

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-

sion. In technique, formal style strives for absolute denotational clarity and maximum discourse coherence.

Like open structure, open style is a limit case, and does not exist in a pure form. At the unreachable extreme, open style would withhold any sort of discursive comment or explanation in lieu of mere observation. Yet any use of film technique, and any style in a nonfiction film, must contribute to the perspective of the discourse. Think of open style not as an absolute, then, but in relational terms, as a matter of degree. Open style withholds expression and authority, never absolutely, but in comparison with formal style. Open style moves toward observation and exploration, but cannot entirely escape rhetoric and implication. Open style exists not in a pure form, but approaches that which refuses to explain, analyze, and/or comment on the material it presents.

The observational film manifests one kind of open style – a stylistics of observation. Observational films typically avoid ornamentation in an attempt to capture appearances and sounds. Like formal style, style in the observational film strives for denotational clarity; however, it avoids stylistic techniques that are thought to constitute unwarranted discursive intrusion – music, voice-over, slow motion, etc. The use of hand-held cameras and portable sound equipment results in the trademark shaky image and low fidelity sound. Black and white and often high-speed, grainy film stock have enabled filmmakers to work in low-light conditions, although recent improvements in stocks make these characteristics less common. The use of the single camera requires long takes and frequent camera movement, such as zooms in and out and the swish pans used to quickly change camera position. Moreover, as Barry Keith Grant observes, the style of observational films evokes the drama of “the camera’s spontaneous search for points of visual interest,” which sometimes surpasses our interest in the profilmic events themselves; this accounts for their feel of spontaneity, and their lack of “well-formed” images.¹ In the name of epistemic humility and a confidence in the ability of the equipment to capture the look and sound of a scene, the observational filmmaker avoids stylistic flourishes, but substitutes a stylistics of another sort.

On the other hand, other films of the open voice – for example, Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* – foreground style as a concomitant factor in an ambiguous presentation of the projected world. In other words, the open voice does not necessarily require observational stylistics, for the ornamental and the expressive can also contribute to epistemic hesitancy or ambiguity. In the films of Les Blank, style is often used to ex-

press the filmmaker’s exuberant sense of humor, yet it offers no explanations or information. Les Blank’s films bear his unique stamp in their celebration of the music and food of diverse ethnic groups. Several of his films have highly reflexive discourse that is overt and expressive, incorporating playful stylistic techniques that call attention to their status as films. For example, *In Heaven There is No Beer* (1984) provides weak exposition for its presentation of Polka music and dancing, but for the most part is content to observe and celebrate eating, drinking, dancing, music, and zest for life. It incorporates some of the nondiegetic stylistic flourishes Blank often uses to comment on the projected world. As the band sings the film’s theme song, “In Heaven There is No Beer,” Blank gives us a sort of Eisensteinian intellectual montage (without Eisenstein’s high seriousness). We see a shot of the statue of an angel with a sad countenance, followed by another shot of an angel – this one with arm upraised, beer can in hand, and a satisfied countenance. Elsewhere, we hear a song about stealing Kiszca (sausage), illustrated by staged shots of a woman stealing a large Polish sausage from a van. Other stylistic marks include graphic matches. One match juxtaposes a shot of a water fountain spurting upward with the spray of a just-opened can of beer. Blank’s hand-drawn titles and credits, with their folk-art appeal, mark the films as “small” and “personal” – as Les Blank films.

Blank’s films and others fit the epistemological stance of the open voice, yet unlike the observational film, they make use of an ornamental style that becomes a mark of overt discourse and authorship. The open voice does not necessarily require the stylistic minimalism of direct cinema. Expressiveness and the flaunting of style do not necessarily imply a discursive explanatory function, but as in the art film, may serve to flaunt the subjectivity of the filmmaker. Nonetheless, we can make certain generalizations about open style. Although style in the open film may imply attitude, as in Les Blank’s films, open style is not used to supply explanations, or to assert high-level propositions about the projected world. In addition, if we take the observational film as the *prototypical* open film, we may add that open style tends toward a stylistics of observation.

Discourse Coherence and Editing

Formal style strives for absolute denotational clarity, or what we might call *coherence*. The coherence or clarity of a discourse resides in part at

the global level, the level at which the text makes use of the organizing principles of narrative, rhetorical, or categorical form, plus strategies of beginning, ending, and structuring. But spectators also approach texts at the local level, making sense of elements linked according to conventions and rules of communication. It is this local level, the level of sequences of images and sounds, that I am concerned with here.

Teun van Dijk calls this linkage "discourse coherence."² Van Dijk is mainly interested in discourse coherence in relation to the chronological ordering of words and sentences, but we will discuss it in image-related terms as well. For van Dijk, linguistic discourse consists of an ordering of sentences that express sequences of propositions. How do the propositions of discourse combine to form complex meanings? The ordering of propositions, van Dijk says, is constrained by rules or conventions of meaningfulness. Many of these rules are lodged in the preconscious of a particular community of language users. To the extent that the discourse follows these rules, it is considered locally coherent. For example, one common convention is that proposition ordering should reflect the general-to-particular ordering of facts. The example Van Dijk gives is the following:

- a. Next month we will be staying in Berkeley.
- b. We will be staying with friends.

This sequence of statements is meaningful to the reader because it follows the general-to-particular principle of proposition ordering. When one reverses their order, the sentences' meaning becomes problematic, and their mutual relationship confusing.

In linguistic discourse, the most conspicuous coherence rules hold for the representation of cause/effect or temporal relations between events and actions. Causes will generally be listed before their effects. A succeeding proposition can then function as a specification, explanation, example, comparison, contrast, or generalization with respect to the previous proposition. In addition, Van Dijk writes that discourse coherence is also related to our schemas relating to everyday life. Conventional procedures govern many of our social activities, including, for example, ordering food at a restaurant. When ordering food, we normally follow established protocols. We do not moan loudly to get the waiter's attention, or order a daffodil salad, because we have schemas about polite social behavior and about what foods are served at our culture's restaurants. A coherent discourse assumes and respects

similar cultural schemas, allowing the reader/viewer to process information quickly and easily.

Nonfiction film discourse, because it conveys information through images as well as language, cannot be modeled exactly in van Dijk's way. A major parameter of discourse coherence in film is editing. Various styles of editing suggest strategies that are more or less conventional, more or less coherent and easily processed. In the canonical fiction film, certain patterns of editing function this way, allowing for clear spatial and temporal relationships from shot to shot. Within a scene, the first shot will likely be an establishing shot, followed by one of three possibilities: a long shot of a different locale, a long shot of a different view of the same locale, or a closer shot of the same space.³ Spectators make sense of succeeding shots by fitting their represented space into a cognitive map of the locale often supplied by the establishing shot.

For the most part, nonfiction films are more free-ranging in their use of space and time than classical fiction films. Spaces are often numerous, fleeting, and not as carefully constructed. Where the fiction film often limits a scene or sequence to a single space, the nonfiction film "bounces" around the globe, using whatever images are needed to construct the thread of its linear progression. Moreover, many documentaries make use of stock footage and are limited to however few shots of the subject are available. Since space is often ill-defined in these films, the axis of action is often broken if not wholly ignored; the construction of a well-defined space is of little concern. In "Harvest of Shame," for example, the spectator rarely gets a sense of a unified space in any of the various labor camps and fields in which the laborers work. In nonfiction film, the spatial context can be as broad as the universe itself (as in Errol Morris's *A Brief History of Time*) and the historical framework as all-inclusive as the history of the world. Think of the *Why We Fight* series, for example, with its divisions of the world into "slave" and "free," "evil" and "good." Whereas the classical fiction film maintains unity of time and space within a sequence, the documentary is spatially more fluid, moving from place to place with an ease rarely seen in its fictional counterpart.

Editing in films of the formal voice typically serves the film's rhetoric through the ordering of *propositions* rather than spaces. Paul Messaris calls this "propositional editing."⁴ I argued in Chapter Four that images convey propositions in relation to their conventional use, linguistic accompaniment, and context. Messaris further suggests that some of

the common propositional uses of editing are to compare and contrast, draw an analogy, infer causality, or generalize. When the formal style uses propositional editing, coherence depends on the same "rules" as linguistic discourse. The general-to-particular rule and the ordering of cause before effect, for example, function in much the same way.

Editing in the formal style keeps the spectator oriented by maintaining a comprehensible pace of shots, and if space is not carefully defined, it is at least not disorienting. This is accomplished both through conventional cinematographic techniques (discussed below) and cues of continuity editing, such as matches on action and the maintenance of consistent screen direction. In the battle scenes of war documentaries, for example, the guns of the favored army will often aim left to right, while those of the enemy aim right to left, or according to consistent screen directions established by maps or charts. In addition, techniques such as eyeline matches, the use of cut-aways and cut-ins, and shot/reverse shot structures are the norm. Edward R. Murrow's interviews with Secretary of Labor Mitchell in "Harvest of Shame," for example, are staged and cut as in a classical fiction film, although with less variation in their basic editing structures. During the interviews, the camera is typically focused on Mitchell in medium close-up. Interspersed are reverse shots of the interviewer, Murrow, and occasional shots of Mitchell over Murrow's shoulder. Point-of-view shots and eyeline matches are common as well. These are efficient and coherent communicative techniques in part because they approximate a human form of information-gathering.⁵ We often look at others to determine what they view, then look at the object of their attention. This exactly follows the sequence of shots in the eyeline match.

Style at the service of information transmission does not preclude poetic interludes and stylistic flourishes, however. The beginning and ending of *The Times of Harvey Milk*, for example, use slow motion montages of shots depicting Milk's political life. Together with the synthesized music, these scenes evoke a dreamlike quality that suggests the importance we often attribute to assassinated leaders. Montage scenes of marchers in the *Why We Fight* series suggest the dance-like lure of regimentation, with their hypnotic rhythms created through sound and editing. And in Disney's *The Living Desert*, informative discourse momentarily halts for a celebration of nature, with a rhythmic montage of courting Scorpions "dancing" the "Stingeree" to country music.

But even with the stylistic flourishes, a primary function of style is to present projected world information, to develop discursive voice, or to

cause an effect in the spectator sympathetic to the textual project. In *The Times of Harvey Milk*, the above-mentioned scene clearly preserves the unity of the film's rhetorical emphasis by mythologizing the fight for gay rights in the person of Harvey Milk. In the *Why We Fight* series, the montages of marching serve to illustrate the rigidity and grandiloquence of the fascist regimes. In *The Living Desert*, the musical interludes reinforce the film's depiction of nature as organically unified and fundamentally benign. In films of the formal voice as in the classical fiction film, style is bridled to the drive to full and adequate knowledge. However, that "knowledge" may be communicated by evocative, connotational means as well as those more denotative and straightforward.

I do not imply that maximum discourse coherence is coextensive with maximum realism. Coherence in the *communication about reality* in no way implies *imitation of reality*. What Noël Carroll points out about canonical fiction films also applies to the canonical documentary:

The arresting thing about movies, *contra* realist theories, is not that they create the illusion of reality, but that they reorganize and construct . . . actions and events with an economy, legibility, and coherence . . . which surpass . . . naturally encountered actions and events. Movie actions evince visible order and identity to a degree not found in everyday experience.⁶

Although a coherent discourse sometimes incorporates techniques that mimic human perception, it just as often depends on the exaggeration or intensification of "natural" perception, such that any claims to realism lack credence.

Editing in the formal style is propositional and analytical, directing the spectator to salient details according to the rhetorical project of the film. In Bonnie Klein's *Not a Love Story* (1981), the discourse cuts from an interviewee claiming that pornography eliminates compassion, to a shot of a heavily made-up man beating rhythmically on drums, signifying a return to the primitive – to animal nature – that pornography represents. Such openly rhetorical editing is common, especially in politically-committed works.

In the open style, however, editing can be much looser, and less likely to direct the viewer along a precisely-detailed path of meaning. In Fred Wiseman's *High School*, for example, the camera is restless and continually moving. Sequences often begin with a close-up rather than an establishing shot. Although each sequence occurs in a single space,

such as a classroom or gymnasium, the viewer never gets a coherent sense of that space. In one sequence a young teacher leads a typing class. The initial shot shows his face in extreme close-up, moving down to his hands as he prepares his students for a typing drill. Next comes a close-up of a typewriter, followed by a rack focus down a row of typewriters, followed by mostly close-ups of hands on typewriter keys, plaques on the wall, and another extreme close-up of the teacher's face as he reads the tedious passage the students have just typed. No obvious logic – of a spatial, causal, or rhetorical kind – directs these shots. Of the film in general we may say that editing and camera movement often proceed with no obvious motivation other than to observe elements of the profilmic scene.

However, no film can wholly escape the rhetoric of editing; we are again reminded that open style is a matter of degree, not kind. In *High School*, even though specific scenes have editing lacking any clear rhetorical purpose, to say that Wiseman's editing is overall transparent would be to miss much of the artifice of his films. Wiseman edits his films as "theories" about the institutions he observes, and the "theory" is constructed not merely by the order of the mosaic sequences, but through occasional forays into analytic editing within scenes. With regard to *High School*, Wiseman has said that he was interested in showing the gap between an official ideology of freedom and responsibility, and an actual practice of authoritarianism, rigidity, and conformity.⁷ Wiseman's editing sometimes presents the teachers in a bad light. For example, in one sequence, an ill-tempered hall monitor walks the halls, humorlessly bullying the students he meets. At one point, he stops to peer through a door. Here Wiseman cuts to a shot of a physical education class in which female students perform a "Simple Simon" routine. Tellingly, the camera lingers on a girl's bottom, suggesting the hall monitor's voyeurism. Wiseman's reliance on editing makes it unlikely that the hall monitor was *actually* watching the girls exercise; the implication fits Wiseman's rhetorical project, however. Given the fact that the film was shot over a period of months, the "hall monitor" and "Simple Simon" sequences were likely filmed on separate occasions.

Image and Profilmic Event

The formal voice allows little room for vagueness and ambiguity, striving instead for absolute denotational clarity. Nonfiction cinematography contributes to this aim. The subject is framed in the center of the

composition, or when time for camera set-up permits, according to the "rule of thirds."⁸ Camera height is eye- or shoulder-level and the camera angle is straight on. *Variable framing* – the selection of scale (close-up, medium shot, long shot), height, and angle – allows the spectator to pick out the salient detail important to the film's rhetorical project, and to gauge discursive voice and emphasis.

Lighting in the formal style can bear similarities to that of the classical fiction film, especially in films for which scenes are arranged and the production team has time for lighting set-ups. Interior scenes of the films of Humphrey Jennings, for example, show the classical three-point lighting scheme common to Hollywood films. However, "actuality" footage – footage not carefully staged for the camera – often is lit with whatever light is available, either the existing light of the scene or a hastily-set-up lamp carried by a crewmember. This accounts for the raw look of many documentary shots.

Cinematography in the formal style follows a "teaching" logic, making use of central and variable framing to pick out the visual information important to the film. The uses of cinematography in the open style, as one might expect, are looser, tending toward chance observations rather than careful framing to create precise meaning. For example, we see many close-ups in *High School*. In the formal style, one would expect a close-up to reveal a detail of special significance, important to the rhetorical or dramatic project of the film. Such motivations are *sometimes* apparent in *High School*. In one scene the camera humorously zooms in to a close-up of the wagging finger of a gynecologist as he discusses sex, birth control, and pregnancy with an assembly of unusually attentive high school boys.

For the most part, however, close-ups in *High School* seem rhetorically purposeless, lacking clear motivation. In the first sequence, as the teacher reads the daily bulletin, the camera holds an extreme close-up of his mouth and eye. In a later scene, as the discipline officer demands that a student change into his gym clothes, the camera zooms to an extreme close-up of the officer's mouth. One might take these shots as discursive subversions of adult authority, except that the students, with whom the film sympathizes, are subjected to the same treatment. This visual style often condenses the characters into a wiggling finger, a winking eye, a mouth, or a nose. One might attribute this to cramped filming conditions, except that frequent zooms out reveal the possibility of medium and long shots.

For both the formal and open styles, many issues of technique con-

cern using images to reveal information about the profilmic event. One vital difference between formal and open uses of photography has to do with the *physical* or *nominal* depiction of a visible entity.⁹ Within its syntactical context, an image physically depicts a dog if it represents a *particular* dog – a Boxer named Bubba, for example. Yet even that same shot can alternatively, in another context, nominally depict a *class* – Boxers, or dogs in general, or dogs that run fast. Such a shot is still of a particular dog, but it is *used* as a nominal rather than physical depiction.

As one might expect, nominal depictions are much more common in the formal style than the open. Formal films often make explicit arguments and strictly control local discourse, such that each image fits into a clear rhetorical scheme. When images are used as nominal depictions, they represent a class of entities, and are made to function as a link in a controlled rhetorical chain of meaning. In the *Why We Fight* series, for example, archival images are used as physical depictions only when representing particular Axis leaders, for example, Hitler, Tojo, and Mussolini. More typically, images function nominally. Shots of crowds of Japanese, German, or Italian people are used as nominal depictions of the Japanese, Germans, and Italians in general, as the voice-over narration makes broad claims about national characteristics or the nature of fascism. For example, shots of German soldiers marching, taken from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, are used to illustrate fascist regimentation.

Conversely, the open style uses physical depictions. If the open voice observes rather than explains, the representation of particulars takes precedence over classes of entities. *Brother's Keeper* uses images to depict a particular group of brothers, one of whom is accused of murder. *Salesman* depicts a particular group of Bible salesmen, and concentrates on one Paul Brennan. The audience may make inductive generalizations about human nature or salesmen based on the images they see. The images themselves, however, are representations of particular entities. Although there will be exceptions, nonfiction films of the formal style often use nominal and of the open style physical depictions.

An important issue in studies of nonfiction has been the extent and limits of the observational powers of the image. All talk of observation must acknowledge that many nonfiction films manipulate the profilmic event. We often see the use of animation and maps, for example, used to make assertions about the actual world. Some filmmakers interact with their subjects, such that one could hardly claim they attempt to

photograph the world as it might be in the absence of the camera. Prominent nonfiction filmmaker Errol Morris manipulates the profilmic scene as a matter of course, and actually claims this to be *more* rather than less revelatory. For his *A Brief History of Time*, Morris actually constructed sets to resemble homes and offices, where he was able to conduct interviews in a controlled setting and create the ambiance he desired.

At times, the importance of manipulation or its lack has been overemphasized in discourse about the nonfiction film; in fact, the issue is something of a red herring, when used to deny the recording capacities of photography. Any shot of a subject is from a particular angle, camera height, and perspective, and is but one view of the scene among the many possible. But this fails to negate the informative possibilities of the image. In our everyday life, we also *see* from a perspective; in no way does that endanger our learning from what we see. Similarly, a nonfiction filmmaker may manipulate the profilmic scene in various ways, through lighting, framing, and the placement of the subject. Neither does this counteract the capabilities of the image to give veridical information. Morris's staged interviews with Randall Adams and David Harris in *The Thin Blue Line* are marvelous personality studies, despite Morris's artificial lighting and framing.

A photographic recording of a manipulated profilmic scene is still a photographic recording; it simply requires a bit of critical analysis to understand what information it holds. In gauging what an image can teach us, we must always consider the nature of the profilmic event, its susceptibility to manipulation, and the affect of any suspected or apparent manipulation. When filming an interview, the filmmaker not only may design a set or alter the location, but in addition prods the subject with questions and other cues to elicit the desired response. On the other hand, a filmmaker confronted with a volcanic eruption or a hurricane has little control over what occurs. Some social events, such as a presidential press conference, a college graduation, or a professional baseball game, are designed in part with the presence of cameras and the public in mind. The point is this: the influence of the camera on the profilmic event ranges from substantial to nonexistent. Although the spectator cannot always know how the profilmic event was actually manipulated, she can make educated hypotheses about how the probable influence of the camera affects the meaning of a shot.

To gauge what an image can teach us, we must also consider how the camera is used. When Wiseman and his camera operator investigate

an institution, they try to remain as unobtrusive as possible, hoping that eventually they will become unnoticed. In contrast, other filmmakers become intentionally obtrusive, and incorporate themselves and their camera as personae in the body of the film. In Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March*, McElwee frequently appears before the camera, speaking about his film and his mental state. Moreover, he talks to people while filming them, and views the various people in his life through the lens of the camera, which becomes his literal point of view. As he speaks and his hand reaches beyond the lens to touch the face of a tearful friend, the camera films. As he hugs friends good-bye, the camera, perched on his shoulder, films. As he is stung by bees, the camera swings wildly about and we hear his yelps of pain. McElwee's interest in women's bodies is apparent as he films Pat's "cellulite" exercises and slowly tilts up band member Joy's body as she sings and plays.

Of course, despite our best vigilance, photographic images can be used to deceive us. In the early years of newsreels, for example, scenes were often staged or faked, then presented as the original event.¹⁰ These types of deceitful manipulations must be distinguished from the typical influences the camera might have on the profilmic scene. Audiences must never blindly assume that events always unfold just as they would have without the presence of the camera. Yet it is just as naïve to claim that we learn nothing from images. Critical audiences will consider the presence of the camera as a part of the profilmic event. What we can learn about the profilmic scene from a given image depends on complex factors, from clues within the image, to the nature of the profilmic event, to the apparent techniques of the camera crew, to the image in relation to conventional use, linguistic accompaniment, and context. Theory cannot make such a determination in advance.

Voice-Over Narration and the Interview

No discussion of the power of images in communication can fail to ignore the coupling of images with sound. Of all the various sound techniques, documentary voice-over narration has received by far the most attention from film scholars.¹¹ How does verbal discourse relate to images? Roland Barthes claims that the verbal text accompanying press photographs never simply duplicates the image, but always adds to or narrows the meanings already present. Upon examination, the same holds true for the nonfiction image accompanied by voice-over. All images are polysemous, ambiguous to a certain degree. Independent of its

context, the image bears multiple possible meanings. Within the formal style, voice-over carries authority over the meanings gleaned from the images. Barthes and other theorists have found ostensible ideological effects in voice-over narration. Barthes writes that the denotational aspects of the image tend to naturalize the connotational linguistic message (and connotative aspects of the image), causing the text to appear as a phenomenon of nature rather than a constructed, cultural representation: "The connotation is now experienced only as the natural resonance of the fundamental denotation constituted by the photographic analogy and we are thus confronted with a typical process of naturalization of the cultural."¹²

From the standpoint of a psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity, Mary Ann Doane argues that voice-over narration perpetuates "the image of unity and identity sustained by this body [the narrator, the spectator]" and staves off "the fear of fragmentation" in the unconscious of the spectator, thus maintaining the "material homogeneity of the 'body' of the film."¹³ This is how voice-over supposedly cooperates in the interpolation of the "bourgeois" homogeneous subject. The voice-over has effects on the conscious spectator as well. Since it comes from outside the diegesis and has no visible body, Doane claims, the narrator is endowed with an authority based on its "radical otherness." Thus the voice seems beyond criticism, and censors questions of origin and identity. The implication is that audiences will uncritically accept what the voice-over narrator claims, because the voice-over is not present as a visible body.

Both of these arguments deserve scrutiny. Both Doane and Barthes imply that the effects they posit are universal, or at least standard for most audiences. However, there is little evidence for these claims, of either an intuitive or empirical kind. Today's audiences are quite suspicious of the media, and do not accept what they see as natural, or the claims of a voice-over narrator as the unproblematic truth. In fact, at the time of this writing, Americans tend to be highly critical, commonly referring to the "bias" of the "liberal media."

Doane points out the diverse relationships possible between voice-over narrators and documentary images. She calls for (1) increasing the number of voices in the voice-over documentary, and (2) changing the relationship of the voices to the image by effecting a disjunction between the sound and its meaning, as Barthes also advocates with respect to vocal music in "The Grain of the Voice."¹⁴ Several documentaries exemplify Doane's recommendations, at least in part. One is

Chick Strand's *Mosori Monika* (1970), a film about a native community in South America. The voice-over in the film is given by two successive female narrators, both of whom are Indian. One has become a nun in deference to the Roman Catholic missionaries who have come to the tribe and who give her sustenance. The other voice-over narrator lives more or less as she did before the missionaries arrived. Neither voice-over is explicitly privileged (although Strand subtly weights the moral center of the film toward the latter narrator) and both give alternative perspectives. Perhaps it is too much to ask that "meaning" be wholly abandoned in nonfiction film in favor of the "grain" of the voice (as Doane seems to advocate), but in *Mosori Monika* meaning is at least made ambiguous and difficult. In this respect *Mosori Monika* employs voice-over narration in the open rather than the formal style.

Another documentary using multiple voices is John Ford's *The Battle of Midway*, though this film maintains a formal style. In representing this World War II battle, the film makes use of four narrators, each bearing a different relationship to the spectator and to the represented events. The first narrator (Donald Crisp) is similar to the omnipotent and impassioned *March of Time* or newsreel narrator. An authoritative patriot, he gets caught up in the excitement, making exclamations such as "Suddenly, the Japs attack!" and "The invasion forces were hit and hit and hit again!" He conveys most of the historical information of the film. The second narrator (Irving Pichel) seems to be a priest or minister, a spiritual and psychological leader. Unlike the first narrator, the second directly addresses the spectator. As the planes return from battle and the airmen disembark, he says: "Men and women of America, here come your neighbors, home from a day's work. You ought to meet them. Here's Jimmy Patch. Seven 'meatballs' on his plane." He also verifies the authenticity of some of the images. As soldiers raise the American flag during a lull in the battle, he claims, "Yes, this really happened." Whereas the first narrator excites warlike emotions, the second is a gentle father or pastor figure. He speaks softly and reflectively. Whereas the first narrator presents factual information, the second enjoys a sort of moral authority.

The third narrator (Jane Darwell) is a particularization of the American mother. She speaks with a definite Midwestern twang. Unfamiliar with the machinery of war, she asks questions that the other narrators answer: "Is that one of those Flying Fortresses?" and "Why, that's young Bill Toomey. He's from my hometown of Springfield, Ohio. He's

not going to fly that big bomber?" Her business is domestic. Playing a stereotypical role, she is a nurturer and maintains an authority in this arena. When casualties arrive, she orders the soldiers to "Get those boys to the hospital!"

The fourth narrator, with voice by Henry Fonda, is "one of the boys." A gregarious sort, he speaks to "mother" and also makes comments on some of the pronouncements of the first narrator. In addition, he has the ability to speak to characters in the diegesis. Talking to a pilot, he asks: "How many more today, Skipper?" Skipper holds up four fingers. This narrator, with his inside knowledge and familiarity, interprets the images from within and seconds the pronouncements of the first narrator. As a flyer is rescued and brought aboard ship, this narrator comments: "His first cigarette - boy - that first drag sure tastes good."

Doane argues against what I have called the epistemic attitude of the formal voice, and especially the use of the disembodied voice-over narrator to disseminate information from a position of authority. Among her recommendations is the use of multiple narrators. From this example we see that a multiplicity of narrators does not guarantee a different discursive stance toward the projected world than that which Doane criticizes. Although *The Battle of Midway* makes use of four narrators, and each bears a different relationship to the projected world and to the other narrators, they nonetheless clearly and unambiguously interpret the images for us. The narrators each occupy clearly constructed social positions, and each assumes authority over a carefully-delineated sphere of knowledge. It is clear, then, that what is most important in gauging the relationship of voice-over narrator(s) and image is not their number or gender, but their epistemic relationship to image and referent.

Another lesson of the voice-over narrators in *The Battle of Midway* is that Barthes' functions of anchorage and relay only begin to tap the diversity of functions the linguistic message may have. As Charles Wolfe notes, voice-over in *The Battle of Midway* is not unlike that of other documentaries of the 1930s and 1940s in its awareness "of the distinctions of region, class, gender, or age" and in its definition of "a complex spatial and temporal relation between the assumed sites of vocal enunciation and reception . . . and the constructed space of the diegesis."¹⁵ The voice-over narrator does more than disseminate information or assert authority; he or she may express a wish, advocate, de-

nounce, express solidarity, plead, hesitate, argue, postulate, and ruminate. Even in films with simple, authoritative voice-over narration, the relationships between voice and image can be highly complex.

Films that avoid voice-overs find other means to supply the information they afford. Sometimes they film persons who are speaking information the film wants to use as exposition. In *Say Amen, Somebody*, we see a disc jockey talking into his microphone, introducing the event that becomes one of the centerpieces of the film: "Yes, this is Columbus Gregory here for KIRL. We'd like to invite you to join us this coming Sunday, as we gather to honor that legend of gospel singers, Mother Willie Mae Ford Smith, for her sixty years of gospel singing." Many films also use interviews to provide exposition.

Interviews are an invaluable resource for the nonfiction artist, and in their presentation lies one of the great strengths of nonfiction film and video. We not only benefit from *what* is said, but from the visual and aural information available in *how* it is said – from facial expression to gestures to inflections of the voice. For the filmmaker working in the formal style, the question becomes how to fit the interviews into the rhetorical project of the film. Each interview has its own perspective, and the filmmaker wishing to make rhetorical points may want to fit those perspectives into the larger film's discursive project.

Bill Nichols notes that the use of interviews in documentaries can lead to problems, for two reasons.¹⁶ First, in the case of films such as *The Wobblies*, all of the personal testimonies agree with each other, creating a facile sense that all personal recollections can be wholly trusted. The spectator also deduces that the filmmaker has chosen to interview only people with whom he or she agrees, casting suspicion on the veracity of the film. A second problem is that the perspective of the film can become lost behind the interviews, and the spectator can lose track of the function of the interviews in the film's rhetoric.

Not a Love Story provides a clear illustration of some of these issues. *Not a Love Story* does use voice-over narration at times, but whenever filmmaker Bonnie Klein resorts to the strategy, it is only to present first-level information, and rarely to reveal her political position. The rhetorical position of *Not a Love Story* is normally expressed through other techniques, such as the numerous interviews in the film. Much of the testimony in agreement with the film's voice gets stylistic support, while oppositional testimony is sometimes subtly undermined. The testimony of Susan Griffin is accorded more authority than that of Klein herself, by its temporal positioning and its stylistic treatment. Griffin's

on-screen testimony is positioned at the beginning of the film, immediately following the title sequence, and at the very end of the film, immediately preceding the end credits. Her testimony literally frames the film, providing moral schemas for the viewer in the exposition (through the primacy effect), and reinforcing those schemas at the conclusion. Griffin's voice is given further authority as some of the only testimony (aside from Klein's) we hear in voice-over, when towards the end of the film her disembodied summations on pornography play over advertisements and over the scene where Tracy poses for photographs.

Griffin's voice-over accrues authority through stylistic strategies as well. Her testimonial is supported by sequences of images marshaled as evidence to support what she says. After the scene in which Linda Tracy protests against pornography in front of the sex club, we see Griffin talking about pornography's attitude toward women: "Pornography is like a film that's projected on a blank screen, and that blank screen is women's silence. Pornography is filled with images of silencing women." Griffin's voice-over is illustrated by stills – a woman in a muzzle, a woman chained and gagged, a woman bound to a tree and gagged. Such illustrative images are afforded other witnesses as they testify, but not those who oppose the position of the film. David Wells, editor and publisher of pornographic magazines, is given no such textual support, and in fact, Klein's open (and on-screen) disagreement with what he says cues the spectator to take his testimony as oppositional. Moreover, the way Griffin's body is framed also adds subtle support to her testimony. We see her only in close-up, a tight shot of her neck and face, with no cut-aways to listeners. The effect is to fragment her body and the space from which she speaks, such that her voice becomes akin to the disembodied voice-over narrator of the more traditional documentary.

Oppositional testimony is marked as such in at least two instances. As Linda Tracy asks questions of the manager of the sex emporium, his face, unlike hers, is consistently in the shadows. Whether this is a chance occurrence or a lighting strategy is unclear, but the effect is to make the man seem especially sleazy. Similarly, at one point Tracy and Klein talk with three members of the pornographic video industry: an actor, an actress, and a producer. While the producer defends pornography as a legitimate form of "tripping out," the film cuts to reaction shots of the raised eyebrows of Klein and Tracy, who obviously take exception to what he says. Again, the voice of the film makes itself heard through technical choices.

Another voice of importance is that of Robin Morgan, whose words, like those of Susan Griffith, become wholly coextensive with the film's voice. Morgan's statements on rage and hope in the face of pornography become a centerpiece of the film. Her testimony is supported by its very length, since it is the longest interview; it is also textually supported by its repetition. Of those who oppose the film's position, only Suze Randall, the porn photographer, is shown twice, and then only to illustrate Tracy's feelings of degradation as she poses for the camera. Moreover, Robin Morgan's testimony is given authority through stylistic means. After hearing poet Margaret Atwood read poems about the treatment of women in pornography, we see a still of a woman whose fallen countenance and pose suggest her oppression. The next shot, of Robin Morgan's face, is a graphic match on the face of the woman in this photograph, and lends textual support to Morgan's role as one who speaks for the oppression of women by pornography.

But not all of the sympathetic testimony is supported through temporal positioning and stylistic strategies, and such strategies are not the only means by which the political position of the film is heard. Of course, stylistic strategies don't determine everything; what the witnesses say can itself align them for or against the voice of the film. Former pornographic film actor Marc Stevens, for example, says that he was forced to perform acts he found degrading to the women he worked with, and that this is the reason he quit the business. The spectator will fit this testimony into the fabric of the film's voice, since it is supported by so much other textual material. Despite its disparate materials and varied modes of discourse, then, the overall voice of *Not a Love Story* is clear. The strategy of including the testimony of persons affiliated with pornography creates a dense fabric of alternative perspectives, out of which the film weaves a coherent position on pornography.

In the open style, the filmmaker may let oppositional interviews stand, with no attempt to weave them into a unified argument, position, or thread of logical progression. Errol Morris's *Vernon, Florida* (1980), for example, consists almost solely of bizarre interviews with various folks in the small town of the film's title. The film's structure constitutes no argument or narrative, but gives us a pastiche of personality portraits, sometimes cross-cutting between the longer interviews and returning to characters with longer stories to tell (as in the case of the enthusiastic turkey hunter). Similarly, the *Frontline* documentary "L.A. is Burning: Five Stories from a Divided City" (1993), asks five persons to narrate their perspectives on the causes and outcome of the

Los Angeles riots following the Rodney King debacle. The persons interviewed represent diverse ethnicities and points of view, but the discourse makes no attempt to weave their words into a unified account. The film also includes shorter interviews with several other persons. Again, this unwillingness to take sides is a matter of degree, because the film is structured in such a way that the most extreme perspectives – of those who justify the beating of trucker Reginald Denny, for example – are subtly undermined.

Musical Accompaniment

Formal style aims for organic unity. That is, all film techniques finally work together in unity of function. Thus we can ask how music relates to images, to other sounds, and to the text as a whole. Does music assert propositions about the projected world? Does it communicate voice? Does it have an effect on the spectator? What is its communicative function?

For opera, German composer Richard Wagner advocated a total synthesis of drama and music, a synthesis in which musical structure is wholly determined by dramatic action. One manifestation of this is the leitmotif, a musical trademark by which a character is marked and identified. Filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, in his post-1930 writings, conceived of film music in similar fashion.¹⁷ Eisenstein thought of the wedding of music and picture in relation to *synaesthesia*, the process by which similar sense impressions or other mental states are generated by different perceptual media. Thus a film sequence and a musical segment can be said to have a similar rhythm or tone, for example. Eisenstein's famous example of the combination of music and image according to "fundamental movements" is from the "Battle on the Ice" sequence of *Alexander Nevsky* (1938). Here he finds a correspondence between the movement of the music, considered in abstract, psychological terms, and the movement of the eye over the plastic lines of composition.

Eisenstein's analysis of the use of music and image in *Alexander Nevsky* remains unpersuasive; his concept of "fundamental movement" as applied to music and to images is ambiguous for both media.¹⁸ Nevertheless, his thoughts about synaesthesia are a good starting point for a study of the place of music within filmic representation, for Eisenstein worked along paths which contemporary cognitive studies of music would soon follow. One contemporary psychologist, Terrence McLaughlin, has used the findings of modern physiology to analyze the

place of music within communication.¹⁹ His conclusion, in summary, is that music is made up of patterns of tension and resolution corresponding to patterns of tensions and resolution in the brain caused by mental and bodily events. Thus various patterns of music have a fittingness with the mental activity caused by physical action and other human experiences. Whether this process is genetic and/or culturally determined, and whether certain types of music have a natural affinity with our experiences or one based on habit and convention, is a difficult question beyond our present scope. Yet clearly, music carries with it an experiential character; when music is combined with images, this character colors the spectatorial experience by means of a fittingness with other aspects of mental and physical life.

By itself, music provides no factual information, as images can. Neither does it convey propositions or conceptual information about the projected world, as voice-over can. Instead, music provides an experiential, emotional character to the spectator's experience, and thus supports the preferred interpretation of the film's voice. Its primary function is not to assert propositions about the projected world, but to evoke emotion or perceptual activity – to help create the *experiential envelope* in which the spectator views the film. The expression or evocation of emotion is one of its primary functions. *The Battle of Midway* uses familiar songs to evoke pride in both country and armed forces. During the opening credits, we hear a variation on "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and during a lull in the battle, while the flag is being raised, the "National Anthem." After the battle has been won and the enemy vanquished, we hear a medley of the fighting songs of all four divisions of the American armed forces – "The Air Force Song," "Anchors Away," "The Marine Hymn," and "Over There" – in energetic celebration. Thus the film not only relates the events depicted, but makes use of music to represent them with a nationalistic emotional force.

The "experiential envelope" consists in part of created moods. A well-designed musical score contributes a great deal to the mood of the spectator, and to the mental frame she uses to interpret the events of the film. For example, the musical scores of Phillip Glass for Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* and *A Brief History of Time* suggest an air of mystery and fate. The folk singing of the coal miners in *Harlan County, U.S.A.* creates identification between the viewer and the striking miners. The plaintive violin and guitar of Ken Burns' *The Civil War* convey the sadness of the loss of precious human lives.

But the evocation of emotion is only one of many varied commu-

nicative functions music brings to film. Music may reinforce the preferred interpretation of a scene in other than strictly affective contexts, lending credence to an assertion or implication about the projected world. In *The Battle of Midway*, we see a short interlude about the "natives" of Midway, not humans but clumsy dodo-like birds with a self-important strut. While the birds waddle humorously, the "whomp, whomp" wails and descending scales of a trombone connote the birds' vainglorious pretensions, as interpreted by the film. Later, the Japanese and Tojo are associated with these "natives" when the camera pans from the wreck of a crashed Japanese plane to a shot of the birds strutting, as though reality has revealed the false pretenses of the enemies' boasting, represented to be as empty as the strut of these birds.

Music may be used ironically, again in tandem with the project of the film. Irony is the dominant device of *Roger and Me*. The spectator who catches on to this takes nothing in the film at face value. Every gesture and facial expression; everything said or shown becomes a new opportunity for subtle (or not-so-subtle) innuendo and a laugh. *Roger and Me* undermines some of what it presents through ironic uses of film technique, often including the juxtaposition of discordant images and music. For example, we hear the Beach Boys' "Wouldn't it Be Nice" while the camera tracks by dilapidated Flint homes and businesses. *Roger and Me* ends at Christmas, but the film uses traditional Christmas music ironically, from the version of "Jingle Bells" barked by a dog, to the choir at the General Motors Christmas celebration, whose singing is used as a backdrop to images of unemployed auto workers as they are evicted from their homes.

Is music used in any special way in formally styled nonfiction films? Because music often implies the authority to interpret events, open style tends to avoid nondiegetic music altogether, as I discuss below. But formal style forges ahead in its use of music to give a perspective toward and assert propositions about the projected world. For example, it signifies emotion, cueing various aspects of the narrative or interpreting narrative events. Music also helps provide unity and continuity. Music in William Wyler's *The Memphis Belle* (1944) provides a fine example. *The Memphis Belle* follows the missions of a "Flying Fortress" as it participates in a particularly ambitious and dangerous bombing mission over Nazi Germany during World War II. Music provides continuity between scenes and unity for the whole project. The music signifies "appropriate" emotions, becoming dramatic during the bombing scene and return to home base, and soft and contemplative as the film shows

wounded airmen and damaged planes. When the King and Queen of England appear to congratulate the victorious men, a drum roll signifies the importance of the occasion, and regal music expresses Their Majesties' royal standing.

Music also gives narrative cues. *The Memphis Belle* begins with shots of the England tourists have come to know, with rolling fields and small villages, each with a centuries-old stone church. But things are not as they seem. The voice-over dramatically announces that this is "a battle front." We see a montage of bombers hidden in the landscape, from various angles and distances; the music emphasizes each cut with a loud and dramatic note, as though each shot is meant to drive home the fact that this peaceful English countryside is not the idyll it initially seems to be.

As I said, the open style – especially in observational films – might be expected to avoid music altogether, since it directs the spectator in ways antithetical to the requirements of the open voice. For the most part this is true, but many observational filmmakers cannot resist the inclusion of at least some nondiegetic music, especially in the more self-conscious beginnings and endings of their films. Even the purist Fred Wiseman featured nondiegetic music in *High School*. The opening sequence consists of a series of traveling shots, moving toward the school. We see houses, garages, stores, billboards, and finally the high school itself, looking (as many have observed) much like a factory with its smokestack jutting prominently in front. The traveling shots give the sense of a journey, with the school as the final destination. On the soundtrack we hear Otis Redding's "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay," a song about a man who leaves Georgia in search of a better life, only to find his situation unimproved in San Francisco. Over the black and white shots of the drab city streets, Redding's song tells of inertia and hopelessness. Occupying such a privileged position, the sequence sets a definite tone for the film and establishes an attitude toward the high school. It seems to imply that the high school dooms its students to the inertia and failure that is the subject of Redding's song.

As with voice-over narration, it seems clear that we have only begun to describe the uses of music in the documentary. The relationships between music, image, and text are inventive; each use may be idiosyncratic, such that no prior theoretical account can exhaust their formal possibilities. For the formal style, however, we can make at least the following generalization. Music serves a unifying function in the formal text, helping to develop the projected world and contributing to the

rhetorical project of the film. Because the open voice often avoids overt marks of narration, the use of nondiegetic music is rare in such films.

The Formal Voice Returns

The function of formal style is uniform; it supports the film's rhetorical project. In addition, formal style strives for denotational clarity and discourse coherence. Style serves as a conduit through which the discourse asserts propositions about the projected world, and through which its voice can be heard. One of the most important functions of style in the formal voice is to develop the authoritative epistemological stance of the discourse.

Bill Nichols has examined the means by which style makes the discursive voice come forward. As I mentioned, he devised a typology of modes that marshal style and technique in different ways, and create varied forms of discursive voice. Nichols' forms or modes of documentary – expository, observational, interactive, and reflexive – are suggestive because they offer a framework at once historically descriptive and heuristically insightful. The modes are historical because they follow a rough order of chronological development, from Griersonian documentary with its "Voice-of-God" commentary (expository) to direct cinema (observational) to films incorporating interviews and/or the filmmaker's presence (interactive) to films acknowledging their constructedness and foregrounding representation itself (reflexive). On the other hand, the four modes have heuristic value because they represent four alternative styles of nonfiction filmmaking, and four different assumptions about the proper means of constructing textual voice and authority.²⁰

Both Nichols and Thomas Waugh find the films of Emile de Antonio to be emblematic of Nichols' fourth mode, the reflexive, or what Waugh calls the new American documentary.²¹ Waugh finds fault in observational cinema because although it postures as objective – or critics claim it does – the films in fact take strong attitudes toward their subjects. The new American documentary, on the other hand, openly exhibits a rhetorical and political commitment. Nichols claims that reflexive films also imply a more enlightened attitude toward the world: "De Antonio's films produce a world of dense complexity: they embody a sense of constraint and over-determination. Not everyone can be believed. Not everything is true . . . de Antonio proposes ways and means to reconstruct the past dialectically."²² Interactive documen-

taries using interviews may suffer from a diffusion of discursive authority, the sometimes unsuccessful blending of interviewed voices with the overall voice of the film. But de Antonio's films do not accept the testimony of witnesses at face value. In his work, differing and tangential perspectives paint a complex picture of history. Yet in the midst of this complexity, de Antonio asserts his perspective – the voice of the film.

Both Waugh and Nichols, I submit, call for a return to a particular manifestation of the formal voice. Their praise for the new American documentary is primarily based on its openly rhetorical stance, its willingness to make assertions about the actual world, and its simultaneous communication of the world's complexities. But it stops short of the postmodernist rejection of meaning and reference. Waugh expresses contempt for direct cinema in its attempt to observe rather than analyze, for its supposed duplicitous submersion of explicit point of view in its attempts at pure observation. Waugh calls instead for analysis and explanation. He does not advocate "overarching solutions" (to political and social problems, presumably), but nonetheless favors the penetration and unsettling of the "liberal equilibrium." His recommendations imply a preference for discursive authority over hesitant observation, and a simultaneous acknowledgment of the world's complexities.

Nichols claims that the New American Documentaries avoid "the apparent simplicities of an unquestioned empiricism (the world and its truths exist; they need only be dusted off and reported)" and that they "produce a world of dense complexity."²³ Nichols, then, finds de Antonio's films to more *accurately* convey the complexity or magnitudes of the world. Furthermore, in calling for the clear "voice" of the filmmaker in political films, Nichols implicitly advocates explanation over observation, and the formal over the open voice.

Both cases show that the formal epistemic function of nonfiction is not a thing of the past, and not an archaic or discarded relic. On the contrary, it has returned in the "new American documentary," although in a contemporary form. We see it in films such as *Not a Love Story*, *The Thin Blue Line*, *Harlan County, USA*, the films of Emile de Antonio, and many others. This form retains the epistemic authority of formal discourse, but unlike some films, reflects or preserves a sense of the complexities and magnitudes of the world. These films move toward knowledge, but present knowledge as difficult, complex, ambiguous – never final and never easy.

CHAPTER 9

The Poetic Voice

Francis Thompson's *N.Y., N.Y.* (1958) sets its camera on familiar urban street scenes in New York City, but films them with prisms, "funhouse" mirrors, and distorting lenses. Bruce Baillie's *Valentin de las Sierras* (1967) was produced in Mexico, and as the title suggests, is a poetic tribute to the Mexican Sierras, and particularly to the people of Chapala, a small village. It features extreme close-up photography, numerous jump cuts, and a seemingly random structure of information. Chris Marker's *Letter from Siberia* (1957) presents itself as a travelog about Siberia, but spends a disproportionate amount of time on one citizen's pet bear, features silly poems and songs, and includes an animated tribute to dancing woolly Mammoths. Clearly, not all nonfiction films easily fit the open and formal categories. Many fall through the cracks of these broad groupings, and not surprisingly, these can be some of the most creative and interesting films.

An account of the nonfiction film that neglects alternatives to the formal and open voices would be incomplete. Although films of the formal and open voices differ in their methodologies, they both perform a central function of the documentary: providing information through explanation, observation, or exploration. If the nonfiction film is a category with fuzzy boundaries, like the category "game," we would expect to find films with alternate functions. The alternative genres I describe here – the poetic documentary, avant-garde film, parodic documentary, and metadocumentary – tend to foreground aesthetic concerns over teaching, exploit a tension between representation and composition, or alternatively, invert observation or explanation into explicit self-analysis.¹ This isn't a matter of exclusive oppositions. I hope I've made it clear that films of the open and formal voices both depend on aesthetics – that is, structure and stylistics. Similarly, it would be wrong to say that poetic films neither observe, explore, nor