

REPRESENTING REALITY

Issues and Concepts in Documentary

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THE DOMAIN OF DOCUMENTARY

Documentary Dimensions

Can we love the cinema and Plato, too? If our love is for the feature fiction film, the answer would surely be, "No." Movies as reflections, though an imprecise analogy and one that denies all the *work* of the cinema as apparatus, institution, and textual structure, does capture both the fascination and the taint of cinema. In fact, the fascination with reflections is part of the taint, at least in the Platonic tradition. The reflection is a diversion. It draws us away from something we ought to behold more directly. Distortions impinge in ways that cannot be ascertained. Presidigitations occur just beyond our line of sight, deceiving us with trompe l'oeil effects.

As Plato himself put it, "When the mind's eye is fixed on objects illuminated by truth and reality [the sun], it understands and knows them, and its possession of intelligence is evident; but when it is fixed on the twilight world of change and decay, it can only form opinions, its vision is confused and its opinions shifting, and it seems to lack intelligence."¹ Cinema presents us with the images of things. Images are mimetic distractions and counterfeits; they cannot engage our reason nor nourish our hunger for Truth.

If our love is for documentary film, the answer may be less obvious, but, finally, it is still "No." Nonnarrative is but another part of cinema, perhaps all the more devious for claiming to be above the deceptive means with which it makes its point (moving images). Images are mysterious imitations of the very things that written language can demystify, make into an object of knowledge, and render available for productive purposes. At best images may *illustrate* a point that must finally return to words for its meaning or implications.

Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare—these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself, they can effect action and entail consequences. Their discourse has an air of sobriety since it is seldom receptive to "make-believe" characters, events, or entire worlds (unless they serve as pragmatically

useful simulations of the "real" one). Discourses of sobriety are sobering because they regard their relation to the real as direct, immediate, transparent. Through them power exerts itself. Through them, things are made to happen. They are the vehicles of domination and conscience, power and knowledge, desire and will. Documentary, despite its kinship, has never been accepted as a full equal.

This is a little odd inasmuch as documentary film often builds itself around the spoken word. Works from Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series (1942-45) on the reasons for United States involvement in World War II to Ken Burns's *The Civil War* (1990) would be subject to endless interpretation if we had nothing but their extraordinarily diverse and historically intriguing images to guide us. Commentary points us toward the light, the truth. In a more modern way of discussing reason and its own shadow-realm of the irrational, fiction attends to unconscious desires and latent meanings. It operates where the id lives. Documentary, on the other hand, attends to social issues of which we are consciously aware. It operates where the reality-attentive ego and superego live. Fiction harbors echoes of dreams and daydreams, sharing structures of fantasy with them, whereas documentary mimics the canons of expository argument, the making of a case, and the call to public rather than private response. It clearly is the fiction film that should be designated as marginal, deviant, and perhaps perverse, at least in relation to the historically prevalent ideologies of our culture. Why, then, is documentary not spared the same opprobrium?

Essentially, documentary films appear as pale reflections of the dominant, instrumental discourses in our society. If movies (fiction) "reflect" our culture, and if this mirror image is the fundamental, determining definition of cinema, then documentaries, too, must pass through this "defile" of a reflection. Instead of directly confronting an issue or problem, the discourse must ricochet off this image-based, illusionistic medium of entertainment. Documentary's alliance with the discourses of sobriety falls under attack due to the imagistic company it keeps.

A deep-rooted response in documentary filmmaking has been vigorous dissociation from the distracting shadow-play of fiction. Early documentarists were particularly vehement in their judgments of the fiction film. Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov and British documentarists like John Grierson, Paul Rotha, Humphrey Jennings, and Basil Wright drew harsh and unflattering comparisons between the fiction film industry and both the formal potential of cinema and the social purpose of documentary. They lambasted Hollywood as a symbol for escapist, metreticulous spectacles. If documentary also depended on images they were at least grounded in more formally innovative and socially responsible motives and intentions.

But such attacks did not win the documentary equal footing with the written essay or book, the scientific survey or report. This higher level of factual, pragmatic discourse about real-life issues remains controlling. It conforms to the preoccupation with production in all its guises that domi-

nates our culture. The preference for nonfiction, nonnarrative, instrumental knowledge and "hard" science complements the engine of progress and capitalism's productive power as a socioeconomic system. This is so commonsensical that it goes without saying. Our weekly magazines subscribe to the discourses of sobriety, beginning with politics and economics and devolving, in the hintermost pages, to movies, books, art, and obituaries. And to prove the point by the exception, late-night talk shows—where a steady stream of celebrities and stars replace the politicians, issues, and dilemmas—feature such individuals precisely because the talk is understood to be inconsequential and diverting. Talk shows market "good conversation" as entertainment. Serious pronouncements are not welcome.

The hierarchy of topics in news magazines, the organization of television news, the nature of talk show conversation all confirm the persistence of the biases that early documentarists sought to overcome. Images may fascinate but they also distract. Productive and interpretive power resides in words. Documentary may also rely on words but these function partly to distract us from the images to which they are companions.

But what of the bond between image and reality? There is, indeed, a distinctive bond between a photographic image and that of which it is a record.² Something of reality itself seems to pass through the lens and remain embedded in the photographic emulsion. If we consider the imaginary realm of fiction as having a metaphoric relation to history and lived experience—as a kind of carefully shaped, translucent cloud that displays contours and shapes, patterns and practices that closely resemble the ones we encounter in our own lives, we might think of documentary as a mode where this fictive cloud has settled back to earth. The elevation provided by metaphor, the sense of remove, is drained away as special properties of photographic film and magnetic tape hold the documentary image to the exact shapes and contours, patterns and practices, of the historical world. We expect to apply a distinct form of literalism (or realism) to documentary. We are less engaged by fictional characters and their destiny than by social actors and destiny itself (or social praxis). We prepare ourselves not to comprehend a story but to grasp an argument. We do so in relation to sounds and images that retain a distinct bond to the world we all share.

But the ability of photographic images (and magnetically recorded sound) to replicate what it records has not elevated documentary to the ranks of the other discourses of sobriety. For one thing, all photographic and motion picture images made according to the prevailing conventions that allow light reflected from physical objects to be registered on photosensitive film or videotape will exhibit a distinctive bond between image and object. (Digital sampling techniques destroy this claim; this study is limited to nondigitized imagery.) The bond of image to object will not, therefore, certify the historical status of the object nor the credibility of an argument; later, we will pursue these points in greater detail. Most documentary films also adopt many of the strategies and structures of narrative

(though not necessarily those of the popular entertainment film). Compounding the difficulty, many "social problem" fiction films are made with as civic-minded and socially responsible a purpose as many documentaries. Thus documentary fails to identify any structure or purpose of its own entirely absent from fiction or narrative. The terms become a little like our everyday, but unrigorous, distinction between fruits and vegetables.

In the Shadow of Plato

Narrative as a mechanism for storytelling seems quite different from documentary as a mechanism for addressing nonimaginary, real-life issues. But not all narratives are fictions. Exposition can incorporate large elements of narrative, as historical writing vividly demonstrates. Documentary can depend on narrative structure for its basic organization, as American cinema verité demonstrated by taking shape around a crisis. (This shape provides a beginning from which an unstable state of affairs emerges, a middle in which a problem gains in force and complexity, and an ending in which some form of resolution occurs.) Documentary form may also incorporate concepts of character development and subjectivity, continuity or montage editing, and the invocation of off-screen space. Like fiction, documentary can also suggest that its perceptions and values belong to its characters, or adhere to the historical world itself: the film merely reveals what we could have seen around us had we, too, looked with a patient, discerning eye. Just as the looks, speech, and gestures of characters can seem to propel a story along all by themselves, so the eye of the documentary camera in the hands of a Robert Flaherty or Fred Wiseman can seem to reveal qualities of the historical world that were there all along.³

No, documentary cannot be loved if we seek (Platonic) truth. Nor can it be loved if we reject the Platonic ideal forms but swing instead to a condemnation of simulations and simulacra. Jean Baudrillard chooses this latter tack, reviving Platonism for a postmodern world. In *The Evil Demon of Images* Baudrillard has this to say:

The secret of the image . . . must not be sought in its differentiation from reality, and hence in its representative value (aesthetic, critical or dialectical), but on the contrary in its "telescoping" into reality, its short-circuit with reality, and finally, in the implosion of image and reality. For us there is an increasingly definite lack of differentiation between image and reality which no longer leaves room for representation as such. . . .

There is a kind of primal pleasure, of anthropological joy in images, a kind of brute fascination unencumbered by aesthetic, moral, social or political judgments. It is because of this that I suggest they are immoral, and that their fundamental power lies in this immorality.⁴

Baudrillard no longer perceives a reality out there but only images that

simulate something that is no longer accessible except through these simulations. It is as though the entrance to Plato's cave were sealed off and all we can see behind us, casting shadows on the wall, are the figures on the parapet. These figures, though, are not the world of historical reality. They are themselves there in order to cast shadows; that is their function and reality. Nothing else exists behind or beyond them; the only other thing are the shadows that make up a circular implosion of image and reality, signs and what they refer to. Reality has been constituted by and for the shadow-play it entertains. We can no longer say that there is some structure or concept for which the figures on the parapet are an imitation and the images on the wall but copies of this copy. All metaphors of depth and abstraction, of "higher" or "deeper" levels of meaning and reality collapse into the endless surface of simulations and simulations of simulations.

Intriguing as these assertions are, I do not accept them. This book is devoted to another set of propositions, ones in which the separation between an image and what it refers to continues to be a difference that makes a difference. Our access to historical reality may only be by means of representations, and these representations may sometimes seem to be more eager to chase their own tails than able to guarantee the authenticity of what they refer to. Neither of these conditions, however, precludes the persistence of history as a reality with which we must contend. Baudrillard, like Plato, carries things to an extreme; in his case it is an extreme of nihilism rather than idealism. It is quite possible, however, to accept the grain of truth about the immorality of images in Baudrillard's argument without jumping into a nihilist sandbox with him. Lives continue to be lost in events such as the invasion of Grenada even if such a "war" is reported and perceived far more as a simulation of war than war itself. The reality of pain and loss that is not part of any simulation, in fact, is what makes the difference between representation and historical reality of crucial importance. It is not beyond the power of documentary to make this difference available for consideration.

There is one other little problem with Plato's critique of the image, if not Baudrillard's: we are not a bit closer to the society envisioned in Plato's *Republic* than socialist states have been to the communitarianism envisioned by Marx. The idealism that informs Plato's utopian *Republic* extends beyond the notion that images are but copies from which we must, however reluctantly, free ourselves. His conception of knowledge and his philosopher as ruler are uncontaminated not only by the dross of worldly distractions but also by ideology and desire.

"The true philosopher," Plato reminds us, "has no time to look at the affairs of men, or to take part in their quarrels with all the jealousy and bitterness they involve. His eyes are turned to contemplate fixed and immutable realities, a realm where there is no injustice done or suffered, but all is reason and order, and which is the model which he imitates and to which he assimilates himself as far as he can."⁵ And, Plato continues, the

Guardians or Rulers "must be told that they have no need of mortal and material gold and silver, because they have in their hearts the heavenly gold and silver given them by the gods as a permanent possession, and it would be wicked to pollute the heavenly gold in their possession by mixing it with earthly, for theirs is without impurity, while that in currency among men is a common source of wickedness. They alone, therefore, of all the citizens are forbidden to touch or handle silver or gold. . . . Upon this their safety and that of the state depends."⁶

Plato does away not only with greed but also jealousy and possessiveness since desire in all its forms is a manifestation of the contrary of reason—the irrational. The family and all of its neuroses and perversions dissolve as sex becomes an exercise in genetics rather than libidinous cathexes: "our men and women Guardians should be forbidden by law to live together in separate households, and all the women should be common to all the men; similarly, children should be held in common, and no parent should know his child, or child its parent."⁷

The quest for the reasoned life takes its toll, but more to the point, the uses of reason are far more diverse, complexly layered, and potentially nefarious than Plato would tolerate. The impurity of images is not the final impediment to truth but part and parcel of a culture in which Plato's Republic remains an (impossible) ideal. Our Guardians and their "auxiliaries" (the professional, managerial class) sit comfortably at the table of "irrational" desires. They freely touch the forbidden fruits of monetary reward and capital accumulation, and they, like us, arise from and, in their turn, give rise to that succession of family affairs Freud did so much to begin to unravel. In short, reason stands in service to the society that deploys it but not disinterestedly. There is the matter of ideology to consider when we speak of reason and justice. Ideology, which Plato might have understood as opinion and belief, if at all, is far harder to expunge from the pages of history than from a utopia.

The Image and Ideology

The dependence of ideology on images and the imaginary (a psychic realm of significant images around which our sense of identity forms) makes the image, copy, representation, and likeness a far more central and dynamic category than Plato would have admitted. Ideologies, beginning with those of gender, will attach themselves to this imaginary sense of self. (Our identity begins with our likeness to and difference from our mothering and fathering parents.) Ideologies will also offer representations in the form of images, concepts, cognitive maps, worldviews, and the like to propose frames and punctuation to our experience. Such ideologies and images are inescapable. No outside exists to the conceptual envelope they establish. Images are at the heart of our construction as subjects and

perhaps for that reason images are also impugned as imprecise, unscientific, *unmanageable* things in need of subordination and control.

And yet images are not quite as unmanageable as they appear. They can be joined together with words or other images into systems of signs, and hence, meaning. They can be framed and organized into a text. Semiology addresses this broad domain of signification, and one of the favorite objects of semiotic scrutiny in the 1970s was the cinema, especially that dominant-but-marginal cinema of the narrative film that banishes the rest of film with the catch-all phrase of "nonnarrative." Semiotics and, after it, psychoanalysis, turn attention to fiction films where they analyze the work of the unconscious and its affinities with ideology. The fiction film presents a cornucopia of symptoms of social and male disease; of real contradictions resolved by sleight of hand or not at all; of projections working to represent women as an imaginary figure, Woman, in her various (stereotypical) guises; of desires sparked and circulated as part of an economy working—at some risk to itself, to be sure—to manage contradiction and propose utopian ideals immune from the very ideologies that underwrote their construction.

If documentary remained marginal in all of this it was because it was not marginal enough. It did not seem to betray with the same intensity, once decoded or its internal gaps and fissures detected, the same central contradictions of gender, race, class, or nationality. It might well address these issues and be susceptible to analyses that would reveal blind spots, hidden assumptions, and faulty conclusions, but the deep structure of the unconscious would slip away, undetected and unconfounded. Ideology would remain at large.

This assumption of documentary's complicity with the dominant discourses of sobriety and, so situated, its lack of a royal road to the unconscious and the secret underbelly of society relegated it to subordinate status in critical theory, a position mirroring its subordination to those primary discourses whose servant documentary was presumed to be: cultural geography for the nature film; history for the historical documentary; sociology and political science for the social issue film; symbolic interactionism for American cinema vérité (a more covert referent than some of the others); anthropology and written ethnography for the ethnographic film; "real" science for the "scientific" or educational film; the vanguard party, radical left, or the conservative alliances and reactionary right for the films of political contestation. Dr. Helen Caldicott's antinuclear speech can be a moving experience for an audience, but why attend or scrutinize a film of it (*If You Love This Planet*) when there is a wealth of printed information from experts to be examined? Why dwell on films that are merely imitations of concepts and images generated elsewhere when the controlling discourse is itself available for scrutiny?

This, however, is to neglect the extent to which image, ideology, and utopia are fundamentally joined. Images help constitute the ideologies that

determine our own subjectivity; images make incarnate those alternative subjectivities and patterns of social relation that provide our cultural ideals or utopian visions. The critique of the image made eminent sense within the frame of nineteenth-century liberal thought where the word reigned supreme. Now the word has troubles of its own. Language can seem a prison-house confining us to a fixed range of predetermined possibilities and barring any more direct access to the real beyond its bounds. To the extent language speaks us rather than we it, we find that the critique of the copy now applies to language itself (it fabricates a world after its own image) although the hope of retrieving or attaining that lost object of the real has also faded.

Documentary film may not provide as direct or scenic a route to the unconscious as most fiction does. Documentary films, though, are part and parcel of the discursive formations, the language games, and rhetorical stratagems by and through which pleasure and power, ideologies and utopias, subjects and subjectivities receive tangible representation. In the beginning was the Word but now there is television—and photographs, movie theaters, the political campaigns of press conferences and photo opportunities, choreographed debates and paid advertisements, the spectacles of space shuttles, Olympic contests, and living room wars.⁸ Dimensions of documentary contribute to all of this. The goal of documenting reality, the hope of arriving at a final resting point where "reason and order," truth and justice prevail, of achieving freedom and diversity within a frame of perfect symmetry, recedes.

Historical reality is under siege. Imperfect utopias and diverse affinities propose themselves as alternatives to the ordered lives constructed by the master narratives of Christian salvation, capitalist progress, or Marxist revolution. Less tainted by its reliance on an image that has become ubiquitous and formative, documentary's alliance with the dominant discourses of the day returns as the fundamental concern but no longer in terms of a supporting or ancillary role. Instead the propagation of images is all about us. The displacement of images and movies, marking both a dominant feature film industry and a marginal nonnarrative cinema, draws on both idealist and pragmatic traditions to promote the illusion that that which affects us most—images—matters least.

Documentary, like other discourses of the real, retains a vestigial responsibility to describe and interpret the world of collective experience, a responsibility that is no small matter at all. But even more, it joins these other discourses (of law, family, education, economics, politics, state, and nation) in the actual construction of social reality. Dziga Vertov advocated in his writings and his films an active process of social construction, including the construction of the viewer's historical-materialist consciousness, and Walter Benjamin, in his seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," foresaw the degree to which the image would be placed in the service of the dominant ideology as spectacle and distrac-

tion but would also retain the explosive potential to reassemble time and space into whatever order one desired: "Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling."⁹

John Berger, in his provocative series of four films, *Ways of Seeing*, carries Benjamin's declaration forward into the latter half of the twentieth century. Berger demonstrates, with sound and images of his own, how the oil painting tradition has passed on many of its functions to photography and, in particular, to advertising. Advertising constructs a view of the world that is at once "mad" and yet irresistible. It constructs mystique-laden objects that threaten to occupy our future, to provide the target for our desire. Advertising constructs the subjectivity that sustains such desires inside of us. This is no mere documentation but an active process of fabrication, if not of physical objects then of a production of meanings and values, concepts and orientations to surround them. Such fabrications propose specific forms of social relation with distinctive places for men and women, rich and poor, First and Third World, black and white. The connotations and assumptions that result occupy our imagination and become a fundamental part of our mental landscape even as we retain the potential to qualify, contest, subvert, or overthrow this particular regime of the visible. "Reality" is ours for the making.

Maryknoll World Video has produced, and distributes by mail, an extraordinary three-part series, *Consuming Hunger*, that addresses the issue of famine in Africa in terms similar to John Berger's approach to painting and advertising. Like the commodity, famine is made and cut to measure. A social reality is produced, in images, by discourses of the real, not by the discourse of fiction. We look past this act of production to the "fact" of famine at our own peril. In this case the organizing agent for our image of famine is television news and the first two parts of the series unravel the narrative braid with which this "story" has been told. What does it take for a historical event to gain entry into the circulatory system of prime time news, especially if there are no publicists to make a case for it? When does the "ordinary" matter of individual death and the occasional misfortune of starvation reach an order of magnitude that requires comment? What evidence must be provided, aurally or visually, before the event can be brought before our attention as a "tragedy" and why, despite the similarity of this tragedy with its representation, does the newscast keep its distance, asking nothing more of us than that we lend an ear?

Such representations play on and derive from longstanding assumptions about the Third World, Africa, the iconography of plagues and disasters, and the mythologies that address the causation of "natural" events like famine. So did the organized response that arose in 1985, aimed at a mass

level by means of such events as the Live-Aid concert heard round the world. As *Consuming Hunger* argues, such events construct their own representation of disaster, offer their own image of (charitable) response, provide a modus for self-congratulation similar to that ascribed to the purchase of a commodity ("Oh, what a feeling!" "Reach out, reach out and touch someone") and transferred to the joy of offering a helping hand, painlessly, with a simple phone call and a modest pledge, and erase from sight questions of economics, self-help, and Third World assistance, or even more, Third World perspectives.

The last thing such mega-events need is to hear from those who have been nominated to stand as victims. It suffices to see them, nameless but not faceless, desperate and without dignity, aware but silenced. For a great many people, these images and these representations will be, if not the sum total of their knowledge, a dominating factor in their awareness. Such representations actively construct a historical reality we may not otherwise see—cobbling much of it together from shards of myth and fact, from the tissue of sometimes contradictory ideologies already circulating within the culture.

Films like *Ways of Seeing* and *Consuming Hunger* enter the fray, putting another construction on things, qualifying and contesting those that prevail. Across the spectrum of issues and values that throb with the urgency of unresolved contradiction, representations are made, images and subjectivities proposed. The subordination of the image was Plato's folly, its equation with reality Baudrillard's. In an age of mechanical production/photographic reproduction, electronic dissemination/cybernetic simulation we dare not repeat such follies. Our lives and our destiny rest in the balance.

Defining Documentary

Documentary as a concept or practice occupies no fixed territory. It mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set number of issues, and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes. The term *documentary* must itself be constructed in much the same manner as the world we know and share. Documentary film practice is the site of contestation and change. Of greater importance than the ontological finality of a definition—how well it captures the "thingness" of the documentary—is the purpose to which a definition is put and the facility with which it locates and addresses important questions, those that remain unsettled from the past and those posed by the present.

Rather than one, three definitions of documentary suggest themselves since each definition contributes something distinctive and helps identify different sets of concerns. Let us consider documentary from the point of view of the filmmaker, the text, and the viewer. Each starting point leads to

a different yet not contradictory definition. As an ensemble these definitions help demonstrate how we constitute our objects of study and how that very process then determines much of the work that will follow.

One common but misleading way of defining documentary from the point of view of the filmmaker is in terms of control: documentary filmmakers exercise less control over their subject than their fictional counterparts do. Douglas Gomery and Robert Allen adopt this definition in their discussion of cinema *vérité* in *Film History: Theory and Practice*.¹⁰ Gomery and Allen base their definition on one given by an introductory textbook that does not even have a chapter on documentary film (it is subsumed into that great Other of "Nonnarrative Formal Systems"). In *Film Art: An Introduction*, Bordwell and Thompson claim, "We often distinguish a documentary film from a fiction film on the basis of production. Typically, the documentary filmmaker controls only certain variables of preparation, shooting, and assembly; some variables (e.g., script, rehearsal) may be omitted, whereas others (e.g., setting, lighting, behavior of the figures) are present but often uncontrolled."¹¹

Apart from all the qualifiers ("often," "typically," "certain variables," "some," "may"), the definition assumes that the "basis of production" is self-evident, unfalsifiable, and therefore a consistently reliable guide. They ignore the extent to which fiction films can mimic these very qualities or the high degree of control exercised over setting, lighting, and behavior in poetic or classic expository documentaries as well as in more recent works like *The Thin Blue Line* or *Far from Poland*. To define documentary strictly in terms of the filmmaker's control over the variables offered by the definition also sidesteps all the social (versus strictly formal) issues that a consideration of "control" invites: what relations (of power, hierarchy, knowledge) pertain between filmmaker and subject; what forms of sponsorship or consent pertain; who will own and distribute the film and to what end?

In addition, even within the very restricted confines of American cinema *vérité* of the sort practiced by Leacock and Pennnebaker or by Fred Wiseman, where the filmmakers went to great lengths to minimize the effect of their own presence during shooting and tried to let events unfold as if they were not there at all, control over the production phase of the filmmaking was hardly absent.¹² None of these individuals nor other observational filmmakers pretended to forfeit control over what occurred. Their directorial strategy sought to elicit highly naturalistic performances that conveyed the vivid impression of people "being themselves." This required a sophisticated form of nonintervention which, like the techniques of participatory observation or sociological and anthropological field work generally, placed considerable demands on the filmmaker to exercise a type of control that was largely unnoticeable.

Dziga Vertov called for montage before, during, and after shooting a film and the observational filmmakers with their strongly narrative-structured films certainly retained tight control of the before and after. It is also clearly

possible to argue that nonintervention may forfeit control over what occurs in one sense but that it requires considerable control over what occurs in another sense: when people behave "as if the camera were not there," which is often described as something that "just happens," this occurs only under controlled conditions where other forms of behavior are skillfully discouraged. And the crew (often just one or two people) must exercise a high degree of self-control, disciplining themselves in how they cohabit a space from which they also absent themselves. The discipline and control of *mise-en-scène* that would have been directed toward what occurs in front of the camera gets turned on those behind it. They must move and position themselves to record actions without altering or distorting those actions at the same time. This requires a great deal of control and helps explain why so much critical discussion of observational film styles dwells, not at all paradoxically, on that very aspect of filmmaking where control is presumably least: the moment of filming and the work of the camera.

This is so because "control" does define, in a backhanded way, a key element of documentary. What the documentarist cannot fully control is his or her basic subject: history. By addressing the historical domain, the documentarist joins the company of other practitioners who "lack control" over what they do: social scientists, physicians, politicians, entrepreneurs, engineers, and revolutionaries. If the reader detects a small measure of derision in this rebuttal, it is because the notion of control as a defining criterion perpetuates a muddleheadedness about documentary filmmaking scarcely less egregious than claims for the truth of documentary representation or for the self-evidence of facts.

A Community of Practitioners

What does characterize documentary filmmaking generally is its status as an institutional formation. Without taking on the firm outline of those institutions that pursue socially defined goals with specific budgetary commitments, legislative mandates, and criteria for membership such as academia, the priesthood, or the military, documentary filmmaking still displays most of the signs of institutional status. Members are defined, somewhat tautologically but nonetheless meaningfully, as those who make or otherwise engage in the circulation of documentary films; members share a common, self-chosen mandate to represent the historical world rather than imaginary ones: they share similar problems and speak a common language regarding the peculiar nature of this mandate—ranging from questions of the suitability of different film stocks for low levels of available light to the relative importance of voice-over commentary in the structure of a text to the difficulties of reaching their intended audience.

A distinct circuit of distributors and exhibition sites function to close the loop between production and consumption. It operates in a tangential or

marginal manner to the dominant loop of commercial, theatrical distribution, sometimes duplicating it (as happened with *Nemook of the North* or, more recently, *The Thin Blue Line*), more often operating in a parallel but decidedly less commercial vein (ranging in venue from union halls to art galleries). Specialized distributors add density to the institutional nature of the field as do professional organizations like the International Documentary Association, the Film Arts Foundation, and the Foundation for Independent Film and Video (the latter two stressing independent [non-studio based] production generally). Funding sources ranging from individual contributors and special interest groups to national agencies like the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the British Film Institute, or the Canada Council establish definite guidelines and criteria for the support of documentary or independent work. Magazines like *The Independent*, various newsletters from *RAVN* (Royal Anthropological Institute News) to *Release Print*, and specialized conferences, seminars, and festivals such as the Mannheim Documentary Festival, the Flaherty and the Grierson seminars contribute to the sense of institutional and community identity. All these characteristics also have a historical dimension as groups and organizations arise and disband, split or transform, with considerable variation in the intensity and extent of activity by region or nation.

What an institutional definition does is begin to hint at the importance, for the filmmaker, of a shared sense of common purpose. Documentary filmmakers may shape and transform the traditions they inherit, but they do so precisely in dialogue with that tradition and with their cohorts. Such dialogue may be oblique—through the films they make and the innovations these works suggest to others—as well as direct, through conversation, written criticism, or manifestos. At one level we might say documentary is what those who regard themselves as documentarists produce. This begs the question of who defines the documentarists, or, perhaps better, acknowledges that this group is largely self-defining. Rather than proposing any ground or center outside the practices of documentary, such a definition stresses how the field operates by allowing itself to be historically conditioned, unfolding, variable, and perpetually provisional, based on what documentarists themselves consider admissible, what they regard as limits, boundaries, and test cases, how boundaries come to exert the force of a definition, however loosely, and how the qualification, contestation, or subversion of these same boundaries moves from inconsequential anomaly to transformative innovation to accepted practice.

An Institutional Practice

In this light documentary film can be considered as an institutional practice with a discourse of its own. Guided by a fundamental preoccupa-

tion with the representation of the historical world, various organizational principles, patterns of distribution and exhibition, styles, structures, techniques, and modes will arise and contend. As Jean-François Lyotard notes, this process is similar to ordinary conversation but with added constraints:

An institution differs from a conversation in that it always requires supplementary constraints for statements to be declared admissible within its bounds. The constraints function to filter discursive potentials, interrupting possible connections in the communication networks: there are things that should not be said. They also privilege certain classes of statements (sometimes only one) whose predominance characterizes the discourse of the particular institution: these are things that should be said, and there are ways of saying them. Thus, orders in the army, prayer in church, denotation in the schools, narration in families, questions in philosophy, performativity in business [representation in documentary—BN]. Bureaucratization is the outer limit of this tendency.¹³

Documentary filmmaking is a long way from this outer limit of bureaucracy and the rigidification of what can and cannot be said. Still, there are material supports for the discourse that occurs and this apparatus of groups, organizations, festivals and conferences, companies, film, media and journalism schools, funding and sponsoring agencies, and news networks provides for a measure of regulation in the discursive traffic that takes place. The normal process of qualification, contestation, and transformation in the rules of the game proceeds apace in the discourse of documentary, just as they do in the feature fiction film industry where the aesthetic and economic constraints on what can be said and done remain open to change. How things may get said and done—possible patterns of ownership, economic power and artistic control, technical and technological innovation, the development of new stories—works itself out around a different class of characteristic statements often coded under the rubric of “entertainment.” As a governing concept, entertainment may, in fact, come closer to policing the limits of what can be said and the ways of saying it than representation has done for documentary, but, even here, considerable variation can be noted over time and across national boundaries.

Michel Foucault captures something of the fluid nature of an institution, apparatus, or discourse when he describes how the apparently disparate discourses on madness across the centuries need to be organized in relation to their incommensurateness. We need to substitute documentary for madness in reading his comments and to regard his commentary not as the antithesis of Lyotard's emphasis on regulation but as an insistence on avoiding the production of a static essence that neglects the regulation of diversity itself:

The unity of discourses on madness would not be based upon the existence of the object “madness,” or the constitution of a single horizon of objectiv-

ity; it would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearances of objects during a given period of time; objects that are shaped by measures of discrimination and religious casuistry, in medical diagnosis, objects that are manifested in pathological descriptions, objects that are circumscribed by medical codes, practices, treatments and care. Moreover, the unity of the discourses on madness would be the interplay of the rules that define the transformations of these different objects, their non-identity through time, the break produced in them, the internal discontinuity that suspends their permanence. Paradoxically, to define a group of statements in terms of its individuality would be to define the dispersion of these objects, to grasp all the interstices that separate them, to measure the distances that reign between them—in other words, to formulate their law of division.¹⁴

We will take up Foucault's invitation to define the dispersion of the object of study further in a discussion of documentary modes.¹⁵

What Foucault's orientation invites us to recognize is the extent to which our object of study is constructed, and reconstructed, by an array of discursive participants or interpretive communities. For example, a common but no longer inviolate continuity through much of the discourse on and practice of documentary centers on the presumption that it is more important to talk about something than to talk about how we talk about something. In other words, discursive operations themselves tend to occupy an unproblematic position as tool or vehicle for gaining access to something else, which is, most often, the historical world. Documentary may talk about anything in the historical world except itself (until we consider reflexive documentaries where this very presupposition becomes the object of scrutiny). It is hard to be reflexive if you have something urgent to say about a pressing issue, and for most documentarists the urgency of the said takes far higher precedence than the self-consciousness of the saying. This defines one of the classic traits of documentary at the same time that it helps explain why the “discursive formation” it establishes (in Foucault's terms) remains somewhat underdeveloped and unexamined.

Documentary as an institutional practice raises questions of the constraints brought to bear by the various discourses that are in play. These constraints may gain the density of codes, ethical dicta, and ritual practices such as, in observational documentary, continuity editing with synchronous sound, the responsibility of the filmmaker to the institution of documentary above responsibility to the film's subjects (the right of “final cut” remains with the filmmaker not his or her subjects), and a practice of nonintervention in what occurs before the camera. In classic expository documentary these constraints include evidentiary editing (cutting to bring together the best possible evidence in support of a point), the filmmaker's responsibility to make his or her argument as accurately and convincingly as possible even if it requires recontextualizing the points of individual witnesses or experts, and a practice of intervening in what occurs

before the camera by means of the interview but without showing the filmmaker or even including the filmmaker's voice. Individuals will both adhere to and infect these constraints through their filmmaking practice, insuring that the films we call documentary retain a relative autonomy from any final or determining definition for them.

A Corpus of Texts

Another, perhaps even more familiar, way to define documentary is in terms of the texts directly. We might consider documentary a film genre like any other. Films included in the genre would share certain characteristics. Various norms, codes, or conventions display a prominence missing from other genres. Each film establishes internal norms or structures of its own but these frequently share common traits with the textual system or organizing pattern of other documentaries. Many of these distinguishing features of the documentary film are the subject of the following chapters. A few of the most salient can serve here as examples.

Documentaries take shape around an informing logic. The economy of this logic requires a representation, case, or argument about the historical world. The economy is basically instrumental or pragmatic: it operates in terms of problem-solving. A paradigmatic structure for documentary would involve the establishment of an issue or problem, the presentation of the background to the problem, followed by an examination of its current extent or complexity, often including more than one perspective or point of view. This would lead to a concluding section where a solution or path toward a solution is introduced.

Downwind, Downstream, for example, begins with images of the splendor and beauty of the Rocky Mountain high country only to show and inform us how the streams, lakes, and snowpacks are contaminated by heavy metals across much of the Rockies. The film explains how this came to be, going back to the early gold rush days when numerous mines were dug only to be subsequently abandoned. The mineshafts then filled with water which came into contact with heavy metal deposits well below the earth's surface. This contaminated water then leached out or spilled out during the spring run-off. The present-day problem extends still further since mining operations have expanded; this is compounded by smelters that spew acid and metal-laden smoke into the atmosphere that returns to the mountain range as rain. Because of the altitude, plant and animal life is even more susceptible to contamination than surface level ecologies. The quality of drinking water for much of the western United States and the survival of the Rocky Mountain environment are both in jeopardy. The film concludes by returning to individuals who have appeared earlier, giving testimony about the extent of the problem. Now we hear them speaking about organizations and committees, grass-roots activities and governmental job-

bying, individual efforts and legislative reforms that, in aggregate, suggest how the problem may be addressed and, eventually, resolved.

Such a structure occurs in a great many documentaries, although some of the most interesting ones approach this paradigmatic pattern mischievously (for example, *Poto and Cabenga*, *Demon Lover Diary*, *British Sounds*, and *Sans Soleil* all thwart our expectations of finding a well-defined problem and readily available solution). Documentaries that are primarily observational exhibit structures closer to those of narrative fiction: an economy of character-based conflict, complications, and resolution replaces that of problem/solution and documentary logic. Still, the problem/solution structure exerts considerable influence and shapes the organization of scenes as well as full films. A typical scene in narrative fiction establishes time and place; presents characters advancing in their attempts to address the conflict, lack, or disequilibrium, and terminates with suggestions of further actions or response required in another time and place (a new scene). In documentary, a typical scene establishes time and place and a logical tie to previous scenes; it presents the evidential nature of some portion of a larger argument (such as an illustration, example, interview with witness or expert, visual metaphor or sound/image counterpoint), and it terminates with suggestions of how the search for a solution might lead to another scene, in another time or place.

To describe a typical scene is to offer broad generalizations. Many scenes will confound this sketch by appearing to terminate on either the sound or image track but not the other (we jump to another mine site visually in *Downwind, Downstream*, for example, but the same point about heavy metals leaching into ground water continues on the sound track). In fact, documentary scenes are more heavily organized around the principle of sound, or spoken commentary, than fiction scenes. In the *Downwind* example, a visual jump to a municipal swimming pool while someone continued to discuss heavy metal contamination would not necessarily violate the logic of the scene; it may imply that the water in such pools is no longer as safe as we assume. The visual, geographic leap is bridged by a logic of implication. In other words, a documentary film can sustain far more gaps, fissures, cracks, and jumps in the visual appearance of its world even though it represents the familiar, historical world. People and places can appear in a manner that would be disturbingly intermittent in fiction. An intermittent representation of people and places, based on the requirements of a logic, can, in fact, serve as a distinguishing characteristic for documentary.

Documentary film structure generally depends on evidentiary editing in which the classic narrative techniques of continuity editing undergo significant modification. Instead of organizing cuts within a scene to present a sense of a single, unified time and space in which we can quickly locate the relative position of central characters, documentary organizes cuts within a scene to present the impression of a single, convincing argument in which we can locate a logic. Leaps in time or space and the placement of

characters become relatively unimportant compared to the sense of the flow of evidence in the service of this controlling logic. Classic narrative fiction achieves spatial and temporal continuity even if the advance of the plot occurs in the face of leaps in logic. Classic documentary will tolerate gaps or leaps in space and time as long as there is continuity in advancing the argument.

Evidentiary editing achieves a different kind of "match" continuity from that of fiction films. In narrative fiction, two pieces of space are joined together to give the impression of one continuous world that spills beyond the frame in every direction uniformly through such devices as "match action" where an action begun in one shot is completed in the next, or through point-of-view shots which shuttle between views of a character and what the character sees. In documentary, two pieces of space are joined together to give the impression of one continuous argument that can draw on disparate elements of the historical world for evidence. This is a form of control fiction film directors seldom have available outside of classic "montage" sequences connoting a general process.

A "match action" edit may occur in documentary but will be less likely to involve the movements of a character than the "movement" of a logic. A typical example would be the sight of a tree falling matched to a log being fed into a sawmill; the match is still between actions but the emphasis is less on spatial continuity than on the concept of a process: logging. The causality that might in fiction film have been attributed to a character (a man moves toward a chair/cut/he sits down), shifts to the social domain beyond the film (in logging, trees are felled/cut/they are sawn into lumber). In each case the edit is motivated, but in one case the motivation is relayed through an imaginary story, in the other it is relayed through an argument about a social or historical process.

Implicit in this text-centered definition of documentary is the assumption that sounds and images stand as evidence and are treated as such, rather than as elements of a plot. This, in turn, gives priority to the structuring elements of an argument concerned with something external to the text rather than to the structuring elements of a story internal to it. Though shaping a plot and making a case may involve similar forms and strategies, they are also distinct. Stories occur in an imaginary universe however closely based on actual events or characters. Arguments occupy an imaginary space (they are abstract), but, in documentary film, they address or represent issues that arise in the lived, historical world. Stories characteristically depend on plot; arguments, on rhetoric. Stories must be plausible; arguments must, in addition, be persuasive. If we understand the argument, we should be ready to explain it; if we comprehend a story, we should be able to interpret it.

The centrality of argument gives the sound track particular importance in documentary. This is in keeping with the relation between documentary

film and those social discourses of sobriety that circulate through the World. Arguments require a logic that words are able to bear far more easily than images. As one major example, images do not allow for negation. A picture of a pipe is *a picture* of a pipe. (Magritte's *La condition humaine*, with its inscription, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," brings this very quality into the foreground.) Images are concrete. They are always of a particular time and place. Words allow for abstractions like "love" and for designations like "umbrella" that clearly signal the class of objects known as umbrellas without having to refer to any one member of that class. Combinations of images—through editing or montage, intertides, and the juxtaposition of images with sounds—can overcome some of these obstacles, but most documentaries still turn to the sound track to carry much of the general import of their abstract argument.

Documentary relies heavily on the spoken word. Commentary by voice-over narrators, reporters, interviewees, and other social actors figure strongly in most documentary. Although we may well be able to infer the story of many fiction films by watching the succession of images alone (watching a movie on an airplane without headphones will bear this out), we would be hard pressed to infer the argument of a documentary without access to the sound track. In this spirit, the recounting of a situation or event by a character or commentator in documentary frequently has the aura of truthfulness about it. Documentaries usually invite us to take as true what subjects recount about something that happened even if we also see how more than one perspective is possible. (Each recounting conveys a *situated* truth, akin to the varying points of view of characters toward the same event in fiction.) Fiction, though, often invites us to take what characters say about what happened as suspect, more tightly circumscribed or restricted to the knowledge and perspective of a character; other information must also be incorporated. (This is particularly evident in detective films.) In documentary, an event recounted is history reclaimed. Qualification and subjectivity infrequently intrude as complicating factors.

Conversely, documentaries run some risk of credibility in reenacting an event: the special indexical bond between image and historical referent is ruptured. In a reenactment, the bond is still between the image and something that occurred in front of the camera but what occurred occurred *for* the camera. It has the status of an imaginary event, however tightly based on historical fact. Fictions, on the other hand, frequently place greater credibility in reenactments than recountings. We can see and hear what is reputed to have occurred; the reenactment is presented as a (fictional) confirmation of what had merely been alleged. After hearing several verbal accounts of a rape in *The Accused*, we are asked to believe the one account (by a male eyewitness) that is presented as a reenactment. And in *Citizen Kane* we are asked to believe the validity of each of several flashback/reenactments even as the film proposes that the story of Mr.

Kane exceeds them all. (Interestingly, written nonfiction such as *Indecent Exposure*, *Final Cut*, and *All The President's Men* has taken to attaching actual dialogue to accounts of past events. Not burdened with the problem of an actual actor who would approximate without being the historical personage, such dialogue provides a credibility to written accounts that visual reenactments still lack. Written dialogue heightens the sense of authenticity; spoken dialogue the sense of a fiction.)

The structure of the documentary text will also display parallels with other texts. These parallels can be on several different levels. They may pertain to a movement, period, national cinema, style, or mode. Like the concept of genre, these are all ways of characterizing films by their likenesses to rather than their differences from one another. If documentary itself is considered a genre (as well as an institution), subdivisions within documentary may go by other names. A movement is a group of films made by individuals who share a common outlook or objective. Neorealism is a prime example in fiction and American cinema *verité* is one in documentary. A period is a historical unit of time within which the similarities and differences among films take on special importance in reference to the times. The period of the 1930s, for example, saw most documentary work take on a newsreel quality as part of a Depression-era sensibility and a political perspective that stressed social and economic action. The category of national cinema is sometimes useful for identifying characteristics common to work from a given country, usually during a specific period as well. The work of Unit B at the National Film Board of Canada during the late 1950s and 1960s, with its emphasis on marginal groups and unusual practices seen with an ironic or detached but not sensationalistic eye, constitutes one vivid example (in films like *The Back-Breaking Leaf*, *Lonely Boy*, *Quebec, USA*, *Rough-roulant*, *Blood and Fire*, *I Was a Ninety Pound Weakling*, and *The Universe*).

Style refers to the distinctive way an individual filmmaker has of putting things but also to the common way of putting things shared by a collectivity. Style in this second sense becomes similar to an institutional discourse, with rules and constraints governing its operations, rules which are themselves subject to change. Style supports the unfolding of a plot to constitute a story and style supports the unfolding of evidence to make an argument. If there is one style that has characterized documentary most forcefully, it is realism. Realism has been such a widespread and pervasive influence that it fails to offer a particularly distinctive foothold for documentary analysis. The concept itself requires clarification and focus given its pervasiveness in our culture generally. Subcategories of national and historical variation, associated with different forms of technology and distinct articulations of purpose, need to be established. The similarities and differences between realism in the fiction and documentary films (again differentiated into related subcategories such as the Free Cinema in 1950s England and the "kitchen sink" realism of British fiction films at that time, or the American

observational or cinema *verité* documentary and the Italian neorealist cinema) also require extended discussion. These are challenges well worth considering, and are deferred for chapter 6 in order to introduce other subcategories of documentary production here.

Modes of documentary production, for example, identify major historical and formal divisions within the institutional and discursive base in a way that complements studies of style but also grounds them in material practices. Four modes of documentary film practice are discussed in chapter 2: expository (the "classic" mode of documentary), observational, interactive, and reflexive. Each mode establishes a hierarchy of specific conventions or norms that remain flexible enough to incorporate a great deal of stylistic, national, and individual variation without losing the force of an organizing principle. (In observational documentaries noninterference during shooting is more important than maximum-fidelity sound recording; in most interactive documentaries, the filmmaker or interviewer may be seen and heard but the words and gestures of interviewees take precedence over the interviewer's own. In expository documentaries the logic of the argument takes priority over the spatial and temporal continuity between shots.) Practitioners of one mode have much less in common with practitioners of another mode than with each other. They establish a community of their own within the overall institution of documentary film. Modes can carry across different periods and national cinemas. They may begin as a movement (the expository mode seems to have begun with John Grierson; the reflexive with Dziga Vertov; observational with Flaherty, and interactive with Jean Rouch and the National Film Board of Canada), but the mode persists beyond a particular time and place, adding new variations in structure and content.

Modes are something like genres, but instead of coexisting as different types of imaginary worlds (science fiction, westerns, melodrama), modes represent different concepts of historical representation. They may coexist at any moment in time (synchronously) but the appearance of a new mode results from challenge and contestation in relation to a previous mode. (We might say that reflexive documentaries call into question assumptions common to all three of the other modes; that interactive documentaries break out of the present tense limitations of an observational mode; that observational documentaries reject the argumentative pitch of the expository mode; and that expository documentaries seek to challenge the invitation to escape from the social world implicit in much fiction.) An orderly succession, however, does not in fact follow since established modes are not rendered inoperative or incapable of producing results by newer ones. Also, some challenges remain anomalous; their potential to stimulate alternative forms of practice lies dormant for a period. And a new mode may attempt to serve a different purpose from that of a previous mode or it may seek to address a deficiency or problem. Almost certainly it will simultaneously create new ones as well.

A Constituency of Viewers

Finally, we may define documentary not in institutional (discursive) nor textual terms but in relation to its viewers. Taking a text in isolation, there is nothing that absolutely or infallibly distinguishes documentary from fiction. The paradigmatic form; the invocation of a documentary logic; reliance on evidence, evidentiary editing, and the construction of an argument; the primacy of the sound track generally, commentary, testimony, and recountings specifically; and the historical nature and function of the different modes of documentary production can all be simulated within a narrative/fictional framework. Films like *No Lies*, *David Holzman's Diary*, and *Daughter Rite* help make this clear. The distinguishing mark of documentary may be less intrinsic to the text than a function of the assumptions and expectations brought to the process of viewing the text.

What are the assumptions and expectations that characterize the viewing of a documentary? To the extent that they can be generalized, they will be the product of previous experience rather than predispositions conjured on the spot. Their latent presence is what a narrative fiction film can capitalize upon and what a documentary will modify within limits but also reinforce as a basically correct form of punctuation within the domain of the cinema at large.

Most basically, viewers will develop procedural skills of comprehension and interpretation that will allow them to make sense of a documentary.¹⁶ These procedures are a form of recipe knowledge derived from an active process of making inferences based on prior knowledge and the text itself. (This knowledge would encompass such things as recognizing a picture of Martin Luther King, Jr. as the likeness of a historical figure, understanding that spatial dislocations can be unified by an argument, assuming that social actors do not conduct themselves solely at the behest of the filmmaker, and hypothesizing the presentation of a solution once a problem begins to be described.) The text provides cues while the viewer proposes hypotheses which are either confirmed or abandoned. Such skilled, learned activity becomes, at its basic levels, habitual; it seldom intrudes upon consciousness proper since the process seldom confronts problems it cannot handle. (Consciousness can be regarded as a mode of awareness directed toward problems; we are always conscious of something that engages us precisely because it is problematic.)

These procedures, then, are also intimately tied to matters of ideology. They govern many of our assumptions about the nature of the world—what is in it, what appropriate action consists of, and what alternatives can be legitimately entertained. Procedural skills of viewing, like habits and the Freudian unconscious generally, orient us toward the world, or a text, in specific ways that are open to change but also quite capable of coping with setbacks and refutations (the process we call “exploration” is not aban-

doned if it leads us into a cul-de-sac; the basic procedure remains intact while the specific application undergoes modification). Previous experience with documentary and cinema, narrative and exposition, will establish procedures that no one text is likely to overthrow. In time, however, the inferences we form and the hypotheses we test can change considerably based on the accumulation of experience and transformations of style, structure, and mode in texts we encounter.

The most fundamental difference between expectations prompted by narrative fiction and by documentary lies in the status of the text in relation to the historical world. This has two levels. Cues within the text and assumptions based on past experience prompt us to infer that the images we see (and many of the sounds we hear) had their origin in the historical world. Technically, this means that the projected sequence of images, what occurred in front of the camera (the profilmic event), and the historical referent are taken to be congruent with one another. The image is the referent projected onto a screen. In documentary we often begin by assuming that the intermediary stage—that which occurred in front of the camera—remains identical to the actual event that we could have ourselves witnessed in the historical world (Hitler speaks at Nuremberg in *Triumph of the Will*, fishermen go about their work in *Drifters*, concentration camp survivors and victims are discovered in *Night and Fog*, miners go on strike in *Harlan County, U.S.A.*).

In many documentaries we may modify this assumption to take account of how the presence of the camera and filmmaker inflect events they appear to record. This necessitates speculation since what might have happened were the camera not there cannot be ascertained. Though inconclusive, the very dynamic of engaging in such conjecture distinguishes a documentary mode of engagement for the viewer. In a narrative fiction we assume that the profilmic event was itself constructed for the purpose of telling a story, that its relation to anything historical is metaphorical, that the people we see, even if they “play themselves” or are nonprofessionals, are nonetheless trained or rehearsed and that the places, though possibly authentic, may just as readily be replicas and simulations without jeopardizing the status of the narrative.

On a second, more global level we set up a pattern of inferences that helps us to determine what kind of argument the text is making about the historical world itself, or at least some small part of it. Instead of using procedural schemata to formulate a story, we use them to follow or construct an argument. Like other discourses of the real, the documentary argument pertains to the historical world itself rather than to an imaginary world more or less similar to the one we inhabit physically. Even if the images forfeit their claims of congruence, even if the documentary constructs what occurs in front of the camera as a representation of what occurs in the world, as do the films *Night Mail*, *Louisiana Story*, *Nanook of the North*, *Letter from Siberia*, and *The Thin Blue Line*, we still persist, as long as we

assume it is a documentary that we are watching; in inferring an argument about the world. The documentary viewer employs "procedures of rhetorical engagement" rather than the "procedures of fictive engagement" that guide the viewing of classic narrative film.

Our procedures for viewing documentary will include ways of assigning motivation to what we see. As a formal term motivation refers to the way the presence of an object is justified in relation to the text.¹⁷ In documentary a primary motivation is realism: the object is present in the text because of its function in the historical world. The hills and fields of the Liri Valley are present in *The Battle of San Pietro* because they were the historical location on which bloody fighting took place during World War II. They defined the shape of the battle; their visible appearance enjoys a historical mandate.

Another form of motivation is functional: the argument itself justifies or makes necessary the appearance of an object. The introductory remarks by General Mark Clark in *The Battle of San Pietro*, for example, have a functional justification: they present the official argument regarding the importance of the battle and the acceptability of its cost. Similarly, the close-ups of dead enemy soldiers can be motivated realistically (these are some of the men who actually died in the hills near San Pietro) and functionally (these faces of dead men illustrate the terrible price exacted by war—a proposition that is part of the film's overall argument).

Intertextual motivation also comes into play. Here the justification for the presence of something in the film arises from its expected or anticipated presence in films of a particular kind. In *The Battle of San Pietro* this would include the montage sequences of artillery barrages where guns fire in loud and rhythmic succession, shots of Italian villagers cheering the arrival of American troops, and the shots of foot soldiers advancing across contested terrain, under fire. Such shots are staples of the war documentary just as extended interviews with participant witnesses have become a staple of the historical documentary. They have the force of conventions and help define a genre, subgenre, or mode of documentary production.

Finally, formal motivation occurs when we justify the presence of an image by its contribution to a formal or stylistic pattern intrinsic to the text. This is the type of motivation least often attributed to documentary but it can still be an important factor. The faces of dead soldiers, for example, may receive their primary motivation realistically (these are some of the actual dead), functionally (as part of an argument about the terrible price of war), or even intertextually (as an image we expect to find in documentaries about war), but they also operate formally: the shots of these faces establish a formal pattern of composition and rhythm in which the series of dead American soldiers contrasts with another series representing the dead enemy such that the emotional overtones of battle and the etiquette of recording it calls for different renderings of American and enemy dead (we see the faces of the enemy dead but not of the American dead).¹⁸ Likewise, the images of the church and its chancel take on multiple

motivations which we as viewers process. Realistically, we regard it as authentic images of the San Pietro church; functionally, the image serves to support the argument that the war has taken a severe toll on the normal patterns of village life (the church has been bombed). Intertextually, the images fall into the general category of examples of the devastation of war, especially of the damage caused to nonmilitary or civilian targets. (They are also motivated, ironically, by an intertextual reference to documentaries that catalogue and display noteworthy works of art.) Formally, the composition and chiaroscuro qualities of the images render the church as an object of intrinsic beauty. The juxtaposition of these visual elements with the voice-over commentary in the style of an art appreciation tour ("Note the interesting treatment of the chancel") adds another type of formal motivation: the "interesting treatment" is the result of bombing, not artistry, but the irony of this juxtaposition requires our recognition of the inappropriateness of the statement. This in turn requires that we grasp how the formal organization of the text invokes a distinct set of conventions (those of the discourse of art appreciation) in the spirit of irony—that is, not erroneously but knowingly. (Another, similar example of formal motivation is the tendency to use tighter close-ups of teachers than of students in Fred Wiseman's *High School*. The presence of these close-ups is not justified on realistic, functional, or intertextual grounds as much as formal ones: they establish an affective, poetic pattern of social representation which we grasp by aesthetic means.)

One fundamental expectation of documentary is that its sounds and images bear an indexical relation to the historical world. As viewers we expect that what occurred in front of the camera has undergone little or no modification in order to be recorded on film and magnetic tape. We are wont to assume that what we see would have occurred in essentially the same manner if the camera and tape recorder had not been there. This is a different assumption from that of minimal intervention that governs observational film. This assumption carries with it no necessary expectation that the film as a whole will subordinate itself to its subject. The kind of ironic commentary and the formal series that juxtapose American and enemy dead in *The Battle of San Pietro*, while "artificial," are acceptable, inasmuch as they do nothing to violate the assumption that the images themselves represent what any observer of these historical events could have observed: the church was not destroyed nor the men posed or murdered in order to be filmed. The camera angle and distance can be carefully chosen; we grant to the documentarist the right of composition much more readily than that of rearrangement. The specific images are not the product of mise-en-scène as they almost certainly would be in a fiction film even though the arguments made about them are clearly the product of a documentary logic and textual economy.

The literalism of documentary centers around the look of things in the world as an index of meaning. Churches and planes, rooms and fields:

these retain the appearance they present to a passer-by or onlooker. Situations and events, where a temporal dimension comes into play, usually retain the chronological arrangement of their actual occurrence (though they may be abbreviated or extended, and arguments regarding causation or motivation may be applied). Individuals will retain their everyday appearance; what's more, they will represent themselves over time, that is, perform, in a manner commensurate with their everyday presentation of self. Their persona will not change significantly (unless as a result of time itself, as in *28 Up* or *A Man Marked to Die: Twenty Years After*, or to indicate how the presence of a filmmaker disrupts their normal style of self-presentation as communicated by an apparently unnatural degree of self-consciousness—in which case this very effect is indexically documented for us to see).

These are some of the expectations and procedural operations that documentary invokes. They arise in relation to conventions that inform the documentary text, especially those associated with realism. These conventions guide our response and provide a starting point for our method of processing the information conveyed by the text. We settle into a distinct mode of engagement in which the fictional game calling for the suspension of disbelief ("I know this is a fiction, but I will believe it all the same," a continual oscillation between "Yes, this is true," and "No, it is not") transforms into the activation of belief ("This is how the world is, but still, it could be otherwise"). Our oscillation now swings between a recognition of historical reality and the recognition of an argument about it.

As we shall see, things are not quite this simple. All of these assumptions of literalness, of the denotative authenticity of an indexical bond, and of the conventions of realism, can themselves be thrown into question by documentary, especially but not exclusively by reflexive documentaries. But most of the time the viewer recognizes a documentary when assumptions or hypotheses applied to the text confirm this set of expectations rather than others. The viewer then sets out to process the film with an understanding that the metaphorical distance from historical reality established from the outset by fiction ("Once upon a time . . .") has been closed ("And that's the way it is . . ."). The text presents a metonymic representation of the world as we know it (the sounds and images bear a relation of part to whole; they partake of the same order of reality as that to which they refer) rather than a metaphorical rendering (where the images and sounds operate on a separate and distinct plane of resemblance to the historical world). Where fiction achieves a "reality effect" by sprinkling doses of authentic historical references across the realm of its creation—costumes, tools, vehicles, known places, or prominent figures—the same references within documentary serve as tangible evidence from the historical world in support of an argument.

The viewer engages documentary with less expectation that a sustained

identification with well-developed characters will follow. Although grounded in a denotative literalism that comes from the optical and acoustic properties of film and magnetic tape, documentary most often draws our attention to an issue, concept, or problem that is at the center of the film's argument. Dependent on the specificity of its images for authenticity, documentary also invites us to regard the specific as an instantiation of something more general, of a way the world is in some broader frame. Even in observational films like *Primary*, *Jane*, or *A Married Couple*, and especially in works by Fred Wiseman like *Hospital*, *High School*, or *Model*, the strong sense of an indexical bond between what occurred in front of the camera and its historical referent draws us not only into the details of the everyday but also into the formulation of a perspective on these institutional domains of the real. We process the documentary not only as a series of highly authentic sounds and images that bear the palpable trace of how people act in the historical world, but also as the serial steps in the formation of a distinct, textually specific way of seeing or thinking.

Though an imaginary realm, fiction depends for its success on its ability to draw us into a highly specific situation through the psychodynamics of identification with characters and turns of plot. Documentary also begins with the concrete representation of people and places, situations and events but depends for its success far more on its ability to induce us to derive larger lessons, broader outlooks, or more overarching concepts from the detail it provides. Every edit or cut is a step forward in an argument. It may seem like a wound on the surface of the world for a Bazinian aesthetic of "respect for reality," but it is also a fundamental building block for the reality of a statement or argument about this world.¹⁹

The notion of the "history lesson" as a central aspect of documentary and as a manifestation of the documentary's affiliation with the discourses of sobriety—the ones that address the historical world of politics and economics, policy and action—shifts our expectations regarding subjectivity and objectivity. In most cases social actors who speak to the camera will not speak of themselves but of events, issues, or topics of which they have special knowledge. Our expectation is that even if a social actor does not speak to the camera but is instead observed by it we will view their speech and actions from the position of a third-person observer. Point-of-view shots, shot/reverse shots, over-the-shoulder shots, and other devices for aligning the camera with the perspective of a particular character in order to establish a first-person, more fully subjective rendering of time and space are rare. If nothing else, these forms of alignment require more thorough collaboration between performer and camera than is possible in the thick of an unfolding event recorded by a single camera. Stopping the action to realign the camera transforms history into *mise-en-scène*; it becomes a cue that we have crossed into the realm of narrative fiction. Subjectivity, rather than enhancing the impact of a documentary, may actually jeopardize its

credibility and shift the focus of attention to the fictional representation of an actual person or event. Our identification with specific social actors therefore has less of the intensity common to fiction.

If our expectations of interiority diminish, our expectations of access to a shared exteriority increase. Objectivity looms as a more crucial criterion and point of engagement. The claim that "This is so," with its tact "isn't it?"—a request for consent that draws us toward belief—makes objectivity, and the denotative, a natural ally of documentary rhetoric. At its simplest, objectivity refers to camera views that are not relayed to us through a character but seem to represent a third-person voice or to imply the presence of an author. Such views can be highly expressive or even expressionistic (much of the archival footage used in *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* is both, for example, as are shots in *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*), but when they are expressionistic these qualities seem to be prompted by the nature of the historical event represented rather than by personal choice. Expressive forms of objectivity attest to qualities of the historical world rather than to qualities of artistic vision.

A more complex notion of objectivity centers around those conventions that govern the fairness and impartiality of a representation. These conventions are allied to but distinct from the ones that govern scientific observation and experiment. In scientific investigation, the criteria of verification place the author inside a parenthesis: the author's personal presence cannot be a prerequisite for the manifestation of the phenomenon; others must also be able to produce the same result. History, though, does not allow for repetition. Objectivity enters in as a more explicit adjunct of rhetoric, as a way to convey the apparent truthfulness of what is said or claimed or to mask the partialities of the reporter. Even when reportage or documentary moves more clearly toward advocacy, effectiveness often depends on satisfying this expectation of impartiality. The advocate may have his or her reasons, but the need for one action rather than another must be logically convincing and fairly argued; opposing views should not be so readily disparaged that doubts as to their merits linger. The viewer's expectation is that the empathetic identification with characters so common in fiction will remain tenuous but that intellectual and emotional engagement with a topic, issue, or problem will gain in prominence, and be mediated by the conventions and rhetoric of objectivity.

This points toward another basic expectation held by the documentary viewer; that the desire to know will find gratification during the course of the film. Documentary invokes the desire to know when it identifies its subject and proposes its own variant on the "history lesson." How did this come to pass (*Smoke Menace: Hunger in America; Years of Lightning, Days of Drums*)? How does this institution work (*Hospital, High School, Joan Does Dynasty*)? What happens to people in a situation like this (*Soldier Girls, Obedience, Let There Be Light*)? What is the source of the problem and how bad is it (*Housing Problem, Downwind, Downstream; A Man When He Is a*

Man)? What price does war exact on those who wage it (*Dear America, The Battle of San Pietro, Nicaragua: No Pasarán*)? What kind of tensions arise in a situation like this (*Family Business, Primary, The Back-Breaking Leap*)? How do members of another culture organize their lives (*Wedding Camels, The Netsilik Eskimo Series, Dead Birds*)? What happens when one culture encounters another (*Kenya Boran, First Contact, Ocampo Is My Town*)?

Documentary convention spawns an epistemophilia. It posits an organizing agency that possesses information and knowledge, a text that conveys it, and a subject who will gain it. He-who-knows (the agency is usually masculine) will share that knowledge with those who wish to know; they, too, can take the place of the subject-who-knows. Knowledge, as much or more than the imaginary identification between viewer and fictional character, promises the viewer a sense of plenitude or self-sufficiency. Knowledge, like the ideal-ego figures or objects of desire suggested by the characters of narrative fiction, becomes a source of pleasure that is far from innocent. Who are we that we may know something? Of what does knowledge consist? What we know, and how we use the knowledge we have, are matters of social and ideological significance. These issues are at the center of this book's examination of the representation of reality by documentary film.

the predominant critical methodologies at greater length in the introduction to *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

1. The Domain of Documentary

1. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (Penguin Books, 1955): 308.
2. Digital sampling techniques, whereby an image is constituted by digital bits that are subject to infinite modification, renders this argument for the unique, indexical nature of the photographic image obsolete. The image becomes a series of bits, a pattern of yes/no choices registered within a computer's memory. A modified version of that pattern will be in no sense derivative from the "original"; it becomes, instead, a new original. Any images that can be generated from these bits of information occupy exactly the same status. There is no original negative for image as there is in photography against which all prints can be compared for accuracy and authenticity. There may not even be an external referent. Computer graphics can generate highly realistic renderings of real-life subjects from software algorithms rather than external referents. The implications of all this are only beginning to be grasped. They clearly set a historical framework around the discussion presented in this book, which continues to emphasize the qualities and properties of the photographic image.

3. An excellent example of how facts and themes are made to appear to emerge from the real-life world depicted in the documentary remains Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). Flaherty's shooting and editing style (far more than his intertitles) work to convey a sense of events unfolding according to their own rhythm, revealing their own meaning, which the filmmaker strives to simply "bring out." They were there all along, not imposed or overlaid.

A more recent example that exposes the fissures Flaherty buried beneath his long takes and continuity editing is the PBS series, "Nature." A six-part series entitled *Australia: The Island Continent* concluded with an examination of the ways in which man has wrought havoc to the ecology of the land. After chronicling numerous major catastrophes (forests destroyed; marginal land reduced to salt flats; grazing land razed by rabbits, sheep, and goats; and so on, often with newsreel footage describing the force of the problem dating from as early as the 1930s), the program's narrator informs us that means are at hand to solve many of these issues. We see analysts who study satellite photographs of grazing land to identify the rate and extent of overgrazing and are told that this information can allow ranchers to shift their stock to other land or take them to market before excess damage is done.

The point of this narrative is to offer a reassurance that "out there" in the real world solutions to longstanding problems are now at hand because science can identify them and propose adjustments to minimize their impact. A contradiction between the severity of decades-old problems and the quick fix of data from a satellite looms, especially since the politics and economics behind the use of this information are not questioned, nor the long-term advisability of raising these particular forms of livestock in the first place. The sense of enthusiastic optimism is a function of the text, of tone, rhythm, and placement (the scientific data collection provides the sense of an ending). The sense of an imposed optimism is stronger than the sense of Flaherty's romanticism as a perspective on the world that does not, in fact, arise from the world, but in each case the text relies on creating the impression that not only the specific events but the tonalities surrounding them emerge from the world itself. Strategies of narrative style are used to efface themselves and propose that the optimism or romantic wonder resides in the world itself. The camera records or reports it. Optimism, romanticism, like solutions that "just happen," these sensibilities appear to emerge from the world itself, at the

bidding of an Invisible Hand that harmonizes our own perceptions with these wondrous qualities. We need not debate their origins or implications. Our task is more to acknowledge the awe inspired by their presence as revealed by the film.

4. Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images* (Sydney: Power Institute Publications, 1988): 27, 28.

5. Plato, *The Republic*, 297.

6. Ibid., 184.

7. Ibid., 237.

8. The development of a postmodern culture of the simulation is discussed in Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1986). Jean Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1976), Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-August 1984): 13-92, and my "The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems," *Screen* 29, no. 2 (Winter 1988): 22-46. It would be a grave error to think of the simulation as on the order of a copy, reflection, or illusion. Wars may be entertained in the living room but lives are still lost. Grenada may play across the nation as a return of *Sands of Iwo Jima* but we cannot get up from our television and say, "It is just a movie." Authenticity may be measured by congruence with previous representations of a "reality" now subject to seemingly infinite regress, but issues of power and desire, authority and finality (death) remain firmly in place.

9. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969): 236.

10. Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1984): 215-39. The usefulness of this definition to them is fairly obvious when we see that their concern is only with a small sample of American cinema verité, principally the work of Donald Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, and Robert Drew at ABC television. Their account of even this small fraction of documentary filmmaking is highly schematic; it is used to demonstrate the validity of a research methodology rather than to examine cinema verité or observational cinema in any great detail. The methodology proves more suggestive than the example proves conclusive.

11. David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990): 23. In a later section meant to illustrate principles of film criticism they stress how Fred Wiseman exercises control over key aspects of the film's structure, but they continue to maintain the position that this documentary, like many others, "surrendered control over what happens in front of the camera" (337).

12. Leacock articulates his own principles of shooting quite clearly. On one occasion he commented, "I want to discover something about people. When you interview someone they always tell you what they want you to know about them. This may be interesting, and is what some people actually want to record. What I want to see is what happens when they are not doing this." Quoted in Louis Marcorelles, *Living Cinema* (New York: Praeger, 1973): 55.

13. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984): 17.

14. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972): 32-33.

15. The echo of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) and his description of "normal"

science as precisely this sort of institutionally governed procedure was inadvertent. On rereading, the reference—ignored by French theorists like Foucault or Lyotard whom I have chosen to cite—seems quite important. Kuhn's work, in fact, prefigures central aspects of Foucault's. What Kuhn ignores, and what remains undeveloped here, are questions of ideology: an innocence or "normalcy" presides over Kuhn's account that Foucault, despite his own extraordinary blindspots (such as matters of gender and the place of women in the history of sexuality), refuses to tolerate. Foucault, like Lévi-Strauss, is in search of the most basic elements of Western culture; Kuhn settles for an account of the institutional basis of Western science. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) trace the relation of Kuhn's work to Foucault's in some detail.

16. This discussion of procedures used to comprehend a text is strongly informed by David Bordwell's discussion of schemata in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985): 31-39. I have chosen not to adopt the vocabulary of cognitive psychology because of its premise that such activity is a value-free mental base for more complex, socially conditioned forms of subjectivity and consciousness.

17. The four types of motivation discussed here are proposed, with somewhat different nomenclature, in Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*: 36.

18. In *The Thin Blue Line*, decontextualized shots of objects like a gun, milkshake, silhouette in a window, and letters being typed onto a sheet of paper, too abstract in their representation to be justified realistically, take on a formal motivation. They become a series of iconographic images that link up primarily to each other in order to suggest how the film, though a documentary, cannot assure us of the historical authenticity of its evidence. This reflexive move locates the text in a borderline territory between narrative fiction and documentary argument, a zone that is very familiar to those who work within a postmodernist aesthetic. We read it primarily as a documentary, but with a steady awareness of how what occurs before the camera displays an appearance tied less to the historical world than to choices made by the filmmaker.

19. André Bazin was a French critic who celebrated the ability of film to capture "the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it." (Quoted from "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *What is Cinema?* [2 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967]: 1:14.) Editing and expressionist techniques obscured the thing itself and imposed new constraints of time and space that were the filmmaker's doing. Bazin's ideal, a realist style that engages us in a manner similar to how the world itself does, stands opposed to didactic commentary, reenactment, and montage effects.

2. Documentary Modes of Representation

1. The interactive mode frequently cedes considerable authority to those interviewed. These individuals may even provide the essence of the film's argument, as they do in *With Babies and Banners*, *Soloaki Power*, *Union Maids*, *Through the Wire*, and *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* or give rise to the predominant tone or attitude of the film. *Where the Heart Roams*, *Wise Guys*, and *Coming Out*, about women's romance literature, a television quiz show, and a debutante ball, respectively, all cede to the participants in these activities the opportunity to set the tone of the representation rather than use them to illustrate a dominant perspective constructed by the film.

2. Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974): 254-55.

3. A paradigmatic instance of this form of debate centered around the film *An American Family*, a twelve-hour series on one family aired on public television in 1973. A rigorously observational work, the series prompted a great deal of journalistic attention in terms of how much Craig Gilbert, the person responsible for it, had shaped, prompted, or otherwise manipulated events in front of the camera. Some of these charges came from the film's subjects, the Loud family themselves, particularly the mother, Pat Loud. Most of them implied far more manipulation than Craig Gilbert saw at work in his or any documentary. See his "Reflections on *An American Family*, II" in Alan Rosenthal, ed., *New Challenges for Documentary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) for a useful summary of the ethical issues as seen by the filmmaker.

4. Semiotic approaches to cinema took it for granted that the images of people were signifiers with attachments, and hence meanings, that depended on their relation to other elements in the signifying chain. Useful as this approach may be to the refutation of notions of transparency between image and reality it does not quell the disturbances semiosis sets up in the bodies of those who have their image "taken." Legal principles of privacy, libel, and slander attest to some of the dimensions of conflict. The uncertainty of the effect on a situation of filming it forms part of the speculative involvement of the viewer. One dimension of this involvement hinges on this question of use. The discursive frame (morally, ethically, politically) within which we debate the issue has its own historical context. If a semiotics of signifiers and their attachments once had a historically valuable role to play in the theory of the fiction film, its applicability to documentary film was always less certain. The relation to what seems to elude the field of a *langue*-centered semiotics—the referent, the person who engages in *parole*, who speaks as well as is spoken—remains a central concern in documentary from multiple points of view.

5. See Paul Rock, *The Making of Symbolic Interactionism* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979) for an excellent introduction to many of the methodological principles that were adopted, knowingly or inadvertently, by observational filmmakers. Rock notes that symbolic interactionism is the segment of sociology "which has devoted itself to the detailed ethnography of small social worlds" (92). Compare Rock's comment on participant-observation with the desire of Richard Leacock, for example, to observe what people do when they are not interviewed or otherwise addressed directly by the camera: "The business of ethnography is presented as comparatively hostile to rehearsal. Much of it is described as if it entailed the artless projection of the sociologist's self into the natural setting. Such artlessness is both the prerequisite and the unavoidable companion of effective communion.... Interactive fieldwork is designed to capture and foster prepredicative experience. It is axiomatic of the methodology that such experience can never be adequately described by words: it occupies realms which are *sui generis*. Full comprehension can stem only from engaging in the experience itself" (197-98).

6. Face-to-face encounter also has its nonpractical ends as phatic communication suggests. (Phatic communication involves interstitial fillers that let someone else know that we are attending to them, such as "um," "ah," or "well.") All utterances and texts, not only art, then, have a nonpractical dimension, while art, or fiction, as part of an ideological system, clearly has a practical outcome in its effects on subjectivity and sometimes on specific opinions, beliefs, attitudes, or forms of behavior.

7. The traditional accounts of documentary in the postwar years refer to the development of lightweight, portable cameras and magnetic tape sound recorders that allowed for synchronous sound recording on location as the central step in the transformation of documentary film from an expository mode (including its poetic variants) to direct cinema and cinema vérité, what I have chosen to call observa-