History documentaries between 1982-2002 on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five.

To get a more detailed picture of the nature of the general trends outlined in Table 6.1, the same data was analysed according to channel. Table 6.2 indicates the breakdown of history documentaries by channel.

|              | BBC1          | BBC2          | ITV          | C4            | C5            | Total          |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>1982</b>  | 4<br>(17.3%)  | 14<br>(60.8%) | 2<br>(8.7%)  | 3<br>(13.6%)  |               | 23<br>(2.88%)  |
| <b>1987</b>  | 10<br>(26.3%) | 11<br>(28.9%) | 3<br>(7.8%)  | 14<br>(36.8%) |               | 38<br>(3.86%)  |
| <b>1992</b>  | 1<br>(7.1%)   | 6<br>(42.8%)  | 2<br>(14.2%) | 5<br>(35.7%)  |               | 14<br>(1.43%)  |
| <b>1997</b>  | 5<br>(14.7%)  | 17<br>(50%)   | 4<br>(11.7%) | 8<br>(23.5%)  |               | 34<br>(2.82%)  |
| <b>2002</b>  | 1<br>(1.6%)   | 30<br>(48.3%) | 2<br>(3.2%)  | 17<br>(27.4%) | 12<br>(19.4%) | 62<br>(5.53%)  |
| <b>Total</b> | 21<br>(12.2%) | 78<br>(45.6%) | 13<br>(7.6%) | 47<br>(27.5%) | 12<br>(7%)    | 171<br>(3.36%) |

Table 6.2: History Documentaries on All Terrestrial Channels. Figures expressed as actual number of programmes. Bracketed figures in channels’ columns represent history documentaries as a percentage of the total number of history documentaries made by all channels in that year. Bracketed figures in the total column represent history total documentary output as a percentage of total output in all genres (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

The bottom row of Table 6.2 indicates that the BBC was a greater producer of history documentaries than independent television, with a combined percentage of 57.8%

(12.2% + 45.6%); compared with the combined percentage of ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five of 42.1% (7.6%+27.5%+7%). In terms of individual channels, BBC2 was the greatest contributor, with 45.6%, but the second channel in terms of contribution was Channel Four with 27.5%. BBC1 was third (12.2%), whilst Channel Five (7%) was almost the equal of ITV (7.6%), despite having only broadcast history documentaries in the 2002 section of the sample.

However, there was a degree of variance for each channel across the period. BBC2 was by far the greatest contributor of history documentaries in 1982. In terms of the number of history documentaries broadcast according to the sample, BBC2's output fell between 1982 and 1987 (14-11), and 1987 and 1992 (11-6). BBC2's history documentary output then climbed sharply between 1992 and 1997 (6-17), and again between 1997 and 2002 (17-30). BBC2's proportion of all history documentaries fell between 1982 and 1987 (60.8-28.9%). However, although the actual number of broadcasts fell between 1987 and 1992, BBC2's proportion of history documentary broadcasts within the sample was rose sharply (28.9-42.8%). There then followed a smaller rise between 1992 and 1997 (42.8-50%), with a slight decrease between 1997 and 2002 (50-48.3%). BBC2 typified the general trends of history documentary's decline and resurgence in the sample between 1982 and 2002.

Channel Four's 1982 figures were based on only one week's sample within 1982, due to the fact that the channel was not launched until November of that year. Considering this limited sample, Channel Four's history documentary output was high, and would have been similar to BBC2's if the channel had been operating throughout 1982. By 1987 Channel Four was the largest producer of history documentary in terms of actual

programmes in the sample (14), but by 1992 it had fallen behind BBC2 (5). Channel Four remained second to BBC2 in 1992, 1997 and 2002. However, whilst Channel Four's history documentary output grew from 1992 to 1997 to 2002 (5-8-17), history documentary as a proportion of Channel Four's total output fell from 1992 to the levels of 1997 and 2002 (35.7-23.5-27.4%). Channel Four's history documentary output was therefore less fluctuant than BBC2's during the period; it neither fell as low in 1987, nor as high in 1997<sup>50</sup>.

In 1982, BBC1's output was lower than BBC2's, and similar to that of Channel Four, even though Channel Four only fell into a quarter of the sample for 1982. But in 1987, BBC1 was comparable in history documentary output to BBC2 and Channel Four. There followed a significant decline in BBC1's history documentary output between 1987 and 1992. In 1997, BBC1's output rose from 1992 (1) to 1997 (5), as did its proportion (7.1%-14.7%). But in 2002, BBC1 only broadcast 1 history documentary in the sample. ITV was consistently behind both BBC channels and Channel Four in its contribution to history documentary output.

ITV was also very consistent in its output, broadcasting between 2 and 4 programmes in each year sample. However, due to the fluctuation of the total number of history documentaries broadcast in the sample, ITV's proportion varied between 14.2% (1992) and 3.2% (2002). The numbers of ITV programmes in the sample make any detection of wider trends difficult, but the figures suggest that ITV maintained a more modest but regular history documentary output than BBC2 and Channel Four.

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<sup>50</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 119-129 for a fuller explanation of the interpretive limits of these figures.

Channel Five did not broadcast any history documentaries in the sample for 1997. However, by 2002, Channel Five broadcast more history documentaries than either BBC1 or ITV, and its output was comparable to Channel Four's. However, Channel Five's output influenced the overall number for 2002, as its 12 programmes accounted for half of the numerical increase between the total number of history documentaries in 1997 and 2002.

### 6.2.3 Evaluation: Amount of History Documentary between 1982 and 2002

Table 6.1 indicates a substantial growth in history documentary output on terrestrial television during the period, from 23 (2.8%) in 1982 to 62 (4.98%) in 2002. The figures also show that the BBC showed most history documentaries throughout the period, in contrast to advertising-funded broadcasters, suggesting a link between PSB and history documentary. The figures also suggested that even though history documentary had grown in frequency during the period, it was a minority, niche genre. In terms of individual channels, BBC2 was the most prolific broadcaster of history documentaries, suggesting that they were scheduled in a channel that had a less active audience-maximising agenda than BBC1. The second highest contributor to history documentary was Channel Four, a channel with a particular PSB remit to serve minorities and innovate, and which consistently achieved a smaller audience share than ITV (Goodwin, 1998: 156; Brown, 2007: 266). Conversely, these figures suggest that the changing fortunes of ITV, and to a lesser extent BBC1, have had very little effect on the output of history documentary.

At first glance therefore, the figures seem to suggest that the number of history documentaries grew during a period in which other forms of PSB programming such



as current affairs and the single play were declining (Barnett and Seymour, 1999; O'Malley, 2001). The inference could also be drawn that this growth was made possible by either the relatively unchanged and protected nature of PSB values at BBC2 and Channel Four, or that a growth in history documentary was itself a sign of commercialisation.

However, the figures also indicate that there was a decline in the output of history documentaries on UK terrestrial television in the years between 1987 and 1992. This process of decline and resurgence between 1987 and 1997 was not discussed in any literature on the topic (Dovey, 2000; Hunt, 2006; Winston, 2006; Bell and Gray, 2007; Chapman, 2007; Williams, 2007), which has instead characterised the change in history documentary as one of continuous growth from the mid 1990s. Despite the limited nature of this sample, this finding of a decline between 1987 and 1992 raises questions about developments in PSB in these years, and whether the numbers of history documentaries was a barometer of some deeper structural change in UK broadcasting.

### **6.3 Context of History Documentary**

#### 6.3.1 Television Genres Between 1982-2002

In order to add detail to the analysis of the fluctuations in history documentary between 1982 and 2002, the output was examined in the context of changes to output in other genres.

| Programme Genres    | 1982 | 1987 | 1992 | 1997 | 2002 |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Arts                | 1    | 3    | 3    | 1    | 1    |
| Comedy              | 7    | 8    | 12   | 10   | 6    |
| Current Affairs     | 3    | 6    | 6    | 4    | 2    |
| Documentary         | 13   | 13   | 14   | 16   | 15   |
| History Documentary | 3    | 4    | 1    | 3    | 5    |
| Drama               | 15   | 12   | 11   | 10   | 9    |
| Light Entertainment | 4    | 6    | 6    | 8    | 7    |
| Leisure             | 1    | 2    | 2    | 5    | 3    |
| Music               | 7    | 4    | 2    | 2    | 2    |
| News                | 27   | 18   | 18   | 18   | 18   |
| Sport               | 5    | 5    | 3    | 3    | 4    |

Table 6.3: TV Genres as a Percentage of the Total Number of Programmes in Sample<sup>51</sup>. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

Table 6.3 suggests that different genres either declined, remained the same or grew during the period of 1982-2002 as a % of all programming. In terms of decline, 'Drama' gradually decreased between 1982 and 2002. 'News' dipped between 1982 and 1987 and then remained constant. In terms of stasis, 'Documentary' changed very little, and 'Arts', 'Comedy', 'Current Affairs' and 'Sport' all either grew or declined slightly during the period, but were found in the sample in similar proportions in both 1982 and 2002. In terms of growth, 'Light Entertainment' and 'Leisure' genres grew slightly during the period. In comparison, 'History Documentary' was fairly static between 1982 and 1987, decreased from 1987 to 1992, and then grew through 1997 to 2002.

Tables 6.4 and 6.5 show how the same genres declined, remained the same or grew during the period on the separate channels. Each Channel will be considered in turn, but are grouped according to the number of history documentaries broadcast, with the major contributors shown first. Table 6.4 shows the data for the two larger

<sup>51</sup> Figures show the most frequent genres only, sometimes leading to uneven total percentages under 100%.

contributors to the broadcast of history documentary, BBC2 and Channel Four. Table 6.5 shows the data for BBC1, ITV and Channel Five.

| Programme Genres    | 1982 |    | 1987 |    | 1992 |    | 1997 |    | 2002 |    |
|---------------------|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|
|                     | BBC2 | C4 | BBC2 | C4 | BBC2 | C4 | BBC2 | C4 | BBC2 | C4 |
| Arts                | 2    | 6  | 5    | 5  | 7    | 3  | 3    | 1  | 3    | 0  |
| Comedy              | 3    | 6  | 4    | 10 | 7    | 22 | 12   | 19 | 9    | 14 |
| Current Affairs     | 1    | 4  | 6    | 12 | 5    | 10 | 3    | 1  | 1    | 0  |
| Documentary         | 22   | 14 | 18   | 21 | 26   | 16 | 26   | 21 | 27   | 23 |
| History Documentary | 6    | 6  | 5    | 6  | 3    | 2  | 6    | 3  | 14   | 7  |
| Drama               | 9    | 10 | 11   | 11 | 10   | 9  | 11   | 9  | 11   | 6  |
| Light Entertainment | 3    | 4  | 1    | 1  | 1    | 7  | 4    | 7  | 6    | 8  |
| Leisure             | 4    | 0  | 5    | 2  | 5    | 2  | 10   | 4  | 6    | 3  |
| Music               | 11   | 8  | 8    | 3  | 4    | 1  | 2    | 4  | 5    | 1  |
| News                | 21   | 20 | 13   | 12 | 10   | 8  | 10   | 9  | 9    | 13 |
| Sport               | 9    | 2  | 9    | 3  | 5    | 2  | 3    | 2  | 7    | 3  |

Table 6.4: Programmes by Genre: BBC2 and Channel Four. Programmes listed by genre and expressed as a percentage of the total number of programmes on all channels in the sample, for each year<sup>52</sup>. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

On BBC2 the ‘dip’ seen in ‘History Documentary’ numbers in Table 6.1, where numbers decreased from 1982 to 1992, and then rose again towards 2002, is shared by ‘Light Entertainment’ and ‘Documentary’. However ‘Sport’, ‘Drama’, ‘Arts’, and ‘Current Affairs’ experienced the opposite; a slight growth followed by a decline.

On Channel Four, ‘Arts’, ‘Current Affairs’ and ‘Music’ declined between 1982 and 2002. ‘Drama’, ‘Sport’ and ‘Current Affairs’ remained static. ‘Comedy’, ‘Leisure’ and ‘Documentary’ grew between 1982 and 2002. ‘Light Entertainment’, ‘History Documentary’ and ‘News’ followed a similar trend: they declined between 1982 and

<sup>52</sup> See footnote 31.

the middle of the sample, but then increased towards the end of the sample. ‘History Documentary’ experienced the greater increase towards the end of the sample.

| Programme Genres    | 1982 |    | 1987 |    | 1992 |    | 1997 |    | 2002 |    |    |    |
|---------------------|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|----|----|
|                     | BB   | IT | BB   | IT | BB   | IT | BB   | IT | C5   | BB | IT | C5 |
|                     | C1   | V  | C1   | V  | C1   | V  | C1   | V  |      | C1 | V  |    |
| Arts                | 1    | 1  | 5    | 0  | 2    | 2  | 1    | 1  | 0    | 2  | 1  | 1  |
| Comedy              | 9    | 9  | 13   | 8  | 19   | 7  | 14   | 3  | 3    | 8  | 2  | 2  |
| Current Affairs     | 5    | 2  | 4    | 4  | 4    | 3  | 5    | 4  | 1    | 5  | 5  | 0  |
| Documentary         | 12   | 8  | 11   | 6  | 11   | 7  | 16   | 10 | 10   | 12 | 9  | 19 |
| History Documentary | 1    | 1  | 5    | 1  | 1    | 1  | 2    | 2  | 0    | 1  | 1  | 6  |
| Drama               | 19   | 20 | 15   | 16 | 13   | 15 | 13   | 14 | 5    | 11 | 11 | 15 |
| Light Entertainment | 2    | 6  | 4    | 12 | 5    | 7  | 5    | 10 | 14   | 2  | 8  | 4  |
| Leisure             | 0    | 0  | 2    | 0  | 1    | 2  | 4    | 1  | 6    | 6  | 3  | 1  |
| Music               | 10   | 4  | 5    | 2  | 3    | 0  | 3    | 1  | 0    | 5  | 1  | 4  |
| News                | 32   | 33 | 28   | 27 | 35   | 27 | 32   | 28 | 22   | 43 | 30 | 14 |
| Sport               | 8    | 2  | 7    | 4  | 7    | 2  | 4    | 2  | 3    | 7  | 5  | 0  |

Table 6.5: Programmes by Genre: BBC1, ITV and Channel Five. Programmes listed by genre and expressed as a percentage of the total number of programmes on all channels in the sample, for each year<sup>53</sup>. (Source, *Radio Times*, various edition, 1982-2002)

On BBC1, ‘Drama’ and ‘Music’ declined from 1982 to 2002<sup>54</sup>. ‘Comedy’, ‘Documentary’ and ‘Light Entertainment’ grew and then declined over the period. ‘Current Affairs’ and ‘History Documentary’ stayed at a similar level throughout the sample. ‘Leisure’ and ‘News’ both grew over the sample period. On ITV, ‘Comedy’ and ‘Drama’ declined. In terms of stasis, ‘Arts’, ‘Documentary’ ‘History Documentary’ and ‘Sport’ maintained a steady proportion. On Channel Five, ‘Comedy’, ‘Current Affairs’, ‘Light Entertainment’, ‘Leisure’, ‘News’ and ‘Sport’ declined. ‘Arts’, ‘Documentary’ and ‘History Documentary’, ‘Drama’ and ‘Film’ grew in proportion between 1997 and 2002.

<sup>53</sup> See footnote 31.

<sup>54</sup> This figure is open to interpretation, as the BBC handbook for this year indicates a growth between 1982 and 1987. See Chapter 3, pages 95-6 for an explanation of the difficulties in using broadcaster yearbooks.

### 6.3.1.1 Evaluation: History Documentary in Relation to All Genres, 1982-2002

There was a decrease in the amount of ‘Drama’ and ‘News’ in the schedule during the overall period, which lends supports to the arguments regarding the commercialisation of television during the period (Seymour & Barnett, 1999; Born, 2005). The ‘Documentary’ genre remained relatively static as a proportion of all genres, a finding that seems to contradict claims that there was a growth in ‘Documentary’ in the 1990s, and that it replaced drama, situation comedy and light entertainment in the schedule (Dovey, 2000: 17-21, 133-138). ‘Light Entertainment’, ‘Leisure’ and ‘History Documentary’ all grew slightly in numbers and as a proportion of output. The growth of the first two genres suggest that they expressed the ways in which TV was responding to increased competition. The growth of history documentary therefore has to be viewed in the context of schedules that were adapting to increased competition.

### 6.3.2 History documentary and other Documentary Sub-genres

After identifying the patterns of growth and decline in history documentary on different channels in comparison to major genres, this section looks at the comparison between History Documentary and other sub genres of documentary.

Table 6.6 indicates that ‘Arts’ and ‘Wildlife’ grew from 1982 to 1992, then declined to 2002. ‘Current Affairs’ and ‘Science’ declined at the beginning of the sample, and then sustained a low level throughout the remainder. ‘Contemporary’ grew continuously from 1982 to 2002. ‘History’ also grew from between 1982 and 2002, but, ‘History’ as a proportion of all documentaries declined sharply between 1987 and

1992, before rising again in 1997 and 2002<sup>55</sup>. The figures therefore show that there was a shift in the mix of documentary genres from a spread in 1982 (12%, 6%, 20%, 12%, 22%, 18%, 10%) to a landscape in 2002 where two genres (‘Contemporary’ and ‘History’) were dominant at 49.2% and 32.5%, whilst the other genres were between 4% and 6%.

| <b>Documentary Sub-Genres</b> | <b>1982</b> | <b>1987</b> | <b>1992</b> | <b>1997</b> | <b>2002</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Arts                          | 12          | 18          | 19.8        | 15.1        | 4.6         |
| Business                      | 6           | 0           | 3.8         | 1.1         | 0           |
| Contemporary                  | 20          | 27.9        | 40.5        | 43.8        | 49.2        |
| Current / Foreign Affairs     | 12          | 7.4         | 3.8         | 1.6         | 4.1         |
| History                       | 22          | 31.1        | 10.7        | 17.8        | 32.5        |
| Science                       | 18          | 6.6         | 3.8         | 5.4         | 5.6         |
| Wildlife                      | 10          | 9           | 17.6        | 15.1        | 4.6         |

Table 6.6: Documentary Subgenres on all Channels. Figures are an expression of the percentage of all documentary programmes in the sample. (Source, *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002)

Whilst Table 6.6 shows the overall position of documentary sub-genres over the period, a more detailed analysis is required of the frequency of these documentary genres on each of the channels within the study. As with the earlier analysis of major genres, this analysis of documentary sub-genres places the channels into two groups depending on the amount of history documentary they produced. The first group comprises BBC2 and Channel Four, and the second BBC1, ITV and Channel Five.

#### BBC2 and Channel Four

Table 6.7 indicates that on BBC2, ‘Arts’ and ‘Wildlife’ grew towards the middle of the sample, and then declined towards 2002. ‘Science’ declined from 1982 to 1987, and remained at a lower level. ‘Current Affairs’ remained static throughout the

<sup>55</sup> This dip in history documentary numbers found in several different analyses in this chapter is discussed more fully in Chapter 9.

sample. ‘Contemporary’ doubled between 1982 and 1987, and increased again to 1992, and remained at a similar that level until 2002. ‘History’ Documentary declined from the levels of 1982 and 1987 to 1992 before doubling between 1992 and 1997, and 1997 and 2002.

| Documentary Sub-genres    | 1982 |      | 1987 |      | 1992 |      | 1997 |      | 2002 |      |
|---------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                           | BBC2 | C4   | BBC2 | C4   | BBC2 | C4   | BBC2 | C4   | BBC2 | C4   |
| Arts                      | 10.4 | 2.1  | 8.7  | 19.4 | 14.3 | 14.3 | 6.5  | 12.2 | 0    | 2    |
| Business                  | 10.4 | 0    | 0    | 2.1  | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1.8  | 0    |
| Contemporary              | 16.7 | 14.3 | 30.8 | 22.9 | 41.7 | 50   | 34.9 | 53.1 | 29.1 | 59.2 |
| Current & Foreign Affairs | 4.2  | 0    | 2.6  | 12.5 | 6.3  | 2.8  | 3.2  | 2    | 9.1  | 4.1  |
| History                   | 29.2 | 42.9 | 25.2 | 31.3 | 12.5 | 13.9 | 25.4 | 16.3 | 52.7 | 32.7 |
| Science                   | 20.8 | 28.6 | 7.7  | 8.3  | 2.1  | 2.8  | 6.3  | 10.2 | 1.8  | 2    |
| Wildlife                  | 8.3  | 0    | 10.3 | 11.1 | 14.6 | 8.2  | 11.1 | 6.1  | 5.5  | 0    |

Table 6.7: BBC2 & Channel Four Documentary Subgenres. Figures expressed as percentages of documentary output for each channel. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

For Channel Four, ‘Arts’ grew between 1982 and 1992, but declined towards 2002. Similarity, ‘Current Affairs’ grew between 1982 and 1987, they then declined for the remainder of the sample. ‘Science’ and ‘Wildlife’ declined from between 1982 and 2002. ‘Contemporary’ grew steadily and substantially between 1982 and 2002. ‘History’ did not grow over the whole sample, but dipped in 1992, grew in 1997, and then doubled between 1997 and 2002.

#### BBC1, ITV and Channel Five

Table 6.8 (see page 281) shows the percentages of documentary sub genres on BBC1, ITV and Channel Five. On BBC1, ‘Arts’ and ‘Science’, ‘History’ and ‘Wildlife’ all rose between 1982 and 1987, but declined overall between 1982 and 2002. ‘Current

Affairs' remained at a similar level through the period. 'Contemporary' almost tripled between 1982 and 2002. On ITV, 'Current Affairs', and 'Science' declined across the sample. 'Arts' and 'Wildlife' grew from 1982 towards the middle of the sample, and then declined to similar proportions in 2002. 'Contemporary' almost trebled across the sample period, from 19.2% to 57.1%. 'History' documentaries on ITV began and ended the period on 7.7%, although there was a high point in 1987 (20%) and a low in 1997 (0%). The sample was more limited for Channel Five, comprising only the years 1997 and 2002. Some movement, however, was seen across the years. There was a substantial decline in 'Wildlife', while 'Contemporary Documentary' was halved between 1997 and 2002. In contrast, 'History Documentary' grew substantially from 0% in 1987 to 34.6% in 2002.

#### 6.3.2.1 Evaluation: History Documentary and Documentary Sub-Genres

As the period developed, 'Contemporary Documentary' and 'History Documentary' became the dominant sub genres. Consequently, the spread of programming between different documentary genres narrowed, suggesting the mixed schedule of the traditional PSB broadcasting system was being challenged. Whilst both 'Contemporary Documentary' and 'History Documentary' grew to dominate documentary output over the period, the growth in 'Contemporary Documentary' was most evident on Channel Four, BBC1 and ITV, and the growth in 'History Documentary' more pronounced on BBC2 and Channel Five. This suggests that 'History Documentary' was both more suitable to the niche audiences of BBC2, Channel Four, and Channel Five, and was most successful still when protected by the stronger PSB remit of the BBC.



|                           | 1982 |     | 1987 |     | 1992 |     | 1997 |     |     | 2002 |     |     |
|---------------------------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|
|                           | BB   | IT  | BB   | IT  | BB   | IT  | BB   | IT  | C5  | BB   | IT  | C5  |
|                           | C1   | V   | C1   | V   | C1   | V   | C1   | V   |     | C1   | V   |     |
| Arts                      |      | 19. |      | 33. | 14.3 | 28. | 6.5  | 11. | 0   | 4.5  | 14. | 1   |
|                           | 19.2 | 2   | 8.7  | 3   |      | 6   |      | 1   |     |      | 3   |     |
| Business                  | 3.8  | 0   | 0    | 0   | 4.8  | 4.8 | 0    | 0   | 0   | 4.5  | 0   | 0   |
| Contemporary              |      | 26. |      | 33. | 38.1 | 47. | 61.3 | 38. | 18. | 59.1 | 57. | 8.6 |
|                           | 19.2 | 9   | 26.1 | 3   |      | 6   |      | 9   | 8   |      | 1   |     |
| Current & Foreign Affairs |      | 23. |      | 13. | 4.8  | 4.8 | 3.2  | 0   | 0   | 4.5  | 4.8 | 0   |
|                           |      | 1   |      | 3   |      |     |      |     |     |      |     |     |
|                           | 3.8  |     | 0    |     |      |     |      |     |     |      |     |     |
| History                   |      | 7.7 |      | 20  | 4.8  | 0   | 16.1 | 11. | 0   | 4.5  | 9.5 | 34. |
|                           | 11.5 |     | 43.5 |     |      |     |      | 1   |     |      |     | 6   |
| Science                   |      | 11. |      | 0   | 14.3 | 0   | 6.5  | 0   | 6.3 | 4.5  | 4.8 | 1   |
|                           | 19.2 | 5   | 8.7  |     |      |     |      |     |     |      |     |     |
| Wildlife                  |      | 11. |      | 0   | 23.8 | 14. | 9.7  | 38. | 75  | 9.1  | 9.5 | 5.7 |
|                           | 23.1 | 5   | 13   |     |      | 3   |      | 9   |     |      |     |     |

Table 6.8: Documentary sub-genres on ITV, BBC1 and C5, as percentages of total documentary output per channel. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

### 6.3.3 Scheduling of History Documentary

The other factor to consider during this period was how history documentary was dispersed within the schedule. Table 6.9 shows how many programmes of various genres began transmission in the ‘peak time’ slot of 8pm to 10pm on all channels. The figures are percentages of the total programming on all channels per year.

|                     | 1982 | 1987 | 1992 | 1997 | 2002 |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Arts                | 0.8  | 3.4  | 1.9  | 0.6  | 0.6  |
| Comedy              | 8.0  | 12.0 | 17.3 | 15.3 | 7.0  |
| Current Affairs     | 2.5  | 7.4  | 4.6  | 3.3  | 2.5  |
| Documentary         | 16.4 | 16.4 | 20.4 | 18.9 | 28.8 |
| History Documentary | 2.9  | 4.9  | 1.2  | 4.5  | 12.3 |
| Drama               | 26.5 | 21.0 | 19.8 | 15.9 | 19.6 |
| Light Entertainment | 4.6  | 6.2  | 5.3  | 5.1  | 8.5  |
| Leisure             | 0.8  | 3.7  | 4.0  | 9.6  | 8.2  |
| Music               | 5.5  | 1.9  | 0.3  | 0.0  | 1.6  |
| News                | 15.5 | 9.6  | 9.9  | 11.7 | 1.9  |
| Sport               | 5.0  | 2.2  | 2.5  | 1.2  | 0.6  |

Table 6.9: Programmes Beginning Between 8pm and 10pm on All Channels. These figures represent programmes in the peak time sample for BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel Four and Channel Five, 1982-2002, with each genre expressed as a % of the total sample for each year<sup>56</sup>. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

Table 6.9 shows firstly that documentary became the dominant genre in peak time, confirming the earlier figures showing a growth in documentary in the context of overall programming. This trend in the growth of documentary in peak time over the 20 year period is echoed by the change in the position of ‘Drama’ and ‘Documentary’ in the schedules over the sample period. In 1982, documentary represented 16.4% of peak time hours, and drama 26.5%. By 2002, the position had reversed: drama represented 19.5%, and documentary 28.8%. Table 6.9 also indicates how news

<sup>56</sup> See footnote 31.

almost disappeared from peak time in 2002, having held a steady percentage up to 1997. Table 6.9 also confirms the earlier data (Table 6.5) which showed an increase in leisure programming and light entertainment, and a rise and fall in comedy and situation comedy. Table 6.9 also shows that the amount of history documentary in peak time follows a similar trend to history documentary throughout the schedule, one of initial growth between 1982 and 1987, a sharp decline from 1987 to 1992 and then a steady increase from 1992 to 1997 and 2002.

Table 6.10 shows how history documentaries were scheduled across all the time slots in the sample.

| <b>Programmes Starting Between:</b> | <b>1982</b> | <b>1987</b> | <b>1992</b> | <b>1997</b> | <b>2002</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 6pm-7pm                             | 9           | 13          | 0           | 3           | 2           |
| 7pm-8pm                             | 23          | 26          | 14          | 33          | 16          |
| 8pm-9pm                             | 18          | 24          | 7           | 24          | 25          |
| 9pm-10pm                            | 14          | 18          | 21          | 21          | 28          |
| 10pm-11pm                           | 14          | 8           | 36          | 15          | 3           |
| 11pm-12am                           | 23          | 8           | 21          | 3           | 5           |

Table 6.10: History Documentaries on All Channels by Starting Time. Figures expressed as percentages of all history documentaries in the sample, per year<sup>57</sup>. (Source, *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various edition, 1982-2002)

Table 6.10 indicates that the starting times of history documentaries changed from being spread throughout the evening schedule in 1982, to a concentration around the peak time hours of 8-10pm by 2002. Table 10 also shows that history documentary moved from the central peak hours to the later parts of the schedule between 1987 and 1992, moving back to the early and central peak hours in 1997, and then to a very strong position within the central peak hours by 2002.

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<sup>57</sup> See Footnote 31.

Table 6.11 shows the same data, analysed by Channel.

|             |             | 6-7pm | 7-8pm | 8-9pm | 9-10pm | 10-11pm | 11am-12pm |
|-------------|-------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|---------|-----------|
| <b>1982</b> | <b>BBC1</b> | 0     | 0     | 0     | 33.3   | 0       | 66.7      |
|             | <b>BBC2</b> | 14.3  | 35.7  | 28.6  | 7.1    | 14.3    | 0         |
|             | <b>ITV</b>  | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 0       | 100.0     |
|             | <b>C4</b>   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 33.3   | 33.3    | 33.3      |
| <b>1987</b> | <b>BBC1</b> | 20    | 30    | 50    | 10     | 10      |           |
|             | <b>BBC2</b> | 18.2  | 27.3  | 36.4  | 9.1    | 9.1     | 0         |
|             | <b>ITV</b>  | 0     | 66.7  | 0     | 0      | 0       | 33.3      |
|             | <b>C4</b>   | 21.4  | 28.6  | 28.6  | 14.3   |         | 7.1       |
| <b>1992</b> | <b>BBC1</b> | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 100     | 0         |
|             | <b>BBC2</b> | 0     | 33.3  | 16.7  | 33.3   | 16.7    | 0         |
|             | <b>ITV</b>  | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 100     | 0         |
|             | <b>C4</b>   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 20     | 20      | 60        |
| <b>1997</b> | <b>BBC1</b> | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 80      | 20        |
|             | <b>BBC2</b> | 5.9   | 29.4  | 23.5  | 35.3   | 5.9     | 0         |
|             | <b>ITV</b>  | 0     | 100   | 0     | 0      | 0       | 0         |
|             | <b>C4</b>   | 0     | 25    | 50    | 12.5   | 12.5    | 0         |
| <b>2002</b> | <b>BBC1</b> | 0     | 0     | 0     | 100    | 0       | 0         |
|             | <b>BBC2</b> | 0     | 27.6  | 24.1  | 41.4   | 0       | 6.9       |
|             | <b>ITV</b>  | 50    | 0     | 0     | 0      | 50      | 0         |
|             | <b>C4</b>   | 13.3  | 13.3  | 40    | 26.7   | 6.7     | 0         |
|             | <b>C5</b>   | 0     | 8.3   | 75.0  | 8.3    | 0       | 8.3       |

Table 6.11: History Documentaries by starting time, and by Channel. Figures expressed as a percentage of all history documentaries on each channel in specific years. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

Between 1982 and 1987 there was an even distribution of history documentaries throughout the schedule on BBC2, with most programmes beginning between 7pm and 9pm. The spread was across 4 hour slots in 1992, even though the early evening programmes had disappeared. The spread was again visible in 1997, although by 2002 history documentaries were shown only between 7pm and 10pm, and there are no history documentaries in the slot between 6pm and 7pm. Excluding Channel Four's incomplete sample in 1982, in 1987 it also had an even distribution of programmes across time slots. In 1992 however, history documentaries were pushed towards the later part of the schedule, and concentrated into three slots. By 1997, history documentaries were more evenly spread, with few programmes in the later slot, and

most programmes beginning between 8pm and 9pm. In 2002, history documentary was again spread across the schedule, and 8pm to 9pm was again the most populous slot. In contrast to BBC2, Channel Four returned to showing history documentaries in the 6pm-7pm slot in 2002.

In 1982, all BBC1's history documentaries started between 11pm and midnight. But by 1987, BBC1 spread its history documentaries across the schedule, concentrating especially on the first three slots, with no programmes in the 11pm slot. In 1992 and 1997 BBC1 returned to showing its history documentaries late in the evening. In 2002, it showed all its history documentaries in one slot, as in 1982, but this time it was the 9pm rather than the 11pm slot.

For ITV, the distribution of history documentaries in 1982 was very similar to that seen on BBC1, as they all started after 11pm. In 1987, the scheduling was split between a larger block in the 7pm slot, and smaller block in the 11pm slot. In 1992 ITV concentrated its history documentaries in the 10pm block, whilst in 1997 they were concentrated into a block in the 7pm slot. In 2002, they were split evenly between the 6pm and 11pm slots. For Channel Five, history programmes are largely concentrated in the 8pm slot, with a few other programmes shown in the 6pm, 9pm and 11pm slots.

#### 6.3.3.1 Evaluation: Scheduling of History Documentaries

Documentary became the dominant genre in peak hours during the period, as the number of dramas receded. This finding supports the assertion that factual programmes had displaced other genres during the late 1990s (Dovey, 2000: 17-21)

where the earlier analysis of genres across the schedule did not. ‘Leisure’ and ‘Light Entertainment’ also grew during peak hours, which further suggests the increasing competitiveness in terrestrial peak time television during the period. History documentary also rose as a proportion of peak time programming from 1992 onwards, suggesting that it was part of whatever process was underway in peak time scheduling during the late 1990s. When the numbers of history documentaries increased within the sample, they tended to appear in greater numbers in peak time.

However, history documentaries also declined in peak time between 1987 and 1992. This decline and the subsequent resurgence of history documentary between 1987 and 1997 in peak time also coincided with similar patterns in two other categories: a decline and resurgence in their overall numbers, and a decline and resurgence in history documentary as a proportion of all documentaries. This raises questions as to why history documentary declined, and what the differences were between the forces that caused its decline and its subsequent rise. This in turn raises questions about the changing function of history documentary within the schedule, and whether those functions had altered between the late 1980s and the late 1990s. If those functions had indeed changed, then other questions are raised as to how the form of history programmes changed during the period.

### 6.3.4 Co-production of History Documentaries

|             | BBC1      | BBC2                                  | ITV | C4                                    | C5                          | Total      |
|-------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| <b>1982</b> |           | 1x PBS<br>2x Time Life<br>1x Euro PSB |     |                                       |                             | 3<br>(14%) |
| <b>1987</b> |           | 1x A&E                                |     | 2x Time Life                          |                             | 3<br>(8%)  |
| <b>1992</b> |           | 1x PBS<br>2x Euro PSB                 |     |                                       |                             | 4<br>(29%) |
| <b>1997</b> | 1x<br>PBS | 2x PBS<br>1x A&E<br>2x Euro PSB       |     | 2x Discovery<br>1x Euro PSB           |                             | 9<br>(27%) |
| <b>2002</b> |           | 1x Discovery                          |     | 1x PBS<br>1x Discovery<br>1x Euro PSB | 1x Discovery<br>1x Euro PSB | 5<br>(11%) |

Table 6.12: Co-production of History Documentaries. Figures expressed as numbers of programmes in the sample. Bracketed figures are number expressed as percentages of all history documentaries per sample year. (Source: *BFI Programme Database*)

Co-production of history documentaries increased between 1982 and 1997, but declined again in 2002. BBC2 and Channel Four were the main co-producers, although Channel Five also co-produced history documentaries in 2002. The percentage of history documentaries co-produced was highest in 1992, when history documentaries were at their lowest in terms of number, and their lowest in terms of their presence in peak hours.

#### 6.3.4.1 Evaluation: Co-production

Co-production increased across the sample until 1997, but decreased in 2002. On the one hand this confirms the idea that there was a growth of funding for PSB programming emanating from commercial deals with broadcasters outside the UK (Goodwin, 1998: 130; Paget, 1998: 197; Steemers, 2004: 104-145; Chapman, 2007: 21) such as the deal between BBC and Discovery Inc. in 1998. However, on the other

hand, the proportion of co-produced programmes dropped significantly between 1997 and 2002, when the number of history documentaries broadcast rose substantially. Additionally, according to the sample, co-production was at its highest as a proportion of history documentaries broadcast in 1992, when the number of history documentaries broadcast was at their lowest. Therefore co-production, according to this sample, does not seem to have been a central causal factor in the growth of history documentaries.

## **6.4 Textuality of History Documentary**

The following section will examine the way the content and form of history documentaries changed over time. This was done by looking at three main categories: period, topic and type.

### 6.4.1 History Documentary Textuality: Periods

Most periods appeared sporadically and with low frequency, but four periods were dominant, namely 'C19th', 'Early C20th', 'Late C20th' and 'Longitudinal'. 'C19th' and 'Early C20th' were at their most frequent in the 1980s, rather than the 1990s. 'Late C20th' fluctuated between 39% (1987) and 20% (2002) throughout the sample. 'Longitudinal' was at its most frequent in 1982, declined in 1997, and rose again in 2002. In 1992, the number of periods decreased, and then increased again in 1997 and 2002.



|                                | 1982 | 1987 | 1992 | 1997 | 2002 |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Pre History                    | 5    |      |      | 9    | 5    |
| Ancient Civilisations          |      |      | 7    | 3    | 7    |
| Dark Ages                      |      | 3    |      | 3    |      |
| Medieval                       |      | 3    |      | 6    | 3    |
| Renaissance & Discovery        | 5    |      | 14   |      | 2    |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> Century       | 5    |      |      |      | 5    |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> Century       |      | 3    |      | 3    | 2    |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> Century       | 18   | 18   | 7    | 9    | 15   |
| Early 20 <sup>th</sup> Century | 32   | 21   | 29   | 26   | 29   |
| Late 20 <sup>th</sup> Century  | 23   | 39   | 29   | 41   | 20   |
| Longitudinal                   | 23   | 13   | 14   | 9    | 15   |

Table 6.13: History Documentary Period by Year, expressed as a percentage of total history documentary numbers for each year in the sample<sup>58</sup>. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various edition, 1982-2002).

In 1992, ‘C20th’ accounted for the largest proportion of the history documentaries shown. After the low point of 1992, the number of periods increased. Both ‘Medieval’ and ‘Longitudinal’ programming made gains by 2002, along with small amounts of programming based on other periods. There was a concomitant decrease in the proportion of ‘C20th’ as the number of periods grew after 1992.

BBC2 coverage of periods dipped from a high of 7 out of 7 periods in 1982, to 4 out of 7 in 1987. However, as the sample progressed, BBC2’s coverage of periods became more diverse, and by 2002 BBC2 covered 9 out of the 10 covered in the whole sample. BBC2 favoured the ‘C20th’, and to lesser extent ‘C19th’ and ‘Ancient Civilisations’, which was consistent with the overall picture. In the first part of the sample (1982, 1987), BBC2 avoided periods outside the photographic record, such as ‘Dark Ages’ and ‘C18th’.

<sup>58</sup> Percentages sometimes add to more than 100 as some periods occur in more than one programme, and are counted on each occasion.

|                          | 1982 |    | 1987 |    | 1992 |    | 1997 |    | 2002 |    |
|--------------------------|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|
|                          | BBC2 | C4 | BBC2 | C4 | BBC2 | C4 | BBC2 | C4 | BBC2 | C4 |
| Pre History              | 7    |    |      |    |      |    | 11   |    | 6    | 8  |
| Ancient Civilisations    |      |    |      |    | 14   |    |      |    | 6    | 17 |
| Dark Ages                |      |    |      |    |      |    | 5    | 11 |      |    |
| Medieval                 |      |    |      |    |      |    |      | 11 | 6    |    |
| Renaissance / Discovery  | 7    |    |      |    | 14   |    |      |    | 3    |    |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> Century | 7    |    |      |    |      |    | 5    |    |      |    |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> Century |      |    |      |    |      |    |      |    | 3    |    |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> Century | 29   |    | 27   | 23 | 7    |    | 26   | 33 | 18   |    |
| Early C20 <sup>th</sup>  | 21   | 75 | 36   | 31 | 14   | 17 | 47   | 11 | 24   | 50 |
| Late C20 <sup>th</sup>   | 14   | 25 | 18   | 38 |      | 67 | 5    | 22 | 26   | 8  |
| Longitudinal             | 21   |    | 18   | 8  | 50   | 17 | 11   | 11 | 9    | 17 |

Table 6.14: History Documentary Periods by Channel: BBC2 and Channel Four, expressed as a percentage of the total number of history documentaries on each channel for each year in the sample<sup>59</sup>. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various edition, 1982-2002).

However, in 1992, the reverse seems to be the case. In 1997, the pattern was again a concentration on periods within the era of photographic record. However, by 2002, several areas outside the era of photographic record were covered, with only ‘C17th’ avoided.

In terms of the spread of historic periods covered, Channel Four consistently covered fewer periods than BBC2. In 1987, the mix of Channel Four’s periods was quite similar to BBC2, but with more emphasis on ‘Late C20th’. This emphasis was also seen in 1992, where BBC2 had vacated that period altogether, choosing to represent earlier periods. In 1997, Channel Four emphasised the ‘C19th’ more than BBC2, who laid more emphasis on the ‘C20th’. There was a reversal in 2002, as Channel Four emphasised the ‘Early C20th’, whilst BBC2 devoted more time to the ‘C19th’.

<sup>59</sup> See footnote 36.

|                          | 1982 |     | 1987 |     | 1992 |     | 1997 |     | 2002 |     |    |
|--------------------------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|----|
|                          | BBC1 | ITV | BBC1 | ITV | BBC1 | ITV | BBC1 | ITV | BBC1 | ITV | C5 |
| Pre History              |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |    |
| Ancient Civilisations    |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |    |
| Dark Ages                |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |    |
| Medieval                 |      |     |      |     |      |     |      | 33  |      |     |    |
| Renaissance / Discovery  |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |    |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> Century |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     |      |     | 17 |
| 18 <sup>th</sup> Century |      |     |      | 17  |      |     |      |     |      |     | 0  |
| 19 <sup>th</sup> Century |      |     |      | 17  |      |     | 14   |     |      |     | 8  |
| Early C20 <sup>th</sup>  |      | 100 | 10   | 33  |      | 50  | 29   | 33  |      | 50  | 50 |
| Late C20 <sup>th</sup>   | 67   | 0   | 80   | 33  |      | 50  | 29   | 33  | 100  | 0   | 0  |
| Longitudinal             | 33   | 100 | 10   | 0   | 100  | 0   | 29   | 0   |      | 50  | 33 |

Table 6.15: History Documentary Periods by Channel: BBC1, ITV and Channel Five, expressed as a percentage of the total number of history documentaries on each channel for each year in the sample<sup>60</sup>. (Source: *Radio Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

In terms of periods, BBC1 represented only the C19th and C20th throughout the sample period. In most cases BBC1 concentrated on ‘Late C20th’, although this was less so in 1997 when it represented four periods, including ‘Longitudinal’. In terms of period, ITV was similar to BBC1, although it did tend to represent a larger spread of periods, albeit having a very strong concentration in the ‘Early C20th’. In terms of periods, Channel Five had a greater, and more even spread of periods than either BBC1 or ITV.

#### 6.4.1.1 Evaluation: Periods

The spread of historical periods covered by history documentaries increased across the sample period, from 7 in 1982 to 10 in 2002. This means that in terms of periods covered the output became more diverse between 1982 and 2002. This provides evidence that calls into question the assertion that commercialisation was responsible

<sup>60</sup> Percentages do not always add to 100 as some periods occur in more than one programme, and are counted on each occasion.

for the narrowing of the scope of programming in order to maximise viewing by avoiding risk and concentrating on a smaller number of successful formats (Kilborn, 2001: 115; Holmes and Jermyn, 2004: 14; Smither, 2004: 51).

However, when viewed on a channel by channel basis, there are telling differences between the output of the two main history documentary bearing channels, BBC2 and Channel Four. These figures show that BBC2 represented a consistently high proportion of the periods covered by all the terrestrial channels. Channel Four, however, represented a slightly narrower spread of periods.

#### 6.4.2 History Documentary Textuality: Topics

The topics ‘War/Military’, ‘Arts/Media’ were the two most prevalent in the sample. The proportions of the ‘War/Military’ topic reflected the pattern seen in Table 6.1, of a dip in 1992, and then a resurgence to 2002. ‘Arts/Media’, did the opposite, declining sharply between 1982 and 1987, growing in 1992, and declining in 2002. The ‘Social’ category followed the pattern of ‘War/Military’. ‘Civilisation’, ‘Religion/Politics’ and ‘Science/Industrial’ followed a similar pattern to ‘Arts’.

|                      | 1982 | 1987 | 1992 | 1997 | 2002 |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| War / Military       | 13.6 | 26.3 | 0    | 21.1 | 23.4 |
| Social               | 13.6 | 7.9  | 7.1  | 27.3 | 9.4  |
| Civilisation         | 18.2 | 13.2 | 21.4 | 9.1  | 4.7  |
| Arts / Media         | 31.8 | 18.4 | 21.4 | 21.1 | 4.7  |
| Science / Industrial | 9.1  | 5.3  | 21.4 | 6.1  | 6.3  |
| Religion / Politics  | 4.5  | 21.2 | 28.6 | 18.2 | 4.7  |

Table 6.16: History Documentary Topics as expressed a percentage of total history documentary numbers for each year in the sample<sup>61</sup>. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

<sup>61</sup> Percentages do not always add to 100 as some topics occur in more than one programme, and are counted on each occasion. Only the main genres are counted.

BBC2 exhibited a wide and relatively even spread of topics during most of the sample, 1982 but in 1992 was less diverse (4 out of 7). ‘War/Military’ was prominent on BBC2 except for in 1992, when there were no ‘War/Military’ history documentaries in the entire sample. ‘Science/Industry’ followed a similar pattern, as it declined from 1982 to 1997, and then increased in 2002. ‘Social’ oscillated between 8%-14 across the sample. ‘Civilisation’, ‘Arts/Media’ declined across the sample.

|      |      | War & Military | Social | Civilisation | Arts & Media | Science & Industry | Religion & Politics | Royalty |
|------|------|----------------|--------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------|
| 1982 | BBC1 |                |        |              | 66.7         |                    | 33.3                |         |
|      | BBC2 | 14.3           | 7.1    | 28.6         | 21.4         | 21.4               |                     |         |
|      | ITV  |                | 50     | 50           |              |                    |                     |         |
|      | C4   |                | 33.3   |              | 66.7         |                    |                     |         |
| 1987 | BBC1 | 30             | 10     |              |              |                    | 30                  |         |
|      | BBC2 | 27.3           | 18.2   | 18.2         | 18.2         |                    |                     |         |
|      | ITV  |                | 33.3   | 33.3         | 33.3         |                    |                     |         |
|      | C4   | 28.6           |        | 14.3         | 21.4         |                    | 35.7                |         |
| 1992 | BBC1 |                |        |              |              | 100                |                     |         |
|      | BBC2 |                | 16.7   | 33.3         | 33.3         | 16.7               |                     |         |
|      | ITV  |                |        |              |              | 50                 | 100                 |         |
|      | C4   |                |        | 20           | 40           |                    | 40                  |         |
| 1997 | BBC1 | 20             | 40     | 20           | 40           | 20                 |                     |         |
|      | BBC2 | 29.4           | 29.4   | 17.6         | 17.6         |                    | 17.6                |         |
|      | ITV  |                | 25     |              |              | 25                 | 50                  |         |
|      | C4   | 25             |        |              | 37.5         | 25                 |                     |         |
| 2002 | BBC1 |                |        |              |              |                    |                     | 100     |
|      | BBC2 | 24.1           | 10.3   |              | 6.9          | 20.7               | 10.3                |         |
|      | ITV  | 50             | 50     |              |              |                    |                     |         |
|      | C4   | 20             | 20     | 26.7         | 6.7          |                    | 13.3                |         |
|      | C5   | 41.7           | 16.7   |              | 8.3          | 8.3                |                     | 41.7    |

Table 6.17: History Documentary Topics by Channel, expressed as a percentage of total history documentary numbers on each channel for each year in the sample<sup>62</sup>. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

<sup>62</sup> See footnote 39.

Channel Four did not show as wide a range of topics as BBC2. The 'War/Military' category followed BBC2's pattern, achieving 29% in 1987, before disappearing in 1992, and then rising in 1997. However, it did not rise again in 2002 as it did with BBC2. 'Social' dipped between 1982 and 2002, disappearing altogether in 1987, 1992 and 1997. 'Arts/Media' was perhaps Channel Four's most consistently high topic in 1982, 1987, 1992 and 1997, but declined sharply in 2002. 'Science/Industry' and 'Religion/Politics' both rose in the middle of the sample, and then declined towards 2002.

BBC1's spread of topics varied from 1 topic in 1992, to 5 in 1997. None of the topics presented contributed to any kind of pattern, except that no one topic dominated the BBC1 output throughout the sample. The following topics were dominant on BBC1 in different years: 'Arts/Media' in 1982 (67%); 'Religion/Politics' in 1982 (33%) and 1987 (43%); 'War/Military' in 1987 (43%); and 'Science/Industry' in 1992 (100%). The same inconsistent pattern characterised ITV's range of topics in the sample. However, while 'War/Military', 'Social', 'Science/Industry', 'Religion/Politics' and 'Civilisation' were all prominent in different years, 'Arts/Media' did not register for ITV in the sample at all. On Channel Five 'War/Military' was 50%, followed by 'Social' at 20% and 'Arts & Media', 'Science & Industry' and 'Royalty' all on 10%.

#### 6.4.3.1 Evaluation: Topics

The 'War/Military' category declined in the 1980s and rose in the 1990s, along with the trends in history documentary numbers, and their proportion of peak time viewing. The topics that grew in the mid 1990s and then receded in the latter part of the sample were 'Civilisation', 'Religion/Politics', and 'Science/Industrial'. This suggests that

the number of programmes in the ‘War/Military’ category was crucial to the maintenance of high levels of history documentary in the schedule. The growth in ‘War/Military’ during the late 1990s towards 2002 could be explained by a concentration of efforts in a popular topic in order to maximise audiences in an increasingly competitive broadcasting environment (Smither, 2004: 51-64). However, the decline of such programmes in the late 1980s and early 1990s is not so easily explained.

#### 6.4.4 History Documentary Textuality: Type

From Table 6.18 two types of history documentary, ‘Archive/Testimony’ and ‘Presenter/Location’ clearly dominated for most of the period. ‘Archive/Testimony’ represented a high proportion throughout the sample, but declined from its peak in 1987 to its lowest proportion in 2002. ‘Presenter/Location’ declined in its proportion from 1982 to 1992, but then grew again in 1997 with a smaller decline in 2002. Another type, ‘Reconstruction’, joined these two types as the period developed. ‘Reconstruction’ represented a small proportion between in 1982 and 1987, grew sharply in 1992, declined again in 1997, and then increased sharply again in 2002. In terms of numbers, this type grew steadily through the sample period. The other types had low representation in the sample. ‘Actuality-led’, ‘Living History’, ‘Drama-Documentary’ all appeared in very low amounts in the sample. Figure 16 shows how these proportions broke down in each channel<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 3, pages 126-127, for a more detailed definition of history documentary types.

|                               | 1982       | 1987       | 1992       | 1997       | 2002       | Whole Sample |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>Actuality-led</b>          | 9<br>(2)   |            |            |            |            | 1<br>(2)     |
| <b>Archive and Testimony</b>  | 41<br>(10) | 58<br>(23) | 64<br>(12) | 52<br>(21) | 23<br>(30) | 56<br>(96)   |
| <b>Presenter and Location</b> | 41<br>(10) | 34<br>(14) | 21<br>(3)  | 39<br>(12) | 34<br>(24) | 36<br>(63)   |
| <b>Reconstruction</b>         | 5<br>(1)   | 3<br>(1)   | 14<br>(1)  | 9<br>(4)   | 25<br>(17) | 14<br>(24)   |
| <b>Living History</b>         |            | 3<br>(1)   |            |            | 2<br>(1)   | 1<br>(2)     |
| <b>Drama Documentary</b>      | 5<br>(1)   | 3<br>(1)   |            |            |            | 1<br>(2)     |

Table 6.18: History documentaries by type, all channels, expressed as a percentage of total history documentary output for each year's sample. Bracketed number indicates actual numbers of programmes. Percentages do not always add to 100 as some types occur in more than one programme, and are counted on each occasion. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various edition, 1982-2002).

Table 6.19 indicates that for BBC2 the dominance of these three main types of history documentary continued. 'Archive/Testimony' was more evident on BBC2 in the middle years of the sample, and declined towards 2002. 'Presenter/Location' declined between 1982 and 1997, but then rose sharply in 2002. 'Reconstruction' remained at a relatively low level until 2002. 'Actuality', 'Living History' and 'Drama-Documentary' appear very little. For Channel Four 'Archive/Testimony' and 'Presenter/Location' both accounted for a large proportion of the history documentaries in 1982, 1987, and 1992. They then declined in 1997, but increased again in 2002. 'Reconstruction' grew over the period overall, but with some fluctuations in proportion. 'Drama-documentary' appeared only once in the sample, in 2002. The other two types, 'Living History' and 'Actuality-led' do not appear in Channel Four's sample.



|          |      | Actuality | Archive & Testimony | Presenter & Location | Re-construction | Living History | Drama Doc |
|----------|------|-----------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|
| 1982 (%) | BBC1 |           | 67                  | 33                   |                 |                |           |
|          | BBC2 | 20        | 10                  | 60                   | 10              |                | 10        |
|          | ITV  |           |                     | 100                  |                 |                |           |
|          | C4   |           | 100                 |                      |                 |                |           |
| 1987 (%) | BBC1 |           | 89                  | 11                   |                 |                |           |
|          | BBC2 |           | 55                  | 36                   |                 | 9              |           |
|          | ITV  |           | 33                  | 67                   |                 |                |           |
|          | C4   |           | 50                  | 36                   | 7               |                | 7         |
| 1992 (%) | BBC1 |           | 100                 |                      |                 |                |           |
|          | BBC2 |           | 67                  | 33                   |                 |                |           |
|          | ITV  |           | 100                 |                      |                 |                |           |
|          | C4   |           | 60                  | 20                   | 20              |                |           |
| 1997 (%) | BBC1 |           | 60                  | 40                   |                 |                |           |
|          | BBC2 |           | 63                  | 19                   | 19              |                |           |
|          | ITV  |           | 50                  | 50                   |                 |                |           |
|          | C4   |           | 29                  | 57                   | 14              |                |           |
| 2002 (%) | BBC1 |           | 100                 |                      |                 |                |           |
|          | BBC2 |           | 27                  | 53                   | 17              | 3              |           |
|          | ITV  |           |                     |                      | 100             |                |           |
|          | C4   |           | 53                  | 18                   | 29              |                |           |
|          | C5   |           | 53                  | 20                   | 27              |                |           |

Table 6.19: History documentaries by type, per channel, expressed as a percentage of total history documentary output for a year's sample. Percentages do not always add to 100 as some types occur in more than one programme, and are counted on each occasion. (Source: *Radio Times* and *TV Times*, various editions, 1982-2002).

On BBC1, 'Archive/Testimony' and 'Presenter/Location' were the only types to appear in the sample, with the former being most prominent. ITV also depended greatly on 'Archive/Testimony' and 'Presenter/Location' types, with the latter used most often. However, ITV used the 'Reconstruction' type for all its history documentaries in 2002. Channel Five used all three main types in 2002, with 'Archive/Testimony' accounting for 53% of its programmes, with 'Reconstruction' used in 27% of cases, and 'Presenter/Location' used in 20%.

#### 6.4.4.1 Evaluation: Type

The ‘Archive/Testimony’ and ‘Presenter/Location’ types were the dominant types throughout the period. However both lost ground to ‘Reconstruction’, which grew to share similar proportions to both ‘Archive/Testimony’ and ‘Presenter/Location’. However, this challenges the impression, given by the sheer weight of writing on the subject (Cook, 2004; Hunt, 2006; Chapman, 2007; Agnew, 2007; Hanna, 2007a; Diffrient, 2007; Arrow, 2007) that the ‘Archive/Testimony’ and ‘Presenter/Location’ types had lost considerable ground to the ‘Living History’ and ‘Drama-documentary’ types. According to this sample, the ‘Living History’ and ‘Drama-documentary’ types had very little presence in the schedules. However, the appearance of these, albeit in small numbers, points towards a growing diversity in the types of history documentary during the period.

### **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented several findings about the amount, position and nature of history documentary on UK terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002.

The analysis of the listings sample also suggested a number of connections between the changing political economy of television and the production of history documentary. In particular the analysis suggested a number of things about the connection between the amount of history documentaries broadcast on UK terrestrial television and the changing nature of PSB.

Firstly, the analysis shows a growth in history documentary, but not the boom suggested in academic literature. History documentary remained a minority, niche genre. The two largest broadcasters of history documentary in the sample were BBC2 and Channel Four, both with PSB remits, and both serving minority audiences. In other words, the channels that showed most history documentary were those least concerned with achieving high audiences. This raised the question whether the general growth in history documentary was made possible by fact that PSB values were protected at BBC2 and Channel Four.

Secondly, history documentary, along with contemporary documentary, grew when 'serious' PSB forms of programming declined, such as drama, arts programmes and current affairs. History documentary also grew in line with 'lighter' forms such as 'Leisure' and 'Light Entertainment'. In addition, history documentary's growth as a proportion of overall documentary coincided with a narrowing of the range of factual programmes. This raised the question whether history documentary was protected by PSB values, or whether the growth in history documentary itself was a sign of a commercialisation that produced a lighter, and less diverse schedule.

Thirdly, the sample not only indicated an increase in history documentary broadcasts, but also indicates a 'dip' in numbers in 1992. Perhaps the dip in numbers indicated an unexpected resurgence in PSB values during the late 1990s, after the assault on it during the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, the dip could suggest a re-negotiation of the aims of PSB, or a re-alignment of history documentary with commercial aims.

Fourthly, as suggested in the academic literature (Goodwin, 1998: 130; Paget, 1998: 197; Steemers, 2004: 104-145; Chapman, 2007: 21), co-production did increase as a funding model for history documentary across the sample. However, the increase did not coincide with the steepest period of growth in history documentary broadcasts, in the sample, 1997 to 2002. Indeed, co-production was at its highest in this sample in 1992, when history documentary output was at its lowest. This raised the question of what, if any, was the connection between the co-production of history documentaries and their growth, lightening and dominance of factual programming sub genres. It must be emphasised that the nature of the listings sample used in this study was small, and any findings are therefore only indicative and not within any statistically significant margin of error. So, whilst the analysis presented here could point towards changing patterns of production and consumption, the conclusions here need to be taken as indicative rather than definitive.

The analysis of the listings also suggested a number of connections between the changing political economy of television, and the developing form and content of history documentaries. Firstly, the spread of historical periods covered by history documentaries increased across the sample period. If history documentary's growth was driven by commercial imperatives, then this would contradict the position that competitive commercial pressure narrowed the range of programming. However, the spread of periods was greater on the BBC, and less on Channel Four. This raised the question of whether this evidence supported the notion that an advertising-funded channel would cut the diversity of its output under commercial pressure, in comparison to one funded by the license fee.

Secondly, the 'War/Military' category was closely aligned to the trends in history documentary numbers, and their proportion of peak time viewing. Obversely, topics that put the events into a larger context, such as 'Civilisation', 'Religion/Politics', and 'Science/Industrial' grew in proportion in the mid 1990s, and declined in proportion as the number of history documentaries rose towards 2002. This raised the question why the 'War/Military' topic declined in the late in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Could the decline in 'War/Military' have been due to a lack of recognition of history documentary's popular appeal by broadcasters at that time? Did the growth during the late 1990s towards 2002 grow out of a growing realisation of history documentary's popularity, and the need to repeat successful popular formats with dramatic and immediate storylines (Smither, 2004: 51-64).

In terms of history documentary type, there was a branching out from the two founding types, 'Archive/Testimony' and 'Presenter/Location'. But this flourishing was not as great as the academic literature suggests. Whilst 'Reconstruction' did come to challenge the two founding types, 'Living History' and 'Drama-documentary' did not appear with any significant frequency in the sample. In addition 'Presenter/Location' underwent a revival from the mid 1990s onwards.

This chapter has argued that there were trends present in the listings sample that could be consistent with accounts of the effects on the political economy of television on programming in chapter 2 and chapter 5. These trends indicated a direct connection between the changing political economy of UK television and the changing function and form of history documentaries. On one hand, political economic changes seem to have driven history documentary to work harder at attracting larger audiences, mainly

through an increased deployment of dramatic reconstruction. On the other hand, ratings pressure seems to have also caused the genre to diversify. In the next chapter, the thesis returns to the views of interviewees in order to contextualise the indicative findings in this chapter.

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**History Documentary on UK Terrestrial  
Television, 1982-2002: Volume 2.**

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the degree of

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## **Chapter 7: The Changing Form of History Documentary, 1982-2002**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses development in the form of history documentary between 1982 and 2002. It draws on secondary sources to contextualise the accounts of developments which emerged from interviews with people working in the industry as producers and commissioners of history documentary. It does this by subdividing history documentary according to its constituent elements: interview, archive, presenter, dramatic reconstruction, with additional attention paid to the periods and topics covered. Section 7.2 will examine each element in turn, by detailing developments and causes for each element. Section 7.3 comprises an extended conclusion in which these accounts are evaluated.

### **7.2 Development of Constituent Textual Elements**

#### 7.2.1 Interview

##### 7.2.1.1 Development of the interview

There was a clear consensus in the interview sample that in the 1980s the interview, in conjunction with archive film, was one of the main ingredients of all history programmes (Interviews: Carey, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Downing, 2006; Anon B, 2006). However, the interviewees also tended to agree that between 1982 and 2002, the use of interviews in history documentary declined (Interviews: Davidson, 2006; Ware, 2006; Rees, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Anon A, 2006). When making an archive/testimony history documentary production, interviewees would be found that could testify to a

historic event, the contents of specific archive, or even to their own appearance in archive film. In the 1980s, and well into the 1990s, key interviews were perceived to be a major component of a successful history documentary, be it with Joseph Mengele's son in *Mengele* (Central Television for ITV/WGBH, 1985) (Interview, Ware, 2006), or Rupert Murdoch in *The Real ... Rupert Murdoch* (3BM for Channel Four, 1998) (Interviews: Berthon, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006).

*All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) included interviews with both shop floor workers and senior management figures in the retelling of the industrial history of Britain in the twentieth century. This approach eschewed experts and official accounts, and placed personal memory at the forefront of the programme's agenda, an approach which had been adopted from ITV practice as a result of the high audience ratings of *The World at War* (Thames TV, 1973-4) (Interview, Anon A, 2006). However, the use of interview limited the periods covered by history documentary to those within living memory (Interviews: Thomas, 2006; Dugan, 2006). This was particularly problematic for one of history documentary's main subjects, the Second World War, as living survivors of this conflict were becoming less numerous by the 1990s (Interview, Rees, 2006).

In the 1990s, new approaches were therefore sought to replace or revive the traditional use of interviews:

People's expectations began to rise. You should look at an early 80s/ late 90s *Timewatch*, and see how they were done. I mean it was rostrumed stills, interviews and archive, and that was it ... and I think early 1990s, that's when it started to take off, people began to be more imaginative about how to do these things. (Interview, Dugan, 2006)

When *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) came under the leadership of Laurence Rees in 1992, films such as *The Stolen Child* (BBC, 1992) produced and directed by Catrine Clay, delineated historical narratives by using *Vérité* techniques, where there were fewer formal interviews, and the past was examined by taking people in the present back to the scene of earlier events, where they were filmed in an observational mode:

She [Catrine Clay] came from a great tradition with building a rapport and relationship with the individual contributor. She made a complete breakthrough film for *Timewatch* in 1992-3, called *The Stolen Child* (BBC, 1993), which was an amazing story about a boy who was snatched by the Nazis as a boy from his Polish mother, and then brought up as an Aryan in West Germany, and had gone back to his birth mother. And through that one story, you had a window into the Nazi racial policy. You could make a programme about that subject interviewing ten different people with lots of archive, following it through narratively, but it would never had had the impact of that one film. It didn't have much archive in it, it was also about him today dealing with the past. Now that was a fantastic film made in the documentary tradition. (Interview, Rees, 2006)

Whilst the traditional use of interviews declined, they were still used throughout the period of this study. However practitioners such as Mark Fielder were conscious of needing to dress interviews to make them more visually stimulating, as was the case in *War and Peace* (BBC, 1992):

I was asked to do a taster tape with Charles Wheeler, for a series called *War and Peace* (BBC, 1992) ... those programmes were relatively conventional in style, the only thing different was that we used images of the young soldiers which we put behind the interviewees - we posted great pictures of them behind them in the studio, it was a little technique, but worked quite well at the time. (Interview, Fiedler, 2006)

It was also a sign of the interviews' waning potency that Laurence Rees justified the use of interviews in *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997) on the grounds of their innovative use in confronting former SS officers with past deeds (Interview, Rees, 2006).

However, when history documentary became increasingly dependent on co-production funding the use of the interview was challenged. American broadcasters were unhappy with long sections of interview (Interview, Ware, 2006). This had an effect on British broadcasters, and from 1998 onwards, BBC controller Jane Root discouraged the use of interview along with archive, in favour of dramatisation: “when she came in she made it known that she didn't like boring old people and black and white film. Producers no longer offered these archive/testimony films. Reconstruction and drama based programmes replaced them, which she did like.” (Interview, Anon A, 2006). In 1999 Discovery issued a style sheet to the BBC which sought to discourage the appearance of interviewees over the age of 50, and to limit any interview material to 14 second passages:

In 1999, there was a style sheet from Discovery which had the following conditions: no black and white archive, because young American viewers turned straight over when they saw it; no people over the age of 50; no interview over 14 seconds; no music in the minor key; only allowed to use AOR - 'adult oriented rock'; wall to wall music; trailer music all the way through. (Interview, Anon C, 2006)

Julian Ware agreed with the view that co-production had limited the use of the interview, and worried about what that shift might mean for history documentary overall:

But now, there are less and less interviews; that's worrying because interviews are real people telling their own story. That other definition of documentary is extraordinary things happening to ordinary people, and if you let them speak, they'll tell you about them. (Interview, Ware, 2006)

However, Laurence Rees refuted the notion that the interview had been phased out. Other approaches had been adopted and developed, but this did not mean an end to the interview in history documentary:

The archive interview form is the basis of all current affairs programming, all news programming, so the archive interview form is a basic form, it's not going away. We still make programmes like that here, *Timewatch* still does them on occasion. It won't go away. (Interview, Rees, 2006)

#### 7.2.1.2 Development of the Interview: Causes

The changes in the use of interviews were driven by both economic and technological factors. In terms of economic factors, the increasing competitiveness of the television sector put pressure on broadcasters to produce higher audience figures. The growing popularity of Second World War films in the mid to late 1990s, added to the decreasing amount of eye witnesses available due to old age, meant new ways had to be found tell these stories. The emphasis on ratings also included a need to target younger audiences. Jane Root discouraged interviews on this basis from 1998 onwards (Interview, Anon A, 2006), Discovery Channel insisted on less interviews from 1999 onwards (Interview, Anon C, 2006), and from 2001 Laurence Rees could also see a connection between an increasingly old audience, and the established archive/testimony form:

I could see from the audience data that that form was beginning to skew incredibly old. And the big challenge, one of many challenges, but the big challenge is how do you keep you core audience who love it, and are generally old, but also bring younger people to it. (Interview, Rees, 2006)

Co-production money led history documentary towards increasingly dramatized representations of history, and to being more sensitive towards the realities of

American broadcasting, where channel proliferation was perceived by broadcasters like Discovery to have led to a loss of audience attention span. Julian Ware noted that this led to the interview appearing slow and inflexible:

For American TV, the scripts become almost the most important thing. It's driven along by the script - the script is punchy, in short sentences, it deals in superlatives all the time, very strong adjectives one way or another, and that is deliberate to keep the pace going. Whereas you blurt away in an interview, and that slows the pace down. So you'll see there's less interview, because there is less attention span, or less perceived attention span. (Interview, Ware, 2006).

Another factor in the changing use of the interview was the use of camera technology in history documentary, which changed from being mainly 16mm film in the 1980s (Interviews: Clay, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006), to a succession of video tape formats in the 1990s (Interviews: Grimsdale, 2006; Mykura, 2006). This allowed interviews to be filmed with more ease, and at far less cost (Interviews: Grimsdale, 2006; Mykura, 2006). Paradoxically, these developments coincided with the decline in the use of the interview in the history documentary:

They [history documentary makers] had been liberated from using professional crews – there were some things you still needed professional crews for, but there were some things you could go out and film them on DV yourself, small format cameras that everybody could use were huge innovations. That spurred a lot of the innovation ... but it also made it more attractive and more possible to make more kinds of history in more kinds of ways. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

The new technology made interviews easier to capture, but it also made other modes of expression easier. Interviews had been expensive and time-consuming, but they had until the development of new cameras, been the only means of telling certain historical stories.

## 7.2.2 Archive

### 7.2.2.1 Development of Archive

At the beginning of the 1980s, archive was, along with testimony, the dominant ingredient in history documentary (Interviews: Davidson, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Downing, 2006: 03.00, 16.12; Carey, 2006: 49.30; Cosgrove, 2006: 49.40; Dugan, 2006). At the BBC and ITV during the 1970s and 1980s, the aim of archive was to illustrate a period in the past:

With the archive, it [the aim] would be to give as lively and as accurate an illustration of the period as possible. Sometimes to illustrate interviewees, but also to illustrate a period, and show you how a period was like. (Interviews, Anon B, 2006).

The archive was often used with its original sound (Interview, Anon A, 2006), and was intended to reveal the past to an audience that had little knowledge about how it looked:

There was a time when you got the archive out, made some interviews to relate to the archive footage, and that was your story. Basically people were watching the archives saying, 'cor, that's how it was, was it?' (Interviews, Carey, 2006).

Archive was at times used differently at Channel Four during the 1980s. Some Channel Four producers in the 1980s rejected the use of archive in history documentary due to its in-built bias towards official forms of history. Colin Thomas encountered criticisms of the use of archive in history documentaries in Colin McArthur's *Television and History* (BFI, 1980), which influenced his use of other methods in *The Dragon Has Two tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985):

It [*History and Television*] mentioned when someone was doing a history of the Third Reich, that the role of the Protestant churches in Germany was

very important, but they didn't mention that in the programme because they didn't have the relevant archive film. Gwyn and I looked at it with horror. If it's important, we must find a way of communicating it. It's history backwards to look at what we have that is visually interesting or relevant. If it was important it would have to be in there, we would find a way to get it in here. (Interview, Thomas, 2006)

Taylor Downing's company Flashback Television also used archives innovatively, to concentrate on aspects of history that were less well known. Their programmes would also use longer pieces of archive and would deconstruct them in more detail:

We went on to approach other subjects which we would not have been able to approach ... we had this idea that we would show longer pieces of archive imagery and deconstruct them in more detail - who shot them, why were they shot, where were they first shown, what was the point of their making in the first instance. (Interview, Downing, 2006)

Practitioners such as Norma Percy and Brian Lapping carried on the BBC/ITV traditions of the Archive/Interview model throughout the 1990s:

The thing about *The World at War* (Thames TV for TV, 1973-4) and *Palestine* (Thames TV for ITV, 1978) and *Ireland: A Television History* (BBC, 1980-1) was that they were research intensive and did depend on a lot of people research, and a lot of archive research. In some ways they are what Norma Percy and Brian Lapping went on doing with the *Second Russian Revolution* (Brook Lapping for BBC, 1991) and *The Death of Yugoslavia* (Brook Lapping for BBC, 1995) and *Fifty Years War* (Brook Lapping for BBC, 1998). In a way they are much more modern history, but they are the same very rigorous putting of the archive together with the people process. (Interview, Anon A, 2006)

However archive became less dominant in history documentaries in the 1990s for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the early 1990s the price of archive grew substantially, in some cases to 20 times the cost it had been during the 1980s (Interview, Darlow, 2006). Secondly producers began to tire of the expressive limitations of archive, and began to think of other ways to make history documentaries (Interviews: Dugan,



2006; Grimsdale, 2006). As history documentary became steadily more frequent and popular on UK TV, archive was seen as too narrow and educational, and not appealing enough:

[In 1991] I started to feel that there was going to be a problem with archive. It had usually already been cut frenetically, in black and white, in not good condition, or no sound. There were limitations. It all started feeling too educational. People don't want to come home and watch TV to feel too educated. It does not help if there is a big capital 'E' to the programme. We have to be more imaginative, after all we are film makers, about how we represent history on television. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

In 1992 the *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) edition *The Stolen Child* (BBC, 1993) signaled a shift towards the *Vérité* form, as it had done with its use of interviews (Interview, Rees, 2006). This involved the use of smaller amounts of archive than in the traditional archive/testimony model, combined with longer passages of observational material:

It [*The Stolen Child*] tells you a fantastic story, told by a good narrator, good interviews, wonderful music, lovely landscape shots. You go to the places, look around them, you interweave it with stills and archive film, and personal photographs. These are your tools. (Interview, Clay, 2006)

By the mid 1990s, the changing market for history documentaries in the USA began to have an affect on the use of archive in history documentaries in the UK. Many high budget archive and interview history documentaries in the 1980s had been made as co-productions. But by the mid 1990s A&E had launched The History Channel (Burnett, 1993) and Discovery launched a specialist history channel (McElvogue, 1994), in both the USA and the UK, generating an increasingly competitive market place for history documentary. This increase in competitiveness changed the type of programmes that US co-producers were willing to accept. Pressure began to be exerted to discourage the use of archive, firstly in around 1995-6, by American

broadcasters. Taylor Downing noted that The History Channel wanted to move away from archive material, and encouraged the use of dramatisation (Interview, Downing, 2006). Julian Ware noted that archive, especially black and white archive, was seen as too cerebral and therefore uncompetitive:

When there was only Discovery and National Geographic, they didn't have to worry about competition. As soon as you got competition - The Learning Channel, National Geographic, The History Channel ... the more you divide the audience ... the more you go for the jugular, the things you know that will get an audience, rather than things which are more cerebral. (Interview, Ware, 2006)

By 1998, Jane Root was controller of BBC2 and was discouraging Archive/Interview programming, and particularly black and white archive, in favour of programmes that contained more dramatized material, even when archive was available (Interviews: Anon A, 2006; Anon B, 2006). In 1999, after the BBC's announcement of their joint venture with Discovery Inc., a style sheet was circulated around the BBC insisting that no ideas containing black and white archive should be offered to Discovery (Interview, Anon C, 2006).

On other channels, producers using archive were thinking of ways to use archive in new ways. Stuart Cosgrove recalled a debate within Channel Four about how more insight could be derived from archive, rather than using it purely as illustration (Interview, Cosgrove, 2006).

People started to ask how archive could be made to work harder - how can we do more with it. That is the '*...In Colour*' debate. How did we find things that weren't archive, new ways of representing archive. Also how do you counter-intuitively read archive? We would get a sequence of rich archive, and play it three times, and allow two people to radically disagree about it. In other words seeing history as a debate, and not fixed ... history

had become an area of intense debate, and reading against the grain of history meant that archive had to do a harder job. (Interview, Cosgrove, 2006)

Cosgrove referred above to another example of the re-working of archive, the ...*In Colour* franchise of history documentary series made by Trans World International (TWI), beginning with *The Second World War in Colour* (TWI/Carlton for ITV, 1999). These series not only made use of the impact of hitherto unknown colour archive of the Second World War, but also broke the link between interviews and archive by using the technique pioneered in Ken Burns' *Civil War* (PBS, 1990) of substituting interviews with diaries, letters and official documents voiced by actors. Traditional archive-based history documentaries used archive to illustrate a story, but Binns only had a relatively small amount of colour archive available to him, which could not illustrate a complete narrative of the Second World War. Therefore the archive was used in a new way, by stressing its emotive power, rather than its claim to represent the past accurately:

It wasn't immediately obvious how to use it [colour archive]; it was probably why it hadn't been used before. Then I realised that Ken Burns' witness technique held the key. Because it allowed you to cross the line from a didactic narrative to a witness based exposition. So the witness technique got you off the hook of where the footage was taking you, because you only needed to go where the footage was ... I realised that the colour closed the 60 years from now to the Second World War, and that you could reinforce the intimacy of the imagery by using the intimacy of letters and diaries. Putting the two together meant that it could be about human experiences, visible in the faces. (Interview, Binns, 2006)

By 2002 archive and interview was still a much-used model, although commissioners and producers had begun to favour other modes of history documentary making, such as presenters and reconstruction.

#### 7.2.2.2 Development of Archive: Causes

Economic factors were important in the development of the use of archive material in history documentary. The cost of archive rose sharply in the 1980s, as archives began to understand the value of their holdings to broadcasters. The cost of archive-led programmes had always been high as they were intensive in terms of research (Interview, Anon A, 2006). The cost of using archive in history documentaries also rose as broadcasters sought permission for more viewings, and permission to sell archive clips worldwide as part of co-produced programmes. Peter Grimsdale recalled how the cost of archive wasn't an issue in the 1980s, when archive was only licensed for one or two broadcasts, and before co-production required a higher level of copyright clearance:

Back in those days people didn't worry if things cost a little bit more than they thought they were going to cost, also in terms of the licensing of archive material, it was maybe one or two showings, and this would be it; back then there was no media distribution or anything like that. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

The increasing cost of archive sometimes meant that dramatic reconstruction was cheaper than acquiring the requisite rights for archive material (Interviews: Thomas, 2006; Downing, 2006). Some executives and producers believed that archive did not engage or excite a young audience, and therefore avoided archive in order to attract them (Interviews: Ware, 2006; Cosgrove, 2006). The limiting nature of archive, both in historiographical and expressive terms was another important factor. Some producers worried about the historiographical implications of dependence on official archive sources, whilst others wanted to explore new periods in history. In terms of expression some producers wanted to be set free from the constraints of the

Archive/Interview model, which they perceived as being exhausted of revelation and novelty.

### 7.2.3 Presenters

#### 7.2.3.1 Development of Presenters

Presenters had been used in history documentaries since the live television lectures of A.J.P. Taylor in the 1950s, and in the early 1960s, on arts and civilisation by Kenneth Clark for ATV (Isaacs, 2004; Bell and Gray, 2007). In these early examples, the presenter's authority was often maintained by an austere visual mode of representation, allowing the presenter's personalities to dominate (Interview, Darlow, 2006). In the 1980s, presenters tended to act as reporters rather than authors, and were more recessive within the programmes' overall visual structure. Michael Attwell recalled the series *Ireland: A Television History* (BBC, 1980-1) and *Africa* (Michael Beazley Television for Channel Four, 1984) as examples:

What they all had in common was that they were all big ... the history of the troubles in Ireland, Africa, they were all big landmark series, and they were all classical, attempting to be definitive history. And although Robert Kee presented the one and Basil Davidson presented the other one, they were not personality presenters, in the way Starkey or Schama are, they were just someone to give you authority. They were low-key personalities, as opposed to personality personalities. (Interview, Attwell, 2006)

George Carey, managing director of the independent company Mentorn, agreed with Attwell, and cited presenters in the 1980s and most of the 1990s, as less charismatic than their counter parts in the late 1990s and early 2000s:

They are more important now. In the 80s, 90s, I think I wrote every word that went into most of the history programmes that were made by this company ... David Dimbleby did *An Ocean Apart* (BBC, WNET, KCET, 1988), and wrote lots of stuff, but by and large, they were producer interview driven, and not presenter driven. (Interview, Carey, 2006)

However, by the early to mid 1980s, the presenter had lost favour with producers and commissioners as a device for history documentary (Interviews: Davies, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Carey, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Davidson, 2006). Whilst the BBC's strand *Chronicle* (BBC, 1966-91) had used presenters extensively in the 1970s, by the 1980s producers has lost faith in them, and wanted to find new modes of storytelling:

... slowly presenters faded - although we never discussed it - I think we all felt that it stultified the programmes, made them look old fashioned. By the early 80s, the presenters were leaving, the new breed of producers were saying 'I want to do it this way'. (Interview, Davies, 2006).

When *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) began, its magazine format required a presenter, but after the departure of Tim Gardam as *Timewatch* series editor in 1985, his successor Roy Davies moved away from the constant use of presenters and changed the series from magazine format to a single film slot, in order to devote more time to each historic episode (Interview, Davies, 2006). The occasional history documentary series at the BBC during the 1980s also eschewed presenters, as they adhered to a historiographic approach which was more concerned with oral history than with grand narratives delivered by establishment figures or professional broadcasters (Interviews: Anon B, 2006; Davidson, 2006). According to the majority of the sample that expressed a view, there was then a substantial period of time until presenters re-appeared.

The re-emergence of the presenter was pinpointed by Laurence Rees and Peter Grimdsdale as having started in the series *Time Team* (Videotext communications for Channel Four, 1994-) which featured the comic actor Tony Robinson as its main presenter, and which used several sub-presenters (Interviews: Rees, 2006; Grimdsdale,

2006). Another early example was *War Walks* (BBC, 1996-7) which featured the military historian Richard Holmes, and was produced and directed by Mark Fielder (Interview, Fielder, 2006). In *War Walks*, the presenter was a useful tool for producing a history documentary on a very tight budget (Ibid).

However, even on this tight budget some sequences of reconstruction were also included due to the producer's desire to "draw in an audience more effectively by offering them more exciting imagery" (Ibid). In 1997 Channel Four commissioned David Starkey, who was at the time a well known contributor on BBC Radio 4 and Talk Radio<sup>64</sup>, to present a history documentary series called *Henry VIII* (Douglas Churnside Productions for Channel Four, 1998). In 2000, the BBC commissioned *A History of Britain* presented by Simon Schama (BBC, 2000-2002). Both series were ratings successes, which came as a surprise to both the BBC and Channel Four (Interview, Mykura, 2006). This success encouraged other, similar, presenter-led projects.

#### 7.2.3.2 Development of Presenters: Causes

Presenters re-emerged in the mid 1990s for a variety of reasons. The presenter was an alternative to archive material which had become too expensive for many smaller productions (Interviews: Fielder, 2006; Berthon, 2006). Commissioners felt that the presenter was able to attract larger audiences to history documentary than were previously attained, and were therefore a valuable tool in a competitive marketplace. Presenters could appeal to the emotions of audiences through their charisma and

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<sup>64</sup> Talk Radio was predecessor to the current commercial UK radio station TalkSPORT. Talk Radio was the "UK's first national commercial talk-based radio station" launched in 1994 (Anon, 2008).

personality in ways which traditional Archive/Interview documentaries could not (Interviews: Dugan, 2006; Carey, 2006; Attwell, 2006):

If you have a voice of god narration, the story can be well told and well written, but you are slightly distanced from it. You can have interviewees with recollections, or if your [topic is] old you are relying on second hand sources from historians, sometimes it doesn't engage in quite the same emotional way. I think that's what caused the need for presenters. (Interview, Dugan, 2006).

Presenters were also more able to present polemical versions of history than documentaries with unseen narration, which made the narratives more dramatic, entertaining and easier to follow (Interviews: Carey, 2006; Ware, 2006). Presenters brought in family audiences to history documentary (Interview, Ware, 2006). The use of polemic also made it possible for such programmes to be noticed in an increasingly crowded schedule (Interviews: Carey, 2006; Mykura, 2006; Berthon, 2006; Dugan, 2006). For Channel Four, David Starkey as a polemical presenter had a specific role in audience attraction after the general election of 1997, by identifying the channel as 'alternative', and therefore distinguishing it from its competitors:

Once we were in a period of Labour government, that anti-establishment thing wasn't going to quite wash anymore; I wanted to do new kinds of alternatives. The BBC would never have commissioned David Starkey then. He was too tricky, an obvious Tory, it was a counter-intuitive thing. I wanted to make a *Real Rupert Murdoch* [an edition of the history biography strand *The Real...*], which was "Rupert Murdoch, the man who is the reason why we are not paying £2.50 for our Guardians". In other words, there had to be another take on the subject ... I wanted to take another point of view, and people would say, 'bloody hell they are doing a film about Rupert Murdoch and it's not a hatchet job', and actually we even got an interview with him ... It was something people wouldn't have expected, in the same way they wouldn't have expected David Starkey. (Interview, Peter Grimsdale, 2006).

David Starkey, like Rupert Murdoch, were figures which Channel Four felt they could deal with in a new light after the election victory of Labour in 1997. In turn, it gave



Channel Four the ability to retain its identity as alternative in the new context of a Labour government.

#### 7.2.4 Dramatic Reconstruction

##### 7.2.4.1 Development of Dramatic Reconstruction

Although the interview sample indicated that dramatic reconstruction in history documentary was very rare in the 1980s, there were indications that dramatic reconstruction had been used before the period of this study (Interviews: Hayling, 2006; Darlow, 2006; Ryan, 2006). There were some instances of the use of dramatic reconstruction in the 1980s (Interviews: Roy Davies, 2006; Peter Grimsdale, 2006), however, most interviewees agreed that the use of reconstruction between 1982 and 2002 began in earnest after 1990<sup>65</sup>. There were many reasons for the infrequent use of dramatic reconstruction in history documentaries during the 1980s. Drama reconstruction was very expensive to execute convincingly, and history documentaries did not have sufficient budgets in the 1980s to hire the necessary expertise and equipment (Interviews: Hayling, 2006; Darlow, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006):

Bad reconstruction is just terrible, absolutely terrible; and good reconstruction is very expensive ... documentary directors didn't have the skills to make good drama reconstructions, so it would look undercooked ... just terrible. (Interview, Hayling, 2006)

Attempts to produce dramatic reconstruction on documentary budgets often encountered resistance from documentary makers, who had a different approach to drama producers:

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<sup>65</sup> There were notable uses of dramatic reconstruction in history documentary in the 1960s and 1970s, including *Culloden* (BBC, 1964), *The War Game* (BBC, 1965) and *Marie Curie* (BBC, 1977).

Most of the people I worked with on *All Our Working* [BBC, 1984] and *Now The War Is Over* [BBC, 1985] had come out of BBC current affairs. They were journalists who wanted to tell stories about the past. The people in the world of drama ... the script would come in, and the story would be already told there, it wasn't as if you were going off looking – a story has been written, you had to go and illustrate it. It's a completely different process. Actually quite a different culture. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

Some history documentary producers had reservations about using dramatic reconstruction, not because they didn't understand the processes involved, but because they believed that dramatisation damaged the credibility of documentary material (Interviews: Darlow, 2006; Anon A, 2006). Michael Darlow was a producer of both drama and documentary, and for him the difference was worth preserving, even though the difference was hard to define:

Documentary has to obey the rules of drama if it's to be a good documentary pretty much, but the rules are bent by the need to tell the truth. For Drama, the need to tell the truth, if it's to have credibility, is very important, but at a subtle level, the balance of the two things is different. (Interview, Darlow, 2006).

In the early 1990s, programmes began to use dramatic reconstruction more widely. Programmes such as *The Great Commanders* (Seventh Art Productions for Channel Four, 1993), *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1989-2004), *Small Objects of Desire* (BBC, 1993), *A Skirt Through History* (BBC, 1994), and *Timewatch: Flames of War* (BBC, 1994) all used a specific form of reconstruction that did not use dialogue, and concentrated on small emblematic details in order to create an impressionistic representation (Interviews: Attwell, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Clay, 2006). Michael Attwell, describes how *The Great Commanders* (Seventh Art Productions for Channel Four, 1993), a series he commissioned for Channel Four, broke new ground:

... we agreed that we couldn't re-enact things, we couldn't afford to do dramatisations of history, but there were certain areas where we needed to, because we didn't have material. So we'd do it in a loose impressionistic way. So you'd see horses' hooves, see spears, and so on, which I am not aware that anyone else did ... at that time. So that's kind of where reconstruction began. (Interview, Attwell, 2006)

The reconstructions were made in this way due to the cost of a more extensive dramatisation, and in order to preserve the credibility of the programmes as documentaries (Interviews: Attwell, 2006; Dugan, 2006). Such dramatic reconstructions were a type of imitation archive used to represent either periods or events for which no archive existed:

Our approach to re-creations has been to be quite stylized - impressionistic stuff. We were one of the first companies to introduce the idea of shooting reconstructions on super 8 film, on funny speeds, six frames per second or something. It gives you a slightly blurry effect; 'it looks like ancient archive' that was the original conceit. (Interview, Dugan, 2006)

However, these early forays into reconstruction were exceptional. *The Great Commanders* had broken new ground (Attwell, 2006), *Timewatch: Flames of War* (BBC, 1993) was the first *Timewatch* (BBC2, 1982-) since Laurence Rees had taken over in 1992 to use reconstruction, and both *Small Objects of Desire* (BBC, 1993) and *A Skirt Through History* (BBC, 1994) were experimental productions made at BBC Bristol. Dramatic reconstruction was still, to some extent eschewed by commissioners. In 1995, Flashback Television produced *War: The Inside Story* (Flashback Television for The History Channel, 1995) for the American channel, The History Channel. The series contained passages of reconstruction, but was not picked up by Channel Four due to their attitude to reconstruction:

It was associated then with low cost, low quality videos you might buy in W.H. Smith, rather than broadcast TV. We did a series on the British Civil War, and the commissioning editor and I joked that we should call it 'not the sealed knot' ... we were aware that men in baggy tights with large beer

bellies wasn't the way to tell serious bit of history. So it was rather looked down on, dramatising scenes, at that point. (Interview, Downing, 2006)

Whilst The History Channel had not explicitly encouraged Downing to use reconstruction, The History Channel gave Downing the freedom to try new forms of expression, as he considered archive to be a tired form:

I was wanting to move on from an obsession, a concentration, focus, from using the film from a particular era [archive] to being more inventive myself. I came to the conclusion that archive film - fascinating though it was and I still love working with it - ultimately is a bit stultifying. (Interview, Downing, 2006).

In addition, because of The History Channel's practice of commissioning long runs, they were able to fund these productions adequately, and also gave Flashback TV a valuable revenue stream:

Here was a new channel, with a new set of values, and reasonably healthy budgets - reasonably, we never got enough but they were healthy and pretty much akin to UK broadcast budgets - but would give us an opportunity to produce a different kind of history. But they were also talking about was long runs, they would commission in 6s, 8s, 10s. (Interview, Downing, 2006)

At the same time David Dugan at Windfall Films produced the series *Lost Civilizations* (NBC / Time Life, 1995) for the American market which was never broadcast in the UK. It had a very large budget, which was used to create lavish dramatic reconstructions, and when subsequently shown in industry conferences drew praise from UK commissioners and producers:

We did a big series called *Lost Civilisations* for Time Life, which never went out here [the UK], where we were responsible for all the dramatic recreation of the whole thing and they were phenomenally funded ... We showed some of those around in conferences, and people said "Wow that's

amazing, how did you do that?”. Well, it cost a lot of money. I think the two go together. (Interview, Dugan, 2006)

However the budget was still out of the reach of UK history documentary commissioners at the time (Interview, David Dugan, 2006).

From 1998 onwards, Peter Grimsdale moved the history output of Channel Four away from the journalistic approach of *Secret History* and *Secret Lives* (Interview, Downing, 2006) and commissioned programming that dealt with pre-archive periods, which required dramatic reconstruction such as in *The Real Georgiana Spencer* (Channel Four, 1999):

At this stage, *The Real...* biographies was people who were alive. It was twentieth century and it was talking heads, people who remembered the person, the person if you could get them, archive, and some general views, filmic. But we also did - I also wanted to break out of the twentieth century - *The Real Georgiana Spencer*. Amanda Foreman wrote a fantastic biography of Georgiana Spencer, a distant relative of Diana Spencer, so I said we are going to grasp the nettle, we are going to back into drama reconstruction. We are going to do it, and do it well. By that time in the late 1990s, there were lots of people who were blurring the boundaries between documentary and drama. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006).

*The Real Georgiana Spencer* led to the commissioning of several history documentaries that used substantial passages of reconstruction in combination with either interviews or archive or presenters, such as *Station X* (Darlow Smithson for Channel Four, 1999), *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) and *Escape from Colditz* (Windfall Films for Channel Four, 2000). *Elizabeth* in particular was a ratings success (Davies, 2000) and encouraged the commissioning of other similar series (Interviews: Grimsdale, 2006; Fielder, 2006; Attwell, 2006). As has been mentioned earlier (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2.1), Jane Root was known to prefer reconstruction to archive, even when archive material of events was available

(Interview, Anon A, 2006). In 2000 *A History of Britain* (BBC/THC, 200-2002) was produced, which made extensive use of the 'fake archive' mode of dramatic reconstruction. Along with *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel 4, 2000), *A History of Britain* (BBC, 2000-2) was credited by many as the beginning of a boom in history documentary production (Interviews: Fielder, 2006; Davidson, 2006; Mykura, 2006).

At this point, the use of dramatic reconstruction had reached its second phase of development. Unlike the first phase of the early and mid 1990s, where small segments of emblematic and impressionistic reconstruction were used, there were now substantial sequences of dramatized material incorporated into history documentaries, and mixed with the other traditional elements, interview, archive and presenters. For David Dugan, there were two clear schools of reconstruction at this stage:

The Starkey school - people in very expensive Elizabethan frocks, beautifully framed, almost looked like a fashion parade, not doing realistic things, lots of poses. Iconic. And then there was our kind of thing, which was gritty but impressionistically filmed, handheld, feeling as if stuff was happening. (Interview, Dugan, 2006)

There was also a third stage of reconstruction which became popular towards the end of the 1990s, a form in which ordinary people from the present day were invited to live in simulations of the past, often referred to as 'Living History' (Interviews: Dugan, 2006; Mykura, 2006; Ryan, 2006; Bins, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006). In 1999, the series *1900 House* (Wall to Wall for Channel Four, 1999) dealt with the problem of scripting history reconstructions in a new way. Originally commissioned by the Science department of Channel Four, the series was intended as a look into domestic life in 1900 as a way of revealing the impact of technological change on family life.

The series followed a family as they were challenged to live for a period of months using the technology that would have been available to them in the year 1900. *1900 House* (Wall to Wall for Channel Four, 1999) was greeted with critical acclaim and enthusiasm, and led to a number of series which used the same methods:

I think *That'll Teach 'Em* [Twenty Twenty Television for Channel Four, 2003-2006], *Bad Lads Army* [Twenty Twenty Television for ITV 2004-2006] all flow out of *1900 House*. *1900 House* made people think 'wow' – putting ordinary people, from today, into historical situations in the past and see how they get on, what a great idea, let's do some more of that. (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006)

Michael Darlow, from a more critical point of view considered living history series to be more mixed, with series such as *1900 House* (Wall to Wall for Channel Four, 1999) succeeding, whilst series such as *The Trench* (BBC, 2002) disappointed, due to its inability to translate the horror of past events in to the present (Interview, Darlow, 2006).

A fourth stage in the use of dramatic reconstruction in history documentaries began in 1999, with the showing of *Walking With Dinosaurs* (BBC / Discovery, 1999). This production was itself the first large scale product of the co-production deal between the BBC and Discovery signed in 1998 (Interviews, Rees, 2006). That deal had given the BBC the funds to overcome the fears producers had about badly funded and badly made dramatizations, and enabled a move into computer generated reconstruction. From then on dramatic reconstruction became a more significant trend (Interviews; Hayling, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006; Downing, 2006; Anon B, 2006):

People in the BBC, using Discovery money started to do reconstruction. They used people that were more skilled, found ways of cutting corners. I don't know how, but it suddenly emerged as a trend, and everybody wanted it, because it was like cheap drama ... you got something really

good like *Dunkirk* (BBC, 2003) which was absolutely brilliant, and it was a full drama made by a documentary department for £600,000 an hour with full battle scenes. (Interview, Hayling, 2006)

History documentaries moved from containing sequences of reconstruction, without speaking actors, to programmes that were entirely reconstructed using a script performed by actors. This in turn led to a less clearly defined difference between drama and documentary producers (Interviews: Anon B, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Fielder, 2006).

*Pyramid* (BBC2, 2002) exemplified this shift in the mind-set of the BBC regarding CGI-led dramatic reconstruction. Laurence Rees, head of history at the BBC in 2002, had felt that the archive and testimony path that had brought him so many awards over a twenty year period was beginning to lose its power. The Discovery deal gave him the resources to make “a revolutionary leap” from the formula he had used for decades, to a model in which “we used entirely drama, entirely computer generated images, about the building of the great pyramid” (Interview, Rees, 2006). The programme attracted 11 million viewers, “the highest audience of any history programme ever made” (Ibid), and led to a series of programmes produced along the same stylistic lines and on the same epic and popular subjects. Channel Four responded by competing with the BBC in creating epic history drama documentaries, such as *Ancient Egyptians* (Wall to Wall for Channel Four / TLC / Canal+ / Rai1 / NDR, 2003) which cost around £1.5 million per hour to produce (Holmwood, 2001).

#### 7.2.4.2 Development of Dramatic Reconstruction: Causes

Several reasons were offered by the interviewees as to the causes of the development in the use of dramatic reconstructions. Economically, dramatic reconstruction became



cheaper due to improvements in camera technology (Interviews: Mykura, 2006; Anon A, 2006) at a point when archive became prohibitively expensive (Interviews: Darlow, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Carey, 2006). To some extent, documentary which used dramatic reconstruction replaced traditional drama series, bringing a substantial cost saving to the broadcaster (Interview, Mykura, 2006).

Another reason given by the interviewees relates to the audience. The use of dramatic reconstruction gained acceptance amongst producers because it was popular with audiences (Interviews: Anon A, 2006; Fielder, 2006). In light of deals such as that between the BBC and Discovery in 1998, the use of dramatic reconstruction increased. This led to growing audience expectations that history documentary should have lavish production values, and make extensive use of dramatic reconstruction and CGI (Interview, Dugan, 2006).

The debate about the use of reconstruction in documentary was effectively won by those who supported its use, despite there being strongly held positions that the widespread use of dramatic reconstruction damaged the documentary credibility of history documentaries (Interviews: Ware, 2006; Anon A, 2006; Darlow, 2006; Hayling, 2006). One reason for this outcome was the attitude taken by commissioning editors at Channel Four, and controllers at BBC2, in the late 1990s. Peter Grimsdale had become the commissioner for history, religion and features at Channel Four in 1997, replacing Alan Hayling. In 1998 Jane Root became the controller of BBC2, replacing Michael Jackson, who in turn had gone to Channel Four. Both Grimsdale and Root had differing attitudes to dramatic reconstruction than their predecessors.

Secondly, the move towards dramatic reconstruction was mostly driven by the desire of producers to widen storytelling possibilities by covering pre-archive periods in history (Interviews: Anon A, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006; Davidson, 2006), to represent events which had not been preserved in the archive (Interviews: Thomas, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Carey, 2006), and to widen the expressive possibilities of history documentary by breaking out from the constrictions placed on form by the use of interviews and archives and thus being able to express themselves using more powerful visual means (Interviews: Fielder, 2006; Clay, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Downing, 2006).

### 7.2.5 Periods and Topics

#### 7.2.5.1 Developments in Period and Topic

The period covering the age of photography was the main focus for history documentary up until, and including the early 1980s (Interviews: Darlow, 2006; Downing, 2006). Martin Davidson saw the traditional periods of history documentary coverage as either the era of photography or ancient history, because of the dominance of two main periods, Ancient Egypt and the Second World War:

... periods were dominated by Fuhrers and Pharaohs, because you either used the amazing landscape of Egypt or the archive associated with the Second World War. Anything else required dramatic reconstruction, and these periods [alternatives to ancient Egypt and the Second World War] increased as the use of dramatic reconstruction increased (Interview, Davidson, 2006)

According to producers such as Michael Darlow and Taylor Downing, by the end of the 1980s, the seam of the Second World War archive was nearing exhaustion (Interviews: Darlow, 2006; Downing, 2006). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the two premiere history documentary strands on UK television, *Secret History* (Channel

4, 1991-2004) and *Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-) adopted a more contemporary view on history (Interview, Hayling, 2006). This challenged the previous notion at the BBC that history ended in 1945, after which current affairs or political programmes took over (Interview, Davies, 2006). From the mid 1990s onwards, the range of periods covered increased, as dramatic reconstruction became a more popular mode of history documentary production (Interviews: Dugan, 2006; Davidson, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006; Fielder, 2006; Carey, 2006):

In the first part of your period [the 1980s], history documentaries were variations of what was or wasn't in the archives ... Partly because the coal-seams have been quarried, there is nothing left ... people are getting technically very inventive about how to bring to life the age before archive, so in the great history of time, I don't know what period you want to put on it, say 5,000 years, there's a lot more stuff to choose from now. (Interview, Carey, 2006)

There was a tradition of history documentaries that covered British social and political subjects, which was pursued in a number of separate directions. The first was epitomised by *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) and the other social history series producer by Peter Pagnamenta and Angela Holdsworth during the 1980s and early 1990s (Anon A, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006). Secondly, programmes made by the film workshops for Channel Four, such as *Making Cars* (Television History Workshop for Channel Four, 1984) (Ryan, 2006; Thomas, 2006), and independent film makers such as Steve Humphries (Deans, 1999; Attwell, 2006), made use of oral history techniques to tell histories from the perspectives of working class people. Thirdly, independent producers such as Colin Thomas and Taylor Downing challenged the orthodox depiction of historical processes and change by including an analysis of the history-making processes in their programmes, such as *Flashback* (Flashback TV for Channel Four, 1983-4) and *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV

for Channel Four, 1985). The aims of these practitioners were summed up by Michelle Ryan, who worked in the television workshop Red Flannel, set up in conjunction with Channel Four in the mid 1980s:

Generally, from Peter Watkins<sup>66</sup> onwards, the attempt was to get rid of the voice of the narrator, to bring the people's voices onto the screen. To represent their lives and their history in a way that has not been represented before, and gave another dimension to historical representation. (Interview, Ryan, 2006)

Although this subject area remained represented throughout the period, particularly in the work of Steve Humphries (Deans, 1999), social history waned on TV during the 1990s (Interviews: Hayling, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Davidson, 2006; Attwell, 2006).

Another popular subject area was military history. Anon A spoke about how military history used to dominate history documentary. Producers such as Anon A felt in the 1980s that the military history of the twentieth century, and especially the Second World War, was too common on TV:

We all thought that there was far too much military history all the time, and that really it was ratings driven. All channels seemed to prefer World War Two ideas to social history or economic history. (Interview, Anon A, 2006)

However, the late 1980s was a time when less military history appeared on television. According to Anon A, although twentieth century military history increased in numbers after the late 1980s, it never regained its former dominance, and was to some extent replaced by national narratives from the pre-photographic age (Interview, Anon

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<sup>66</sup> Peter Watkins is the director of the historical drama-documentary *Culloden* (BBC, 1964) depicting the famous battle of 1765 and the subsequent clearances of the Scottish Highlands. He also directed the speculative documentary-drama *The War Game* (BBC, 1965/1985), which was banned by the BBC for 20 years.

A, 2006). Michael Attwell recalled how difficult it was to commission military history at Channel Four in the early 1990s:

Apart from *The World at War*, there was no military history at all. The first thing that happened was *The Great Commanders* (Seventh Art Productions for Channel Four, 1993). That must have been very, very early 1990s, 1990 almost ... In fact John Willis, although he'd probably never admit it, was very, very reluctant to let me commission it. (Interview, Attwell, 2006)

Another great shift in the subjects covered by history documentary, according to the interviewees, was the movement towards celebratory accounts of familiar passages from British history in the pre-photographic era. In the mid-1990s series such as *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2004) *Reputations* (BBC, 1994-2004), and *Secret Lives* (Channel Four, 1995-7) offered irreverent and subversive accounts of national icons and iconic events (Interviews: Berthon, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006). Alan Hayling recalled one of the most subversive biographies in the *Secret Lives* series, *Edward VIII: The Traitor King* (Hart Ryan Productions for Channel Four, 1995):

... we would investigate the reputations of the great and the good, normally dead but not always. There was enormous uproar about a film called *Edward Traitor King* (Hart Ryan Productions for Channel Four, 1995) about Edward VIII. It got a huge audience, 4.5-5 million, a very much bigger audience than we expected, or they [Channel Four] expected. We accused Edward VIII of having deliberately betrayed Britain, and cost the lives of British servicemen. The *Daily Mail* went mad, Andrew Roberts, a rival historian, went mad. (Interview, Hayling, 2006)

However, by the late 1990s, series such as *Secret Lives* had been re-branded, and there was a move towards what Martin Davison called “a radically conservative” discussion and celebration of British iconic figures and events in series like *A History of Britain* (BBC, 2000-2002) and *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) (Interview, Davidson, 2006). Davidson saw this as a move away from what he

called Marxist history, which questions structures of power. According to Davidson, social history was replaced by a narrative approach, in which history documentaries became “unembarrassed about a huge subject, and secondly it was unembarrassed about approaching that subject in a narrative way” (Interview, Davidson, 2006).

There was significant agreement amongst the interviewees that during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the range of subjects covered by history documentaries decreased (Interviews: Dugan, 2006; Carey, 2006; Anon A, 2006; Berthon, 2006; Anon C, 2006). This meant that certain subjects would be barred, whilst other subjects became more prevalent:

...all that broadcasters are interested in today [2006] is name recognition ... there has to be an Attila the Hun - or an event you have heard of, the gunpowder plot - and it doesn't matter how many times you make that film, you can go on making it every three or four years. (Interviews, Dugan, 2006)

According to Anon C, a highly experienced and senior BBC history documentary producer, the effect was to limit the nuance and complexity of any subjects' treatment:

There was a strangle-hold on the types of subject matter. Maximum drama, maximum familiarity, maximum lack of ambiguity, maximum potential for adrenaline. It excludes whole areas of history. You must also bait your hook to keep a young feckless American watching the programme in the 500 channel world. Pressure on action, music, gimmicks. It doesn't leave much room for argument. It doesn't leave much room for contradiction, or nuance, or ambiguity or even quietness. (Interview, Anon C, 2006)

#### 7.2.5.2 Developments in Period and Topic: Causes

It was claimed that political trends in the culture of history documentary production accounted for a shift, whereby history documentaries that emphasised the experiences of the working class and “normal people” were replaced by history documentaries that

emphasized the role of powerful governmental or monarchic elites (Interviews: Hayling, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Davidson, 2006; Attwell, 2006; Anon A, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Ryan, 2006). Michelle Ryan suggested that social and political agendas had swung away from a discussion of the common man, and towards discussions of those in power. Martin Davidson also claimed that there was a wider cultural shift, which was also visible in academic history, as a rejection of studies that examined individual problems or topics in favour of sweeping narratives (Interviews, Davidson, 2006).

Anon A suggested that the shift from social history documentary to documentaries containing celebratory national narratives of power and monarchy was caused by the discovery in the late 1990s that in a more competitive market, the latter could attract larger audiences than the former, in the same way as military history had done for many years: “the discovery that the kings and queens of the earlier centuries, plagues and romances could be as popular as military history is what changed things” (Interview, Anon A, 2006).

Davidson claimed that the move to celebratory national narratives of power and monarchy, in addition to reflecting a shift in academia, was also due to the need to capture a fragmenting audience, whose attention span was steadily shortening (Interview, Davidson, 2006). Davidson further claimed that this shift was due to a trivialization of history documentary, in which the serious concerns of society and politics were exchanged for the escapism of heritage-based pleasures, again done in order to maximize the audience in an increasingly competitive marketplace:

It suddenly became easier to do a three part series on Henry VIII, than on the PLO ... we have taken refuge in heritage history as a way of getting

away from the problems of the current contemporary world. (Interview, Davidson, 2006)

The increase in military history as a subject was also caused by the effects of measuring and serving the audience, as television became more competitive during the 1990s. According to Davidson, the ground had been laid for the rise in military history programmes in the mid 1990s by a similar rise in leisure programmes. By the late mid 1990s, *Changing Rooms* (Endemol for BBC, 1996-2004) had been specifically designed to appeal to women in a particular part of the schedule, while military history programmes such as *Decisive Weapons of World War Two* (BBC, 1996-7) had been specifically designed to target male audiences:

It was no coincidence that these were not at nine o'clock; they were half hour shows, not fifty minutes. One of the arguments in the programme's favour was that whilst all other leisure programming had a strong female audience, this would, like *Top Gear* (BBC, 1978-), bring in a male audience at this early evening time. It was 'lighter', and the schedulers and commissioners were swayed by that. (Interview, Davidson, 2006)

Another cause for the development of period and topic that was suggested by many interviewees was that of a commissioner's, or controller's personal taste. They cited Jeremy Isaacs, John Willis, Laurence Rees, Janice Hadlow, Michael Jackson, Jane Root and Tim Gardam as figures who had directly affected the history documentary output of UK terrestrial television (Interviews: Grimsdale, 2006; Attwell, 2006; Anon A, 2006; Downing, 2006; Carey, 2006; Mykura, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Ryan, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Berthon, 2006). Two individuals were mentioned more than others as being directly influential: John Willis and Laurence Rees.

Several interviewees claimed that John Willis had been instrumental in the conception of *Secret History* (Channel 4, 1991-2004), and by doing so had affected the subject



periods and topics dealt with in history documentary across the all channels (Interviews: Hayling, 2006; Mykura, 2006; Ware, 2006; Attwell, 2006). According to Michael Attwell, the commissioning of David Starkey's first series, *Henry VIII* (Douglas Churnside Productions for Channel Four, 1998) came about as a direct consequence of circumstances in John Willis' family life: "What was interesting was that John Willis' son was at school, and he realised that they were doing the Tudor period, but they didn't know anything about it. He suddenly thought, there's a gap in the market." (Interview, Attwell, 2006).

However, while John Willis was able to influence programming directly, he was not immune to the context in which he worked. Michael Darlow suggested that Willis had far less control as Director of Factual & Learning at the BBC (2003- 2006) than he did when he was director of programmes at Channel Four (1992-1997) (Darlow, 2006). Alan Hayling claimed that John Willis would have made a great difference to Channel Four's history had he been appointed Chief executive instead of Michael Jackson in 1997, he would not have been immune to the increasing commercial pressures that Jackson eventually faced (Interview, Hayling, 2006). Laurence Rees was also a figure that was widely cited as an individual who had a direct influence on the topic and period of history documentary over the period (Interviews: Mykura, 2006; Fielder, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Anon A, 2006; Binns, 2006). Anon A claimed that Rees was not only a dominant figure because he produced quality programmes, but because his interest happened to coincide with a subject area that was popular with audiences (Interview, Anon A, 2006), a point Rees himself openly admitted to:

Why has the BBC done all these programmes on Nazis and the Second World War? It's because I'm really interested in Nazis and the Second World War. I am also very interested in other history, and I have overseen lots of other history, but it would be a lie to say, if you look at my CV, that there hasn't been a recurring theme here of being interested in a particular area ... It's individuals and their individual interest and talents that in many respects drive the types of programmes. (Interview, Rees, 2006)

### **7.3 Conclusion**

This section draws together the material from the previous sections, and asks how far the practitioner views presented go towards answering the thesis' third main research question regarding the connection between changes in the political economy of television and the form of history documentaries.

#### 7.3.1 Interview

The sample noted several developments in the use of interviews over the period. There was an overall decline in use; the traditional, formal, locked-off interview was challenged by other techniques, such as observational film making, and a more conscious 'dressing' of interview frames. The interview as a technique, especially when used to interview eye witnesses, was a barrier to the coverage of certain periods of history. In addition, interviews came under pressure as competition for audiences, often articulated through the needs of American co-production partners, required faster forms of information transfer. However, the widespread practice of using formal, locked-off, interviews survived through the period.

### 7.3.2 Archive

Archive was a dominant element in history documentary at the beginning of the 1980s, along with the interview. Traditionally, it had been used as a document, along with any original sound, to give an impression of a past period. But during the 1980s producers began to get tired of it. Channel Four experimented by cutting it with interview in new ways that raised questions about the origins of the material itself. The *Timewatch* move towards *Vérité* challenged the status of archive, as it had challenged the interview. There were also similar pressures from American co-producers, and from Jane Root the BBC2 controller, to limit the use of archive, especially black and white material. Despite these challenges, archive remained a much used element in 2002, albeit not as dominant as in 1982. These changes were driven by the cost of archive, the perception of its unattractiveness to a younger audience, and the need of seasoned producers to adopt new styles of expression for reasons of personal expression and satisfaction.

### 7.3.3 Presenter

The sample agreed the presenter had lost its popularity with commissioners and producers by the 1980s, despite having been a long standing element in history documentary production. What presenting there was, was producer-led rather than presenter-led as had been the case in earlier programmes presented by A.J.P. Taylor, Kenneth Clark and Jacob Bronowski. There was also agreement about the re-emergence of the presenter in the mid to late 1990s, and that the ways in which the presenters who appeared in the late 1990s were used emphasised their charisma and personalities. Presenters became a means of engaging the audience emotionally, and distinguishing programmes from the others around it in a crowded schedule. The

presenter had also been an economically preferable alternative to archive material, whose cost rose throughout the 1990s.

#### 7.3.4 Reconstruction

The sample agreed that dramatic reconstruction was very rare in the 1980s. It was not used because of the threat it was believed to be to documentary realism. It was also avoided because of the high cost of rendering convincing reconstructions, and because of the general attitude of commissioners towards the amateurish products of 'bad' reconstruction produced on documentary budgets. There was a cultural divide between those who produced documentary and drama. There was a link between co-production funding and achieving the budgets that were required to create convincing reconstructions. There was also a link between an increase in dramatic reconstruction and producers' aspirations to express themselves in new ways. These aspirations could be either to cover periods in history that were not accessible through archive, or to produce programmes that were more visually polished and engaging. There was disagreement in the sample as to what this meant for the history documentary as a whole. Apart from the factor of producer aspiration detailed above (and on pages 68, 73 and 323-324), the adoption of dramatic reconstruction was seen as the last in a line of formal changes, motivated by the commercial imperatives of audience maximization and competition for audience attention, that threatened to destabilize the accuracy of the past represented on television. On the other hand, the proliferation of channels and the increasing use of co-production money had enabled new techniques, and crucially had not extinguished traditional methods and aims.

### 7.3.5 Periods and Topics

The periods covering the age of photography and ancient civilizations were dominant in the early 1980s. The subjects of the Second World War and Ancient Egypt were particularly emphasized. The Second World War became less dominant towards the end of the 1980s. Social history was popular in the 1980s, both on BBC and Channel Four, albeit in different forms. Journalistic exposés of recent history became more popular in the early 1990s after *Secret History* and *Timewatch* changed their emphasis. Towards the mid to late 1990s, there was a turn towards earlier periods, caused by a number of inter-related factors: a political shift towards narratives of power and monarchy; an abandonment of social history, and a shift towards narrative history; the sourcing of co-production funding to enable the dramatic reconstruction of periods before the reach of the photographic archive. This shift was followed quickly by a period that interviewees characterized as one in which historical subjects became limited to highly familiar and iconic events and figures.

In terms of the tension between traditional and new methods there were three main positions articulated within the sample. Firstly, a group of interviewees were optimistic about the changes. They saw changes in form and practice having developed as a result of the personal agendas of commissioners and producers as much as from political, economic or technological pressures. Technology had improved the standard of presentation, and marketisation within television had increased the range and diversity of history documentaries on UK television. (Interviews: Grimsdale, 2006; Mykura, 2006; Rees, 2006; Attwell, 2006; Cosgrove, 2006). Secondly, another group of interviewees broadly expressed the view that traditional methods were rooted in a sincere and serious respect for historical

accuracy, a position which had been threatened by the marketisation of television during the late 1980s and 1990s (Interviews: Anon A, 2006; Anon B, 2006; Darlow, 2006; Ware, 2006; Davies, 2006; Nelmes, 2006).

Thirdly, other interviewees saw the traditional forms of history documentary as claiming a false objectivity, which sometimes led to an authoritarian or overly 'official' position. Traditional methods did not allow for alternative perspectives from outside the usual televisual channels, and also insisted on a limited range of formal expression. Interviewees in this camp saw some formal developments as welcome breaches of a constricting orthodoxy, enabling obscure corners of history to be illuminated in a variety of methods. They were anxious about the effects that marketisation had on history documentary form, but were also aware of the advantages and limitations of the traditional model (Interviews: Downing, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Rees, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Carey, 2006; Berthon, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Temple, 2006; Davidson, 2006; Fielder, 2006). These competing claims will be explored through textual analysis of key programmes in Chapter 8.

There is a tension in this study between two motivating forces behind the development of history documentary: the political economic climate, and the input of individuals such as Laurence Rees or John Willis. The balance between these two factors is difficult to judge in absolute terms, and due to the producer perspective of this study, the power and influence of individuals may be over emphasised. However, the data gathered in the study does suggest that whilst political and economic considerations limited the autonomy of producers and commissioners, some

individuals did seem better equipped to operate in certain circumstances. It remains for another, further study to assess the effects of the limitations in more detail.

This chapter has presented evidence that suggests changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 had a number of particular effects on the form of history documentary. It has also presented a range of views regarding the changing quality of the programmes produced. The next chapter will explore discussions of textual change, and its link to the changing political economy of television, by tracking the competing claims regarding programme quality through a series of case-studies built around key programmes.

## PhD Chapter 8: Key programmes

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter is an indicative exploration of selected dimensions of textual change over the period of investigation. It engages with the third of this thesis' research questions, which explores the connection between the changing political economy of television between 1982 and 2002, and changes in history documentary form. It does this by examining the formal characteristics of series and programmes within series, as well as landmark individual programmes.

The previous chapter dealt with this question through an analysis of commissioners' and producers' views of formal change. That analysis posed a number of possible trajectories for the development of the history documentary between 1982 and 2002. This chapter engages with the question of a connection between political economy and changing programme form from a different angle, that of the textual qualities of key programmes broadcast on UK terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002. As mentioned earlier (Chapter 3, Section 3.6) the key programmes analysed in this chapter were chosen because of the frequency with which they were referred to in the practitioner interviews, and then according to three main criteria:

1. Programmes that innovated in some way
2. Programmes that influenced the making of later programmes
3. Programmes that typified the mainstream, rather than the margin<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> By approaching the choice of programmes through their frequency in the interview sample, many examples of good practice as mentioned in Ward (2005), Bell and Gray (2007) are omitted, which might give a distorted picture of overall change in history documentary. However, the sample does represent landmarks of the mainstream as chosen by interviewees in terms of their understanding of both 'good' and 'bad' practice.



The chosen programmes were analysed according to two sets of opinion: the critical literature on history documentary outlined in the literature review; the opinion of commissioners and producers discussed in Chapter 6. The critical literature fell into two broad positions, one which tended to argue that history documentary had improved in quality between 1982 and 2002, and another which argued that the quality of history documentary declined:

| <u>Decline in Quality (1A)</u>   | <u>Increase in Quality: (1B)</u>  |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greater spectacle means less questioning by audience (Wilson, 2003:176).</li> <li>2. Spectacle is problematic for historical accuracy (Williams, 2007: 130; Hunt, 2006:846).</li> <li>3. Presenters mean less questioning by audience (Bell and Gray, 2007: 127-130).</li> <li>4. Male, Oxbridge-educated presenters limit alternative historical views (Williams, 2007: 133; Bell and Gray, 2007: 127-130).</li> <li>5. Archive limits alternative historical views (Williams, 2007: 136).</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visual depictions are not inimical to reasoned argument (Schama, 2004: 32)</li> <li>2. Dramatic codes enable revisionist historical views (Ward, 2005: 49-65).</li> <li>3. Visual codes contribute towards democratising history on television (Schama, 2004: 32)</li> <li>4. Presenters can encourage questioning by audience (Bell and Gray, 2007: 127-130).</li> </ol> |

Table 8.1: Critical Perspectives on the Development of History Documentary Form, 1982-2002 (Source: Academic Literature)

The positions shown in Table 8.1 agree with two of the three taken by commissioners and producers, regarding the development of history documentary form, as outlined in Chapter 6. These are the two polar positions taken by commissioners and producers, that history documentary had either become worse, or better, between 1982 and 2002.

| Declining Quality in History Documentaries (2A)  | Increasing in Quality in History Documentaries (2B)  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A loss of analysis in programmes</li> <li>2. There was a lessening of the intellectual content</li> <li>3. A move towards celebratory narrative history</li> <li>4. Entertainment and nostalgia took the place of argument and analysis</li> <li>5. Trans-Atlantic funding infantilised the content of history documentaries</li> <li>6. Less time and money spent on original research</li> <li>7. More money was spent on spectacle</li> <li>8. Centralisation of commissioning led to less individual voices</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. More money was spent on history documentaries</li> <li>2. Programmes were watched by more people</li> <li>3. Programmes represented the viewing desires of the audience</li> <li>4. More diversity of periods and topics were represented</li> <li>5. More diversity of producers of history documentaries</li> <li>6. More diversity of representational styles</li> <li>7. Through trans-Atlantic money, production values were increased</li> </ol> |

Table 8.2: Commissioners and Producers' Accounts of Changes in History Documentary Form (Source: Practitioner Interviews).

For ease of reference in this chapter, the views in column A of Table 1 and Table 2 will be referred to as 'Perspective A', and the views in column B of Table 1 and Table 2, as 'Perspective B'.

This chapter presents the result of its analysis in two main sections. Section 8.2 analyses key programmes, either landmark one-offs or exemplary episodes from landmark series, and is subdivided as follows: firstly a brief description of the chosen programme's commissioning context; secondly, a formal analysis of the chosen programme, using the critical framework shown above; thirdly, an evaluative conclusion that assesses the programmes position within critical debates concerning quality, and the effects of political economy on text production. Section 8.3 concludes, by comparing the key programmes in terms of critical positions outlined in the literature review. The key programmes selected for consideration in this chapter are as follows:

1. *All Our Working Lives* (BBC2, 1984)
2. *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985)
3. *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel Four, 1992)
4. *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997)
5. *Elizabeth* (United productions for Channel Four, 2000)
6. *Pyramid* (BBC/Discovery/NDR, 2002)

## 8.2 Key Programmes

### 8.2.1 *All Our Working Lives* (BBC2, 1984)

#### 8.2.1.1 Commissioning Context

*All Our Working Lives* was commissioned as a fully-funded BBC production, around 1981. The series was transmitted on BBC2 on Fridays in 12 parts between 4<sup>th</sup> October 1984 and 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1984 (BFI, 2008). *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) was inspired by the success of a previous BBC history documentary series, *Ireland: A Television History* (BBC, 1980-1), which, in turn, was inspired by history documentary series produced by Thames Television in the 1970s, such as *The World At War* (Thames TV for ITV, 1973-4). *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) had a personnel link to the Thames Television tradition through its executive producer, Peter Pagnamenta, who had earlier produced *Palestine* (Thames TV for ITV, 1978). *All Our Working Lives* dealt with the industrial history of Britain over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, up to contemporary times. It did this by dedicating a separate episode to different industries (shipbuilding, plane building, railways, retail, coal mining, and agriculture) together with some episodes that discussed general

developments (BFI, 2008). This analysis is based on two episodes of the series: *Shipbuilders*, and *Planemakers*.

#### 8.2.1.2 Textual Analysis

Due to its position near the beginning of the sample period, *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) could be seen either as an example of history documentary before a decline in quality (Perspective A), or prior to an increase in quality (Perspective B). From the perspective of critics and practitioners who claim that there was a decline in quality across the period, *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) has several hallmarks of a high quality history documentary. The series displayed evidence of extensive and detailed research into the history of development of British manufacturing industries throughout the twentieth century.

In terms of its use of interview, the programme bore the hallmarks of rigorous research. The programme showed material from 14 interviews, eight with ex-manual workers at various shipyards in the UK, and 6 with ex-managers of shipyards in the UK. Not only were the interviewees highly knowledgeable and articulate, but they also featured in a number of the passages of archive film used, as in the examples of Alf Senior picked out in the archive as a dock worker in the 1930s, and Sir John Hunter, owner of Hunter's Shipyard on Tyneside. There was also a rigorous use of archive. In addition to the customary illustrative use of archive footage, the archive was given historical specificity by identifying individuals from the archive material, who explained the context of the events shown in the archive. Some sequences of filmed material were also presented as documents in their own right, as industrial

films such as *Shipyard* (Dir Paul Rotha, 1935), *Tyneside Story* (1943) and *Clydebuilt* (1944) were labelled and quoted at length with their original audio track.

The programme was also very careful to position itself in a balanced and objective fashion. The programme used a commentary, which acted as a guide to the narrative, moving the focus between the broad sweep of the overall story and the close detail of the interviews. In contrast to *The World at War* (Thames TV for ITV, 1973-4), in which the delivery of Laurence Olivier was highly performative, the delivery of John Woodville in *All Our Working Lives* was more consistent in terms of tone and cadence, thereby projecting a more objective, dispassionate perspective. The commentary also acted as an arbitrator within the programme, between the two groups interviewed: workers and managers. *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) was broadcast concurrently with the miner's strike, and in the context of widespread unemployment and industrial privatisation in the early to mid 1980s. The series was therefore engaging with a controversial area of contemporary political debate and activity, by discussing the history of the British manufacturing industries. An example of its editorial balance was in the discussion of working practices such as “the squad system” and “demarcation”<sup>68</sup>. The programme claimed that these practices had been introduced originally by managers to cut costs, but were later used by trades unions as leverage in industrial disputes. These working practices were presented as leading towards an “over-unionisation” of the shipbuilding industry, caused by a management committed to maintaining a casualised workforce. The programme therefore avoided obvious partisanship, while still engaging issues with topical parallels in the history.

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<sup>68</sup> ‘The squad system’ was a way of organising labour in a boatyard. It involved a team made up men with several different skills (i.e., riveter, fitter, carpenter) who worked on sections of a boat together, and then having finished one section, moved onto another as a team. ‘Demarcation’ was the difficult process by which the boundaries between the duties carried out by sets of skilled men were negotiated. This could be problematic as the difference between the duties of a riveter and fitter could overlap.

From this perspective, ('Perspective A'), *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) was a series in which a balanced and a gently questioning approach was taken to a delicate and topical area of history. The stylistic austerity of the black and white archive and talking head interviews signalled an emphasis on analysis, rather than on entertaining through visual pleasure, and suggested that the resources devoted to the series had been invested in research, rather than display.

Whilst the programme could be seen as a high point of the output of the period, it could also be seen as deficient in many respects ('Perspective B'). The series used several devices to establish a sense of balance and objectivity, which tended to hide the way the series generated its historical knowledge. Firstly, unseen commentary for *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) was situated in the present, occupying the customary omniscient position within the knowledge hierarchy of a history documentary (Bruzzi, 2000: 40-41), and was able to move the programme's focus from broad historical statements to more focussed and localised anecdotes contained in the interviews.

The text of the commentary never admitted the possibility of knowledge gaps, and also confidently asserted generalised ideas about historical processes. The commentary established the notion of a knowing present, and therefore implied a past in which actions were taken with less awareness of an ultimate consequence. This example is near the beginning of the *Shipbuilders* programme:

[Narrator:] When Iron replaced Wood in shipbuilding, yards were started beside the great rivers of the Northeast – the Tyne, the Wear, the Tees - and the Clyde in Scotland – where coal and steel were nearby. The skills

of the craftsmen drawn to the new towns on the river banks were developed and exploited by Victorian businessmen. Fortunes were made. (*All Our Working Lives: Shipbuilders*, BBC, 1984)

This example, like many other passages of commentary tended to strip out agency from the historical processes being described. The series hid, or simplified, historical practices in other ways. The veracity of the archive was never challenged, and context of the production and reception never mentioned. Whilst, *Shipyard* (Dir Paul Rotha, 1935), *Tyneside Story* (1943) and *Clydebuilt* (1944) were labelled and quoted at length and with their original audio track, there was also extensive use of unlabelled news film. Archive was often used as an illustration of the narration, therefore re-affirming the power of the commentary's position. There was also a conspicuous absence of dates in the commentary, again emphasising general trends over moments in time. For example the narrator in *All Our Working Lives: Shipbuilders* (BBC, 1984) refers to the Jarrow hunger marches of 1936 as "the hunger Marches", with no other contextualising information, including a date.

There were also signs that the programme was not as objective and balanced as its use of 'balanced' commentary and archive suggested. In terms of the pre-archive period, the use of archive stills was limited to portraits of the 'original' shipyard owners, Alexander Stephen, Sir Alfred Yarrow, Lord Armstrong, Sir George Hunter, together with a painted portrait of Alexander Stephen's estate before it became a shipyard. However, there were no still images of workers, or other working class figures used. The portrait stills of the industrialists were animated, giving the impression of successive portraits emerging from the depths of the past towards the viewer, accompanied by informative narration about each figure in turn. Whilst the purpose for these stills within the narrative was to introduce the progenitors of what the series'

subtitle called “a twentieth century story”, the effect was also to put these progenitors in a separate historical category to the workers.

Whilst the vast majority of interviews were non-confrontational, there was an uneven in the use of confrontational interviews when they were used. In particular, there was an incongruous use of a television news interview with the Clydebank union representative Duncan O’Neill, in the episode *Shipbuilders*, in which he was asked to defend an accusation about his members’ inefficiency by the Prime Minister of the day, Margaret Thatcher. The news reporter was seen within the footage, thereby giving the interview the status of contemporary archive. This material carried, within the context of an archive-based programme, a strong implication that it was both topical and truthful. The television reporter’s words, and those of Margaret Thatcher, became closely aligned with the unseen and unheard interviewer of the series, who was in turn closely aligned with the powerful commentary. O’Neill defended himself robustly, but the tone of this exchange was far more aggressive than any other exchange in the programme, and O’Neill was cast, to some extent, as an agitator. In contrast a similar question was asked of shipyard owner Lord Hunter. However, the tone of this interview contrasted with the O’Neill interview. The questioning was non-confrontational, and Hunter gave a calm and unchallenged account of the demise of the industry. In addition, the individuals in the owners’ interviewee group appeared more often in the archive than the workers. This might have been difficult to avoid as many archive clips were newsreels reporting the latest developments in industrial disputes, and in those sources owners were more likely to would have been quoted more frequent than ‘ordinary’ workers.



Another way in which *All Our Working Lives* matched the criticisms made in the critical literature and the practitioner interviews was its engagement with the audience. The programme required a high degree of knowledge about twentieth century, such as the Jarrow marches, in order to contextualise the information given in the commentary and interviews. This expectation of general knowledge, added to the austerity of the presentation and the bias towards the management side of the story outline above, might have explained why the producers expected neither a large audience, nor an audience drawn from the working classes (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006).

#### 8.2.1.3 Summary

The series could be seen from ‘Perspective A’, as an example of a high quality product. It fore-grounded research and attempted to retain a balanced outlook on a contentious area of history. However, whilst the programme constructed an objective editorial position, closer examination reveals that there were some traces of a pro-establishment bias. It also made little attempt to be accessible to a large audience, an approach which was visible in both its austere style and the high level of general knowledge needed to understand much of the discussion.

The relationship of this programme’s characteristics to the political economy of television, and particularly of the BBC, in 1984 are relatively clear. The series was the product of a producer-led system of history documentary production operating at the BBC at the time. This was complicated by the arrival of Peter Pagnamenta from Thames Television as executive producer, who practiced a specific model of the long-running history documentary series, incorporating testimony from both official and

unofficial eye witnesses, developed at Thames by Jeremy Isaacs and others (Interviews: Anon A, 2006; Anon B, 2006). This model had required substantial financial support, and had been successful both in attracting large audiences, and winning approval for ITV's PSB claims.

### 8.2.2 *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985)

#### 8.2.2.1 Commissioning Context

*The Dragon Has Two Tongues* was commissioned in the early months of Channel Four, in 1982, by Jeremy Isaacs. The series was transmitted between the 9<sup>th</sup> of January and the third of April, 1985 (BFI, 2008). Work on the series began in late 1982, and took three years (Thomas, 2006). The series comprised thirteen half hour episodes in which two presenters, Professor Gwyn Alf Williams and Wynford Vaughan Thomas, debated the history of Wales in chronological order from prehistory to the present day. The series was an answer by Wynford Vaughan Thomas, then an executive board member and Head of Religious Programmes at HTV, to a request from Jeremy Isaacs for histories of Scotland and Wales to follow the BBC's *Ireland: A Television History* (BBC2, 1980-81) which Isaacs himself had produced (Interview: Thomas, 2006). The following analysis is conducted mainly on the episode *How Red Was My Valley*, which deals with the history of the first two decades of the twentieth century.

#### 8.2.2.2 Textual Analysis

Due to the formal innovation of *The Dragon Has Two Tongues*, it could be both applauded and criticised from both of the critical/practitioner perspectives outlined at the beginning of the chapter ('Perspective A' and 'Perspective B'). The series' most

individual characteristic was the use of two presenters, who performed in declamatory and poetic registers, to bind together a diverse set of devices and elements within the programme. There was little use of archive in the series, but when it was used, it was often edited to punctuate the performativity of the presenter, as in this example of Gwyn Alf Williams's commentary:

[Gwyn Alf Williams:] This was a big country, with big communities, big chapels, big clubs, big choirs, big shops (*The Dragon has two Tongues: How red was My Valley*, HTV for Channel Four, 1985)

At each iteration of the word “big”, the image cut to an archive still representing each category, giving the archive a relationship to the concepts in the narration, rather than merely an illustrative function. Actuality footage was, like archive, cut to punctuate the performative narrative of the presenters. For example, as Gwyn Alf Williams talked of the immigration to South Wales during the beginning of the twentieth century:

[Gwyn Alf Williams:] By 1900, in terms of world immigration, South Wales rated in intensity second only to the USA itself ... Two hundred and seventy thousand colliers and their families – 40% of the Welsh people, getting on for three quarters of the Welsh people - lived here (*The Dragon Has two Tongues: How Red was My Valley*, HTV for Channel Four, 1985)

As Gwyn Alf Williams made a characteristic pointing gesture in his piece to camera on the word ‘here’, there was a cut from archive to contemporary footage of colliers walking to a pit-head. The cut not only connected the Welsh valleys of the 1930s with those of the 1980s, but did it through the muscular performativity of Professor Williams' delivery. The presenters were also used to reconstruct historical events by acting out the voices and actions of historical characters such as in the example of David Davies of Llandinam at the opening of the episode *How Red was My Valley*.

The presenters, and the visual richness of the series could be interpreted in contrasting ways according to ‘Perspective A’ and ‘Perspective B’. Firstly, from the perspective of overall decline of quality over the period, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel 4, 1985) displayed several characteristics of quality. The series used two presenters to contrast different approaches to historical interpretation, and through the debate between them a highly analytic method of historical description was developed. Each programme ended with a discussion between the two historians as they struggled over which perspective should hold sway. These exchanges represented a highly complex engagement with historical concepts and processes, as in this example from the end of *How Red Was My Valley*, where they discussed the changing political climate in Wales in the two decades before World War One:

[Gwyn Alf Williams:] You see history as a series of episodes. I tend to see it as a process; and you can see that this little group of minority Marxists that you denounced me for as inflating, they are there, they are the seeds of the future, they are growing and growing and growing and even ... let me finish ... even as the ballot box remains a Liberal monopoly, by the middle of the World War the South Wales Miners Federation has written the abolition of Capitalism into its rulebook and it defeats Lloyd George. It defies Lloyd George in 1915 in a strike in the middle of a war....

[Wynford Vaughan Thomas:] ... There you are picking up the early seeds and you’re building them up as if they are completely grown. I see history as a much slower process than that. I like to dwell in fact upon periods, perhaps that is too episodic for you, but I think that it’s important, we as historians want to know how people actually felt and lived at the time. We’ll agree on this point. The end of that First World War brought curtains for old non-conformist, Liberal Wales.

[Gwyn Alf Williams] Amen

[End Credits]

(*The Dragon Has Two Tongues: How Red Was My Valley*, HTV for Channel Four, 1985)

This passage exemplifies a number of points. Because of the use of two presenters, the same events and figures were often discussed from different historical angles, creating a narrative that was dense in terms of intellectual content, and which demanded the full attention of the viewer. The presenters in the series, and particularly the interaction between them, made their function one of questioning received history, rather than merely recounting received versions of the past. One of the presenters, the Marxist historian Professor Gwyn Alf Williams, also represented a historical voice that was new to the television. In addition, the programme used only a small amount of archive, and therefore avoided the problems of selectivity implicit in the extensive use of the photographic archive.

But the series could also be criticised from ‘Perspective A’, as its emphasis on visual spectacle could be said to have impaired its ability to be historically accurate. The programme, at times lacked a clear focus. This was because the different historical interpretations could easily suggest that the programme’s main concern was to generate a clash of personalities and performances, rather than seek to resolve differences. The sheer formal virtuosity of the series, and especially the performative nature of the presenters, detracted from the objective and dispassionate laying out of a historical narrative. Additionally, although there was novelty in the fact that Professor Williams’ historical position was given airtime, this was undercut by the fact that both presenters were examples of the older, white, male presenters, that had traditionally dominated TV history.

*The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1984) was also an ambiguous if judged from ‘Perspective B’. In its favour, the programme was able to be highly visually diverse, using archive, presenters, reconstruction and actuality, whilst also putting forward complex historical arguments. This contradicted the views of Wilson (2003: 176), Hunt (2006: 846) and Williams (2007: 130) that a concentration on visual codes could damage historical accuracy. The use of presenters in the series did not limit the application of new historical views, indeed the dual presenters made a virtue of having multiple approaches to historical analysis. The use of presenters also enabled the series to look at history before the photographic era, and the declamatory performativity of the presenters made pre-archive passages engaging. On the other hand, exact dates were largely ignored in the narrative, where no one coherent chronological strand was established as the programme often ‘rewound’ to use the same events, individuals and locations in arriving at radically different historical interpretations<sup>69</sup>. This was a highly demanding structure intellectually, and implied the close attention of an already educated audience.

However, in contrast to *All Our Working Lives*, this expectation of prior knowledge in the audience did not have quite the same patrician function. Whilst *All Our Working Lives* tended to invoke a definitive shared prior knowledge symptomatic of a static hierarchy of education and access to knowledge, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* tended to invoke prior knowledge in order to challenge its origins and its veracity.

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<sup>69</sup> The series comprised 13 30 minute episodes that covered a period from prehistory to the modern day.

### 8.2.2.3 Summary

*The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985) could be viewed as a high quality production by both ‘Perspective A’ and ‘Perspective B’. The series combined formal innovation, visual innovation and performativity with a long period of research and preparation, and intellectually demanding historical analysis. The series also brought an obscure area of history to the television screens and with it a new historical viewpoint in the Marxist historical professor Gwyn Alf Williams. Whilst such an approach could have been criticised from different perspectives as either emphasising spectacle and visual display over research analysis, that charge could not have been levelled against this programme. The charge that it was only accommodating an elitist view might have been fairer, although the producers of *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* set up viewing clubs all over Wales during the series’ run, who met after the broadcast in a conference in Cardiff, attended by the producers and Channel Four’s chief executive, Jeremy Isaacs (Thomas, 2006a)<sup>70</sup>.

The link between the political economy of television and the approach taken in this programme is clear. Jeremy Isaacs presided over a period of innovation at Channel Four, in which new voices and methods were encouraged. The series’ producer, Colin Thomas, had left the BBC to become an independent producer after having a programme on the IRA censored (Interview, Thomas, 2006), and was therefore an example of a producer who had not had the ability to express himself fully under the duopoly system.

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<sup>70</sup> During the 13 weeks of broadcasting, viewer groups in cities and towns in both Wales and England met up weekly to discuss the programme. These groups then came together, with Colin Thomas, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and Gwyn Alf Williams in a conference held at UWIC in Cardiff in 1985 (Thomas, 2006a: 2).

#### 8.2.4. *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel Four, 1992)

##### 8.2.4.1 Commissioning Context

*Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel 4, 1992) was commissioned as part of the second year of the *Secret History* (Channel 4, 1991-2004) strand. The series was conceived by John Willis as a mixture of the historical documentary and current affairs genres (Willis, 1991). John Edgington, the producer and director, had discovered the covert use of Deep Sleep Therapy (DST)<sup>71</sup> by the CIA in a hospital in Montreal during his research for an earlier programme on the assassination of Martin Luther King (*Inside Story: Who Killed Martin Luther King?*, BBC1, 1989). However, the commissioning editor of *Secret History* (Channel 4, 1991-2004) at the time, John Willis, rejected an initial programme proposal on this story, because *Secret History* (Channel 4, 1991-2004) had already commissioned a programme that dealt with a CIA conspiracy about the killing of former Italian Prime Minister, Aldo Moro (Edgington, 2006). In response, Edgington proposed a programme about the use of DST in a hospital in Australia, between 1962 and 1979, which avoided repetition within the strand, but still engaged with issues of mental health and the ethics of the medical profession.

##### 8.2.4.2 Textual Analysis

In terms of the perspective that documentary declined over the period ('Perspective A'), there were several textual characteristics that mark the programme out as a 'quality' product, and therefore one that showed that trends had not led to a loss of

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<sup>71</sup> Deep Sleep Therapy was a controversial treatment for depression, which involved placing the subject in a drug-induced coma for several weeks. The coma enabled patients to undergo prolonged electroconvulsive therapy, otherwise known as electroshock therapy. The technique was pioneered in the 1950s by Dr. William Sargant. The therapy was finally discredited when long periods of drug-induced coma were seen to have lethal side-effects (Lupton, 1993).



quality by 1992. The programme used several devices to create the impression of objective, dispassionate reporting. The programmes avoided an over-dependence on visual stimulation by adopting a severe and austere style, in which only dispassionate commentary, some actuality material, and a mixture of formal and informal interviews were used. By avoiding a presenter, the programme avoided the subjectivity that could accompany the use of one.

The commentary was delivered by a disembodied voice, which used an official and investigative register. The voice of the narrator was the experienced broadcast journalist Philip Tibenham. He had been a reporter on *Nationwide* (BBC1, 1969-1984) during the 1970s and had worked for Central Television during the 1980s (Jones, 2002). The tone and register of current affairs was evident in the delivery. For example, in the description of the background to the story of Chelmsford Hospital, the workings of the Australian health service were outlined, in terms which emphasised institutions and regulations rather than emotions. Due to the contemporary nature of the topic, and its hitherto obscurity, there was very little archive and therefore little chance of the historical representation being dominated by the bias of previous accounts. The programme emphasised its pursuit of objective and rational knowledge with the use of rostrumed documentation, such as death certificates and reports, with the passage referred to in the voice over being highlighted. There was also use of rostrumed newspaper cuttings. There were quotations from other programmes, namely *Towards Tomorrow* (BBC, 1968). This programme was quoted at length on DST as practiced in the 1960s in London's St Thomas' Hospital.

The programme was also very clear in the way in which it attempted to uncover hidden histories, rather than celebrate familiar events, or indulge in nostalgic reminiscence. It did this in two ways. Firstly, the programme concentrated on an event in the very recent past. By doing this the programme accentuated the research it did independently of any academic historical research. Secondly, the programme emphasised its revisionist mission by borrowing extensively from the methods and textual characteristics of current affairs documentary. It did this by an extensive use of interview, and by tightly controlling narrative flow through the commentary. The programme's end exemplifies its close association with the conventions of current affairs, when the doctors who presided over Chelmsford Hospital are tracked down and the producer of the programme attempts to interview them by confronting them on the street, or through taped telephone calls.

From 'Perspective A', however, *Secret History: Deep Sleep* did show some signs of a reduction in quality. There were signs of a loss of intellectual rigour in the programme, as its borrowing of current affairs conventions simplified the analysis of events. The programme tended to describe the circumstances of patient trauma in emotive terms, and as a result moved the programme's discourse from one of sober analysis and objectivity, towards entertainment. For example, the chief suspect in the programme, Dr Harry Bailey, was cast as a stereotypical villain:

[Narrator:] Bailey was the kind of doctor who glossed over his lack of experience with skilful name dropping, and showbiz flair. In spite of his lack of relevant qualifications, in the early 60s he persuaded the government to put one million pounds into a new brain research unit with Bailey as its director (*Secret History: Deep Sleep*, Otmoor Productions for Channel Four, 1992)

These words were accompanied by a tilt up a rostrumed still of Bailey, wearing a raincoat and smoking a cigar, in a pose that emphasised the characterisation in the narration. No evidence was offered as to Bailey's "showbiz flair", nor was there any further analysis of what "kind of doctor" Bailey represented.

This stereotyping was accompanied by a raw appeal to the emotions in many of the interviews. Two kinds of interview were used in the programme. One type featured formal interviews with hospital officials, politicians and lawyers. The other type contained the traumatic testimony of the survivors and relatives of the dead from Chelmsford Hospital. The first type used close or mid shots, with locked off camera and formally composed lighting, which put the interviewees in their professional context, at a desk or in an office. The trauma testimony deployed a variety of devices to distort the objectivity and balance of the formal interviews. In one example, the first traumatic testimony of a victim of the DST therapy at Chelmsford hospital, Barry Hart, was filmed with a hand held camera, giving the appearance of spontaneity rather than being the product of carefully planned research.

On the other hand, from 'Perspective B' the programme represented a slight improvement in programming since the 1980s. There was a greater diversity of topics across the *Secret History* (Channel 4, 1991-2004) strand with *Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel 4, 1992) being an example of a hidden corner of history that would never have been illuminated without a commitment to unearthing new historical areas. However, in terms of the other criteria for increase in quality in 'Perspective B', *Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel 4, 1992), did not represent an improvement. In terms of new ways of visualising history, the programme stayed within the confines of the current affairs model. The programme

was also highly definitive – whilst it did attempt to illuminate an obscure area of history it did it in a form that did not allow for interpretation on behalf of the viewer.

#### 8.2.4.3 Summary

This programme was mixed in terms of quality, whether viewed from ‘Perspective A’ or ‘Perspective B’. From ‘Perspective A’, it was based on original research, opened up new areas of historical investigation, revised recent history, and did not over emphasise spectacle. But it did favour emotional appeal and stereotyping over historical analysis at times. From perspective B, its austere style claimed a false objectivity, but its use of current affairs conventions did make the story accessible to an audience of 5 million (Anon, 1992a), large for such a series on Channel Four in 1992 (Interviews: Edgington, 2006).

From a political economic perspective, this programme, and *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2004) generally, was evidence of a change in the leadership of Channel Four. The programme was less concerned with formal and methodological innovation, and more concerned with giving the audience slots in the schedule in which they knew what to expect. The use of the current affairs format enabled Channel Four to attract large audiences to well researched and unfamiliar history. *Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2004) was therefore a reaction to the changes happening throughout broadcasting in the UK in the early 1990s, as notions of audience maximization began to affect old programming agendas. It was also a reaction that attempted to interpret those impulses creatively, in a way that would retain intellectually challenging and revisionist history documentary.

### 8.2.5 *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997)

#### 8.2.5.1 Commissioning Context

*The Nazis: A Warning From History* was produced by Laurence Rees, and was his first production after taking over the role of editor at *Timewatch* in 1992. The series traced the development of the Nazi party from the First World War to the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. The series was commissioned by Michael Jackson, then controller of BBC2, after seeing *Schindler's List* (Dir. Spielberg, 1993) (Brown, 1997). It took four years to complete (Snowman, 2005). This analysis looked at two episodes in particular: *Helped to Power* (1<sup>st</sup> of 6) and *The Road to Treblinka* (5<sup>th</sup> of 6).

#### 8.2.5.1 Textual Analysis

From the position of 'Perspective A' *The Nazis: A warning From History* (BBC, 1997) displayed some of the hallmarks of quality. The series presented a definitive and detailed account of a period in history, which bore the hallmarks of extensive research. The series' content was based on a detailed analysis of the existing records as well as new findings. In addition, the nature of the interviews in the series, confronting ex-Nazi party members and collaborators with their actions, challenged the usual methods of an archive and interview based history documentary.

An example was the interview with Dr Alt in the episode *Helped to Power*, where archive documents bearing Dr Alt's signature were used to confront the interviewee with documentary evidence that conflicted with the account of events he had previously given in the interview. At other times, the veracity and sincerity of testimony was challenged by the off-camera interviewer, pushing interviewees such

as Juozas Gramaliskas, in the episode *The Road to Treblinka*, to justify their part in the massacres of Jews in Lithuania. The use of an unseen interviewer's voice was a standard device of Vérité films, and connoted the 'liveness' and unpredictability of an interview, giving the series an investigative feel. In the context of *Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997), the investigative nature of the interviews also functioned as a justification for making another series about Hitler and the Second World War (Snowman, 2005) and gave the series 'revisionist' credentials.

However, the confrontation in the interviews could also be viewed as an attempt to increase the emotional attachment in the programmes without adding to the analysis. The confrontation of ex-Nazis was an established tradition in history documentaries covering the Second World War such as *Le Chagrin et la Pitié* (Dir. Marcel Ophuls, 1969) and *Shoah* (Dir. Claude Lanzmann, 1985). This iteration could be seen as taking advantage of a clear moral position, rather than revealing any new findings about the period. The analysis in the programme was detailed, but was definitive, leaving no room for different versions of history. This marked a move away from the attempts at balance seen in *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984). The structure of the episodes in *Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997) posed broad historical questions early in each episode, which were answered later in the same episode. This amounted to a subtle polemicism, also evident in the confrontational interviews.

Added to these questions about content, were substantial questions of style. The commentary in the programme was delivered unseen by Samuel West, a classically trained and well known Shakespearean actor. West produced commentary of muted performativity. It was more darkly dramatic in tone than the commentary of John

Woodvine in *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1994). This was in part due to the subject matter of *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997). In this example, the narrator plainly recounts statistics about the enormity of the suffering in WW2:

[Narrator:] Fifty five million people died in World War Two. [pause] The Germans took five million Russian prisoners of war alone, only two million survived, and during the war Hitler authorised a policy unique in all history, the mechanised destruction of an entire people. (*The Nazis: A Warning From History: Helped into Power*, BBC, 1997)

There were frequent pauses in the narrative and testimony, after such sobering contributions. The long pauses before, within and after the above quotation enabled the listener to reflect upon the enormity of the information, and also lend a tension to the commentary.

There was also a conspicuous styling for the title sequence, post-title sequence episode graphics, rostrumed stills and documents. The lighting was extremely low, and the colours of the images were dominated by dark reds browns, and black. There was also a consistent use of a 'burning layer' device, in which several layers of image would be superimposed upon each other, and lower layers would 'burn' through to the surface, or 'bleed' through. Both these transitions carried overt associations of trauma and death. When rostrumed documents were used, the camera panned across a specific passage, and key words emerged out of the text in far larger fonts, and with burning edges. In one specific example Nazi documents about killing squads in Poland were rostrumed, showing the numbers killed in numerous massacres during July 1941. These figures were overlaid with images from the equivalent document for August 1941, showing a large increase in the numbers of people killed. Then the

burning layer device was used, and both layers of rostrumed<sup>72</sup> documentation burn away to reveal the total numbers killed in the region in those months, “4,400” and finally “38,324”.

The archive was also subject to a similar styling. The first five minutes of each episode contained colour archive. Colour archive had been rarely used by 1997, coming two years before *The Second World War in Colour* (TWI/Carlton for ITV, 1999), which featured a large amount of previously unknown material (Interview, Binns, 2006). There was no labelling of archive film material, and no substantial quotation from any other films. This has the effect of giving the series a sense of seamless glossiness, to go along with the other forms of styling present.

From the point of view of ‘Perspective B’, the styling might not have detracted from the analysis of the programme, but added to it. The programmes were watched by a large audience of between 4.5 and 5 million (Interview, Rees, 2006). The stylistic devices used in the programme may have been responsible for retaining a larger audience, and in which case might have extended the viewership of history documentary. However, there was very little added by the visual styling to the account of the rise of the Nazis. The styling was in effect an updating of the styling of *The World At War* (Thames TV, 1973-4), which was very similar in terms of the title sequence, the dramatic title music, the narrator, and the area of history. The series was made by the dominant historical voice within the BBC at the time, Laurence Rees, and therefore did not represent a diversity of producers or historical voices, but indeed suggested the continued power of large broadcasters such as the BBC.

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<sup>72</sup> A rostrum camera is a specially rigged camera, used to film photographic stills (Case, 2001: 130)



### 8.2.5.3 Summary

*The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997), could be viewed from both ‘Perspective A’ as a slight decline in quality, whilst from ‘Perspective B’, it showed an increase. From perspective A, the series was a well-researched attempt to create a definitive portrayal of a period in history (Rees, 1997; Anon, 1997a). However, the period itself was already well-covered, and there was evidence that the series was more concerned with styling than the objective and dispassionate analysis of a period of history. From ‘Perspective B’, *The Nazis: A warning From History* (BBC, 1997) was an updating of *The World at War* (Thames Television, 1973-4), not only in subject matter, but also in visual style, with its use of graphics and colour archive. It attracted a large audience, and gave a definitive view on a popular subject, whilst also updating its research and presentation, and keeping the levels of intellectual rigour relatively high.

*The Nazis: A Warning From History* had a pivotal position between 1982-2002 in terms of the relationship between the political economy of television, and history documentary form. On one hand it aligned itself with the Thames tradition, began in *The World at War* (BBC, 1997) and developed through *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984). On the other hand it was, according to Rees, the series that showed that serious history programming could also attract large audiences in an increasingly competitive environment (Interview, Rees, 2006). The styling and concentration on a familiar subject area were signs of the need, by 1997, for the BBC to do more than merely make well-researched and well-produced history documentaries.

## 8.2.6 *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000)

### 8.2.6.1 Commissioning Context

*Elizabeth* was produced by the independent production company United Productions for Channel Four and transmitted in 2000. It was commissioned by Peter Grimsdale as a follow up to *Henry VIII* (Douglas Chirnside Productions for Channel Four, 1998), which was the first television series presented by David Starkey. The series recounted the life story of Elizabeth the First, and focussed in particular on the life and politics of the Royal court at the time. The series comprised 4 hour long episodes that were broadcast in May 2000 (BFI, 2008).

### 8.2.6.2 Textual Analysis

From ‘Perspective A’, *Elizabeth* represented an increase in quality. On one hand there was evidence that the intellectual content of the series was bolstered by a detailed interpretation of the physicality of documents. An example of this detailed analysis was the treatment of Elizabeth’s letter to Mary Tudor on the night before her transportation to the Tower of London, in the episode *From the Prison to the Palace*. In this passage, David Starkey was shown handling the actual document, whilst he commented on the quality of the handwriting. Starkey interpreted Elizabeth’s correction of mistakes as signs of nervousness, and describes the old practice of drawing lines from the letter’s last line to the bottom of the page, making it impossible for others to add incriminating passages. Such insights were typical of the detail that Starkey applied throughout the series, which is a form of historical reflexivity, a demonstration and reflection upon the processes of historical research.

However, in other respects *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) exemplified a decline in quality during the 1990s. The use of dramatic reconstruction with spoken dialogue was an example of the prioritising of spectacle over analysis, as *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) sought to identify itself with cinema, through its visual similarity to the feature film *Elizabeth* (Dir. Kapur, 1998). The inclusion of interviews with the descendants of historic figures, rather than academic experts, damaged the credibility of the historical evidence presented in the series. The presence of Starkey as a presenter shut off notions of historical contingency and multiple historical perspectives, as Starkey emphasised a definite and direct chronological causality to events. Starkey's accent and background also signalled that historical authority rested in the academic and social establishment of Oxbridge, thereby implicitly closing out historical views from elsewhere in society. The programmes also represented a move towards celebratory narratives of familiar episodes in history, rather than critically revealing or revising received history.

From 'Perspective B', however, *Elizabeth* can be viewed more positively. *Elizabeth* made use of a wide palette of devices, including commentary, rostrummed portraiture and documentation, interviews, dramatic reconstruction and direct address by presenter. This represented a rich variety of visual codes that could be understood as being capable of stimulating a greater sense of the period. The dramatic reconstruction re-enacted with a conscious interpretation and open use of symbolism, as in the example of the slashing of the teenage Elizabeth's dress by Seymour's sword. Not only was this depiction subtly suggestive of the sexual abuse Elizabeth suffered from Seymour, but it also foreshadowed the violence with which Elizabeth was later threatened.

The series made several efforts to make a remote period in time accessible to a large audience. Firstly, the dramatic reconstruction used actors, in costume, with the editing, lighting cutting and colour saturation consistent with mainstream western feature film production practices. Secondly, these reconstructions used either tableaux-like compositions that drew on the portraiture of the period, shot mute, with the actors sometimes looking directly down the camera as if directly addressing the audience, or used brief spoken reconstructions where the dialogue has been garnered from written documents such as letters and chronicles. The quotations were acted naturalistically, rather than delivered through a presenter or commentary, as if they were words in a fiction script, acted in the scene of a screenplay. The effect was to render older English phrases relevant and immediate to a contemporary audience.

The presenter's pieces to camera also built a bridge between the past and the present. Starkey often used the present tense whilst referring to historical events:

[David Starkey:] It is October 1592. Queen Elizabeth has lain unconscious in a coma for the last twenty four hours. (*Elizabeth: Gloriana*, United Productions for Channel Four, 2000)

Starkey also sought to establish the relevance of the series for a contemporary audience, without losing the texture of the period, as in the opening statement of the series:

[David Starkey:] In January 1559, Elizabeth was crowned Queen of England. She was the last of the great Tudor dynasty. A bright star that dazzled both the nation and the world. The achievement of most stars fades quickly, but Elizabeth has lasted for nearly four centuries. She reigned for 45 tumultuous years. Her ships defeated the Spanish Armada and sailed around the globe. In her time, Shakespeare wrote plays, and Spenser wrote poems. English noblemen and foreign Princes wooed her, but she, the Virgin Queen, made love to that loyalest of audiences, the English people. (*Elizabeth: From Prison to the Palace*, United Productions for Channel Four, 2000)

While Starkey as a presenter was also firmly placed in the present, his dress also gave him a liminal quality between present and past. His appearance in an elegantly tailored dark blue suit distanced him from the customary casual dress of presenters such as Tony Robinson<sup>73</sup> or Simon Schama<sup>74</sup>. Starkey's appearance was instead a combination of Cambridge Don and contemporary courtier, combining with his positioning in Elizabethan locations to place him more as an observer of events, than simply a contemporary authority. This proximity to the past was also constructed in Starkey's mix of informal and formal language:

[David Starkey:] Elizabeth was in love. The ice maiden had melted. The Virgin Queen was longing to become a blushing bride. Anjou had caught her on the rebound ... Anjou was different. With his quirky face, his expressive hands and his French ways, he charmed her into love. Elizabeth was in love with a man 20 years her junior, a Catholic, and a Frenchman. (*Elizabeth: Gloriana*, United Productions for Channel Four, 2000)

This commentary moved back and forth between the registers of accessible romantic fiction and sober historical insight, using devices such as the coupling of the phrases 'Virgin Queen' and 'blushing bride' and the attempt to create a dialogue between past and present.

The interviews used in the series also set up a peculiar relationship between past and present. These interviews were not the customary interviews with experts and eye-witnesses, but were conducted with modern day equivalents of historical characters. These equivalents were either descendants of historical figures mentioned in the commentary, or were modern day members of institutions such as the Catholic

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<sup>73</sup> Tony Robinson is a successful British television actor, and presenter of the long-running archaeology series, *Time Team* (Videotext communication for Channel Four, 1994-).

<sup>74</sup> Simon Schama is Professor of Art and History at Columbia University, and has presented a number of series on UK television, including *A History of Britain* (BBC / THC, 2000-2002).

Church. These interviews were shot on location, mostly outdoors, where interviewees shared Starkey's liminal position between past and present.

### 8.2.6.3 Summary

From 'Perspective A', *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) represented a reduction in quality, whilst from 'Perspective B', it represented an increase. From perspective A, *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) abandoned the analysis of history in order to conduct a celebration of a certain period, in which a familiar narrative was told in a visually pleasing manner. There was less analysis of historical processes, and the styling of the series displayed an aspiration to the codes and conventions of commercial cinema. From perspective B, *Elizabeth* used visual codes in a sophisticated way in order to build a sense of a period far in the past, rather than being purely derivative of cinematic conventions. This brought large audiences to a type of programme that did not normally command them. In addition, whilst the history was not revisionist in a broad sense, there was a high degree of originality and detail in the presentation of the minutiae of Tudor court life. The combination of large audiences and detailed research made the series a successful exercise in making history accessible.

In terms of the relationship between text and political economy, *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) was both a product of Channel Four's increased desire to maximise audiences after it became self-funding in 1993, and then as the television marketplace became increasingly competitive during the 1990s. The choice of David Starkey as presenter in 1998 (*Henry VIII*, Douglas Chirnside Productions for Channel Four, 1998) and his subsequent output deal with Channel Four (Aston, 2002)

marked an ideological shift in the commissioning of history documentaries on Channel Four, as it attempted to remain politically ‘alternative’ after the election victory of New Labour in 1997 (Interview, Grimsdale, 2006), and a move away from the journalistic revisionism<sup>75</sup> that had characterised the channel’s history output since 1991 (Interview, Hayling, 2006).

### 8.2.7 *Pyramid* (BBC/Discovery/NDR, 2002)

#### 8.2.7.1 Commissioning Context

*Pyramid* was commissioned by Laurence Rees after the success of *Walking with Dinosaurs* (BBC1/Discovery, 1999) (Rees, 2006). *Pyramid* was co-produced with Discovery and NDR (Stout, 2002: 31). It recounted the life story of a fictional composite character, Nakht, based on the lives of those who worked on the building of the great pyramid of Giza. Director Jonathan Stamp was inspired by the CGI in *Gladiator* (Dir. Scott, 2000) and asked the company that created the effects on that film, The Mill, to do the same for *Pyramid* (Stout, 2002: 31).

#### 8.2.7.2 Textual Analysis

From ‘Perspective A’ *Pyramid* can be seen mostly as a reduction in the quality of history documentary programming, despite the fact that the programme used no archive, and no presenter. Although these omissions may have signalled that the programme was free from the limitations placed on narrative by presenters<sup>76</sup> and archive, the programme’s total reliance on dramatic reconstruction was a problem. The sheer scale of the reconstruction meant that the programme’s focus was clearly

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<sup>75</sup> For the earlier discussion of journalistic revisionism, see Chapter 6, Section 2.4.1

<sup>76</sup> This draws on the work of Bell and Gray (2007) and their differentiation between presenters who are instrumental in the construction of ‘mindful’ and ‘mindless’ connections with historical discourse. According to their model, depending on the way a presenter functions they can either limit the audience’s critical engagement with history, or enable it.

not on analysis, but on visual display. According to perspective A, this led to a diminution in analysis and intellectual content.

The reconstruction was lavish, using a cast that in some framings could be more than 50 extras, expanded to thousands by CGI. There were at least five main characters, who were sometimes represented by both children and adult actors during the programme. The main character, Nakht, is on screen for a large amount of the programme. There are several location sets, and the use of full scale reconstructed boats. The filming was naturalistic, using continuity cutting and framing redolent of mainstream commercial feature film production. The use of CGI in this programme was extensive. It was used to enrich the dramatisation, by swelling the numbers of extras from tens to tens of thousands, or by adding extra dows to the scenes depicting travel on the river Nile. The CGI also enabled the Pyramids to be shown, as promised in the early narration, “in a way never attempted before” (*Pyramid*, BBC/Discovery/NDR, 2002).

As a consequence of the focus on the visual, the information carried in the commentary of *Pyramid* was light, as the slow pacing of the words, and the long pauses between the voice of the main narrator, and the voice of Nakht, cut down the amount of information transferred by voice. The music score was redolent of epic feature films such as *Gladiator* (Dir. Ridley Scott, 2000). Other signals of the film’s aspiration towards cinematic values were the creation of fictional characters, such as Nakht. The music was used to punctuate emotional intensity, such as the revealing of the finished pyramid, or the death of Nakht’s brother, but was never used to comment on the information conveyed.



Due to the use of dramatic reconstruction, the programme presented a closed narrative, where at no point was the account given offered up for negotiation. The programme sought to give credibility to its account by mimicking the usual archive/testimony/narrator format with a structure of CGI/fictional character/narrator.

In this system, the commentator and Nakht were given separate registers:

[Nakht:] Everyone chatted about where we were going and what we had to do. But no one really knew and Kharom-a said nothing to explain. Just that we owed everything to the King, and that now we would have the chance to repay him.

[Narrator:] Young conscripts like Nakht and Debar had no reason to approach the start of their journey with dread. Contrary to popular myth, not one of the people who built the great Pyramid was a slave. Egypt had no need of slaves, and all because of the Nile.

[Nakht:] We joined in the familiar prayer, “Hail to you Old Nile, sprung from the ground, who produces the barley and makes the wheat grow, you rise and the lands exult, and everyone there is joyful”.

[Narrator:] The river’s annual flood, covering the land in fertile soil made Egypt’s farmland uniquely rich, one of the first countries in history where the workforce didn’t have to spend all its time growing food, but could labour on other things instead, such as building Pyramids.

(*Pyramid*, BBC/Discovery/NDR, 2002)

The main narrator introduced an objective, fact-based narrative overview. The chief narrator, Michael Pennington, was an established theatre and television actor, and therefore stood in the Olivier/Woodvine/West tradition of using classically trained actors as history documentary narrators. His register was authoritative, sober and informational. The subsidiary narrator, Nakht (read by Omar Sharif), was also in the same tradition of using an actor to read a voice over rather than a journalist, but Sharif brought with him celebrity connotations, associations with his native Egypt, and strong associations with epic desert landscapes through his role in the film *Lawrence*

*of Arabia* (Dir. Lean, 1962). Nakht's register was more emotive, nostalgic and mythical.

The programme can be viewed as representing a decline in quality, because of the familiarity of the subject. Egypt, as practitioners had noted (Interviews: Davidson, 2006; Carey, 2006), was one of the most covered subjects and periods in history documentary, and so *Pyramid* broke no new ground. The programme did not cast a critical eye over the history of the Pyramids. It simply celebrated the building of the Pyramid, and to dispel any ideas that they were built by forced labour by showing the constructors were motivated by notions of duty and religious service.

However, from 'Perspective B', *Pyramid* can be viewed far more favourably. Firstly, the technology used in the programme was advanced for 2000 (Interviews: Rees, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Dugan, 2006). This resulted in higher production values redolent of commercial cinema, which enabled a re-visioning of ancient Egypt in an innovative way. The pyramid at the centre of the programme was viewed in several stages of development. *Pyramid* also made use of cutting-edge techniques whereby CGI was seamlessly blended with live action material, lending the CGI material a higher level of production value than earlier programmes, where existing technology did not allow for such mixing.

There was also evidence that the CGI and dramatisations in the programme were not merely based on editorial choices along the lines of the language of current commercial cinema, but had been influenced by academic research. The building of part of the sets, such as the dows on the river Nile and the Pharaoh's barge, required

considerable ingenuity and the imaginative use of scholarship<sup>77</sup>. As a consequence, the pauses built into the script were not merely an emptying out of content and lessening of the intellectual demands on the audience, but an important space in which the audience could take pleasure in visualisations that contained complex and detailed historical information. In terms of financial investment, *Pyramid* represented a high point in 2002 (Rees, 2006)<sup>78</sup>. The viewership was also higher than of any previous history documentary shown in the UK (Interview, Rees, 2006) at 9.05 million viewers, and 35% of the audience (Revell, 2002). Both these factors suggested that the programme had been designed to reach a far larger audience than previous history documentaries, and therefore increased the accessibility of historical subjects to the mass of the population.

#### 8.2.7.3 Summary

From ‘Perspective A’, *Pyramid* (BBC / Discovery / NDR, 2002) indicates a reduction in quality between 1982 and 2002. Although the programme freed itself of the constrictions of archive and presenter, its lavish reconstruction prioritised spectacle over analysis. The programme was also uncritically celebratory of a period in the past. However, from perspective B, *Pyramid* (BBC / Discovery / NDR, 2002) achieved high ratings, with 9.05 million, a 35% share of the audience, and came 17<sup>th</sup> in the top 50 programmes of the week (Revell, 2002: 27). The audience was far younger than usual for history documentaries (Interviews, Rees, 2006). This was welcomed in *History Today* as a breakthrough in engaging a new generation with historical

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<sup>77</sup> As alluded to by director Jonathan Stamp in the ‘making of’ documentary which accompanies the American release of *Pyramid* on DVD.

<sup>78</sup> The company behind the graphics for *Gladiator* (Dir. Scott, 2000), The Mill, had just set up a subsidiary company, Mill TV, catering for the TV market’s increasing need for CGI. Even in 2001, CGI was very labour intensive: “a team of 16 had to create more than 100 shots and 20 minutes of CGI over a seven-month period” (Stout, 2002: 31).

discourse (Snowman, 2005: 36). Rees felt that that there was a risk the project could be seen as an exercise in dumbing down, but justified it in these terms:

That didn't just spawn a whole raft of programming that exists now ... it didn't just mean a huge move to drama. It did give me the confidence when I did the Auschwitz series last year (2005), to use these techniques in, for want of a better word, what you might call a much more scholarly, serious piece of work. I was able to adapt those techniques from that film into something that actually was using a level of rigour. (Interview, Rees, 2006)

*Pyramid* (BBC / Discovery / NDR, 2002) represents a particular effect of political economy on the textuality of history documentary. The co-production deal with Discovery Channel in 1998 led to the production of *Walking With Dinosaurs* (BBC/Discovery, 1999), which set new standards in terms of budgetary expense and audience size<sup>79</sup>. *Pyramid* was the historical equivalent of *Walking With Dinosaurs* (BBC/Discovery, 1999), and the first time the same CGI-dependent approach had been taken in a history documentary (Interview, Rees, 2006). The pressures that led to the BBC deal with Discovery therefore manifested themselves clearly in *Pyramid* (BBC / Discovery / NDR, 2002): the need to attract a large audience in a competitive marketplace; the need for co-production funding to bolster the budgets of large scale factual programming; the need to attract a young audience, both in terms of the BBC's demographic, and that of the commercially-driven Discovery network. In addition, the move towards wholesale dramatisation reflected the changing aims and aspiration of the producers of history documentary, as their priorities shifted from austere objectivity and analysis, to visually spectacular and pleasurable entertainment.

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<sup>79</sup> *Walking With Dinosaurs* (BBC/Discovery, 1999) cost around £12 million to produce (Interview, Berthon, 2006), and was viewed by 13.2 million, representing 51% of the audience share (Azeez, 1999).

## 8.3 Conclusion

### 8.3.1 Comparative Qualities

Rather than demonstrating one of the two perspectives to be a more accurate evaluation of developments between 1982 and 2002, these examples show that a tension has always existed between two broad ideas of function, quality and service in the production of history documentaries. In each example the producers were aware of the need to be popular, with the partial exception of *The Dragon has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985), although it too was driven by a search for new audiences through new methods. Each programme was also bound by the requirement to produce accurate and accessible forms of public history. However, the balance of this tension changed over the period, resulting in a change in history documentary form.

These variations in balance affected the history documentary across three main spectra: balance to polemic; exposition to investigation; words to images. There was a shift over the period from an approach that maintained a balanced account of history, exemplified by *All our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984), towards one that was more polemic, such as *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel 4, 2000). This shift contained within it a significant difference between the more conservative and orthodox readings offered by the BBC and the alternative voices offered by Channel Four. However, even *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985), a series given to wild polemic at times, was ‘balanced’ in that no one position was given a definitive view. The differences between *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoo Productions for Channel Four, 1992) and *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997) re-affirmed the difference between the BBC and Channel Four, but yet the

styling and emotive elements of *The Nazis: A Warning From History* are obvious along side the more traditional values of objectivity and balance seen in the earlier *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984). With the diminution of balance, there was also a dilution of the notion of a definitive history. This dilution itself could have led to a more complex view of historical processes, a hallmark of intellectually challenging programming. However, along with the diminution in the notion of definitive history, there was also a foregrounding of personality and opinion, which tended to limit the possibilities of historical interpretation and complexity, rather than expand them. With the shift from balance towards polemicism, came a greater appeal to emotions, as seen in the gossip of *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000), and the romantic visual allusions of *Pyramid* (BBC / Discovery / NDR, 2002).

Along with the shift from balance to polemic, came a shift from exposition to investigation, in which the investigative aspect of a history documentary was foregrounded as part of the narrative frame, rather than merely being part of the production process. *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel Four, 1992) and *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997) exemplify this foregrounding, in contrast to the delivery of *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) and *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel 4, 1985), in which exposition is foregrounded, rather than the process of investigation. This investigative foregrounding was a sign of an escape from the restrictive balance of earlier programmes such as *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984). It was also a tool used with the intention of increasing dramatic content and engagement with audiences. However, the shift from exposition to investigation was reversed towards the end of the period. *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) and *Pyramid* (BBC

/ Discovery / NDR, 2002) still contained references to investigation in their narrative frames, but were mostly concerned with delivering an account that had already been investigated.

There was also a shift from the domination of words, to the increasing importance of images, as a means of conveying information within the texts. The styling of *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997) and *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel 4, 2000) positioned the words used in an atmosphere, and to differing extents aspired visually to feature film conventions. This is in contrast to the austere styling of *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) and *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmor Productions for Channel Four, 1992). Although the commentary of *Elizabeth* (United Productions for Channel Four, 2000) dominates screen time, the visual styling of the series contributed largely to the establishment of period ‘feel’, and to themes of national and royal celebration. By 2002, *Pyramid’s* (BBC / Discovery / NDR 2002) emphasis was on the visual rather than the spoken, and again themes of royalty and celebration were grafted onto a familiar area.

### 8.3.2 Comparative Effects of Political economic Change

According to this limited sample of programmes it seems that during the period in question history documentaries shifted broadly from balanced, definitive and word-based texts to polemic and visually based texts. This, in the terms of the BRU’s definition (BRU, 1989), might well be considered a diminution of quality, one which stemmed from challenges to the PSB system. It is worth noting that there were significant differences between the development of history documentary output on the BBC and Channel Four between 1982 and 2002. In the 1980s the BBC was more

concerned with balance and definition than formal invention or visual expression. In the late 1990s the pressures on the BBC to become more commercially aware, can be closely related to the deal with Discovery in 1998, and a drastic formal change of direction with *Pyramid* (BBC / Discovery / NDR, 2002). On the other hand Channel Four conducted experiments with form and approach throughout the period, many of which were subsequently copied and developed by the BBC. Channel Four did not enter into co-production deals to the same extent as the BBC, due to its constitution as a publisher-broadcaster. This constitution seems to have safeguarded a formally innovative approach to history documentary production, whilst the BBC's approach increased the volume of co-produced, and commercially aware, programmes.

Both strands of development responded in varying degrees to the increasing competition in UK terrestrial broadcasting, and managed to extend the range and diversity of history documentaries in terms of approach, period and topic. This may well have been due to history documentary's ability to adapt to changes in funding models and form which other genres, such as the observational documentary, found more difficult during the same period. However, this extension of stylistic range does seem to have been achieved at a cost. History documentary lost something of its textual complexity over the period, as the delivery of information became more concerned with visual exposition than verbal discussion. History documentary also largely lost the connection with contemporary issues which marked it throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, to be replaced by a celebration of national narratives that were to some extent an escape from contemporary issues.

This chapter has argued that key history documentary programmes from between 1982 and 2002 confirm to some extent the literature reviewed in chapter 2, and the



interview material of chapter 5 and 6 in respect of various claims regarding the changing form of history documentary. There seems therefore to be a connection between political economy and programme form, although the exact nature of the connection varies across broadcasters, and its effect on programme quality is contested by both interviewees and academics. In the next chapter, the strands of preceding chapters will be brought together to see what connections can be clearly drawn between the changing political economy of television, and the changing form of history documentary.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes this study into the development of history documentary between 1982 and 2002 on UK terrestrial television. Section 9.2 briefly summarises the literature and theoretical framework underpinning the research, as well as the range of methods used to collect and analyse the research data. Section 9.3 answers the thesis' research questions, firstly, by recapping certain areas of discussion and analysis: the connection between the changes in the political economy of television in the UK between 1982 and 2002; the changes in production of history documentary; the effect on history documentary form. Section 9.4 critically compares the answers to the research questions with the theoretical debates referred to in the literature review section. Section 9.5 contains suggestions for further study.

### **9.2 Chapter Summaries**

Chapter 2 ('Literature Review') examined the past and current debate on the political economy of media, and in particular the function of state and private ownership in providing diversity and choice in television programming. The positions of critical political economy and neo-classical political economy were outlined, and a general consensus was found that regulation of some form was necessary to maximise choice and diversity, but also to limit the inherent trend within media structures to centralise and form monopolies. The first position, exemplified by Golding and Murdock (2005) advocated a holistic approach to the study of the political economy of the media, and

was broadly critical of mainstream economics' ignorance of the shifting power structures and inequalities in the production, distribution and consumption of media products. The neo-classical position, exemplified by Peacock (1986, 2000) and Collins (1994, 1996, 2001) emphasised the importance of consumer sovereignty and choice, and advocated a free market system in order to introduce such elements, and maximise the welfare of the consumer. The literature review then went on to discuss the notion that has traditionally been at the forefront of discussions of media governance in the UK, public service broadcasting (PSB). The notion of quality was discussed, and particularly its articulation of notions of producer autonomy, audience expectation and textuality with the governance of media production. It was also noted that the notion of quality was difficult to define and was open to a number of conflicting interpretations and definitions. Whilst it was useful in tracking producer debates around changing form, it was also a term that required careful handling when drawing conclusions.

The second part of the literature review sought to place the development of history documentary into the context of critical discussions of political economy and PSB. It began by reviewing recent accounts which identified a change in the frequency and amount of history documentary on terrestrial television. This was then followed by a wider discussion of the critical accounts of changes in the production and form of documentary and history documentary between 1982 and 2002. The chapter identified three basic interpretations about the changes in history documentary during the period: firstly the view that there has been a decline in terms of quality, due to the commercialisation of television discourse; secondly that of an increase in the quality and quantity of history documentaries, due to changes in technology and the adoption

of new expressive techniques; and a third position in which no discernible overall shift could be identified.

The survey of literature led to the formulation of a set of research questions designed to examine closely the nature and significance of the development of history documentary on UK terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002:

1. What were the key developments in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002?
2. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and the production of history documentary on UK terrestrial TV?
3. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and changes in history documentary form?

Chapter 3 ('Methods') looked at the methods required to answer the research questions. The thesis deployed a range of methods to answer the research questions: documentary analysis, content analysis, interviews, and textual analysis. The strengths and weaknesses of these methods were identified, and the mix of methods justified. One early obstacle was the lack of access to broadcasters' archives for the period, which necessitated an unusual use of practitioner interview in both the tracking of the production of history documentary, and in the tracking of the evolution of history documentary form. These interviews were used in conjunction with other methods in order to ameliorate the reliability of data gathered through interview. This increased

the dependence on the other methods of analysis. These methods were deployed in the remaining chapters as follows.

Chapter 4 ('The Political Economy of UK Television, 1982-2002') used documentary analysis to interpret official governmental documents such as reports and Acts of Parliament. This was used to explore the changes in the political economy of UK television between 1982 and 2002, in order to lay the basis for later chapters. Chapter 5 ('History Documentary on UK Terrestrial Television, 1982-2002') used interview material in order to explore the connections between the changing political economy of UK terrestrial television, and the production of history documentaries. Interviews with commissioners and producers were used to build a narrative of the changing practical circumstances under which history documentaries were produced between 1982 and 2002, and to place history documentary within the context of the narrative described in Chapter 4. Because the reliability of interview data is open to question this data set was supported by the analysis in chapter 6 ('The Production of History Documentary on UK terrestrial Television, 1982-2002') which used content analysis to explore two sets of connections: those between changing political economy and the production of history documentaries; those between the changing political economy of television and changing history documentary form. With regards to the connections between political economy and history documentary production, content analysis tested specific claims in the literature concerning a boom in history documentary between 1982 and 2002. It was also used to chart the changes in the frequency and positioning of history documentaries in the schedule.

With regards to the connection between political economy and changing history documentary form, content analysis was used to ascertain broad changes in terms of the periods and topics dealt with by history documentaries, and the types of history documentary deployed. Chapter 7 ('The Changing Form of History documentary, 1982-2002') used interview material to explore the connections between political economy and changing programme form, as interviews were used to track the changing form of history documentary between 1982 and 2002. As with the relationship between the interviews in chapter 5 and the analysis in chapter 6, the analysis of chapter 6 then informed the analysis of interviews in chapter 7. Additionally, the analysis in chapter 7 was ameliorated by the analysis in chapter 8 ('Key Programmes') where textual analysis was used to track the connections between political economy and programme form by exploring assertions made in both the literature review and the interview sample, about the textual development of history documentaries between 1982 and 2002.

### **9.3 Research Questions Answered**

Chapter 4 ('The Political Economy of UK Television, 1982-2002') laid the basis for the thesis by reviewing the general development of television in the UK between 1982 and 2002. This chapter discussed the transformation of UK television from three to over 200 channels.

There was a political shift at the end of the 1970s which had an effect on the broadcasting policy in the 1980s, that challenged PSB as the organising principle of

broadcasting, and initiated a move to a market-driven system. In turn this implied a move away from the power of broadcasters in setting programming agendas, as the consumer was placed at the centre of broadcasting. However, whilst the emphasis shifted in broadcasting management towards market values, there were also political and industrial factors that resisted many of the proposals and notions implied by such a shift. The BBC underwent a series of changes in its political economy during the late 1980s and 1990s which included: cuts in spending; the selling off of some of its resources; a re-negotiation of its relationship with the independent production sector that included a significant movement of its staff into the independent sector and a split between its broadcasting and production arm; and the imposition of commercial agendas including joint ventures and co-production deals. However, the status of its funding was more secure than it had been during the mid and late 1980s. This enabled an expansion of services, rather than the break-up and privatisation many feared would be the result of the political and economic pressure of which the Peacock Report was a part. Therefore, whilst UK terrestrial television had become more commercial by 2002, PSB still remained an important factor, both constitutionally, and motivationally, for broadcasting in the UK.

Whilst new technology, and the solving of spectrum scarcity, was claimed as the starting point for liberating broadcasting from old structures, the relationship between technology, politics and economics was not straightforward. As technology created opportunities for greater choice within broadcasting, political change produced an ideology that was prepared to act on such developments in a particular way. A prime example of how political change channeled the development and adoption of

broadcasting technology was the varying development of cable and satellite systems in the UK.

As well as being manifested in the way in which broadcasting was organised, the consequence of political economic change in television was seen in the nature of the programmes produced. The BBC underwent a change of culture between the 1980s and 1990s in which strategic managers became more powerful than programme commissioners and producers. Changes at the head of the organisation in the late 1980s, the introduction of 'Producer Choice', the deliberate move towards a business-inspired management model (Born, 2003: 65-71), and the increasingly important role of marketing and scheduling in the commissioning process (Born, 2004: 254-301), all contributed to a shift in power away from those who made programmes to those who accounted for the BBC's resources.

ITV's organisational character changed from producer-led to business-led in the early 1990s. Before the changes in management and ownership that were initiated by the 1990 Broadcasting Act, there was a strong sense that at ITV licensees such as Thames, Granada and Central that programme producers had significantly more power in the setting of agendas and programme commissioning than they did later in the 1990s (Darlow, 2005; Goddard et al, 2007; Fitzwalter, 2008). Both BBC and ITV's production facilities lost ground to the growing independent sector. There were increasing fears expressed by regulators and commentators throughout the 1990s, about the declining quality of programming, especially programming that had to come under the rubric of 'serious television' in both the calculations of the BBC and ITV before the 1990s. Channel Four underwent changes in ethos in line with, although not



always directly caused by, its Chief Executives. Jeremy Isaacs (1982-87), Michael Grade (1987-1997) and Michael Jackson (1997-2001) all affected the way the Channel developed, be it through their direct action, their encouragement of an ethos, or their interpretation and implementation of policy from above (Born, 2003). This represented a shift from an experimental phase in which new voices were allowed into broadcasting, and audience maximization was not an issue, to Channel Four's status as a multi-channel brand in the early 2000s, in which commercial considerations were predominant.

This process of change was reflected in the independent production sector, which grew substantially during the 1980s and most of the 1990s, in terms of its output, its workforce, its profitability, and its influence on broadcasters. However, towards the end of the period in question (1982-2002), the independent sector began to consolidate. The increasingly competitive television market required the dedication of increased resources to administration, management and marketing. Independent producers found that in these circumstances the economies of scale available in larger companies outweighed the creative advantages of the boutique company. In addition, this consolidation was also shaped by broadcasters' increasing requirement during the 1990s for guarantees in programme delivery and ratings, and by their consequent move towards favouring larger 'key supplier' production companies.

The connection between the political economy of television and the production of history documentary on terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002 was explored in two main chapters, Chapter 5 ('The Production of History Documentary on UK

Terrestrial Television, 1982-2002') and Chapter 6 ('History Documentary on UK Terrestrial TV, 1982-2002').

In Chapter 5, changes in commissioning at the BBC were seen to have freed producer imagination, but were also seen as destroying collegial values, and the intellectual rigour of programming. At Channel Four, changes in commissioning in the 1990s had curtailed the experimentation of the 1980s. Audiences became increasingly important, and budgets became dependent on increasing levels of co-production finance. There was debate as to the effects this had on commissioning practices, and whether producer autonomy had been affected. It was also felt that Channel Four had been immune for longer than the BBC from the need to deliver large audiences.

It could be argued that successful producers, and especially those who had been more financially successful in the independent sector than they would have been at the BBC, might be pre-disposed to view changes as enabling and freeing. However, within the confines of this study, no clear cut evidence of such bias was found. Successful independent producers expressed mixed feelings about the changing commissioning regimes of various broadcasters on grounds of a decline in programme quality (Interviews: Berthon, 2006; Hayling, 2006; Dugan, 2006; Thomas, 2006), whilst long-standing BBC staff producers and commissioners saw that the shift towards new methods of working had brought some benefits (Interviews: Rees, 2006; Grimsdale, 2006; Davidson, 2006)<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Although there may have been differences between the policies in place at BBC1 and BBC2, the overwhelming evidence collected in this study is that BBC2 was the home of history documentary, and therefore no meaningful differential between both channels came to light.

There was debate regarding the effect of this dependence on co-production funding. Whilst the move to co-production funding was driven by attempts to bolster shrinking budgets, it was also driven by producers' attempts to increase the expressive possibilities of their programmes. There also appeared to be a difference between the BBC's standardised dependence on co-production, and the more ad-hoc arrangements at Channel Four and in the independent sector. However, all such conclusions regarding the effects and significance of co-production need to take into account the varying nature of co-production, depending on the partners involved. For instance, the BBC continued to co-produce some history documentaries with The History Channel (*The Ship*, 2002) and PBS (*The Seven Wonders of the Industrial World*, BBC/PBS, 2004) after the Discovery deal of 1998; all three of these co-production partners had varying editorial agendas, a variation that complicates any simple notion of a connection between co-production and programme form and content.

Whilst emerging technologies had speeded up the production process, their effects on programme quality were disputed, especially in terms of the quality of research produced. Technology had extended the possibilities of post-production, but some feared that advances in the area had led to the abandonment of reflective and intellectual pleasures in favour of high-octane visual stimulation. Despite these insights, the interview sample mentioned the impact of new technology infrequently. This may have been an indication that professional practice in history documentary production was not driven by technological innovation as much as it was in other television genres. However, this could be due to the views held by this specific interview sample, and another study might find it fruitful to focus on this area in more detail.

The analysis of the television listings in Chapter 6 ('History Documentary on UK Terrestrial Television, 1982-2002') also produced findings that were relevant to the link between the changing political economy of television, and the production of history documentary. The main finding was that contrary to the literature, the sampling indicated that there was no significant boom in history documentary output in terrestrial television between 1982 and 2002. History documentary increased in frequency and amount substantially during the late 1990s, but it had also declined sharply between the end of the 1980s (1987) and the early 1990s (1992). This therefore represented a 'dip' in history documentary levels on terrestrial television between the high point of the late 1980s and the late 1990s, rather than a 'boom' throughout the period. On one hand, the dip in numbers could have been caused by an initial retreat from history documentary whilst PSB was under attack in the late 1980s and early 1990s, its return in the late 1990s marking a return to PSB values. On the other hand, the dip could signify a change in the nature of history documentary; that it had been transformed between the mid 1980s and mid 1990s from a sub-genre that embodied particular elements of PSB values, to a genre that was competitive in a crowded, marketised television environment. It is important to note here that a more detailed investigation of a larger sample would be necessary to probe farther the significance of this indicative finding.

Chapter 6 also presented findings about the relationship of history documentary to other genres. Whilst history documentary grew in frequency and amount during the late 1990s, it remained a niche, minority genre, and was mostly broadcast on niche channels with strong PSB remits: BBC2 and Channel Four. This raised the possibility

that an increase in history documentary indicated an increase in the commitment to PSB values. However, there was evidence that supported the contrary view. History documentary also grew in frequency and amount as other traditional forms of PSB programming - such as 'Drama', 'Arts Programmes' and 'Current Affairs' – were in decline, and lighter forms of programming – such as 'Leisure' and 'Light Entertainment' were growing. History documentary's growth coincided with a narrowing of the range of factual programming. This raised the question of whether a rise in history documentaries during a period in which traditional PSB values and programming were in decline represented a concentration of PSB values in history documentary, or a shift in the nature of history documentary away from PSB.

Chapter 6 also found that there was an unexpected link between the growth in history documentary and the use of co-production as a funding model. Whilst academic literature (Goodwin, 1998: 130; Paget, 1998: 197; Steemers, 2004: 104-145; Chapman, 2007: 21) suggested a considerable rise in co-production for factual programming during the 1990s, there was no increase during the steepest period of growth in history documentary broadcasts in the sample, from 1997 to 2002. The co-production funding of history documentaries was at its highest, in terms of the proportion of programmes in the sample, when history documentaries were at their lowest in number (1992). This suggested that the increase in history documentary had not been fuelled by co-production funding, but by domestic fully-funded projects. This in turn suggested that history documentary had not become a commercial product designed for the international market during the 1990s, but rather, that its increase as a sub-genre during the late 1990s was the product of its function in the domestic market television schedules.

Chapter 6 also engaged with the connection between political economy and programme form, in terms of a broad study of the changes in period, topic and type deployed by history documentary between 1982 and 2002. The spread of historical periods and topics covered by history documentaries increased across the sample period. This finding seemed to contradict the evidence in other genres (Seymour and Barnett, 1999) of the narrowing of programming scope during the late 1990s, caused by commercial competition and an erosion of PSB values. In addition, the spread of periods was greater on the BBC, and less on Channel Four. The interview sample had indicated that commercial pressure on history documentary makers had been less severe on those in Channel Four than in the BBC based on their recollections of the dates at which specific ratings became explicit requirements of programme performance, but BBC was the most diverse in its representation of historical periods and topics. This finding therefore suggested that contrary to expectation, BBC2's history documentary output was under more direct commercial pressure than that of Channel Four, because history documentaries were protected as a 'loss-leader' that helped to preserve Channel 4's PSB credentials, but BBC was the most diverse in its representation of historical periods and topics.

However, whilst there was evidence of a growth in the diversity of periods and topics represented in history documentaries, there was also a direct relationship between the levels of history documentary numbers and the prevalence of the 'Early C20th' period and the 'War/Military' topic. As history documentaries declined between 1987 and 1992, the 'War/Military' topic category also declined. However, as history documentaries rose in number from 1992 onwards the topic 'War/Military' also grew,

at the expense of broader topics like ‘Civilisation’, ‘Religion/Politics’, and ‘Science/Industrial’. This suggests that while the diversity of periods represented was stronger in the late 1980s and 1990s, the high numbers of history documentaries in the late 1980s and late 1990s were due mainly to high levels of military history, rather than a growth in the diversity of periods and topics.

In addition to a diversification of history periods, there were signs of a flourishing of diversity in history documentary types, as alternatives were found to the traditional ‘Archive/Interview’ and ‘Presenter/Location’ models. This finding also seemed to contradict Seymour and Barnett (1999) on the loss of diversity during the late 1990s due to the challenges faced by PSB. However, this growth in diversity was not as great as the academic literature suggested (Hunt, 2006; Bell and Gray, 2007). Whilst the ‘Reconstruction’ type challenged the two founding types in terms of proportion, as a type it was largely built on the original ‘Archive/Interview’ and ‘Presenter/Location’ models. In addition ‘Presenter/Location’ underwent a revival from the mid 1990s onwards, further emphasising the dominance of the two original types. Although the ‘Living History’ and ‘Drama-documentary’ types attracted much attention from scholars, they did not appear with any significant frequency in the sample. This suggested that any growth in diversity of approach applied to exceptional or experimental projects, whilst the main body of work was still conducted using two types, albeit featuring increasing amounts of dramatic reconstruction.

Chapter 7 ('The Changing Form of History Documentary, 1982-2002') also engaged with the connection between the political economy of television and the changing form of history documentary.

It found that there was an overall decline in the use of interviews. This was partly due to the eye witness interview being considered a barrier to giving an account of certain periods of history. In addition, the need to maximise audiences, and to reach younger audiences, required faster forms of information transfer than interviews. Nonetheless, the widespread practice of using formal, locked-off, interviews survived throughout the period. The evidence also indicated a decline in the use of archive footage. Interviewees thought the costs of archive grew during the 1980s and early 1990s, making reconstruction a cost-effective alternative. As with interviews, archive footage was seen as a barrier to the representation of earlier ages. Additionally, producers began to tire of the traditional use of archive as illustrative of interview and commentary material. There were also pressures to reduce black and white archive due to its supposed unattractiveness to younger audiences, which led to the use of colour archive in ways that emphasised an intimate and emotive relationship between past and present, rather than as a document of a past event.

The interview sample indicated that by the 1980s, the presenter form had lost its popularity amongst commissioners and producers; residual presenting was used in order to save costs, and when used, was done in a plain informational mode, rather than in the mode of the charismatic presenters such as A.J.P. Taylor, Kenneth Clark and Jacob Bronowski. However, amongst those interviewed for this study there was a view that the presenter did re-emerge in the mid-1990s, for a number of reasons. The



presenters of the late 1990s either used charisma to engage with an audience, or attracted attention to programmes in a crowded schedule through the use of polemic.

Those interviewed tended to think that dramatic reconstruction was rare in the history documentaries of the 1980s. It was avoided due to its high cost, and the damage it could do to the credibility to the evidentiary claims of a history documentary. There was an increase from the early 1990s onwards, caused both by an increase in co-production funding and a willingness by producers to experiment visually. Producers also sought to represent periods in history that were not accessible through archive by dramatically reconstructing them. However, the adoption of dramatic reconstruction was seen by some interviewees as a threat to historical accuracy and an unwelcome shift from the discussion of ideas to the display of stimulating visual material.

In terms of the periods covered, interviewees identified key differences between the 1980s and the 1990s. The subjects of the Second World War and ancient Egypt were emphasized in the 1980s, as was British social history. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an increase in journalistic exposés of contemporary history, and a decrease in military history. Towards the mid to late 1990s, there was a turn to earlier periods, and to narratives of power and monarchy, at the expense of social and journalistic historical narratives. This period was further characterized by a dependence on familiar events and figures, in order to attract audiences.

Chapter 8 ('Key Programmes') also engaged the connection between political economy and programme form, by tracing the textual detail of a group of texts that represented the leading edge of formal innovation in history documentary between

1982 and 2002. These analyses indicated that there was a compromise at the heart of history documentary production between the need to be popular, and the requirement to produce accurate and accessible forms of public history. In the group of programmes analysed, history documentary manifested this tension across three different spectra: balance to polemic; exposition to investigation; words to images. There was a shift over the period from a balanced to a more polemic approach. There was also a tension between exposition and investigation, as the former was stronger in the early and mid 1980s and in the later 1990s, with the latter being more prevalent in the middle of the sample period. In addition, the BBC tended to emphasise an expositional approach, whilst Channel Four tended to favour the investigative. There was also a shift from the domination of words, either spoken by commentary or interviews, to the domination of visual material.

The key programmes discussed in Chapter 8 also pointed towards relationships between the changing political economy of television and changing history documentary form between 1982 and 2002. The shift from balanced, definitive and word-based texts could be seen as a diminution in quality, as in the sense developed by the BRU (BRU, 1989)<sup>81</sup>, or in Mulgan's notion of 'producer quality' (Mulgan, 1990: 10-11). However, history documentary also diversified in its treatment of period and topic, and in its formal approach, indicating a diversification in the perspectives and voices represented in output, developments which echoed Mulgan's concept of 'quality as diversity' (Mulgan, 1990: 26-28).

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<sup>81</sup> See appendix 9 for more details.

## 9.4 Conclusion

This thesis therefore argues that changes in the political economy of television affected the development of history documentary form between 1982-2002 in specific ways. The move away from PSB as an organising principle in UK television, towards market-oriented notions of consumer sovereignty, affected the type of history documentaries produced, and the way in which they were produced. While the size and composition of the audience had always been central to the financial model of ITV and important for the BBC's self-justification, the growth in the importance of audience figures as an index of worth for television programmes during the 1990s was a crucial element in the development of history documentary form. It necessitated new management and commissioning structures, the adoption of formal approaches that emphasised the visual and emotive, and a concentration on familiar areas of history. It also led to innovation in programme format, and to an increase in history documentary production and viewership.

By arguing this, the thesis addresses gaps in the existing literature. Firstly, it applies a political economic approach to the study of history documentary, an area that has not been covered in this way before. Secondly, it engages with two contrasting approaches to political economy: critical political economy and neo-classical political economy.

In terms of critical political economy, the study demonstrates the value of trying to link historical context, production and text as a way of grasping the dynamics of change in television over time. It also illustrates the difficulty of doing this, and raises

questions about how adequate the framework is for dealing with individual accounts of change. On one hand, the study shows that producer views are important in order to contextualise and deepen analysis of structural change. The study shows how critical political economy is a valuable framework, but one which must be open to perspectives that come from a closer examination at a relatively micro level. However, the study also shows that evidence from the micro level, from sources such as practitioner interviews, also need corroboration from documentary sources from meso and macro levels of organisational management to fully verify their significance.

The thesis also engages with neo-classical political economy. It could be argued that the “functioning consumer market” envisaged by Peacock in 1986, and championed by others since, never fully developed in the UK. It could be argued that had Peacock’s vision for UK broadcasting been more fully developed, then the worst symptoms of downward commercial pressure on standards might have been avoided. In as much, Peacock’s criticisms of advertiser funded TV, as being a system that served advertisers rather than consumers (Home Office, 1986: para. 421), was proved right in the case of ITV’s history documentary output after 1990, Channel Four’s increasing commercialism from 1997 onwards, and indirectly in the BBC’s requirement to maximise audience ratings. It could be further argued that the areas in which Peacock’s recommendations were most fully realised, the independent production sector and the BBC’s requirement to operate commercially, competitive forces were successful in releasing creativity and formal innovation in history documentary production that met with mass consumer approval.

However, this thesis also suggests that Peacock's intervention may have been unrealistic, and that the neoclassical approach to political economy does not take account of the myriad factors and forces that sustained television in its culturally predominant role. In particular, Peacock, and others who espoused the application of market economics to broadcasting, arguably failed to understand the complex motivations of producers and consumers, preferring instead to let the market calculate for such complexity itself.

The thesis addresses a gap in the literature surrounding the connection between the development of documentary and the structure of television during the 1990s. The thesis engaged with the literature around the changing function of documentary. The shift from rigorous objectivity of *All Our Working Lives* (BBC, 1984) to the diversions offered by the visualisations of *Pyramid* (BBC/Discovery/NTL, 2002) coincided with Corner's notation of the shifts in documentary function during the same period (Corner, 2002: 259-260). In addition, the views of interviewees regarding the changes in history documentary quality between 1982 and 2002 fell into similar categories to the views on documentary quality discussed in the literature review. This framework was therefore highly useful as a basis for researching documentary development, although it often lacked an empirical basis, and tended to take exceptional examples as indicators for general shifts in form and function.

The thesis also addresses a gap in the critical writing on the development of history documentary itself. Whilst this thesis agreed with the prevailing assessments in the literature concerning changes in function and form, the views in the literature seldom took the historical development of television into account. This thesis seeks to build

on the work already done in this area, by presenting systematically gathered empirical data to support its arguments.

The thesis also engages with the issue of programme quality. On one hand the thesis argues that there was a demonstrable decline in quality, if judged by the BRU's formulation (BRU, 1989). However, the thesis has also illustrated the difficulty of achieving consensus on a definition of quality. The interview material reveals widely differing positions in its understanding of quality, as does the material in the literature review, and subsequently the analysis of key programmes. This study therefore indicates whilst quality is a potent rhetorical term in discussions of television development, it requires refining if it is to be used as an empirical measure of change.

#### 9.5 Suggestions for Further Study

While this study has attempted to give an overview of the development of history documentary on UK television it has, inevitably, left many areas and issues untouched. A number of these deserve particular attention and closer study.

The first is the role and influence of ITV in the development of history documentaries across the period. The predominance of BBC and Channel Four in the critical literature on history documentary, added to the small amount of ITV programmes in the listings sample, and the difficulty of covering such a large period in time meant that ITV did not receive as much attention as other channels. However, it is possible that a closer look at history documentary output of ITV across the ITV licence auctions of 1991, at Thames Television, Granada and Central Television in particular, might have thrown additional light onto the function of history documentary on

terrestrial television, and the sub-genre's relationship to PSB. The same can be said for Channel Five, whose institutional history is a neglected area in academic discourse.

Secondly, this study, for reasons of scope and manageability, did not look at the output of cable and satellite channels between 1982 and 2002. Whilst there was no 'boom' in historical documentary on terrestrial television in the UK, there was almost certainly a much larger increase in the amount and frequency of history documentaries on cable and satellite channels over the period<sup>82</sup>, albeit watched by a much smaller share of the audience than those broadcast on the terrestrial channels. This study has also touched on the role played by co-production funding from overseas broadcasters. A fuller study of the relationships between UK and USA broadcasters in the commissioning and funding of history documentaries would be beneficial to a wider understanding of the processes examined in this thesis.

Finally, this study's period of examination ends in 2002, for reasons outlined in Chapter 3 ('Methods'). However, by the date of the submission of this thesis (October 2008), the circumstances in which history documentaries are produced and consumed have changed considerably. Of particular interest would be whether a study of the intervening period showed a fuller use of the potentialities of the new forms of history documentary developed in the late 1990s, or whether the commercial imperative to maximise the audience in a rapidly fragmenting audience had increased. In addition, it would be of interest and relevance to the thesis's engagement with issues surrounding PSB, to assess the changed nature of the history documentary producing community.

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<sup>82</sup> This figure would almost certainly be higher, given the British launch of Discovery Europe in 1989 (Singer, 2002), The History Channel in 1995 (Anon, 1995), and the National Geographic Channel in 1997 (Anon, 1997).

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*Living in the Past* (BBC, 1978)

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*Mengele* (Central Television for ITV / WGBH, 1985)

*Nationwide* (BBC, 1969-1984)

*Neighbours From Hell* (Central Television / Carlton Television for ITV, 1998-)

*Nicholas and Alexandra* (Granada, 1994)

*Nippon* (BBC, 1990)

*Now the War is Over* (BBC, 1985)

*Out of the Doll's House* (BBC, 1988)

*Pandora's Box* (BBC, 1992)

*Police Camera Action* (Carlton Television for ITV, 1994-)

*Pyramid: The Building of the Great Pyramid at Giza* (BBC / Discovery, 2002)

*Reputations* (BBC / A&E, 1994-2004)

*Revealed* (Channel Five, 2002-)

*Revealed: Who Killed Tutankhamun?* (Atlantic Productions for Channel Five / Discovery, 2002)

*Schindler's List* (Dir. Steven Spielberg, 1993)

*Secret History* (Channel Four, 1991-2004)

*Secret History: Deep Sleep* (Otmoor Productions for Channel Four, 1992)

*Secret History: The Charge of the Light Brigade* (Scottish Media Group / Red Vision for Channel Four, 2002)

*Secret Lives* (Channel Four, 1995-97)

*Secret Lives: Edward VIII – Traitor King* (Hart Ryan Productions for Channel Four, 1995)

*Secret Lives: L. Ron Hubbard* (3BM for Channel Four, 1997)

*Secrets of the Dead* (Channel Four / PBS, 1999-2003)

*Sex and Shopping* (Douglas Chirnside Productions for Channel Five, 1998-2001)

*Shipyard* (Dir. Paul Rotha, 1935)

*Small Objects of Desire* (BBC, 1993)

*Station X* (Darlow Smithson for Channel Four, 1999)

*The British Empire* (BBC / Time Life, 1972)

*The Day Before Yesterday* (Thames Television, 1970-1)

*The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985)

*The Dragon Has Two Tongues: How Red Was My Valley* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985)

*The Edwardian Country House* (Wall to Wall for Channel Four, 2002)

*The Great Artists* (Seventh Art Productions for Channel Five, 2001-3)

*The Great Commanders* (Seventh Art Productions for Channel Four, 1993)

*The Great War* (BBC, 1964)

*The Moors Murderers* (Chameleon Productions for Channel Five, 1999)

*The Most Evil Men in History* (Uden Associates for Channel Five, 2001)

*The Nazis: A Warning From History* (BBC, 1997)

*The Nazis: A Warning From History – The Road to Treblinka* (BBC, 1997)

*The Nuclear Age* (Central Television for ITV / WGBH, 1989)

*The People's Century* (BBC, 1995-7)

*The Real...* (Channel Four, 1998-2004)

*The Real Rupert Murdoch* (3BM for Channel Four, 1998)

*The Real Georgiana Spencer* (Channel Four, 1999)

*The Second World War in Colour* (Trans World International / Carlton Television for ITV, 1999)

*The Sex Trade* (London Weekend Television for ITV, 1998)

*The Sexual Century* (Carlton Television / Bara-Alper Television, 1999)

*The Trench* (BBC, 2002)

*The World At War* (Thames Television, 1973-4)

*Time Team* (Videotext Communications for Channel Four, 1994-)

*Timewatch* (BBC, 1982-)

*Timewatch: The Stolen Child* (BBC2, 1993)

*Towards Tomorrow* (BBC, 1968)

*Tyneside Story* (Dir. Gilbert Gunn, 1944)

*Video Diaries* (BBC, 1991-)

*Walking With Dinosaurs* (BBC / Discovery, 1999)

*War and Peace* (BBC, 1992)

*War in the Air* (BBC, 1954)

*War Walks* (BBC, 1996-7)

*War: The Inside Story* (Flashback Television for The History Channel, 1995)

*World in Action* (Granada Television, 1963-1998)

*You've Been Framed* (Granada for ITV, 1990-2006)

## Appendices

### 1. Appendix 1: Programme Attributes From Listings

For each programme in the listings sample logged in a database, the following information was gathered from the *Radio Times* and *TV Times*:

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| Title  | History Documentary Topic  |
| Channel  | History documentary Period |
| Genre  | History documentary Type   |
| Duration                                       | Format                     |
| TX Time  | Co-production Partner(s)   |
| TX Date  | Presenter                  |
| TX Day   | Director                   |
| Documentary Genre                              | Producer                   |
| <i>Radio Times</i> and <i>TV Times</i> Billing | Editor                     |
|  | Production Company         |

## 2. Appendix 2: Programme Genre Coding Frame [print out landscaped]

The following codes were used to categorise and count the instances of different genres in the listings sample. The genres were adapted from broadcasters' annual reports. The documentary sub-genres and history documentary topics, periods and types were derived from the Radio Times and TV Times information.

| Genres   | Documentary Sub-genres   | History Documentary Period  | History Documentary Topic   | History Documentary Type   |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| 1. Sport<br>2. News<br>3. Music<br>4. Leisure<br>5. Light Entertainment<br>6. Drama<br>7. Documentary<br>8. Current Affairs<br>9. Comedy<br>10. Arts | 1. Business<br>2. Current / foreign affairs<br>3. Contemporary<br>4. Arts<br>5. Science<br>6. Wildlife<br>7. History | 1. Longitudinal<br>2. Pre-history<br>3. Ancient<br>4. Civilisation<br>5. Dark Ages<br>6. Medieval<br>7. Renaissance<br>8. C17<br>9. C18<br>10. C19<br>11. Early C20th<br>12. Late C20th | 1. Arts/Media<br>2. War/Military<br>3. Religion/Politics<br>4. Science/Industry<br>5. Civilisation<br>6. Social<br>7. Royalty | 1. Actuality-led<br>2. Archive-led<br>3. Reconstruction<br>4. Living History<br>5. Drama-documentary |

### **3. Appendix 3: Interviewee Biographies**

#### Anon A

This interviewee is a highly experienced producer of documentaries for both ITV and BBC over a thirty year period.

#### Anon B

This interviewee is a highly experienced film archive specialist and producer, and has worked for the BBC for over three decades.

#### Anon C

A highly experienced producer of history documentaries at the BBC.

#### Michael Attwell

Michael Attwell trained as a factual producer at LWT in the 1960s. He was a commissioning editor at Channel Four in the early 1990s (1988-1993), then moved to the BBC (1993-1996), and finally to Channel Five (1996-2001). He returned to production in 2001 when he established an independent production company, MAP TV.

#### Simon Berthon

Simon Berthon trained at Granada, and was an executive producer for *World in Action*, before he established an independent production company, 3BM, in 1995. He produced several episodes of *Secret History* and *Secret Lives* for Channel Four, and several series for the BBC including *Allies at War* (BBC2, 2001).

### Stewart Binns

Stuart Binns was trained at the BBC in the early 1980s, and then moved to Trans World International (TWI) to set up and produce the weekly sports magazine programme *Trans World Sport* (International Distribution, 1991-2005). He was executive producer of *Century* (TWI/The History Channel, 1999) and the *...in Colour* (TWI/Carlton, 1999-2004) franchise of documentary series.

### George Carey

George Carey Trained at the BBC in the current affairs department, and created *Newsnight* in 1986, before leaving the BBC to work in the USA. He returned at the end of the 1980s to form an independent production company, *Barracough Carey* in 1989, which later merged with *Mentorn* in 1997.

### Catrine Clay

Catrine Clay was a producer on the BBC documentary series *40 Minutes* during the 1980s, and was asked by Laurence Rees to join her when he took over the *Timewatch* strand in 1992.

### Stuart Cosgrove

Stuart Cosgrove has been a commissioner at Channel Four since 1994, when he was put in charge of the Independent Film and Video (IFV) department. He became commissioner for History, Religion and Art at Channel Four in 1996. He became Channel Four's Head of Nations and Regions in 1997 and remains in this post.



### Michael Darlow

Michael Darlow was trained at the BBC, before working as a freelance director and producer of history documentaries for Granada throughout the 1960s. He was the director of several episodes of *The World at War* (Thames TV, 1973-4).

### Martin Davidson

Martin Davidson trained at the BBC, and was an executive producer of many history documentary series over the last 30 years, most notably *A History of Britain* (BBC2, 2000-2002). He was for many years a producer of Arts programming at the BBC and is married to Janice Hadlow, executive producer of history at the BBC.

### Roy Davies

Roy Davies was trained at the BBC, and was a producer on BBC2's history documentary strand *Chronicle* from 1975, specialising in the history of Ancient Rome. He became editor of *Chronicle* and *Timewatch* in 1987. He became head of factual programmes for BBC Wales in 1992.

### Taylor Downing

Taylor Downing was trained at Thames TV, and founded the independent production company *Flashback Television* in 1982 with Victoria Wegg-Prosser. He has made several history series for Channel Four, the BBC and the American market.

### David Dugan

David Dugan trained in the BBC's science department. He left the BBC in 1988 to form 'Windfall Films'. He has made several series and one-offs for the BBC, Channel Four and American broadcasters.

### John Edgington

John Edgington trained as a journalist, and moved into television production in the 1980s with a film about the assassination of Martin Luther King for the BBC. He then formed an independent production company, *Otmoor Productions* in 1989. This led to several other commissions including *Secret History: Deep Sleep* (1993).

### Mark Fielder

Mark Fielder trained at the BBC, and was a producer at BBC Bristol where he made *War Walks* (1996-7). He left the BBC to join *United Productions* in 1999 to produce *Elizabeth* (Channel Four, 2000). In 2003 he founded the independent production company, Quickfire Media.

### Peter Grimsdale

Peter Grimsdale trained at the BBC, and worked on landmark history documentary series for BBC2, before moving to BBC Bristol. He became the commissioning editor for religion and arts at Channel Four in 1994, and became commissioning editor of history at Channel Four 1997 until 1999. He then became head of the Independent Commissioning Group (ICG) at the BBC from 1999 to 2002.

### Alan Hayling

Alan Hayling trained at the BBC, and then left to become an independent producer in the 1970s. After making *Secret History: Drowning By Bullets* (Point Du Jour for Channel Four, 1991) he became the series' commissioning editor. He left Channel Four in 1997, to be a commissioning editor of documentaries at the BBC. He left the BBC to work as an independent producer in 2006.

### Hamish Mykura

Hamish Mykura trained at the BBC, and worked as a producer of history documentaries there until moving to the independent production company Blakeway Productions. He became commissioner of History at Channel Four in 2001.

### Diane Nelmes

Diane Nelmes trained as a print journalist, and then worked for BBC News, and Granada, becoming the only woman to be an executive producer of *World in Action* in 1992. She became Controller of Factual Programmes at Granada in 1993, and head of factual for ITV in 1999. She has commissioned and produced many of ITV's history documentary series including *Nicholas and Alexandra* (Granada for ITV/A&E, 1994).

### Laurence Rees

Laurence Rees trained at the BBC, and became the editor of the history documentary strand *Timewatch* in 1992. In 1994 he became joint head of history at the BBC with Janice Hadlow. He remains the creative head of history at the BBC. He has produced many of BBC's most prestigious history documentary series, such as *The Nazis: A*

*Warning from History* (BBC2, 1997), *Horror in the East* (BBC2, 2001), and *Auschwitz: The Final Solution* (BBC2, 2005).

### Michelle Ryan

Michelle Ryan founded *Red Flannel*, a women's film workshop in Pontypridd in 1984. She later joined Cardiff-based independent production company Teliesyn in 1991.

### Sue Temple

Sue Temple trained where she worked in the programme acquisition department before leaving to work in the USA. She returned to the UK to set up a distribution company specialising in history documentaries in 1990.

### Colin Thomas

Colin Thomas was a BBC producer and left to become an independent producer in the 1970s. Colin Thomas was a founder member of the independent production company Teliesyn. He was the producer and director of *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (HTV for Channel Four, 1985). He now works as a freelance director for BBC4 and More4.

### Julian Ware

Julian Ware was trained at Central TV, where he was an editor and producer. He directed several episodes of Channel Four's first major history documentary series, *Vietnam: A Television History* (Central for Channel Four/PBS). He now works as executive producer at the independent producer *Darlow Smithson*.

#### 4. Appendix 4: Interviewee Coverage

The table below indicates the extent to which the interviewees cover the time period of 1982 to 2002, in terms of both commissioning and production roles. Ticks indicate when years and sectors are represented by at least one interviewee.

|      | BBC<br>Com. | BBC<br>Prod. | ITV<br>Com. | ITV<br>Prod. | C4<br>Com. | C5<br>Com. | Indie<br>Prod. |
|------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| 1982 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      |            |            | Covered        |
| 1983 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      |            |            | Covered        |
| 1984 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      |            |            | Covered        |
| 1985 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      |            |            | Covered        |
| 1986 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      |            |            | Covered        |
| 1987 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      |            |            | Covered        |
| 1988 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1989 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1990 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1991 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1992 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1993 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1994 | Covered     | Covered      |             | Covered      | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1995 | Covered     | Covered      | Covered     |              | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1996 | Covered     | Covered      | Covered     |              | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1997 | Covered     | Covered      | Covered     |              | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1998 | Covered     | Covered      | Covered     |              | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 1999 | Covered     | Covered      | Covered     |              | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 2000 | Covered     | Covered      | Covered     |              | Covered    |            | Covered        |
| 2001 | Covered     | Covered      | Covered     |              | Covered    | Covered    | Covered        |
| 2002 | Covered     | Covered      | Covered     |              | Covered    | Covered    | Covered        |

## **5. Appendix 5: Interviewee Consent Email**

Dear \_\_\_\_,

I am a PhD student at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, researching the changing industrial context and form of history programming on UK television between 1982-2002. I am particularly interested in the ways in which history documentary has changed over that period and the reasons for those changes.

I formerly worked in the industry as a development researcher and recognise that you must be very busy. I would, however, very much like the opportunity to interview you about your understanding of the way history programming has developed over this period. The material will be used solely for my thesis and, eventually for publication in an academic context.

I will be happy to send you details of the questions I would like to ask in advance and give you assurances regarding confidentiality. The interviews will be recorded and I will, if you wish, provide you with a copy of the interview tape. I anticipate that the interview should take at the most one hour.

I would like to conduct the interview in the latter half of June this year, but am, of course, willing to fit into your schedule.

If you have any questions before deciding whether to participate, then please contact me on the numbers below, or by email.

I do hope that you will have time to assist me in this project.

Yours sincerely,

Dafydd Jones

University of Wales, Aberystwyth

Department of Theatre, Film and Television

01654 XXXXXX

07740 XXXXXX

[dgj03@aber.ac.uk](mailto:dgj03@aber.ac.uk)

## 6. Appendix 6: Advance Interview Questions

### MAIN PHD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What were the key developments in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002
2. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and the production of history documentary on UK terrestrial TV?
3. What was the relationship between changes in the political economy of television between 1982 and 2002 and changes in history documentary form?

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Was there a boom in TV history documentary after 1986? If so, why did it occur?

- Do you think there has been 'boom' or growth since the 1980s in history documentary in UK TV'?

2. What is the relationship between the amount of history documentaries on television and the changing political economy of television production in the UK between 1982 and 2002?

- What changes in the laws governing broadcasting from the 1980s onwards have impacted on the production and scheduling of history documentary?



- What political changes in broadcasting policy since the 1980s do you consider have had the most impact on the way in which history documentary is produced and scheduled on UK TV?
- What institutional developments in the commercial and the public sector have had the most impact on the development of history documentary over the period?
- How has the management of history documentary within the various broadcasters changed?
- What changes in the economics of broadcast production since the 1980s have, in your view, impacted on the way in which history documentary was produced and scheduled?
- Have the typical viewing figures / audience profiles achieved by a history documentary changed since the 1980s?
- What was the typical budget / research period / shooting period / editing period for a one hour history documentary in the 1980s? Has this changed?
- Did any emergent technologies change the production context of history documentary?

3. What impact have changes in the political economy of broadcasting over the period 1982-2002 had on the form of history documentary?

- Has history documentary 'dumbed down' over this period?
- Did history documentary's standing in comparison with other genres change?
- Did the balance of editorial power in the production of history docs change, if so, why?

- How has the use of Archive / Presenter / Voice Over / Reconstruction / Interview / Contemporary Footage and Landscape / CGI / Music change during the period in question?
- What do you think were the aims of history documentary makers in the early 1980s? Have those aims changed in the period of change after 1982? If so how? If so why?
- Can you think of any individual programmes which exemplify these changes?

## 7. Appendix 7: Interview Log Code

The following coding frame was used to create an interpretive path from the Research Questions to the interview questions, and back to the analysis of interview material. When the answers were entered into the database, the appropriate code was entered into a separate field, in order that interview material could be collated according to sub-question.

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| A   | History Boom  |
| B   | Political Economy / Volume  |
| B2  | Law Changes   |
| B3  | Broadcasting Policy   |
| B4  | Institutional Changes   |
| B5  | Management / Commissioning  |
| B6  | Economics Of Production / Scheduling                                |
| B7  | Viewing Figures / Profiles  |
| B8  | Budgets / Research Periods / Shooting Periods / Editing             |
| B9  | Emergent Technologies   |
| B10 | Co-Production   |
| C   | Political Economy / Form  |
| C1  | Dumbing Down  |
| C2  | History Documentary Vs Other Genres                                 |
| C3  | Editorial Power Balance   |
| C4  | Archive / Presenter / Vo / Reconstruction / Interview / CGI / Music |
| C5  | Aims  |
| C6  | Key Programmes / People   |
| C7  | History Concepts / Topics   |

## 8. Appendix 8: Independent Companies Commissioned by Channel Four

Compiled from the Annual Reports and Accounts of Channel Four, 1983-2003.

| Year          | Number of Independent Companies Commissioned by Channel Four |
|---------------|--|
| To March 1982 | 150  |
| To March 1983 | Not Available  |
| To March 1984 | N/A  |
| To March 1985 | 313  |
| To March 1986 | 332  |
| To March 1987 | 360  |
| To March 1988 | 460  |
| To March 1989 | 491  |
| To March 1990 | 526  |
| To March 1991 | 668  |
| To March 1992 | 664  |
| To March 1993 | 553  |
| To March 1994 | 539  |
| To March 1995 | 527  |
| To March 1996 | 549  |
| To March 1997 | 450  |
| To March 1998 | 465  |
| To March 1999 | 412  |
| To March 2000 | N/A  |
| To March 2001 | N/A  |
| To March 2002 | 300  |

## 9. Appendix 9: The BRU Definition of Quality

| Supportive to Quality Television  | Detrimental to Quality Television  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Editorial freedom from the obligation to maximize ratings.</li> <li>- Time, in the making of programmes</li> <li>- High levels of craft skill</li> <li>- Well-informed producers</li> <li>- Permission to take risks, and fail, without loss of income</li> <li>- Peer-group admiration for excellence</li> <li>- A sense of mission: the conviction among production staff that what they do should educate the nation, rather than anaesthetize it.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The obligation to maximize ratings</li> <li>- Fear of failure, leading to reliance on copies of existing audience-pleasers</li> <li>- Shortage of time, leading to formula programme-making.</li> <li>- Peer-group admiration for high ratings.</li> <li>- No sense of mission: the awareness among production staff that they're only there for the money</li> </ul> |

(Adapted from, BRU, 1989)