

## CHAPTER 7

### Structure

It is sometimes thought that the structure of a nonfiction film arises naturally from its subject matter, just as a road follows the contours of the terrain on which it lies. However, we can also build the road high above the ground on pylons, run it through tunnels beneath the earth, and dig and blast the terrain to suit the road builders. I have claimed that the nonfiction film, similarly, may legitimately represent a subject in a variety of ways, and in diverse *structures*.

It is true that in a historical documentary, the order of projected world events must correspond to the chronological order of actual events. If I make a documentary about the beating of Rodney King (event A), the criminal trial of the policeman who beat him (event B), and the ensuing riots in Los Angeles (event C), the projected world of my documentary should represent the events as having occurred in the order: A, then B, then C. However, the *discursive presentation* need not follow such an order. I may first recount event C, then examine events B and A as causes. Or in a film about the policemen's trial, I may first briefly cover A and C to provide context, then go on to examine the trial (B) in greater detail. As I argued in Chapter Five, the discursive order of presentation may differ from the order of events as they are thought to have occurred. Form does not naturally follow content, and the structure of a nonfiction film depends as much on the rhetorical choices of the filmmaker as it does on subject matter.

#### Rhetorical and Other Structures

Narrative is but one means of structuring the projected world of the documentary. Nonfictions also use associational, categorical, and rhetorical forms. Associational structure emphasizes likenesses or relationships between entities, as *The Bridge* juxtaposes various elements of a bridge, *Chronicle of a Summer* features interviews about "happiness," and *In Heaven There is No Beer* chronicles Polka music by

showing a sequence of dances and clubs, culminating in the annual "Polkabration." Associational structure well fits the open voice, as it requires only the loosest of structures, and can be based on likenesses or similarities of any sort, including the contiguities of a single location, event, or institution. Thus Wiseman's explorations of institutions follow a loose associational form, as do numerous other observational films.

Although, at its simplest, categorical form may consist of a mere list of entities, it is often conventionally structured, featuring definition, classification, and comparison and contrast. It may consist of a catalogue of parts or elements, together with an explanation or analysis. An analysis distinguishes between the parts of the thing described. *Functional* analysis goes a step further, determining the function of the parts in relation to the whole. *Causal* analysis determines the function of the parts as they cause and effect one another.

Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1955), in its formal voice, analyzes the horrifying phenomenon of the Nazi concentration camps by giving a catalogue of the various elements that ensured their "efficient" operation. We see the transportation of people to the camps in trains, the social designations and hierarchies in the camp, living conditions, medical facilities and cruel medical experiments, camp prisons, gas chambers, and ovens for the disposal of bodies. We also see the Allied arrival at the camps after the defeat of the Nazis. At each point, the voice-over offers explanations of what we see, or statements that describe what we are not shown. "Many are too weak to defend their rations against thieves." "They take the dying to the hospital." The film's music, although muted, gives a clear context of sorrow to the subject. The end of the film offers a firm conclusion, and an explicit context in which to put the prior information. The Nazis ensured that nothing would be wasted in their drive to exterminate millions of people. We see piles of eyeglasses, women's hair to be used to make cloth, human bones for fertilizer, bodies for soap, and skin for paper. The appalling cruelty and destruction of life is apparent, and the voice-over intones: "There is nothing left to say." But in the conclusion of the film, and in its alternating black and white footage of the past with color footage of the present, the discourse does make explicit claims that sum up the warning central to the film. The explicit point is that we must be ever vigilant to prevent similar occurrences in the future. "War nods, but has one eye open," the voice-over says. The scourge of the death camps is still among us.

Lee Grant's Academy Award-winning *Down and Out in America* (1986) stands at the shading between the formal and open voices, and between categorical and associational form. Its use of voice-over narration is a technique associated with the formal voice, since it carries much of the information of the film, clearly identifying the images and illustrating their pertinence for the broader issue – unemployment and poverty in America. The film begins to analyze the situation by partitioning it into several categories: farmers having financial difficulty and losing their farms, workers facing unemployment due to industrial plant closings, a parking lot in Los Angeles – Justiceville – turned into a living space for the homeless, and Hispanic families in New York renovating abandoned apartment houses. In the last segment, the film focuses on a particular family of six who lack the resources to escape their dismal life in a welfare hotel.

The film straddles the boundaries between the open and formal voices because explicit analysis occurs only *within*, and never *between*, each of these partitioned scenes; the relationship between scenes is one of association but never explicit analysis. The voice-over describes each situation, but draws no comparisons between them. *Down and Out in America* stops short of coming to any generalized conclusions about what the several scenes add up to, refraining from linking the various situations with generalized comments on the state of poverty in America. The film remains open in this respect, because it leaves the viewer to come to her own conclusions.

Other films feature a rhetorical structure. In the realm of rhetoric, some make a distinction between persuasion and argument. Argument is typically thought of as a formal, logical process. To settle a matter by formal argument is to appeal to reason. To make an argument is to claim that a conclusion, usually in the form of a proposition, merits belief on the basis of salient evidence, true premises, and valid reasoning. Persuasion, on the other hand, is a much less formal process – the art of getting someone to do or believe what you want them to do or believe. We might describe such a process not as argument, but as “artistic proof.”<sup>1</sup> Following Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, successful persuasion wins assent to the will of the persuader, and depends on *dispositio*, or structure, *elocutio*, or style, and *inventio*, argument or proof. Three types of “proof” equip the persuader: (1) ethical proof – the presumed character and credibility of the persuader, (2) emotional proof – the persuader's ability to stir the emotions, and (3) demonstrative proof – the appeal to evidence (testimony, statistics, examples). In the case of demonstrative

truth, the aim is to present evidence in the best possible light, so that it is persuasive (although not necessarily accurate or authentic). Whereas the aim of formal argument is to establish a reasonable conclusion, the end of persuasion, or artistic proof, is to win the assent of the listener or spectator.

All films are rhetorical in the sense that they imply an ideological position toward their subject. One could say that all films of the formal voice are persuasions, since they proselytize – implicitly or explicitly – for their ideological position, and since their function is to teach and explain. But not all films employ overt artistic proofs as their overall organizational principle. Explicit argument and artistic proof are often antithetical to the whole project of the open voice, because they eschew the teaching function (and thus presume to persuade the spectator of very little). Nonetheless, the discourse in such films often smuggles in rhetorical material, and no nonfiction film can escape rhetoric entirely. The formal voice, on the other hand, often makes use of explicit strategies of persuasion to win the spectator's assent.

With few exceptions, a persuasive case in a formal film is stated verbally by a voice-over narrator or interviewee. To structure a film as an artistic proof usually requires the use of language. Only verbal or other symbolic discourse, perhaps in tandem with images, can explicitly make complex arguments and persuasive cases. Willard Van Dyke's *Valley Town*, for example, makes its position verbally explicit. Over shots of men working on an airplane engine, the voice-over sums up the film's argument: “Let's keep the workers up to date. Let's keep their skills as modern as the new machines.” In addition, films of the formal voice do not simply include local rhetorical moments (as in open films), but are often globally structured according to an artistic proof that becomes the motivating principle of the work.

A clear example of rhetorical structure is *CBS Reports'* 1960 “Harvest of Shame,” an hour-long episode featuring Edward R. Murrow as voice-over narrator. “Harvest of Shame” is structured as an artistic proof, bringing evidence and emotional appeals to bear on a set of propositions to which the film wishes to gain assent. (This is a rare example of a network documentary that sharply criticized American society, placed blame for a social problem squarely on a particular group, and advocated specific legislation to alleviate the problem.) The propositions can be condensed into two general theses. The first is that migrant workers suffer under inhumane living and working conditions. The second is that federal legislation is needed to alleviate the problem.

The overall rhetorical structure is very simple, as the film (1) presents visual evidence and oral testimony in making its case, (2) makes an emotional appeal for action, and (3) suggests a plan of action, in that order. It also couches its rhetorical structure within an overarching narrative movement, a cyclical journey as we follow the migrants from job to job and from location to location.

#### Formal Narrative Structure

Any film that recounts a chronology of events makes use of a narrative structure. In their narrative structure, nonfiction films of the formal voice share important structural similarities with classical fiction films. One of the means by which David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson characterize the classical Hollywood style of filmmaking is through Hollywood's discourse about itself in trade manuals, memos, production and screenwriting books, etc.<sup>2</sup> To characterize what is "classical" about nonfiction films of the formal voice by similar means, however, would be impossible.

Trade manuals for nonfiction film are not only less common than those for fiction, but with few exceptions, they do not treat the structure of the films.<sup>3</sup> For example, an early handbook of documentary film production, W. Hugh Baddeley's *The Technique of Documentary Film Production*, wholly ignores the structuring and composition of documentary discourse.<sup>4</sup> Baddeley's book is highly technical, covering such topics as budgets, equipment, editing, and distribution. This neglect of narrative structure has stemmed in part from the widespread idea that the documentary, as a representation of reality, should be formed "in sympathy" with its subject. What is usually meant by such a claim is that the documentary must somehow copy, trace, or imitate reality not simply in its model of the real (the projected world), but in its discursive presentation. In his book, *Directing the Documentary*, Michael Rabiger writes that the documentary "owes its credibility to acts, words, and images quite literally plucked from life and *lacking central authorship*." In fiction, Rabiger writes, the artist "has control over the form in which content is expressed," whereas in the documentary, "freedom of expression is severely curtailed by the idiosyncratic nature of the given materials, even circumscribed by them."<sup>5</sup> Once again, the correspondence theory of nonfiction film raises its head.

The projected world of a nonfiction film is a model of the actual world. The subject matter of the nonfiction film may circumscribe that

model. Responsibility requires that the filmmaker give up an element of freedom in the name of accuracy, for to preserve truth in discourse, one's assertions, to the best of one's knowledge, must be accurate. But this does not require that the *discourse* not manipulate projected world data in myriad ways, both structurally and stylistically. For any given subject, one can devise numerous and diverse means for its presentation. A highly structured, stylized discourse may still assert true propositions and function as nonfiction. The ethical filmmaker strives for accuracy in representation; yet to claim that each subject naturally *requires* a particular documentary form goes too far. The assertion of truth claims, and even what might be called "accurate portrayal," can come in many varied packages.

When one examines the structure of many narrative nonfiction films, one sees repeated patterns – conventional structures. The constant repetition of these structures leads to one of two conclusions. Either the world is naturally structured according to the dictates of conventional structures, or the schemas with which documentarists work impose a conventional structure onto their subject. I suspect the latter. If nonfiction filmmakers take structure for granted, the result is that many implicitly embrace canonical structures inherited from prior documentary practice, from the classical fiction film, and from time-honored conceptions of narrative, rhetoric, and composition.

Whether employed intentionally or not, these structures are derived from centuries of discursive and artistic practice, having classical formal qualities such as unity, coherence, emphasis, harmony, and restraint. Such a discourse defines its dominant topic, distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, and subordinates minor to major topics. Since it explains phenomena, the formal voice selects, unifies, orders, and gives emphasis to appropriate elements of the projected world. These are features so ingrained in the Western viewer's mind that they qualify as schemas, extrinsic norms we expect to find in many documentaries.

#### Beginnings

Temporal ordering principles, along with voice and style, are primary means by which the discourse develops the projected world as a model, and thus makes assertions and implications about the actual world. The beginning of a formal nonfiction film – the titles and credit sequence, prologue, and preliminary exposition – carries as much weight

as does the beginning of a classical fiction film. This "classical" beginning serves both a formal and an epistemological function.

Formal narrative structure follows canonical story formats in positing an initial "steady" state that is violated and must be set right. In both fiction and nonfiction film, the violation of the steady state is a catalyst for further textual movement, whether it be narrative or argument. Robert Flaherty's *The Land* (1942), for example, begins by showing idyllic scenes of American farming, while the voice-over urges that this is good land and these are good people. But these harmonies are soon interrupted when the discourse introduces a significant, threatening problem – widespread erosion. Because the steady state – good farmers farming profitably on good farms – must be restored, the discourse now is driven forward by the need to find a solution to the problem. The steady state has been made unstable, and according to the conventions of the canonical story format, must be set aright.

Humphrey Jennings' *The Silent Village* (1943) reenacts the Nazis' brutal treatment of the people of a small mining town in Czechoslovakia during World War II. The opening sequence is a poetic celebration of life before the Nazi occupation. We see church sanctuaries filled with singing parishioners, busy workers and the sounds of heavy machinery, children watching a Donald Duck cartoon, miners drinking at a pub, a mother combing a child's hair. The sequence is comprised solely of these sorts of atmospheric images accompanied by diegetic sound. The voice-over then announces that such was village life before the Fascists. We then see the first signs of the Nazi occupation – a black car with a loudspeaker, blaring propaganda. Again, the steady state has been violated, and the movement of the narrative typically works to reinstate such a state.

The violation of the steady state is the *formal* function of such a beginning; its *epistemological* function is to raise the question or questions that the narrative will gradually answer. Whether or not a steady state has been violated, the epistemological function of the beginning is always present. It initiates the cognitive processes of the spectator, encouraging hypothesis- and inference-making about the narrative and the knowledge it (ostensibly) imparts. The beginning of the film suggests frames of reference that the viewer may employ in comprehending the text. These frames enable the spectator to fill in narrative or expositional gaps with appropriate data. The formal narrative film is an erotetic narrative of the sort I described in Chapter Five; it encourages the spectator's attention by posing questions and answers, or problems

and solutions, by the end of the film having answered most of the salient questions posed, and having offered solutions to problems it identifies.

No clearly identifiable steady state exists in Pare Lorentz's *The Fight for Life* (1940). The narrative immediately confronts the spectator with a crisis situation, in which the delivery of a child results in the mother's death. Exposition is delayed until after the event. Then the doctor walks solemnly through the rain, his interior monologue (in voice-over) both asking the relevant questions and stimulating the dramatic progression of the narrative, as the doctors search for safer methods of delivering babies. It is common for documentaries – as for fictions – to *assume*, rather than *initially represent*, a normal, or desirable state of affairs. In this case, the steady state is a society in which maternity is safe for both mother and child.

In *Fires Were Started* (1943), director Humphrey Jennings begins the exposition with explanatory titles, telling the spectator that the film is a story of English firemen during the Nazi bombings of London. Preliminary exposition and the steady state occur simultaneously, apparently during a lull in the bombings. The voice-over introduces us to each of the auxiliary firemen who people the film, while the group gathers around a piano, singing a jolly fireman's song. With the drone of enemy planes overhead and the blasts of exploding incendiary bombs, the firemen's narrative proper begins. Rather than an explicit posing of questions, the raising of questions here is implicit, as in most fiction. The spectator is cued to ask the questions herself. Will the bombing start fires, and will the firemen be able to put them out? What are their methods? How will they hold up in times of extreme danger and stress? Will any of the men be hurt? The formal disruption of the steady state and the epistemological function of raising pertinent questions occur here simultaneously, as the narrative begins its dramatic and epistemological movement, which is eventually brought full circle to a satisfying and symmetrical end.

The beginning of a classical narrative structure, then, serves to catalyze the dramatic movement of the narrative and open the viewer's play of question and answer. But it does more than serve as catalyst for the succeeding narrative elements. It also serves as *exposition*, creating a frame by which the narrative action can be understood. Exposition in the formal narrative documentary serves roughly the same function as it might in fiction. The function of exposition, Meir Sternberg writes, is to



... introduce the reader into an unfamiliar world ... by providing him with the general and specific antecedents indispensable to the understanding of what happens in it. [The reader] must usually be informed of the time and place of the action; of the nature of the fictive world peculiar to the work or, in other words, of the canons of probability operating in it; of the history, appearance, traits, and habitual behavior of the dramatis personae; and of the relations between them.<sup>6</sup>

The spectator of the formally-structured nonfiction film is provided the same sort of information about a projected world presumed to be a model for actuality.

Because its goal is to impart knowledge of the events it depicts, formal exposition tends toward absolute clarity; it thus narrows possible interpretations in favor of the one preferred by the discourse. The formal documentary takes full advantage of the "primacy effect." We are all familiar with the explicit expositional technique of network television documentaries. In the CBS television documentary series, *The Twentieth Century*, which aired from 1957-1966, Walter Cronkite appeared in the prologue of each episode to introduce the subject, explain its significance to the interests of the spectator (assumed to be American, lover of freedom and liberty, anti-Communist, etc.), and imbue the events with a moral import. Such is the typical means of exposition of network documentaries centered around a well-known anchor.

Other methods of exposition include introducing the spectator to important characters through image and voice-over. In the ethnographic film *Dead Birds* (1963), the exposition introduces the spectator to its two major subjects - Wayak, an adult male warrior, and Pooah, a small boy. The voice-over gives the two well-defined psychologies (as they might have were they characters in a classical fiction film), and describes the goals by which they live their lives. When first introduced to Wayak, we hear:

His name means "wrong." For as a child he showed unreasonable rage. As a man he learned to govern his temper, and though neither very rich nor very powerful, he has the respect of all with whom he lives. He is a warrior, a farmer, and leader of a band of men who guard the most dangerous sector of a frontier which divides themselves from the enemy.

In formally structured nonfiction films, exposition often includes spoken or written discourse, since verbal discourse is an efficient and codified means to fix interpretive schemas.

In Chapter Five, I described Meir Sternberg's classification of the various ways exposition may be positioned within a narrative. Because the function of the formal voice is primarily to impart knowledge, exposition tends to avoid "artfulness," and is preliminary rather than delayed, and concentrated rather than distributed. This is the simplest, least mentally taxing approach (for the spectator), but perhaps also the least formally interesting. *The Wilmar Eight* (1980), a Lee Grant film about eight employees of a small Minnesota bank who go on strike, concentrates its exposition before showing the women's ordeal. The first titles urge the political standpoint of the film with a rhyming ditty:

The banks are made of marble  
With a guard at every door,  
The vaults are stuffed with silver  
That the people sweated for.

Over shots of people shovelling snow and the women picketing on a bitterly cold winter's day, the voice-over then explains their situation succinctly and generally:

On December 16, 1977, in Wilmar, Minnesota, eight women, employees of the Citizen's National Bank, walked out of their jobs and went on strike. They walked a picket line for the next year and a half, through the bitter cold of two Minnesota winters, isolated in their own community.

This exposition sets the framework for the entire film. We know both the political sympathies of the narration and how the discourse will represent the struggle (as long, difficult, and lonely). The remainder of the film unfolds the drama of the strike in roughly chronological order.

By *in media res*, Sternberg means a discursive change in the chronological sequence of projected world events. This often entails plunging the discourse into a narrative occasion and the delay of expositional and narrative antecedents. Consider the *in media res* opening of Robert Epstein's *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1984). This film is a narrative history of the political career of Harvey Milk, sometime supervisor of the 5th district in San Francisco and outspoken gay activist. The film begins with news footage showing then-mayor Diane Feinstein announce the shooting of Milk and Mayor George Mosconi. Over a black and white photograph of the two, the voice-over repeats the news of their assassinations. This is succeeded by another photograph, this time of Harvey Milk alone, as the voice-over intones: "Harvey Milk had served

only eleven months on San Francisco's board of supervisors, but he had already come to represent something far greater than his office." The film's opening, then, immediately plunges the spectator into the "middle" of the story, creating dramatic interest that will help sustain the narrative history of Milk's career leading up to that crisis point. Even here, though, the plunge is brief and relatively conservative; the spectator is soon given a full account of the gaps in knowledge opened by the beginning. The exposition proper begins immediately following the reports of the murders, and from this point on the discourse parallels the chronological order of projected world events.

To sum up, beginnings in classical structure serve formal, epistemological, and expositional functions. A narrative usually begins with the violation of a steady state, which serves as a catalyst for further actions and events. The epistemological function is to raise the questions that the narrative gradually answers. The opening thus serves as a catalyst both dramatically and epistemologically. The beginning also functions as exposition, creating a frame of reference by which the events of the narrative may be understood.

#### Endings

The end of the formal narrative documentary has both a dramatic function and an epistemological goal, as does the beginning. The dramatic function is much the same as for the canonical fiction. The end of the classical fiction film typically brings a decisive victory or defeat to the protagonist, or the clear achievement or nonachievement of goals by the major characters. The epilogue often celebrates the stable state achieved by the major characters (reinforcing the tendency to a happy ending) and reinforces the thematic motifs appearing throughout the film.<sup>7</sup>

Because it is also heavily indebted to canonical story formats, formal structure in nonfiction film often shares many of these characteristics. By the end of Raymond Boulting's *Desert Victory*, Rommel and the German armies have been routed in North Africa. The celebration in the epilogue is a patriotic salute to England, including a shot of the British flag. At the end of *Farrebique*, the old patriarch has died, but his eldest son has taken his place, telling his wife that there will always be a new spring and a new beginning. He cuts bread at the family table, as the patriarch previously did at the film's onset, giving the end a strong sense of symmetry. *Target for Tonight* (1941), a Harry Watt film about

a British bombing raid over Germany, ends with the success of the mission in the face of incredible odds. The pilots head off to bed, while one ground officer says to another, "Well, old boy, how about some bacon and eggs?" In all of these cases we find strong closure at the level of projected world and the discourse. Also notice the tendency for a happy ending, as in the classical fiction film.

Exceptions to the canonical paradigm exist, of course. The end of *The Silent Village* finds the entire village devastated by the Nazis. Although the end is decisive, it is not happy. The men have been shot, the women and children sent to concentration camps, the town's buildings burned to the ground, and its name taken off the face of the map. Near the end the camera slowly pans across burned items in the smoldering ruins of a house – a sewing machine, a coffee pot, the cracked photograph of a man. After a shot of a burning church, the last image is of broken household items strewn haphazardly in a rocky stream. Although the happy ending is not present here, and although the discourse deems it unnecessary to interpret the projected world events for the spectator, the film works to give a rigorous sense of closure nonetheless.

The *overarching* function of the ending is epistemological rather than dramatic. Formal endings guide the backward-directed activity of the spectator in comprehending the film. The ending may fill in gaps, sum up main points, or suggest a "correct" frame by which the previous data can be interpreted. This backward-directed activity can be achieved by "retrospective additional patterning," by which the end adds to or alters the epistemological framework constructed earlier in the text. Or the end may simply reinforce the frame that has been previously constructed.

For example, in showing the cultural life of the tribe it represents, *Dead Birds* concentrates on the men and their warlike rituals. The epilogue, in voice-over, sums up the film's interpretation of these rituals and what they mean to the culture that practices them: "They kill to save souls, and perhaps, to ease the burden of knowing what birds will never know, and what they as men, who have forever killed each other, cannot forget." War rituals, the voice-over suggests, are a way for this culture to confront their ultimate fate of death. They neither wait for death, nor take it lightly when it comes; instead, they "passion" fate.

The end of the formal narrative documentary parallels the overall epistemological function of the text, providing full, clear, high-level knowledge of the ostensible truth. It accomplishes this by answering

salient questions earlier raised, summing up, reinforcing main points, or providing a frame for interpretation. There is a tendency toward a happy ending in films of the formal voice, but more universal is closure, if not in the projected world *and* the discourse, then in the discourse alone. This move toward closure is fitting for the general function of the formal voice – imparting knowledge about the actual world.

#### Dramatic Structure and Representation

Hayden White observes that historians do not simply *find* stories in the actual world, as though they are there to be plucked, like ripe apples from a tree. If one writes narrative history one must give narrative form to what White calls the chronicle – a simple list of events in chronological order. Real events, White claims, do not offer themselves naturally as stories.<sup>8</sup> We may translate White's claim into my terms; real events may dictate certain characteristics of the projected world of the nonfiction film, but they do not determine the discursive presentation. The historian must choose a beginning, a first event from the infinite number available. Similarly, the narrative must conclude, not merely end. This involves again choosing a last event to depict, and investing it with historical significance. Of the infinite number of events he could represent, the historian must choose what to depict and omit. In addition, the writing of narrative history involves more than establishing a sequence of events; the events must be given a structure of meaning. Every narrative history weights events with a significance for some individual or group, be it a nation, race, or smaller group of peers. Thus, White claims, every narrative history must moralize the events it depicts. A narrative is never a perfect copy of the world in all of its plenitude, but a particular representation from a point of view, given a significance according to the author's perspective at a particular historical juncture.<sup>9</sup>

John Grierson held that the documentary film consists of "arrangements, rearrangements, and creative shapings of natural material."<sup>10</sup> Hayden White offers a provocative account of possible means by which that "natural material" is shaped. All histories, he claims, combine data, theoretical concepts for explaining those data, and a narrative structure; all histories have a deep structural content that is poetic and imaginative. White describes histories as having several levels of conceptualization.<sup>11</sup> In the first instance is the chronicle, a mere list of historical events in chronological order. Next comes the story, through

which the chronicle is fashioned into a narrative that features a beginning, ending, and dramatic structure. Within a narrative, data can be explained in various ways; White writes of explanation by emplotment, explanation by argument, explanation by ideological implication, and tropes of discourse. White observes that histories are fashioned in part on broad structural levels, or literary tropes. Here White follows Northrup Frye who, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, traces five types, or strata, of plot structure in Western literature: myth, romance, comedy, tragedy, and irony. Frye's typology is especially useful for the theorist of historical narrative, White says, because the narrative structures of histories tend to be relatively simple. If one looks closely at narrative histories, one finds that they exhibit one or more of these types of plot structure.

What White says of narrative history also applies to the historical nonfiction film. In narrative films, ordering is not merely chronological sequencing, but investing events with dramatic movement and emotional force according to the perspective of the discourse. The techniques so used foreground, give emphasis, exaggerate, or invest narrative elements with some variety of significance. Although nonfiction stories have their roots in actual events, the stories are not merely "found," "uncovered," and "identified." Invention also plays a part in the operations of the historian and the documentarian.

As I have said, one of the influences on narrative documentaries has been the classical fiction film. In early nonfiction films making extensive use of staged scenes, character and character goals become an important force in the narrative movement, just as they are in the classical fiction film. *Fires Were Started*, about London's auxiliary fire service during the Nazi bombings, follows one group of firemen as they battle a fire after a night bombing. Having been introduced in the exposition to several of the firemen, the narrative is driven forward by their goal of putting out a particular fire. The discourse concentrates on the men as a team rather than on a particular hero, and it is the goal of the team that motivates succeeding actions. The protagonist is a group of men; the antagonist is the fire.

Another sort of classical structure dispenses with characters altogether, at least as they appear in the classical fiction film. In these films, the primary forces set off against each other are broader groups or impersonal agents, such as nations, labor unions, management, farmers, and nature, or natural disasters. Narrative movement in these films progresses according to the actions and goals of these groups or enti-

ties. War documentaries provide clear examples of nations as stand-ins for the individual protagonists and antagonists of narrative fiction. The films of the *Why We Fight* series provide an especially apt example. *Prelude to War* (1942) divides the Earth into the "Free World" and the "Slave World," further personifying the "forces of evil" into three nations – Germany, Japan, and Italy – and more specific yet, three leaders – Hitler, Hirohito, and Mussolini. *The Silent Village* presents its narrative as a clear conflict between the Nazis and the townspeople. *The Wilmar Eight* pits a group of women against the management of a bank. The conflict in these films is between groups rather than individuals – groups cast into the roles of protagonist and antagonist.

The narrative movement of many nonfiction films is motivated by the vagaries of nature or history rather than individuals, according to a hypothesized natural or historical progression. In *The Land*, for example, improper farming procedures have caused erosion. Here the antagonist is not a group so much as lack of education and foresight, together with the forces of nature. In this film and also in *Valley Town* (1940), the "growth of mechanization" motivates much of the narrative action. Represented as a natural, irresistible force, however, this growth is never seen as something to be overcome, as a war documentary might see a foreign army. It is seen as a permanent result of natural progression to which human agencies will have to adapt.

In general, the causality attributed to the narrative movement in formally-structured films is based on assumptions about historical progression; history is usually given a teleology. A common feature of the formal voice is the representation of this progression – be it a personal history or broader in scope – as motivated, goal-oriented, and relatively conclusive or interpretable. And although individual characters and their goals may be submerged into those of the larger group, narrative in the formal nonfiction film gives evidence of typical dramatic conventions. The narratives all present conflicts between a force with goals (the protagonist) and an opposing force standing in the way of their achievement. Although the projected worlds of formal nonfiction films differ radically from film to film, then, in the above respects we see a commonality and a continuity.

In addition to these broad structural oppositions, formally-structured films make use of other elements of traditional fictional narrative. For example, it is common for formal documentaries to use devices that create suspense. In *The Sky Above, the Earth Below* (1962), the voice-over stresses the danger of the expedition, as white explorers ven-

ture into uncharted areas where humans still live in "the stone age." As the expedition nears a village, the group sees no signs of life; here the discourse encourages suspense by extending the waiting period. Where are the inhabitants? Will they be peaceful or warlike? Will they be cannibals? Are the natives lying in wait, ready to ambush the expedition as it approaches?

In *Target for Tonight* we see that the climactic resolution is another device commonly used in the formal voice. The concern of the film is with the methods and character of the members of the British Royal Air Force during World War II. On the dramatic level, however, the most suspenseful question is whether a British bomber will return safely from its mission over Germany. Men at the airfield wait on the ground in anticipation, hoping for the safe return. The climactic moment occurs when the plane – badly damaged and in thick fog – does land safely. These examples illustrate one means by which events in the documentary are given significance – by traditional dramatic structures incorporated into the nonfiction film.

The epistemological function of the formal voice ultimately determines structure in the narrative documentary. As with beginnings and endings, dramatic movement develops in tandem with a clear rhetorical purpose encompassing the film's narrative development. The exposition poses the salient question or questions. The narrative unfolds in a constant process of answering previous questions, posing new ones, and partially revealing answers that will be answered by the end. In many films this process is explicit. The journalistic television documentary, for example, features an on-screen anchor who explicitly formulates and verbalizes the questions, for example, "Our environment – can it survive a Republican congress?" A more subtle film (or a film of the open voice) might pose these questions only implicitly, relying on the spectator to infer the questions favored by the discourse.

#### Open Structure

Open structure is a limit case, never found in an absolute form in any nonfiction film. It is a goal or a tendency, limited by the fact that a film must have a perspective, and that its discourse implies a way of viewing the world it projects (it has a voice). Pure open structure would render the projected world formless, as though observation occurred without the direction of the filmmakers, as though someone had set up the camera randomly and had begun and ended filming according to throws of



dice. Observation in such a pure form occurs only rarely. Most films with open structure are never purely open, but fall somewhere along the way to withholding epistemic authority, and refusing to form their materials. They lie at various distances from this unattainable limit case (what we might call, in a nod to Platonic Ideal Forms, the "Absolute Open Film"), some closer than others, many mixing formal and open techniques. All of this makes talking about open structure a bit awkward, because open structure often manifests itself in negative terms, as a reaction to formal structure, and as a relative *lack* of structure that never escapes structure altogether.

Werner Herzog's *Huie's Sermon* (1980) comes relatively close to this observational extreme, as it records a minister delivering a spirited homily. Herzog's camera is nearly immobile and is steadily trained on the minister, "Huie," for much of the film. *Huie's Sermon* follows the chronology of the church service quite closely, and provides no background information either through voice-over or titles. We do not learn Huie's surname, the denomination of the church (we assume it is some branch of Protestant Christianity), or the city in which the church is located. While trained on the minister, the camera slowly zooms in and out and moves to follow his actions as his sermon builds to a fever pitch. However, this single take of the sermon allows for no narrational comment and little eliding of time through editing. Some editing occurs at the beginning, as the congregation files into church, and at the end, when the elders bless children and we see baptisms performed. Aside from these shots, the temporal structure of the film is commensurate with the structure of the sermon.

The only overt discursive intrusions occur toward the end of the sermon, and again in the last shot of the film. Towards the sermon's end, Herzog cuts to two tracking shots of the dilapidated neighborhood that is the location of the church. In addition, the last shot is a straight-on view of the now-silent Huie, as he gazes intently into the camera, as though expecting some sign that he may depart. There is little sound, and the minister stands relatively still. The effect is discomfiting, because the camera lingers on Huie, refusing to cut away, and because he stares into the camera. Far from the classical summing up and contextualization within a moral or political framework, *Huie's Sermon* ends on this bizarre and enigmatic shot, subject to a wide variety of interpretations.

The uses of open structure are historically determined and malleable. Open structure in the nonfiction film has been heavily influenced by direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*, both movements of the 1960s. Direct

cinema in the United States is partially an outcome of emerging film technologies that enabled less cumbersome means of filming subjects. Filmmakers prodded technicians to develop new equipment, lightweight cameras synchronized with mobile sound recording units, which made possible the "direct" style of shooting. Excited by the possibilities of this new equipment, early users developed an ethos of observation and recording; the function of the filmmaker became to transparently observe the world. Although this style emerged first and foremost as a series of technical and stylistic prohibitions (no voice-over, no influence on the profilmic event, no artificial lighting), it also extended to practices of structure and editing.

However, the observational cinema never settled on a consistent use of structure and editing; filmmakers continued to differ in their approaches to the organization of shots and information. At the extreme, an open structure would consist of uncut footage shot randomly. Any editing or rearrangement of the chronological order of events constitutes a manipulation of the spectator's perception, which is equivalent to the maintenance of authority on the part of the narration. Some proponents of the observational documentary have spoken in favor of preserving the chronological order of recorded events. D. A. Pennebaker, for example, has claimed that he edits his films very little, usually only when the camera malfunctions or he errs in the shooting.<sup>12</sup> And Ricky Leacock has said that he avoids rearranging the chronology of the material "like the plague."<sup>13</sup> Of course, the open documentary cannot record any event in all its plenitude, and the filmmaker must choose elements most relevant to the film's purpose.

Aside from some early and overly enthusiastic pronouncements, filmmakers working in the open voice admit the need to impose order and dramatic structure onto their films. Ordering shots necessarily provides a minimal context and implies an attitude toward the subject. Perhaps the direct cinema filmmaker moving furthest toward formal structure is Robert Drew, who ironically also played a major hand in developing the equipment that made observational filmmaking possible. Drew makes his case as follows:

*drama*

What we're not doing today is making documentaries which present information and attract people. The only way we have a chance to build our impact is through dramatic development. Verbal development in documentary film is a straight line. It might build a little, but it's not going to build much. But character and life and death and so forth have the potential.<sup>14</sup>

If the observational documentary stands somewhere between respect for the chronology of the represented events and the imposition of a dramatic structure, Drew's films are closer to the latter extreme. Stephen Mamber writes that Drew's films exhibit a "crisis structure" featuring a hero, a contest, a winner, a loser, and a usually positive outcome. Mamber even finds parallels between Drew and Hollywood director Howard Hawks, claiming that the Drew image of the hero is quite Hawksian; a sense of male professionalism predominates the films. Mamber concludes that Drew's films are a mixture of direct cinema techniques and fictional conceptions of character, action, and structure.<sup>15</sup> To say that Drew's conceptions of character, action, and structure are *fictional* goes too far; what is clear is that they conflict with the observational ideal. Despite this, Drew's advocacy of dramatic structure is perhaps not so curious; it simply amounts to a call for a mixture of open and formal techniques – open style (discussed in Chapter Eight) and formal structure.<sup>16</sup>

Even those observational documentaries that avoid *formal* structures, however, have a loose structure that is hardly "neutral" or "objective." Fred Wiseman rarely respects the chronological order of the scenes he shoots. He claims that he selects and orders scenes based on his view of the experience he had while filming:

*selecting*  
 . . . your imagination is working in the way you see the thematic relationships between the various disparate events being photographed, and cutting a documentary is like putting together a "reality dream," because the events in it are all true, except really they have no meaning except insofar as you impose a form on them, and that form is imposed in large measure, of course, in the editing. I mean, the limits of the form you can impose are the limits of the raw material you have in your eighty thousand feet or forty hours of film. You finish shooting, but in that framework you can make a variety of movies, and it's the way you think through your own relationship to the material that produces the final form of the film.<sup>17</sup>

Wiseman's films and all open structures have loose, episodic form, more open to various interpretations than classical forms. Indeed, this openness is a conscious goal of many of the filmmakers. As Patricia Jaffe writes, direct cinema, because it is "less formal and more episodic," demands more participation on the part of the audience.<sup>18</sup> Wiseman claims that although his films are structured according to his view of the material, he nonetheless keeps them open-ended to encourage varied responses and interpretations: "Since reality is complex, contra-

dictory, and ambiguous," he says, "people with different values or experiences respond differently. I think there should be enough room in the film for other people to find support for their views, while understanding what mine are."<sup>19</sup> Ricky Leacock repeats the same sort of claim, saying that in watching a direct cinema documentary one "can start to put things together in one's own head and make one's own logic, draw one's own conclusions, and find one's own morality."<sup>20</sup>

Direct cinema has had a strong influence on open structure; we tend to overlook another significant influence, however – the European art cinema. The art cinema emerged after World War II, but is best remembered for the films of the late fifties and the sixties, especially those of Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, Truffaut, and other well known Western European directors. Jean-Luc Godard, of course, had a fascination for the documentary, and in 1968 came to the United States to make the still unfinished *1 A.M. (One American Movie)* for Leacock-Pennebaker. By that time the art cinema had become known to Americans with the rise of the "art house" and with the accessibility of American theaters to foreign productions.<sup>21</sup> Direct cinema, *cinéma vérité*, and the art cinema all became recognizable movements in the mid-sixties, and all share a reaction against the classical style. Direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* were movements opposed to formal methods of documentary filmmaking, whereas the art cinema developed as distinct from the classical Hollywood fiction film.

In its narrative structure, the classical fiction film follows canonical story formats, with clear exposition, linear narrative structure, and a resolution ending the plot line(s) with either a clear-cut victory or defeat for the protagonist. The structure of the art film, on the other hand, is much less predictable, with a meandering plot, a narrative movement seemingly motivated by chance rather than linear causality, and a conspicuous absence of a clear exposition or resolution. By the end of Fellini's *8½* (1963), for example, all but the most supremely confident spectators remain unclear about what has occurred at the level of the projected world. Has Guido shot himself, or has he finally resolved his existential dilemma in some other way? The structure of the art film is often wholly unpredictable, whereas in the most programmatic of classically structured fiction films, one can predict the story's outcome ten minutes into the film. One of the chief characteristics of the art cinema is its adherence to a different conception of reality than that of the classical fiction film – what David Bordwell calls "objective realism." Objective realism is marked by a dedramatization

of the narrative, permanent gaps in the exposition, and a tenuous linking of events.<sup>22</sup>

Art films also appeal to the "subjective realism" of character psychology. The protagonist of the classical fiction film is goal-oriented. The protagonist of the art film often undergoes a crisis of identification; he is not directed by a goal, but is searching for one, or in some cases, meandering aimlessly in a world bereft of meaningful action or fraught with contradiction. This makes the choice of any one action impossible or at least uncertain. Where Rick, in the classical film *Casablanca* (1942), determines what is right and acts decisively to effect the escape of Victor and Ilsa Laslow, Guido in *8½* is paralyzed by a lack of focus and by an inability to make decisions. The film in effect becomes less plot-centered and more an exploration of Guido's psyche, illustrating the interest in subjectivity evident in the art film. The art film character, as Bordwell puts it, is "sliding passively from one situation to another."<sup>23</sup> This is sometimes justified as a more realistic portrayal of the human character than the relatively confident, goal-oriented protagonist of the classical film.

What do observational film and open structure have to do with the art cinema? All are reactions to classical means of structuring information. All flourished in the 1960s, and continue to wield significant influence today. All appeal to different conceptions of realism than the classical film. Instead of the imposition of formal structures, we see meandering structures seemingly based on chance rather than causality. Observational films often lack clear exposition, structure information without clear-cut logic or causality, leave out the contextualization of knowledge performed by the "summing up" of the epilogue (if one exists), and leave it to the viewer to make explicit sense of what she sees.

So far I have discussed some historical influences on open structure in the nonfiction film. I now turn to its specific characteristics. Formally-structured films create a clear context and moral/political framework for the viewer, conceptual schemas with which the spectator makes sense of the given information. Much of this work is performed at the beginning and ending of the film. In a "pure" open structure we would expect no preliminary exposition at all. Fred Wiseman's films come relatively close to this limit case. *Law and Order*, a film about the day-to-day experiences of Kansas City police and citizens, begins with its title and a series of mug shots of the faces of men (presumably criminals). It then moves to tales of various people, for example, a man arrested for beating a child, another whose daughter has been raped, an arrested

woman, police officers, etc. Nothing but the film's title (and Wiseman's reputation) produce contextual schemas for the spectator, and there exists no preliminary or delayed exposition. Similarly, Tom Palazollo's *Ricky and Rocky* (1974) shows a wedding shower for an engaged couple. The spectator knows what event is being filmed only if he recognizes the depicted practices as those traditionally associated with 1970s Polish-American wedding showers. A spectator from a foreign culture might have no idea what social event occurs in this film, because it provides no exposition.

Although open structures avoid the careful exposition of the formal voice, many open films do employ a "weak" preliminary exposition. This may come in the form of introductory titles that introduce the subject or give information about the film itself. Although filmed in the direct cinema style, *California Reich* (1976) begins with these explanatory titles:

It is estimated that the Nazi Party in America – National Socialist White People's Party – has approximately 2000 members. Nazi units exist in twenty-five cities across the country. Four are in California. *California Reich* was filmed in 1974 and 1975. Its subject is the rebirth of the Nazi Movement in America. There is no narration in this film. It is the filmmaker's belief that the characters' own words are the most eloquent indictment of their racial philosophy.

Notice that this minimal preliminary exposition consists of two parts. The first introduces the subject, narrowing it from the Nazi Party overall to the four units in California. The second gives some background to the film itself, and provides a moral framework – a stance toward the Nazis. Although the discourse remains invisible throughout and is content to observe, it nonetheless calls itself an indictment of the Nazis' racial philosophy.

Several films with otherwise open structures make use of titles or even voice-over as preliminary exposition, giving a modicum of context for the film or its subject. Emile de Antonio's *Point of Order* (1963) begins with a man's voice-over: "Everything you are about to see actually happened. Eight hours a day for thirty-six days, the Special Senate Subcommittee held televised hearings, known as the Army-McCarthy hearings, in the spring of 1954 . . . and the hearings became the greatest political spectacle of its history." Given this sort of preliminary exposition, why is this nonetheless a film of the open voice?

Gauging the epistemological stance of a film is tricky. However, in

the open voice, any existing exposition is drastically attenuated. Discursive exposition in the open voice is one or all of the following: relatively uncommunicative, lacking in authority, or lacking in knowledge. Although *California Reich* and *Point of Order* begin with a certain amount of exposition, discourse in the body of the films becomes much less authoritative. In neither film do we hear voice-over or nondiegetic music. The few written titles serve only to give location names and/or dates. Open structures cannot avoid all preliminary exposition, and what exposition does occur is often weak and limited to the film's beginning.

In fact, the conclusion of a nonfiction film is often a stronger clue to its epistemological position. "Absolute Open Structure" offers no explicit epilogue; no voice-over narrator sums up the meaning of the film for the spectator. In Fred Wiseman's *Hospital* (1970), a hospital priest tells worshipers that people are "nothing" before God. The film then ends with a long shot of the hospital, as the camera zooms out to reveal a highway in the foreground. On the soundtrack the parishioners sing, while we see cars driving on the highway in the foreground, and hear the rhythmic clicking of wheels on cracks in pavement. Fade to black. The film offers no explicit summing up, but instead a stark, disturbing ending, subject to multiple interpretations.<sup>24</sup>

In *Point of Order*, a voice-over narrator introduces the subject of the film at the beginning. However, the film ends with no explicit discursive comment, as while the hearings recess and the participants file out, Senator Joseph McCarthy continues to drone on. Like that of *Hospital*, the ending here is again suggestive. It suggests that McCarthy has begun to lose power, as those at the hearing no longer listen to his extravagant warnings about communist infiltration. Films of the open voice, then, may implicitly suggest an interpretation of events, but they cannot offer explicit explanations. Whereas formal structures ask and answer clear questions, open structures may not formulate clear questions, and certainly do not answer them.

The end of *Chronicle of a Summer* suggests a means by which a cinéma vérité film takes the epistemological position of the open voice. At some point during the production, filmmakers Rouch and Morin decide to screen the unfinished film for those people who have been filmed. The discussion that follows shows not only that those persons disagree about the film's merits, failures, and meanings, but that they have begun to quarrel with each other. In the reflexive last scene of the

film, the filmmakers discuss the screening and the strategies of the film in general. Rouch does give a weak summation, as he and Morin stroll through an interior hallway: "This film, unlike normal cinema, re-introduces us to life. People react as they do in life. They're not guided, nor is the audience. We don't say, this man is good or another wicked, or nice, or clever. So the audience is bewildered by these people they could actually meet. It feels implicated but would prefer not to be." After these words, the filmmakers wander into the streets. In the last words of the film, Morin says, "We're in for trouble." Immediately following are the end credits (over circus music designed to associate the film with circus-like antics). The film is an experiment, an exploration, and the filmmakers withhold the final authority to explain either the subject matter or the project of the film. Morin's last words express more than hesitancy; they mark his epistemic *doubt*. Although it is never clear what kind of trouble Morin refers to, it is at least plausible that the trouble is one of determining what the film has accomplished.

Exposition occurs in formal structures not only in the beginning, but often is distributed throughout the body of the film. Voice-over typically performs this task explicitly, as language has the capacity to express high-level propositions with efficiency. Films with open structures typically avoid the use of voice-over narration, precisely to forebear the explicit exposition typical of the formal voice. In fact, we see far less exposition throughout the body of films with open structures.

*California Reich* is organized as a series of personality studies of various neo-Nazis in California. These are interspersed with various events, such as the celebration of Hitler's birthday, and a social gathering during which a group watches football and teaches the children Nazi principles. Although explanatory titles appear at the beginning and end of the film, no explicit discursive presence makes itself known during the body of the film, aside from brief identificatory titles.

After becoming acquainted with the neo-Nazis, the spectator suspects that some suffer from serious mental problems, including paranoid feelings of isolation from society. Where the formal voice might analyze the psyches of the neo-Nazis and *identify* their possible mental disorder(s), *California Reich* refrains from such identification. Where the formal voice might *define* the word "Nazi," or the California brand of Nazism, *California Reich* simply presents us with their words and actions, without such a conceptual framework. *California Reich* does not give the information necessary to constitute an analysis, but merely



presents images and sounds. Although the film takes a clear position toward the neo-Nazis, it is nonetheless an observation. Where exposition analyzes and explains, giving explicit information about the various parts of the subject and perhaps their respective functions, observation merely *presents the subject to the senses*.

Similarly, in its account of the Army-McCarthy hearings, *Point of Order* condenses a thirty-six day event into a film of less than an hour in length. Director Emile De Antonio has obviously chosen some of the most heated exchanges between the participants, plus material that reflects poorly on McCarthy. The represented events, however, are linked without benefit of the clear causal structure that would be found in the formally-structured film. Each represented episode is introduced by a title, such as "The Cropped Photo," "President Eisenhower Intervenes," and "The Accusation." The discourse neither implies nor asserts anything about the significance of each episode or its relation to the others. Here the spectator must extrapolate for herself. Permanent gaps in exposition deny the explanations expected of films of the formal voice.

Formal structure is typically unified and coherent, and makes use of strategies of emphasis. Although the open structure is often unified in a weak sense – that is, it is about one subject and not a hodgepodge – it is normally less coherent and less likely to use techniques which ensure emphasis. Coherence is often a matter of order. A logical and conventional system of ordering promotes coherence, and the film using familiar means of discourse ordering – chronological, logical, spatial, etc. – will be more easily comprehended by the Western spectator. A coherent text also makes use of transitions, reminders, repetitions, and "signposts," all of which work to ensure an easy understanding.

Although most open structures are not confusing masses of unrelated parts, they nonetheless exhibit less concern with the precise, linear coherence of their formal counterparts. Wiseman's films, for example, are ordered according to his impressions of the institutions he films. However, they are structured in complex ways which demand a great deal of synthesis on the part of the viewer. A formally structured film about the police in a large city would organize the discourse into neat categories that reflect conventional means of discursive organization. It might first introduce the police, then detail crime problems, then show the interactions between police and the lawbreakers. Or it could deal with jails, the streets, organized crime, and other topics in recognizable

groupings. Wiseman's *Law and Order*, on the other hand, is arranged in no such clear ordering system. In an elaborate *mosaic* (to use Bill Nichols' term), we see an interview with a prospective police officer, a man who has been beaten and robbed, roll call at the police station, a domestic dispute, a woman whose purse has been stolen, a man cursing at the police, etc. The spectator eventually gets a sense of the complexity of police work and of the social problems that make police necessary. We might even find a vague structure of sequences showing the police to be alternatively kind and cruel, as Barry Keith Grant says.<sup>25</sup> Although one can interpret a thematic purpose to the structure of sequences, the structure of information is relatively unconventional.

Emphasis is central to the formal film because textual elements attain greater or lesser importance according to the film's epistemological project. The discourse emphasizes through voice-over statements of importance, by the positioning of various elements, by the proportion of time spent on an element, and by repetition and other formal strategies. The open structure must emphasize some events over others; the importance with which spectators invest beginnings and endings makes this unavoidable to a degree. Yet unlike the formal structure, open structure develops no textual hierarchy and allows no clear linear development. In *Law and Order*, for example, no segment is explicitly stated or shown to be more important than another, and no particular scene foregrounded as a key to understanding the film. The roll call scene, in which officers report for duty, is repeated, but only because it is a daily occurrence, and not for any special significance it has. Some scenes are longer than others, but again, the spectator is likely to attribute this to the requirements of the profilmic scene rather than to an emphasis asserted by the film's discourse. The last segment of the film shows a desperate young man pleading for access to his child. This scene takes on a special importance because of its position in the film's structure. The police tell the man that his only recourse is through the courts. Some may interpret this as comment on the inability of the police to solve social problems. Yet again, the film itself does not emphasize this segment by any means other than its position as last segment.

In general, open structures are more episodic, meandering, and idiosyncratic than their formal counterparts, although no film can avoid formal structure altogether. Formal structures are motivated by the requirements of conventions of composition. Open structure may be motivated in various ways, by the filmmaker's associations while filming,

by an anthropological experiment or a journey, or by pure chance. Open structures will be less predictable than formal structures. Open structure will always contribute to the voice of the film, and in films of the open voice, it works in tandem with an epistemic hesitance, a reluctance to claim full knowledge.

## CHAPTER 8

### Style and Technique

Nonfiction film and video obviously depend on technology. The representations possible to the documentarian are limited not only by the imagination, but by the capabilities and availability of many types of machines. If the structure of a nonfiction is somewhat independent of technology, style and technique wholly depend on technological equipment – cameras, film stocks and videotapes, lights, sound recorders, sound equalizers and processors, computers and software, and editing systems. In this chapter we explore the implications of style and technique.

Here I think of film *techniques* as local means of composition in film; obvious examples are editing, camera movement, lighting, and sound. A film's *style* consists of its patterns of uses of such techniques. Style and technique have both a rhetorical and an informational function. Style participates in world projection and the modeling of the real, and thus in the determination of discursive voice. Style transmits information, but its functions extend far beyond this. Like structure, it is also a means to affect the spectator emotionally and perceptually.

The formal voice maintains an epistemic authority toward the world it projects. All of its textual elements – including technique and style – are ordered and unified according to its explanatory or teaching function. Style in the formal voice serves the rhetorical project of the film; it transmits information about the projected world; it helps develop the film's perspective; it elicits the desired perceptual and emotional effects in the spectator. Style is rarely used as an end in itself – as an ornament, but is bridled to the unified functions performed by the film's discourse. Stylistic flourishes may occur, but they remain flourishes in a discourse otherwise marked by a consistent communicative function. Technique, structure, and voice all intermesh in another characteristic of formal style – discourse coherence. A communication is "coherent" when its parts are appropriately organized to facilitate spectator comprehen-