discourse, I have attempted to judge their historical contingency, textual efficacy, and mutually defining character. Such a study is necessarily open-ended and demands extension in several directions, not the least of which might be the evaluation of the specific effects of video rather than film practices within each of the functional categories.

As a writer and teacher, I benefit from work which challenges my critical preconceptions and takes the occasional risk. It is my hope that the practitioner can likewise draw upon my research as a basis for an ongoing process of self-examination and boundary-testing. For in the cultural context in which lively debate gives way entirely to survival techniques or business as usual, all pay a price. If a vital, self-sustaining documentary film culture is, indeed, our shared goal, we cannot afford to fail.

3

The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription

Brian Winston

1

Contemporary positioning of photography as an art does not detract from the camera's status as a scientific instrument. There are two main reasons for this; first, the long history of pictorial representation as mode of scientific evidence, a history which conditions, in part, the research agenda that produces the modern camera; and second (to be dealt with in the next section of this essay), the tendency of modern science to produce data via instruments of inscription whose operations are analogous to the camera.

On July 3, 1839, M. François Arago, the radical representative for the East Pyrenees, rose in the Chamber of Deputies to persuade the French government to purchase Daguerre's patents for the world. In his arguments, he stressed the scientific uses of the apparatus; for instance, to make accurate copies of hieroglyphics and, more generally, for physicists and meteorologists. In short, the camera was to join, as Arago listed them, "the thermometer, barometer, hygrometer," telescope, and microscope as nothing so much as the latest of scientific instruments.[1]

Arago was able to mount this argument because the entire enterprise of modern science, an experimental and, therefore, observational enterprise, had already produced the instruments he mentioned, thus creating a class into which the camera could be inserted. The camera would certainly affect some sorts of artistic production; but as Arago explained it, these were of a kind that had long gone on in the service of science. Hence, his offering the example of the laborious business of hand-copying Egyptian hieroglyphs as a specific case of what photography might best replace.

Images in the service of science are, Elizabeth Eisenstein argues, a

result of the spread of the press in Europe. With print, maps, tables, architectural and other patterns, botanical, geographical and anatomical images acquired a new scientific, that is, an evidentiary, force. "[F]ruitful forms of collaboration brought together astronomers and engravers, physicians and painters."[2]

The use of images for scientific purposes can also be found in a distinct painterly tradition uncovered by Peter Galassi. He suggests that the impulse behind works from Dürer's *The Great Piece of Turf* (1504) to de Valenciennes's studies, in the 1780s, of atmospheric conditions is essentially observational in a scientific sense.[3] Even as late as the early nineteenth century, when art and science were assuming their modern oppositional guises, the observational impulse continued to lead some artists to cleave to a certain scientism.[4] In 1836, Constable could still suggest that

> painting is a science, and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature. Why, then, should not landscape painting be considered as a branch of natural philosophy of which pictures are but the experiments.[5]

Clearly, this is an enunciation of the tradition that grows out of Dürer's clump of grass to include all the great naturalist/illustrators up to the present.

Galassi argues that photography, which required no technological or scientific breakthroughs to be "invented" in the 1830s, lacked an aesthetic basis until then. This basis he locates in the development of a new scientific observational thrust to art which, in Galassi's opinion, brings the various elements together to create photography; although, it can be noted, rhetoric such as Constable's represents at the same historical moment a recovery, or memory, of the Renaissance observational impulse, a tradition Galassi himself outlines. Nevertheless, one would want to add Galassi's insight to more generally understood factors influencing the development of photography, such as the needs of the middle class in the years following the French and Industrial Revolutions for personal and decorative images.[6]

The social pressure to create specific images of individuals resulted in a succession of fashionable techniques from the silhouette through the physionotrace to photography. Despite Arago's rhetoric, it was the portraitists and the miniaturists who were most affected by the introduction of photography, and noisiest in expressing their distaste for the development.

It is, of course, possible to read Arago's speech, which has barely a nod toward photography as a substitute for such painting, as nothing more than a political ploy to placate an outraged army of painters. His insistence on science does, indeed, make this sort of political sense, but it also makes

just as much cultural sense, that is, as a plea for science. The "political" solution was that the portraitists figured prominently among the first users of Daguerre's techniques.

The carte de visité democratized the aristocratic miniature. Before photography, it would take the likeness on a coin to trigger the capture of a Louis at Varennes. After photography, the Paris police would use photographs of Communards at the barricades as a basis for arrest. Indeed, photography became an indispensable and widely used criminological tool by the end of the century.[7]

If the democratization of the individual likeness was of primary importance, the provision of other images was not a too-distant second. This demand, arising as did the need for likenesses among the increasingly culturally dominant bourgeoisie, also necessitated a series of technological responses beginning with lithography and continuing with and beyond photography to modern printing and image-reproducing techniques of all kinds. The idea of the photographic reproduction of artworks occurs to a photographic entrepreneur as early as 1860.[8] By the late 1880s, the entire Louvre collection could be ordered in photographic form from a catalog. It is possible to see in this use of photography for artistic reproduction a final affirmation of its scientific heritage. Photography's scientific ability to produce an image mechanically is the earnest of its accuracy as a copy of the original.

Arago wanted the camera to substitute for all artistic endeavors in the service of science and his wish has been largely granted. Indeed, by the 1870s, cameras were producing knowledge of physical phenomena, such as motion, that could not be gained in any other way. (Muybridge's first Palo Alto horse sequences were published in *Scientific American*.[9]) But the old painterly tradition was vibrant enough to persist. Modern scientific artwork can still most readily be seen in natural science texts, the *fons et origo* of the enterprise. Many contemporary versions of these works eschew photography in favor of traditional art. The first Audubon *Field Guide* to use photographs of birds rather than paintings and drawings was not issued until 1977.[10] Paradoxically, it is the contemporary heirs of Audubon who most vividly remind us of one of the camera's primary purposes.

2

Arago's positioning of the photographic apparatus in the scientific realm had another profound cultural effect. In this founding moment in 1839, the climax of 6 months of enthusiasm and fear (on the part of the artistic community), Arago, by stressing science, helped condition the public reception of the new technique. In effect, he officially (as it were) con-

firmed for the public that seeing is believing, and that the photographic camera never lies; or rather: the camera lies no more than does the thermometer, the microscope, the hygrometer, and so on. All these devices produce analogues of nature. That the camera can be manipulated more easily than, say, the thermometer is less significant than the fact that both instruments produce a representation of reality. It is this process of representation that is shared and reinforces Arago's original vision of the device as being of a piece with other scientific apparatuses.

The instruments cited by Arago were in the service of observation which was, and remains, critical to the experimental method of modern science. Experimental observation was, in Bacon's words,

> the most radical and fundamental towards natural philosophy; such natural philosophy as shall not vanish in the fume of subtle, sublime or delectable speculation, but such as shall be operative to. . . . the benefit of man's life; for . . . it will give a more true and real illumination concerning causes and axioms than is hitherto attained.[11]

Elizabeth Eisenstein cautions us not to read too clean a break with the immediate past into this sort of rhetoric. Observation, as a method, dates back to the Greeks and, for Bacon and his contemporaries, the "great book of nature," itself a medieval conceit, was still to be found more in ancient texts, now newly printed, than in the protolaboratory.[12] She argues not that observation was unknown prior to the printing press but that the dissemination of those observations was particularly prone to scribal degradation. This was because, in the scrolls, "words drifted apart from pictures, and labels became detached from things."[13] Print fixed that.

However, a century and more later, what was to be different for the Baconians was the nature of the observations themselves, exactly because Arago's devices came increasingly into play. Eventually, much of the "book of nature" was to be read in the gauges, meters, and physiographs of the modern laboratory.

To emphasize the degree to which modern science depends on modes of representation of these kinds, let me take sociologist Bruno Latour's "obstinate dissenter," a somewhat deviant person of our own time, who refuses to believe a result reported in a scientific paper.[14] In Latour's exposition, this person eventually penetrates the laboratory of the professor who has produced the result being questioned. The dissenter wants to go behind the text to the actual experiment. " 'You doubt what I wrote?', says the professor. 'Let me show you.' " The obstinate dissenter is led to an array in which a physiograph has been mounted. Out of the device comes a paper on which there is an image just like the ones the dissenter saw reproduced in the original paper.

The obstinate dissenter realizes that, as Latour puts it:

> We are at the junction of two worlds: a paper world that we have just left, and one of instruments we are just entering. A hybrid is produced at the interface: a raw image, to be used later in an article, that is emerging from an instrument.

Latour describes this hybrid as a "fragile film that is in between text and laboratory."

At the heart of the array is a glass chamber in which is suspended the ileum of a guinea pig. When the professor injects substances into the chamber, the ileum responds and the needles of the physiograph dance. Latour writes: "This perturbation, invisible in the chamber, is visible on paper; the chemical, no matter what it is, is given shape on paper"; that is, the shape to which the professor points to stifle the obstinate dissenter's doubts about his results.

Latour equates *scientific instrument* with *inscription device*. For Latour, the work of science is to create setups, arrays which produce inscriptions which can be used in texts and scientific papers. "What is behind a scientific text?" he asks. "Inscriptions. How are those inscriptions obtained? By setting up instruments." And what happens when we are confronted with an instrument? Latour says "we are attending an 'audio-visual' spectacle. There is a visual set of inscriptions produced by the instrument and a verbal commentary uttered by the scientist."[15]

I would like to suggest we have reached a place not unlike that occupied by the viewer of a documentary film.

When documentary filmmakers liken their work to data collection or "voyages of discovery," they implicitly position their audiences as Latourian obstinate dissenters who have penetrated the lab of their filmmaking experiments.[16] All the filmmakers' off-screen denials of objectivity, all off-screen protestations as to their own subjectivity (should they make them), are contained and, indeed, contradicted by the overwhelmingly powerful cultural context of science. As the *Encyclopedie française* puts it: "The photographic plate does not interpret. It records. Its precision and fidelity cannot be questioned."[17] However false this might be in practice, the *Encyclopedie*, without question, accurately sums up the nature of photographic authority, as it is popularly understood. The centrality of this scientific connection to documentary is the most potent (and sole) legitimation for its evidentiary pretentions. Thus, documentarists cannot readily avoid the scientific and evidential because those contexts are "built-in" to the cinematographic apparatus.

There is a powerful argument, grounded in centuries of modern scientific inquiry, for seeing the camera as no more and no less than a device

for representing the world of natural phenomena, a device like any other Latourian "instrument." At this level of history and culture, there is no difference between the camera and the, say, thermometer.

3

In the development of the documentary film, the scientific connection was suppressed during the years of Griersonian reconstructional practices. Griersonian Realist filmmakers never actively wanted to reconstruct. It was a technique forced on them, or so they thought, by the sync-sound equipment they used. Inappropriate studio apparatus was seen as being the big impediment to realizing the full observational potential of the form.[18] All it required, in the minds of North American filmmakers at least, was the arrival of more suitable equipment—handholdable cameras and battery-powered tape recorders, enabling instantaneous filming in almost all circumstances. By the mid-fifties, television news had created a large enough market for 16mm sync-sound apparatus for an R&D program to be sustained. By the early sixties, this program had produced the machines of which the Griersonians had long dreamed.[19]

However, the issue was not simply technological. Throughout the period of reconstructional practice, Realist artistic legitimations were given full reign. Now, with the new phase, scientific rationales came to the fore and traditional reconstructed Realist documentary was opposed to observational work—Direct Cinema.

It is, therefore, inevitable that the scientific legitimation for the documentary enterprise came to be most strenuously expressed at the outset of the Direct Cinema phase. Yet observational claims caused the filmmakers many difficulties, especially as the dream of "simply" filming events proved to be as elusive with the new equipment as it had with the old. To cope with external attacks and internal doubts, the Direct Cinema practitioners developed two overlapping and contradictory rhetorics. One luxuriated in the scientific potential of the form, the other (to be dealt with in the next section of this essay) denied it.

With the new equipment in hand, enthusiasm for its observational possibilities knew few bounds. Just as the thermometer gives "real" temperatures, so, in the right Direct Cinema hands, the camera can give "real" life. Richard Leacock claimed:

> Many film makers feel that the aim of the film maker is to have complete control. Then the conception of what happens is limited to the conception of the film maker. We don't want to put this limit on actuality. What's happening, the action, has no limitations, neither does the significance of what's happening. The film maker's problem is more a problem of how to convey it. How to convey the feeling of being there.[20]

Conveying "the feeling of being there" was simply a technical issue or, rather, a series of technical issues. The drive of the Leacock generation, the second generation of Griersonian documentarists, was for sync portable equipment exactly because they wished to reduce the need for intervention and thereby improve observation. Throughout the sixties, scientism, as it were, triumphs. It is the experimental method and the place of the camera as scientific instrument that provides the context in which the filmmaker/observer emerges—heavily disguised as a fly on the wall.

> With this equipment they [the American Direct Cinema school] can approximate quite closely the flexibility of the human senses. This opens up whole new fields of experience; they can follow their subjects almost anywhere, and because of their unobtrusiveness (they need no artificial lighting) people soon forget the presence of the camera and attain surprising naturalness.[21]

Very quickly, this sort of rhetoric about the new equipment, which implicitly denied the subjectivities of selection and arrangement, took hold: ". . . [t]he effort to capture, with portable sound-film equipment, life as it is lived and not as it is re-invented by the traditional cinema."[22] "The Maysles are more concerned with using their technical skill . . . to record reality without tampering with or imposing on it."[23] "Time and time again, one finds oneself wincing and looking away from the screen because what is coming from it is obviously too real."[24] "It is life observed by the camera rather than, as is the case with most documentaries, life recreated for it."[25] "We find ourselves *there,* with the camera. We are observers, but there is no handy guide."[26] Louis Marcorelles talks about being given by these films "a sensation of life, of being present at a real event."[27]

It is not just critics who adopted this position which trades so simplistically on the scientific connection; filmmakers were also happy to make similar claims. Donn Pennebaker: "It's possible to go to a situation and simply film what you see there, what happens there, what goes on. . . . And what's a film? It's just a window someone peeps through."[28] Robert Drew: "The film maker's personality is in no way directly involved in directing the action."[29] The Maysles were equally emphatic. Al said, "Dave and I are trying to find out what's going on. We capture what takes place."[30]

Not only that—Al Maysles went so far as to eschew editing; and Pat

Jaffe, who with Charlotte Zwerin perfected Direct Cinema editing, herself allowed that:

> When the cameraman is really operating smoothly and moving from one image to another with ease, the footage has the quality and rhythm of a ballet, and whole sequences may be left intact.[31]

When editing occurred, it could be shaped by what had been obtained unconsciously: "Often we discover a new kind of drama that we were not really aware of when we shot it."[32]

Here is Stephen Mamber's "ethic of non-intervention" aborning.[33]

Thus, at the outset, the claims of Direct Cinema were presented as being relatively unproblematic—to be "recording life as it exists at a particular moment before the camera," to produce a cinema, moreover, which would be, to quote a title of a 1961 article of Leacock's, "uncontrolled."[34] In 1963, when Leacock was asked if his aim was to get the people he was filming entirely to forget the camera, he replied: ". . . the story, the situation. . . . is more important than our presence. . . . We don't cheat."[35] The following year, he said of shooting *Happy Mother's Day:* "We never asked anybody to do anything; we were simply observers."[36] As late as the early seventies, Leacock could still claim Direct Cinema as a species of "research data" and inveigh against technicians festooned with equipment.[37] "I'd rather not have a camera at all," he said. "Just be there."[38]

Nonintervention, with its implied promise of unmediated observation, became the prime source of legitimacy for filmmakers as observers. These new observers

> work. . . . believing that the camera finally has only one right—that of recording what happens. They find the events, they don't ask anyone to *do* anything or to say anything.[39]

Such rhetoric does nothing less than release the scientific potential of the apparatus as a tool of observation—"the camera as an impartial and unobtrusive observer capturing the sight and sound of real life."[40] All this was to put documentary on a new footing at this time, one far away from the "ordinary virtues of an art," which Grierson, in the Manifesto, claimed were what distinguished documentaries from other types of nonfiction films. And it was put on this footing with a great deal of fanfare and ballyhoo.

One major consequence, and perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Direct Cinema practice, was that all journalistic/investigative traditions

were jettisoned in favor of one "tremendous effort"—which was how Drew described the essential production technique of his method: "The tremendous effort of being in the right place at the right time."[41] This became "the major creative task." This search for "the highly charged atmosphere" did have a number of crucial implications.[42] These were at least as significant as the filming methods (handholding, available light and sound, long takes, crystal control mechanisms) to which much more attention has been paid.

First, "the tremendous effort" approach sustains, more than any other single element in the repertoire of Direct Cinema, the implicit scientific claims of the enterprise—the powerful notion that what the camera saw and the recorder heard was "raw." It reinforces the concept that the filmmakers have not mediated the result. The documentarists are supposedly as new to the actual event as their audiences are to the record of that event on film.

Second, this unreconstructed vision of "reporting" as pure responsiveness led to some very curious results. For instance, a crew was dispatched to cover an Indian election from the point of view of Jawaharlal Nehru and was surprised, but undeterred, to find that the subject was a shoo-in. From the journalistic point of view, there was "no story." In the event, there was also almost no film.[43] It is as if the ethic of nonintervention had expanded to encompass a ban on reading newspapers. All was justified in the name of experimentation, of data collection. What was discovered, whatever it was, was observationally valid.[44] This is not only the posture of science; it is also the clue to the reception of the films.

In these early debates, a certain aggression emerged on the part of the Direct Cinema filmmakers. By 1961, Drew was saying: "In my opinion, documentary films in general, with very few exceptions, are fake."[45] Drew and his associates became "furious" with people who worked in the older way.[46] Al Maysles felt the use of narration and music produced "illustrated lectures" and described much of the documentary work of the National Film Board of Canada as "propaganda."[47]

The insistence on Direct Cinema techniques as the only true path was propounded at a 1963 conference on new documentary, a crucial meeting arranged by the French national broadcasting organization (ORTF) and held in Lyon. The Americans encountered the French and (Mario Ruspoli aside) both discovered themselves to be divided by more than language. The established American feeling that anything less than an automatic approach could not produce documentary film was expressed vigorously:

> [b]ecause they could now record actual events and sounds, they believed that anything else, including any sort of rehearsal or post-

synchronization, was immoral and unworthy of a showing at a conference on Cinéma-Vérité. If the material was not spontaneous, they said, how could it be true?[48]

The basic fact was that, for the first time in the history of the documentary, such a position of reduced or nonmediation could be articulated.

> And this is a great step forward. If other film makers can follow his [Leacock's] lead, it is entirely possible that a whole new documentary tradition will arise: a tradition of "meeting the reality of the country" in a more intimate, interesting, and humanly important way than any Grierson imagined.[49]

One hundred thirty-six years after François Arago claimed the camera for science, the documentary purists, essentially the American Direct Cinema proponents, implicitly reasserted that claim on behalf of the lightweight Auricon and the Eclair. "Great stress was placed on the objectivity of the film maker." "We . . . attempt to give evidence about which you can make up your own mind."[50] The notion that such objectivity could be achieved is grounded in science and the scientific heritage of photography.

4

Such claims were also immediately attacked. "Among some of the technicians at Lyon a blinkered approach to the new possibilities was evident, the result of an inadequate appraisal of the medium," wrote one English attendee.[51] A little later Jean-Luc Godard, writing in *Cahiers*, complained:

> Leacock and his team do not take account (and the cinema is nothing but the taking of account) that their eye in the act of looking through the viewfinder is at once more and less than the registering apparatus which serves the eye. . . . Deprived of consciousness, thus, Leacock's camera, despite its honesty, loses the two fundamental qualities of a camera: intelligence and sensibility.[52]

Godard (who, some five years after these remarks were published, was to use both Leacock and Pennebaker as camerapersons in an unhappy episode) was still looking, à la Grierson, for "the ordinary virtues of an art" and arguing, *sotto voce*, the old case for photography as art.[53]

These objections were grounded in a sense that the Griersonian baby was being thrown out with the bathwater. They were most strenuously reinforced by another body of opinion that questioned the degree to which

the new style could or could not deliver on its scientific claims. Although not his view, Nöel Carroll best summed it up:

> [N]o sooner was the idea . . . abroad than critics and viewers turned the polemics of direct cinema against direct cinema. A predictable *tu quoque* would note all the ways that direct cinema was inextricably involved with interpreting its materials. Direct cinema opened a can of worms and then got eaten by them.[54]

In the face of such objections, the Direct Cinema practitioners learned to refine their rhetoric, in effect adding a second (and contradictory) strand to it. The techniques of Direct Cinema, especially "[t]he tremendous effort of being there," could encompass the idea of the filmmaker's personality, and in ways that did not compromise the "raw material" claim. An accommodation to a measure of subjectivity could be achieved. This was to be the essential characteristic of this second strand of rhetoric; and, as a result of its deployment, what was said about the films by their makers and by critics would undergo considerable development as the decade progressed.

As early as 1964, Leacock had already developed a way of deflecting the criticism that claims made for Direct Cinema's objectivity were too strong:

> When you make an electrical measurement of a circuit, you do it with a volt-meter. Now the moment you do that, you change the circuit. Every physicist—and I used to be one—knows this. So you design your volt-meter so that very little goes through it. And in a very sensitive situation you need very much less going through it. . . . The physicist is a very objective fellow, *but he is very selective*. He's much more selective than we are. He tells you *precisely* and *only* what he wants you to know. All the rest is irrelevant.[55]

This stance also had the advantage of reendowing the filmmaker with Godardian "intelligence" and "sensibility."

Drew takes a similar, if less sophisticated, line. For him, subjectivity became more or less synonymous with "sensitivity." "Sensitivity" was defined as the quality required to know when an event is "happening." In other words, personality determined when the machines were switched on. That is why Drew can say, "The film maker's personality has much more effect in this form of reporting."[56] Obviously, these admissions and analogies do not compromise Direct Cinema's explicit claim to authenticity exactly because the filmmaker's personality operates only in the context of what is not being filmed, not what is.

By the late sixties, more elaborate rhetorical responses had been built on these early distinctions, essentially allowing for subjectivities to invade

the perimeter while preserving the authenticity of the central matter—the uncut footage. Al Maysles:

> We can see two kinds of truth here. One is the raw material, which is the footage, the kind of truth that you get in literature in the diary form—it's immediate, no one has tampered with it. Then there's another kind of truth that comes in extracting and juxtaposing the raw material into a more meaningful and coherent storytelling form, which finally can be said to be more than just raw data.[57]

Note here that the "raw material" is like a "diary." This transformation of science (that is, "raw material" with which "no one has tampered") into subjectivities ("diary") is the key. This sort of sophistry had, using various guises and analogies, come to be the preferred route of escape from the hyperbole of early claims of authenticity.

Al Maysles, it should be remembered, had established himself as the "purest" of the "pure," even refusing to edit his material. When Leacock told his interviewer, Levin, this, Levin dismissed it, saying: "So David [Maysles] does it." Levin went on to tell Leacock that Al Maysles was less fanatical than he had been. "I talked to him again a couple of months ago, and he's not quite so adamant about the purity of cinema verité." This interview was done in August 1970.[58] By this time, Leacock too was less certain than he had been that he was involved in a breakthrough that would "revolutionize the whole industry."[59] However, still seeking the El Dorado of "moments of revelation," he began enthusiastically to explore another techno-fix—sync 8mm.[60]

What Direct Cinema needed by its second decade was an advocate who could protect the central observational premise on the screen in a series of apparently uncompromised, "pure" films while creating an obfuscating blizzard of off-screen rhetoric. Frederick Wiseman, because of the regularity of his output if for no other reason, filled this bill.

However, he too began by being not overly troubled with the observational claims of the style: "It's the idea of using film and film technology to have a look at what's going on in the world."[61] As is clear from the following explanation of why he made his first film, *Titicut Follies*, this was indeed his earliest motivation:

> At Boston University Law School [where Wiseman was teaching in the mid-Sixties] a lot of students go on to become assistant DA's [sic] and DA's [sic] and judges in Massachusetts; yet most people working on the prosecution end of things have little idea of where they are sending people. . . . So that's how I got to know Bridgewater [the mental institution in *Titicut Follies*], and the idea of making the film grew out of that.[62]

Given this intention, the idea that film would provide evidence of events and situations otherwise unavailable as experience, how then is one to explain Wiseman's stance later on in the same interview?

> My films are totally subjective. The objective–subjective argument is from my point of view, at least in film terms, a lot of nonsense. The films are my response to a certain experience.[63]

Elsewhere, Wiseman dismisses the objectivity claim as "a lot of horseshit" or "a real phoney[sic]-baloney argument."[64] This repeated protestation creates a profound contradiction. Specifically in terms of this first film, the question can be asked: Of what value to prospective DAs is a subjective impression of Bridgewater, idiosyncratically created by Wiseman? Either his invasion of Bridgewater is justified as a means of obtaining evidence or his project becomes "mere opinion" and falls by the light of his own announced intention. (Similar questions can be asked of all his subsequent work.)

The confusions between a Direct Cinema intention to acquire evidence of an institutional reality and so vehement a dismissal of the mimetic power of the camera can be easily explained. Wiseman found himself entrapped after making *Titicut Follies* in a series of legal difficulties. These were to condition his whole subsequent approach, both in terms of filmmaking practice and rhetoric.

One of his responses to those problems has been to articulate an ever more sophisticated and increasingly opaque rationale for his work and the "horseshit" issue of objectivity. Here is the matured Wisemanian formulation, if it can be so described, of the objectivity question:

> Which is not to say the films don't have a point of view. But they have a point of view that allows you—or, hopefully, asks you—to think, to figure out what you think about what's happening.[65] I don't know how to make an objective film. I think my films are a fair reflection of the experience of making them. My subjective view is that they are fair films.[66]

With this line of argument—the construction of a questioning viewer behind a smoke screen of legalistic double-talk—our hero springs free of the chains of objectivity and escapes to a postmodernist world of open textuality and critical acclaim. And he takes the entire Direct Cinema movement with him. In the course of the sixties, the whole question of objectivity (and with it the underlying scientific legitimation of the Direct Cinema enterprise) had become shrouded in a miasma of circumlocutions. Wiseman's pronouncements are a new testament, come to fulfill the

promise of the old (as it had been haltingly expressed by Leacock, the Maysles, and the others).

But the films are now both self-expression ("a fair reflection of the experience of making them") and objective evidence ("that allows you . . . to figure out . . . what's happening"). There is still a residual claim of objectivity here; and it still relies on an implicit cultural appeal to photography's scientific heritage, that other strand of the Direct Cinema practitioners' rhetoric discussed in the previous section. It is the films themselves that most vividly reinforce this.

Direct Cinema hides its processes as much, if not more, than does Hollywood. The long takes, the lack of commentary, music and sound effects, the absence of cinematic lighting, the understated titles, even the early, persistent use of black-and-white stock—what are these if not earnests of objectivity for an audience schooled in the reception of realist images, earnests vouched for by the subjects' occasional direct gaze at the lens and the occasional jump-cut?[67] The film maker might claim that the work is personal but in technique it is deliberately and systematically "unsigned"—as Pauline Kael put it at the time, the style is "so simple, so basic."[68] Wiseman reportedly pitched topics to his public television patron in equally simple and basic terms: "I want to do a juvenile cout" or "I want to do a study of welfare."[69] For these constituents, if not for Wiseman himself, five centuries of lens culture and the successful efforts of Arago et al. to place the reception of the photography in the realm of science are not to be thrown aside merely by crying "horseshit!"

5

There was another way of avoiding being eaten by the worms, whether of the Godardian sort, nibbling away at the sensibility issue, or the *tu quoque* type, attacking on the mediation front; simply take the position of the other side at Lyon.

The French Cinéma-Vérité practitioners (as they should be called in contradistinction to their Direct Cinema colleagues) took the objectivity problem on directly and tried to solve it by putting themselves into the films. By eschewing the implicit claim of objectivity that nonreflexive material carries within it, Jean Rouch, Edgar Morin, and (at times) Chris Marker sought something more limited but, as they hoped, more incontrovertible—the "truth" of their own observation, guaranteed in some way because we, the audience, could observe them apparently in the act of observing.

(This reminds one of the instructions in a current British police photography manual recovered by John Tagg: "In producing photographs to court,

the police photographer must state on oath the time, day and date he took the photographs. . . ."[70])

With a film like Rouch's *Chronique d'Une Éte*, Cinéma-Vérité tried to close the gap between a rhetoric of subjective witness and the idea of evidence by avoiding transparent production practices.

> The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the Rouch cinéma vérité artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of an uninvolved bystander; the cinéma vérité artist espoused that of provocateur.[71]

The price was that the only appropriate subject for documentaries appeared to be the making of documentaries; but the seeming advantage was that the supposed mimetic power of the camera to collect evidence was, in the more limited arena Cinéma-Vérité created, preserved.

Chronique is, at one level, nothing more than a reversal of normal ethnographic film, with "the strange tribe that lives in Paris" as its subject and even a young African playing the part of the great (white) explorer/ethnographer.[72] At the time, such a project sat well with Rouch; with the state of French anthropology; and with its major institutions, one of which, the Musée de l'Homme, was the site of the film's climactic sequences. The museum is a monument to Popular Front liberalism and anticolonialism, but it was then coming under attack for the first time for embodying a paternalistic tendency to essentialize tribal culture. Anthropology was experiencing something approaching a crisis occasioned not least by the collapsing legitimacy of field work in general and the ethnographer's monological authority in particular; for example, in France, the classic texts on the Dogon, created by Marcel Griaule, were being subjected to increasing questioning.[73] (One of Griaule's earliest major exploits had been to gather some 3500 African objects now in the Musée de l'Homme. He was also the pioneer of French ethnographic film.[74]) As an anthropologist connected to the museum and numbering Griaule as one of his teachers, Rouch was not untouched by these developments. It was a time to leave Africa and, at home in Paris, deal with some of these questions—the politics of anthropology ("the eldest daughter of colonialism" as Rouch was to call it); the limitations of participant observation ("You distort the answer simply by asking the question"); the usefulness of film as a "note taking tool".[75]

The French had, then, quite different ambitions for, and understandings of, the new apparatus. As anthropologists and sociologists, rather than physicists, journalists, and lawyers, they had perhaps the advantage of a more sophisticated conception of the problems raised by participant

observation and other fieldwork issues. It is this awareness in particular that drives *Chronique's* (and Cinéma-Vérité's) reflexivity.

This did not placate the Direct Cinema group. The Americans were as critical of Cinéma-Vérité as they were of more traditional Realist documentaries, claiming, for instance, that *Chronique* was less powerful than their texts because it "seemed to have been manipulated arbitrarily both in shooting and editing."[76] Leacock said the film "bothered me very much."[77] This is, of course, to miss the point that Rouch and Morin were making. They were beyond the simplicities of Direct Cinema where "manipulation" (or rather the supposed lack of it) was the be-all and end-all. On the contrary, Cinéma-Vérité accepted the *tu quoque* charge of mediation with enthusiasm. Moreover, it could not be accused of denying the filmmakers' intelligence and sensibility, either.

However, for all the seductiveness of *Chronique's* reflexive practice, for all the lack of tendentiousness and consistency in the film's rhetorical positioning, for all that one can sympathize with the oppositional political and anthropological impulses behind it—for all this, the film still embraces science and the possibility of the image as evidence.[78]

Despite their on-screen presence, how far are Rouch and Morin with their "research" from Wiseman with his "voyages of discovery"/"spoor collection"? As Morin indicated, *pace* the caveats, they were still after some type of "truth," however problematic.[79] *Chronique,* Morin wrote, "is research. . . . This research concerns real life."[80] This rhetoric had the desired effect. Critics understood this to mean that *Chronique* was an experiment in the realm of the uncertainty principle. Bohr and Heisenberg were both invoked in the *Cahiers* review. The experiment is authenticated because Rouch and Morin knew that

> it is also necessary to isolate the observer from his apparatus of observation. . . . They are honest enough to enter the arena, to put themselves onto the stage (and into the question). . . . They set before us all the conditions of the experiment.[81]

But it is an experiment—science—nonetheless.

On screen, Morin claimed the film

> reintroduces us to life. People approach the film as they do everyday life, that is they aren't guided, because we have not guided the spectator.[82]

That these words are actually said on-camera in an utterly anti-Direct Cinema fashion becomes less important than the fact that they are, exactly, words that could easily have been uttered by a Direct Cinema filmmaker.

The only difference is that Rouch and Morin are, like the police photographer, under oath (because seen) and, thus, less tendentious.

Chronique eschews the transparency of an invisible Direct Cinema filmmaker to offer us another transparency, that of Rouch and Morin in the shot. The scientific status of the image is, therefore, still in play—as was understood by Lucien Goldmann:

> [T]he cinema has no autonomy in relation to equivalence with reality except in so far as it wishes to be seen as a means of aesthetic creation. Which is to say that at the same time as acknowledging the value of experience and testimony represented by Morin and Rouch's film, we are afraid that right from the start it is very close to the limits of this kind of film, and that scientific truth, cinematic realism and aesthetic value are precisely beyond these limits.[83]

At the end of *Chronique,* walking the halls of the Musée de l'Homme, Morin sums up by saying, "*Nous sommes dans le bain*"—"We're implicated."[84] And they are—just as much as any Direct Cinema filmmaker. Direct Cinema (for all its caveats) aspired to be a "fly on the wall." Cinéma-Vérité, as Henry Breitrose notes, wanted to be a "fly in the soup . . . visible for all to notice."[85] Cinéma-Vérité might luxuriate in revealing its processes, allowing for a claim that the work is personal, "signed," and mediated in an open and aboveboard fashion. But the gesture becomes hollow because the spirit of Arago yet hovers over the enterprise, urging us to believe that what we see is evidence, evidence of documentarists making a documentary.

6

The trouble is that neither of the parties at Lyon can 'scape whipping because the intellectual ground had shifted under all these filmmakers. It is the epistemological move to postmodernism that transforms the scientific connection from legitimation into ideological burden. This move prolematizes objectivity for Direct Cinema and renders Cinéma-Vérité's reflexive gestures moot. Another observation of Nöel Carroll's, perhaps inadvertently, best illustrates the enormous extent of this change of terrain. Carroll is dismissive of "arguments against objectivity in nonfiction films" (such as those deployed here).

> unless [he writes] their proponents are prepared to embrace a rather thoroughgoing skepticism about the prospects of objectivity in general. The defense of such a far-ranging skeptical position would, of course, have to be joined on the battlefields of epistemology rather than in the trenches of film theory.[86]

But it is exactly on the broader epistemological battlegrounds that postmodernism was joining the issue. Carroll's trench is easily attacked:

> [T]he world is in a strong sense independent of our possible representations, and may well extend beyond them. This has implications both for what objectivity achieves when it is successful and for the possible limits of what it can achieve.[87]

Others, for whom no strategy presented itself to determine objectivity's "successes," would go further. The skeptics were charging at full tilt:

> [I]t is no longer possible to salvage Western rationality or its totalizing potential from the clutches of context by ahistorical claims to a superior theoretical and methodological armament.[88]

For the result of such thinking, let the attack on Rouch's teacher Griaule cited earlier stand *exempli gratia*. Suffice it to say that such postmodern skepticism embraced even the hardest of sciences. The significance of Latour's reduction of "science in action" to a series of inscription practices (section 2 supra) can also be read as a dispatch from this same epistemological battlefield, a reaction to the hegemonic identification of knowledge with science.[89]

The connection to scientific signification practices suggested by Latour impels us to treat the photographic image as evidence. This requires, in its train, that photography be seen as "realist": "Realism offers a fixity in which the signifier is treated as if it were identical with a pre-existent signified."[90] Whether or not such a relationship can be achieved is, in its turn, subject to serious postmodern doubts. Stuart Hall points out that, once, "the real world was both origin and warrant for the truth of any statement about it."[91] This was particularly true of visual (that is, photographic) texts, but it no longer holds. Hall gives television as an example of how this "origin" and "warrant" doubling is now seen:

> . . . . it would be more appropriate to define the typical discourse of this medium [TV] not as naturalistic but as *naturalized:* not grounded in nature but producing nature as a sort of guarantee of its truth. Visual discourse is peculiarly vulnerable in this way because the systems of visual recognition on which they depend are so widely available in any culture that they appear to involve no intervention of coding, selection or arrangement. They appear to reproduce the actual trace of reality in the images they transmit.[92]

Hall is in no doubt as to how improper these appearances are. He concludes: "This, of course, is an illusion—'the naturalistic illusion.' " The "ontological agnosticism of deconstructive criticism" (in Julianne Burton's phrase) has become a truism.[93]

Documentary more than any other filmic form "produces nature as a guarantee of its truth." Moreover, this "desire for a mimetic relation with nature" is, according to Jurgen Habermas, one of the crucial distinguishing elements of bourgeois art, a perfect example of the ineffability, as Roland Barthes saw it, of bourgeois ideology.[94]

If one takes this skeptical position, then it follows that, reflexivity aside, the more a text appears to produce nature, the more illusionist and ideologically suspect it becomes—the more bourgeois. And, of course, even reflexivity involves the unsupportable reference back to the preexistent signified, for as Michael Renov has said:

> Every documentary issues a "truth claim" of a sort, positing a relationship to history which exceeds the analogical status of its fictional counterpart.[95]

These shifts in epistemology were coming into general play in sync with the development of the Direct Cinema/Cinéma-Vérité schools. It is somewhat ironic, then, that just as documentarists finally got the equipment to illuminate, as they supposed, the real world of externally verifiable data, that world was denied them and they were instead revealed as the constructors of particular ideologically charged texts par excellence.

This is why Wiseman's objection to objectivity, which can, of course, be read as a postmodernist *cri du coeur,* will not so serve his turn. He cannot have his postmodernist cake and eat it. His films are legitimated because of their "direct ontological claim to the real."[96] What has happened is that the claim cannot be sustained and the legitimation cannot be renegotiated in such terms about such texts. Again, this also applies to Rouch's strategies; they too depend on the same suspect "naturalistic illusion."

It is possible, therefore, to claim that the epistemological shift has created a real legitimation crisis for the documentary. But there is more than that. We are also witnessing a development that calls into radical question the entire mimetic status of the photographic image. After 150 years, Arago's basic assumption as to the fidelity and precision of photography is coming under overwhelming *practical* as well as theoretical attack.

Consider the following: A popular British newspaper runs a "Spot the Difference" competition. Readers were asked to identify five differences between two images, scarcely a novel puzzle.[97] However, what is new here is that the two images are not drawings but photographs. An image of the Queen and Prince Philip has been digitally retouched—clothing has

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been recolored; a pocket book has been removed; the Queen's hat has lost its pompon. Here, digital technology is deployed to *mock* the relationship of the image with the preexistent signified reality of their majesties. And mock it, it can because it is now so easy to manipulate the image and so undetectable. Absolute undetectability is what is really new here.

The technology for digital retouching is becoming a fixture in all newspaper and magazine offices. The pioneering commercial device's brand name is a synonym for the whole process, "Scitex" (cf. "Hoover"). As a verb it is already a term of art, "to scitex," meaning to retouch digitally.

The parallel technology for the moving image exists, marketed as a computer called "Harry." Music video director Ethan Russell spent 6 days with "Harry" altering 42 seconds worth of Hank William's lips on a 1952 kinescope so that he appeared to be singing "Tears in My Beer." On the original, he sang "Hey, Good Looking."[98] Colorization processes are, then, but the beginning. Bette Davis can get to play Scarlett O'Hara after all—and will, if it is to the copyright holder's advantage so to arrange.

It seems to me likely that the implications of this technology will be decades working themselves through the culture. But it is clear that in ways more fundamental than any theorist conceived, the fixity of the relationship between signified and signifier supposed by realism cannot be guaranteed photographically any more. On the battleground of epistemology, the weapon that is Scitex operates with nuclear force. What the chemists bestowed 150 years ago, the computer scientists are now removing.

In the longer term, this leaves the documentary film project in all its guises in parlous state—just as it strikes potentially fatal blows against all evidentiary visual forms, including television news. In the short term, which might well be as long as the next half century given the powerful political investment the culture has in the mimetic force of the image, a number of strategies suggest themselves (albeit not very forcefully) for maintaining some legitimacy for the documentary.

One can take Carroll's part, arguing that it is confusions and misuses of language which have caused us to conflate various senses of "objectivity" with each other and with "truth." Untangling these would allow for a recuperation of the mimetic power of the camera along Bazanian lines. Insofar as this power is generally sustained in the culture, then a documentary form which took advantage of it by "being still responsible to established standards of objectivity" could exist.[99] (This assumes, of course, that there are and will continue to be established standards of objectivity.)

Better, perhaps, to roll with the epistemological blow, abandoning the claim to evidence, excising scientific legitimations and returning to an unambiguous Griersonian privileging of art over science. The price would be a more "analogical" relationship to the preexistent signified. Defining

the documentary would require turning back to considerations of how materials could be subjected to "creative treatment" and yet not totally fictionalized. It would, perhaps, still allow for documentary in certain circumstances, say in the developing world, to function as

> a piece of "authentication" inserted into a broader rhetoric that sustains its force on the legitimate referential weight of what is presented on the screen.[100]

This is perhaps the best that can be achieved but it does assume, as with Carroll's position, that a measure of cultural agreement as to the mimetic power of the camera will be sustained—that the image will indeed have some legitimate, if reduced, referential weight.

In all events, it seems to me necessary for the documentary, in some way, to negotiate an escape from the embrace of science. Even if epistemology does not demand this, then the technology does (or will). It is now clear that François Arago did not, after all, give the world a species of thermometer when he argued for the state acquisition of the Daguerre patents. We should never have believed him in the first place.