

A NEW HISTORY OF
DOCUMENTARY FILM

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Chapter Fifteen

English-Language Documentary in the 1970s: Power of the People

The documentary impulse has always been linked closely to its social and intellectual environment. In the 1920s Flaherty's films were set within the beginnings of anthropology and interest in comparative cultures. Vertov and the Soviet filmmakers attempted to meet the needs of a new state, the first communist society. The continental realists were part of the avant-garde, experimenting with artistic means for expressing concepts coming from the physical and psychological sciences.

Documentaries in the 1930s were connected with economic and political upheavals and innovations. Totalitarian regimes employed them to gain the allegiance of their peoples. In Britain and the United States they were used to try to strengthen democratic societies in the face of ailing economies at home and imperialist aggression abroad.

The 1940s were the years of World War II and its aftermath. During the first half of that decade documentaries were used in unprecedented numbers by the English-speaking countries in their fight against the Axis powers. In the second half of the decade, the United States, and to some extent Britain and Canada, employed documentary in the cold war against communism.

The 1950s, in the United States at least, were marked by conservatism and complacency; and, as it would subsequently appear, hidden uncertainties. It was not a significant or innovative decade for documentary except as new types of subjects and forms compatible with distribution nontheatrically and over television were explored. The 1960s saw the beginnings of direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*.

For documentary, the transition from the 1960s into the 1970s was a vital era, a time of fruition and fullness. It was the peak of independent 16mm-movie funding and production, distribution, and exhibition. The nontheatrical 16mm marketplace—schools, libraries, colleges and universities, film societies, art the-

aters, even prisons, and later airlines—was substantial in the United States. It provided a financial base that allowed considerable creative development for independent filmmakers working outside traditional Hollywood and New York film and television establishments. The early seventies was also a time to pass the nonfiction baton. A new generation of documentary filmmakers, those who had not lived through the experiences of world depression and WWII, began to come into their own. The 16mm educational and nontheatrical market base, the emergence of degreed film programs, the political and social upheavals of the 1960s, and a variety of personal factors combined to make documentary filmmaking a leading means of creative expression for more people than ever before. But first a look at what some veteran filmmakers were doing.

Veteran Filmmakers

Four major figures were among the sturdiest and most influential documentary makers in North America as the 1960s turned into the 1970s. Two of these worked in Canada—Donald Brittain and Michael Rubbo—and two in the United States—Emile de Antonio and Frederick Wiseman. All four had entered filmmaking following other careers.

Donald Brittain worked as a journalist until he joined the National Film Board in 1954 as a writer. He scripted most of his own films (as well as those of many of his colleagues); frequently he collaborated on their direction. Brittain's "writing" is really his matching of words and images; the creative process for him existed centrally in editing. In this respect he might make one think of Stuart Legg's work on "The World in Action" series in the early days of the Film Board. Or, perhaps even more, of Frenchman Chris Marker of *Le Joli Mai*, etc. Both Brittain and Marker had an insatiable and uninhibited curiosity about people and a wry sense of humor. Brittain's approach was characteristically oblique and understated, yet he involves us with his subjects in a way that makes them stick firmly in our memories.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen (1966, with Don Owen) is an affectionate, nonadulatory portrait of the then young Canadian poet, who is allowed to participate fully in the presentation. Lest we take him too seriously, Cohen himself offers an injunction for us at the end of the film, written on a steamy glass while he is bathing: *caveat emptor: let the buyer beware. Memorandum* (1966, with John Spotton) is an account of a reunion of Jewish survivors of Nazi concentration camps twenty years after their liberation. It centers especially on a Canadian father making the pilgrimage with his teenage son. This subject seems scarcely open to the whimsical, irreverent approach characteristic of Brittain, yet he manages to root his observation in the mundane and to make very real the banality of horror. *Memorandum* is an important film on the Holocaust, comparable in its force but quite different in its manner from Alain Renaud's *Night and Fog*. Another significant Brittain film was the Academy Award-nomi-

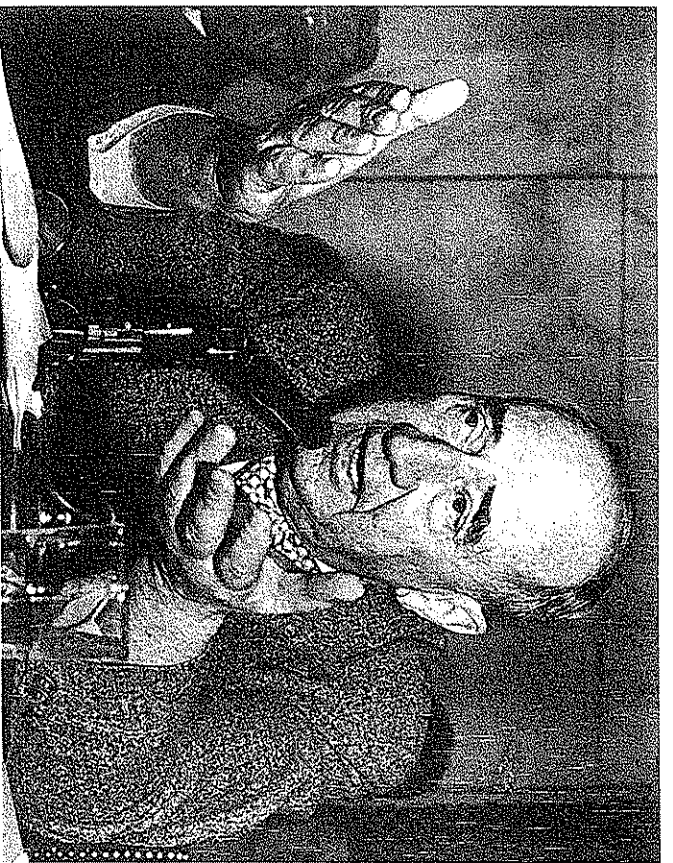


Emile de Antonio. Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive

nated feature *Volcano: An Inquiry into the Life and Death of Malcolm Lowry* (1976), an impressionistic rumination on the life and work of the self-destructive author who was thought by some to be one of the literary geniuses of the twentieth century, but who wrote only one major book: *Under the Volcano*. Brittain died in 1989, a much-honored figure who had made over 100 films in his fifty-year career at the NFB.

Emile de Antonio came to film after careers as a philosophy professor, longshoreman, and art promoter. His documentaries, all feature-length, received some theatrical distribution. Consistently he advanced a left-wing political view, frequently using compilation—"radical scavenging," he called it—and avoiding the documentary mainstream of cinema vérité/direct as well as the standard voice-over narration. His documentary technique consisted in large part of obtaining footage from television networks, sometimes surreptitiously (that is, illegally) and excerpting and editing it to make damning critiques of aspects of American politics and culture. He labeled his work "the theater of fact."

De Antonio's first success was *Point of Order* (1963), which enjoyed an extensive theatrical run. It was made from 16mm kinescopes of the televised 1954 Army-McCarthy hearings. The title comes from an oft-repeated interruption of the proceedings by Senator Joseph McCarthy—"Point of order, Mr. Chair-



Counsel for the U.S. Army, Joseph Welch, as he appeals to the 1954 Army-McCarthy hearing panel in *Point of Order* (U.S., 1964, Emile de Antonio). Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive

man”—and the film allows the senator to discredit himself and his methods without voice-over commentary or manipulation of the footage other than reducing 188 hours to 97 minutes.

In *the Year of the Pig* (1968), perhaps de Antonio's best and most influential film, is a compilation about the history of the Vietnam War. It employs a mix of news footage, political propaganda, antiwar speeches, and other sorts of evidence and argument including the famous photograph of a young U.S. soldier with *Make War, Not Love* scrawled on his helmet. It is highly critical of United States involvement. *Millhouse: A White Comedy* (1971) is a witty and savage attack on Richard Milhous Nixon, made the year before he was elected president. The sardonic misspelling of Nixon's middle name suggests the satirical intention. In this case, added to newsreel and television footage are interviews with various political commentators. Less than a year after its release the Watergate scandal broke.

De Antonio's relationship with younger radicals was considerable. Perhaps the most potent example of this is *Weather Underground* (1975, with Mary Lampson, shot by Haskell Wexler). In this remarkable document we see, from rear view or through gauze, most of the core group of the then fugitive Weather

Underground—Cathy Wilkerson, Kathy Boudin, Bernardine Dohrn, Jeff Jones, and Bill Ayers. These people had been responsible for five and one half years of bombing at the Pentagon, the State Department, the U.S. Capitol, and twenty-two other targets. As they sit beneath a homemade quilt emblazoned with the motto *The Future Will Be What We the People Struggle to Make It*, they elucidate their philosophy for the camera, leaving us an indelible record from the most strident of the "New Left" of the 1960s and 1970s.

De Antonio died at the end of 1989. His final project was a self-reflexive biographical eulogy. *Mr. Hoover and I*, released after his death, is fraught with the formalism of jump cuts and John Cage music. Like all of his work, it retains the mark of a dedicated "Old Leftist" radical and artistic modernist.

Michael Rubbo, an Australian painter and photographer with an education and interest in anthropology, joined the National Film Board in 1965 after studying film at Stanford University. His best-known work is *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* (1970).

Sad Song was shot in Vietnam in 1969. Rather than military action, then at its peak, we see life on the streets of Saigon: the shoeshine kids ("dust of the streets"); three idealistic young American journalists trying to help them; the opium lady, who died in the tomb she lived in while the film was being shot; and a little monk in saffron-colored robes who takes a symbolic walk each day from "Saigon" to "Hanoi" and back. In talking about his work on this and other films, Rubbo said, "[T]hese days I even make a virtue of being unprepared." He then advanced a position that sounds rather like Frances Flaherty talking about her husband's "non-preconception" and finding his story by living with his subjects. Rubbo explained, "You go out with vague ideas about what you want and then just let things happen, trusting in your good instincts. I know it sounds dangerous, but life will inevitably serve up much better stories than you could ever think up beforehand. The trick is to get involved, to get in."

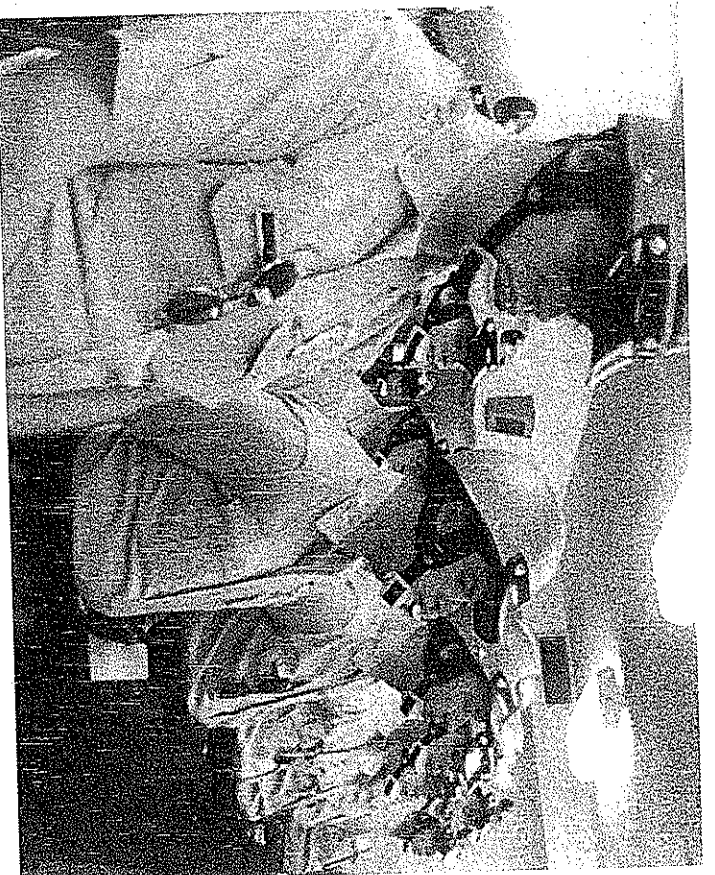
Another widely discussed and characteristic Rubbo film is *Waiting for Fidel* (1974), which came about in a curious way. A Canadian multimillionaire owner of radio and television stations, Geoff Stirling, had arranged an interview with the president of Cuba. He invited along his old friend Joey Smallwood, ex-premier of Newfoundland, and a Film Board crew headed by Rubbo. When Castro failed to appear, Rubbo began recording the ongoing dialectic between capitalist Stirling and socialist Smallwood about what they were seeing in communist Cuba. The making of the film itself became part of the argument. Stirling was furious about what he regarded as the waste and non-professionalism of shooting a nonevent. Following one of those confrontations Rubbo asked his cameraman, Doug Kieffer, if he appeared in the shot. "Are you in the shot," was the reply, "my God, you are all over the shot!" The film figured in the debates about a filmmaker's presence in his/her films, as discussed below. In subsequent years Rubbo returned to Australia to a teaching career and a renewed interest in painting.



Waiting for Fidel, left to right: Geoff Stirling, Joey Smallwood, and Michael Rubbo (Canada, 1974, Michael Rubbo). National Film Board of Canada

Frederick Wiseman, formerly a lawyer, began filmmaking as producer of *The Cool World* (1964), a fictional feature directed by Shirley Clarke. Shot in Harlem and using many nonprofessional actors, the film has some semidocumentary characteristics. Wiseman's first direct cinema documentary was *The Tivoli* (1967), codirected with John Marshall (subsequently a very important figure in visual anthropology documentary whose credit was later removed from the film after editing disputes). It is an examination of the Bridgewater State Hospital for the criminally insane in Massachusetts. The title refers to an annual variety show performed by inmates and employees. The film offers an unflinching look at the day-to-day situation within the institution. Without doing more than showing the treatment the inmates receive and the attitudes and behavior of all involved, the hopelessness of the combined care and incarceration meted out becomes evident. The film became the subject of litigation, and the Supreme Court of Massachusetts banned its showing within the state; subsequently the film became a cause célèbre in the documentary world.

As examples of Wiseman's more than forty subsequent films, two from this period have been chosen for discussion. They are not typical but instead more innovative and ambiguous than the detailed and sustained observation (in films of increasing length, some over three hours) of most of his later work. *Law and Order* (1969), about the Kansas City Police Department, is the first.



Law and Order (U.S., 1969, Frederick Wiseman). Photo by Oliver Kool, 1969. Zip-porah Films

After *The Tivoli Folies* (and *High School*, 1968) one might have expected Wiseman to continue with what could be seen as his exposé of public institutions. Given prevalent feelings about police at the time, the height of the Vietnam protest, it seemed quite likely that he would find brutality, corruption, incompetence, and stupidity. However, he did not present such a picture. Some violence, insensitivity, and perhaps racial prejudice are evident in the film, but only as part of a whole that is equivocal—no doubt reflecting Wiseman's own ambivalence about what he found. In fact, the evidence offered in *Law and Order* could have served to counter the widespread prejudices of the time, though that may not have been Wiseman's intention.

Another example of Wiseman's work, which is dissimilar in other ways from the bulk of his films, is *Model* (1981), about the business of fashion modeling headquartered in New York City. Throughout, it alternates between fashion modeling (concentrating on a single agency) and life on the streets of Manhattan. The model business is based on glitz and illusion; real life is nitty-gritty and diverse. One intriguing sequence shows passersby watching a commercial being shot on a residential street. Elderly women, construction workers, derelicts, young businessmen, and dogs regard somewhat indifferently the sexy model,

the high-tech equipment, and the Hollywood mannerisms of the crew. Another extended sequence concerns the production of a hosiery commercial that involves interminable takes (up to fifty-five on one shot). The sequence concludes with the thirty-second result of all this professional skill, perfectionism, and grueling work.

The myriad of detail offered by the film (it runs 125 minutes) can be read in at least two ways, probably many more. One is that *Model* is essentially a not uncritical celebration of a bizarre, fascinating, glamorous, and crazy institution in the Big Apple of our society. The other is as an exposé of exploitative, manipulative, frivolous, and greedy people working at a profession that is the epitome of consumerism gone berserk. But the final sequence seems to confirm the first view. It is of the fashion buyers' show, which resembles, and is shot and edited like, a musical. Beautiful young women in high-style gowns pirouette down a runway to show tunes ("Strike Up the Band" among them). Unusual camera angles and dynamic cutting complete the choreographic effect. It ends with dancing and applause. The fact that the intent of the film can be debated—exposé or celebration?—may suggest that the many snippets we are offered form a mosaic of, or a metaphor for, aspects of our culture, which, of course, is open to as many interpretations as there are cultural observers.

In England, a cinéma vérité counterpart to Wiseman is American-born television documentarian **Roger Graef**, who has been producing and directing programs for various British channels since before 1970. Like Wiseman he is a proponent of filming without interference, has received most of his funding from broadcast television, and is interested in the everyday workings of institutions. The name of Graef's production company, Films of Record, sums up his own goals for documentary as unadulterated looks at reality. His earliest major series was *The Space Between Words* (1972) for BBC, which explores the processes of communication within various organizations. Graef's films in the 1970s, mostly for Granada Television, are examinations of powerful institutions such as British Steel, Occidental Petroleum, the British Communist party, and the European Commission.

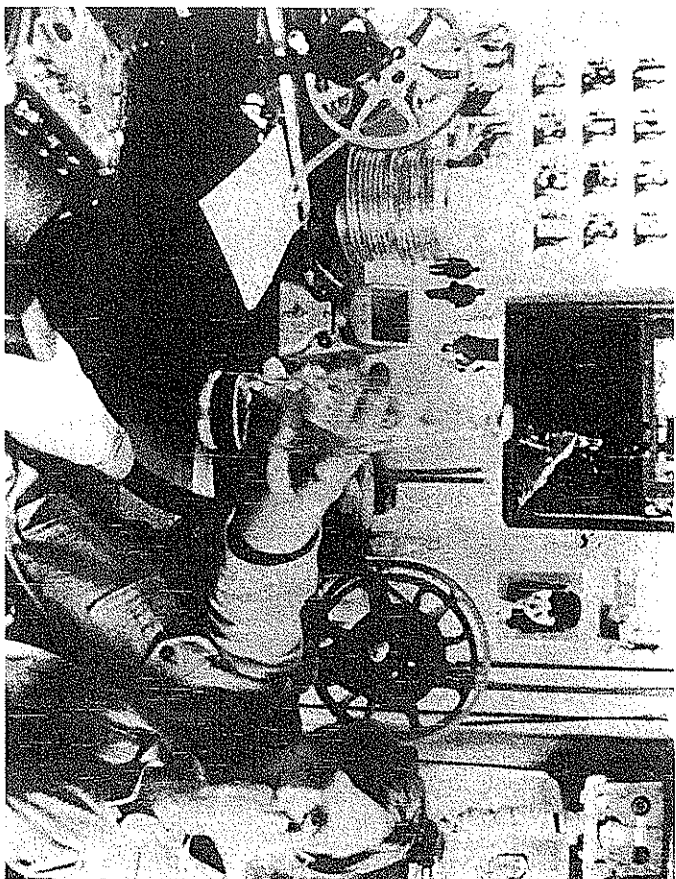
His most highly acclaimed series is *Police* (1981), about the Thames Valley Police force, shown on BBC between January and March of 1982. It foreshadowed Graef's continuing interest in the workings of law enforcement and the institutions of criminality. One episode, "An Allegation of Rape," contains interrogation of a rape victim—shot over her shoulder, never revealing her identity—by three male police officers. Their apparently insensitive treatment of the victim led to public outcry and ultimately to a change in the laws regarding police procedure in rape cases. *Police* was second only to the American nighttime soap opera *Dallas* in audience ratings during the three months it aired, and it has been cast by some as the progenitor for the highly successful Malcolm McBride and John Langelly Fox television series *COPS*, although *COPS* did not premiere until March 1989.

New Directions in Vérité

Another predecessor of *COPS* was *Police Tapes* (1976), made by Alan and Susan Raymond. Like Wiseman's *Law and Order*, it focuses on one police station, this time in the South Bronx. Perhaps best known for their intimate involvement (camera, sound, directing) in the groundbreaking U.S. public television series *An American Family*, the Raymonds have made numerous significant films in the last thirty years. For *Police Tapes* they rode in patrol cars, Alan shooting video and Susan taking sound. Recording what they saw and heard, they also talked with the police about their work. What resulted is a chilling view of criminal activity in the city, and of public servants trying to do an impossible job. *Police Tapes* was also the direct predecessor of the hit ABC television series *Hill Street Blues*. The first episode of *Hill Street Blues* is an almost scene-for-scene reproduction of the Raymonds' vérité style, particularly in its use of naturally overlapping dialogue. *Blues* producer Steven Bochco has been quoted as saying, "We really stole the style of *Hill Street Blues* from something called *The Police Tapes* . . . It was one of the most arresting things I'd ever seen in my life. We said, 'This is the feeling we want. We want to create something that gives the illusion of a random event.'"

Cinéma vérité methods continued to evolve in ever more complicated inter-twinings of reality and fiction. The generation of filmmakers who matured in the 1970s strengthened a trend toward blurring the conventional distinctions between documentary, experimental, and fictional films that had existed at least as far back as Vertov's "Kino-Pravda." In some cases this took the form of the "staged vérité documentary." Controversy about directing documentary participants to engage in activities outside their normal routines has raged from the work of Robert Flaherty onward. There is also the ongoing ethical question of how far a filmmaker should go in exposing the personal lives of her/his subjects. What was different from straightforward documentary for a certain segment of 1970s filmmakers was their intention to confuse the audience about the veracity of the work.

An early and influential example is *David Holzman's Diary* (1968). It concerns a young man who begins filming his apartment, his girlfriend, the people in his neighborhood, and every aspect of his life with his portable sync-sound camera rig. Initially the film appears to be a direct-cinema documentary about such a situation. David Holzman is inspired by his conviction that the motion picture camera is capable of recording and representing "truth." But his obsession with trying to capture everything as it really exists, rather than leading him closer to reality, removes him from it. As the film progresses the Eclair camera and Nagra tape recorder replace Holzman as protagonist. Further, when the credits appear at the end we discover that we have been subjected to a hoax. L. M. "Kit" Carson plays Holzman (and also wrote much of the dialogue); James McBride directed; cinematography is by Michael Wadleigh. In short, this is a fictional film about documentary filmmaking—about reality and illusion.



David Holzman's Diary, a classic of staged cinéma vérité (U.S., 1968, Jim McBride). Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive

... *No Lies* (1973, Mitchell Block), shot in cinéma-vérité style, is a staged film about rape. Appearing to be a documentary, it plays upon our expectations until we discover at the end that what we wish had not happened in fact has not happened. Another filmmaker who worked in a similar vein is Michelle Citron. Her two best-known films, *Daughter Rite* (1978) and *What You Take for Granted* (1983), experiment with the traditional modes in the process of exploring issues of central concern to women. *Daughter Rite* is about the position of women in the nuclear family. It concentrates on the relationship between two daughters and their mother and between one another. *What You Take for Granted* addresses the situation of women in jobs thought of at the time as traditionally "man's work." Both of Citron's films are acted, but the roles and the dialogue are drawn from extensive research and interviews, as is the case with ... *No Lies*. *Daughter Rite* and ... *No Lies* look like cinéma vérité, complete with rack focusing, panning back and forth between people in conversation, not having the camera where the action is, and so forth. *What You Take for Granted* employs a more didactic documentary style with talking head shots. While the three films are visually coded to be seen as documentaries, all are done with actors.

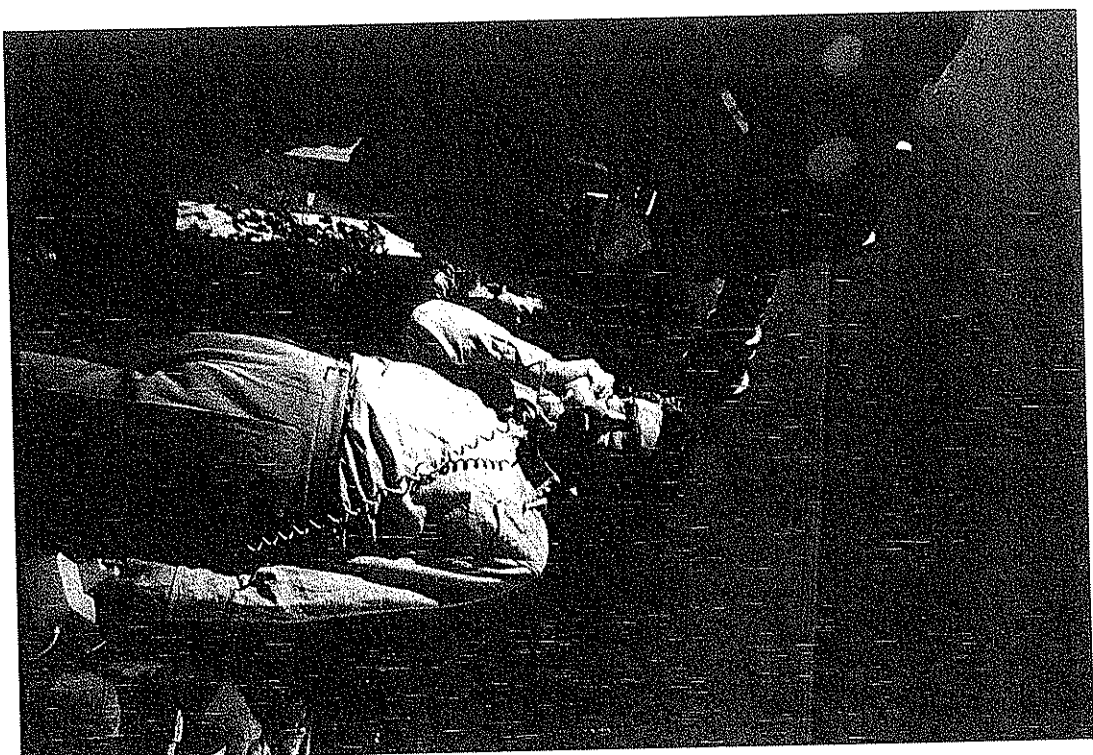
Barry Spinnello's body of work is intriguing in its boundary crossing. He started as an abstract experimental filmmaker, drawing directly on film stock,



... *No Lies*, with Shelby Leverington, plays upon documentary expectations (U.S., 1973, Mitchell W. Block). DCL © 2005, all rights reserved

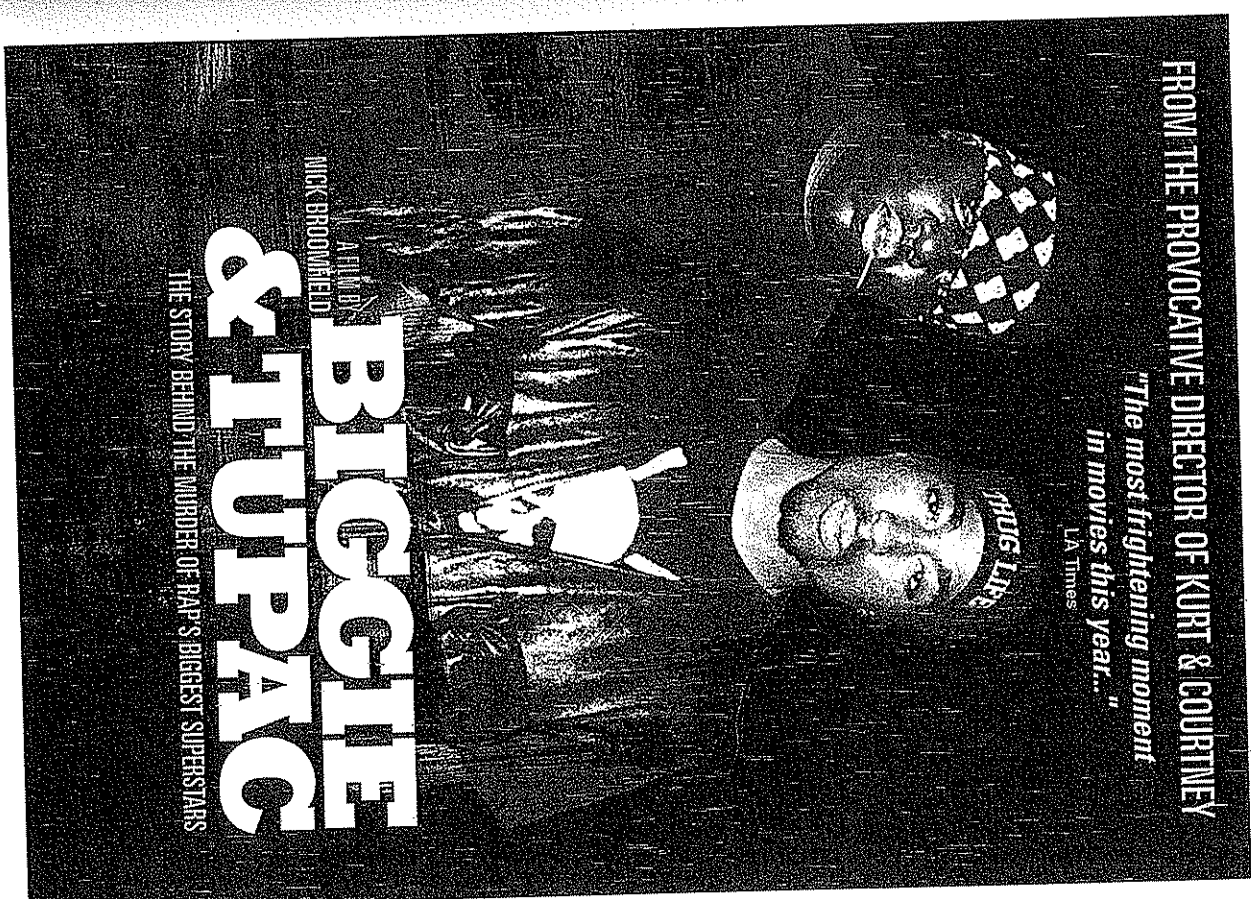
but then won an Academy Award for his fictional short *A Day in the Life of Bonnie Consulo* in 1975. The melding of staged documentary, actuality shooting, and pure fiction continued in *Rushes* (1979), in which Neil (Spinnello) turns to the camera and says, "Film everything for the next twenty-four hours, 'cause I've come to a strong, positive decision—namely, to commit suicide." We then see what appear to be the last twenty-four hours of Neil's life. We see him direct the film from inside the film and only learn that it is a total fiction as the final credits roll. *Rushes*, like *David Holzman's Diary* and ... *No Lies*, also uses the technique of self-reflexivity in which a genuine filmmaker appears as part of the production as the filmmaker but is, in fact, also acting. The staged documentary would be pushed much further in the 1980s.

A documentarian who began in the 1970s and became one of the avant-garde of self-reflexive cinema in the 1980s and 1990s and beyond is Nick Broomfield, though his route to self-interjection on camera is different from that taken by filmmakers discussed above. Unlike them, Broomfield's subjects have no relationship with the filmmaker prior to making the documentary. Nor is his work scripted and acted. A London-born graduate of Britain's National Film School, Broomfield started making films in England in 1971. It was when he teamed up with codirector Joan Churchill on a succession of films that his work solidified. Their most well-known early work together, *Soldier Girls* (1980), is a feature-length documentary in the vérité style that follows three female U.S. Army re-



The staged documentary becomes ever more disturbing with Barry Spinello in *Rushes* (U.S., 1979, Barry Spinello). DCL © 2005, all rights reserved

cruits through the rigors of basic training. It focuses intimately on the women soldiers, a subject never tackled before. Like Wiseman's films it employs no narration, no subtitles, and no interviews. Unlike his *Basic Training*, however, Churchill's and Broomfield's film centers on the personal more than on the institution of the army. It is a fully realized work in the tradition of following an



A poster for *Biggie and Tupac* (U.K., 2000, Nick Broomfield).



Privates Joanna Johnson, Jackie Hall, and Carla Tuten in *Soldier Girls* (U.S., 1986, Joan Churchill and Nick Broomfield).

emotional story line from an observational point of view. Toward the end of the film the subjects acknowledge the presence of the filmmakers in an onscreen hug, a unique gesture in what is otherwise a classic *vérité* approach.

Broomfield continued to create controversy with what some critics characterize as intrusive and unethical approaches to documentary. For example, he has been known to arrive to do an interview and begin shooting as an unprepared subject opens the door, creating a situation of adversity rather than trust between subject and filmmaker. His work, however, is consistently challenging and richly layered, always underpinned by a commitment to story.

Joan Churchill, the cinematographer on *Soldier Girls*, has had a lifelong passion for filming observational documentaries, which she has described as "A subjective camera style that throws the viewer into an intimate, firsthand experience with participants doing what they would have been doing if the camera wasn't there." Part of a documentary-making family, Churchill is steeped in *vérité* camera tradition. She worked with the Maysles on *Gimme Shelter* and was a cinematographer on *An American Family*. She and Broomfield hooked up, both professionally and personally, while she was teaching at the National Film School. Her collaborations as both cameraperson and director have continued with many and various filmmakers for over thirty years.

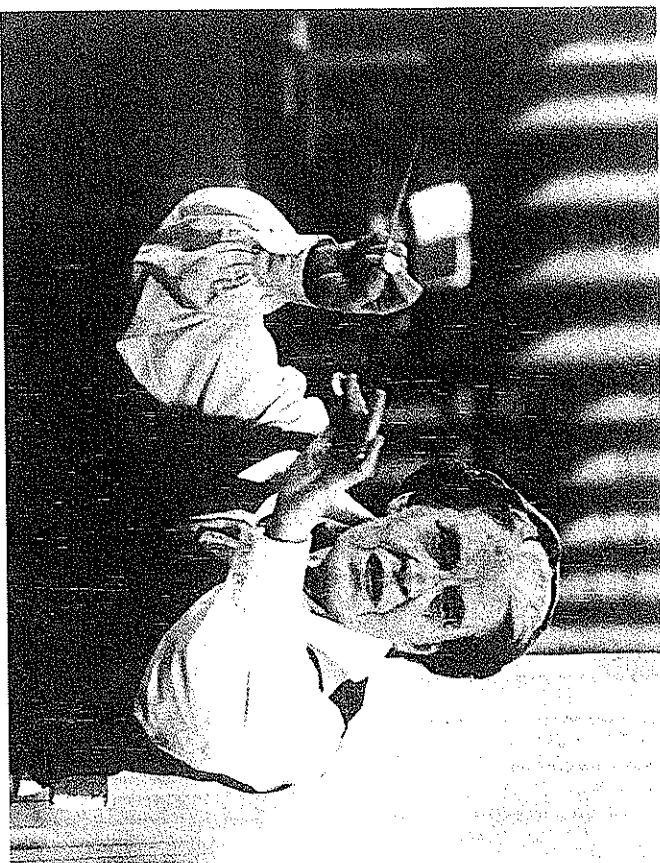


Nana, Mom, and Me (U.S., 1974, Amalie R. Rothschild). Amalie R. Rothschild

By leaving in the onscreen good-bye hug of the recruit rejected by the army, Churchill and Broomfield helped to move the classic direct cinema style in the direction of reflexivity. After the two parted ways, Broomfield's films began to include more and more interaction between subject and filmmaker, challenging the objectivity of the filmmaker. Critical controversy raised by his insertion of self into the films reached a boiling point when Broomfield is seen onscreen handing money for interview time to his leading subject in *Heidi Fleiss: Hollywood Madame* (1995). In part his work seeks to confront on deeper and deeper levels the dilemma of how the presence of a film crew can alter subjects' behavior in *vérité* films. On the other hand, Broomfield became the "star" of his own later documentaries, with his presence as agent provocateur creating serious tensions with the films' ostensible subjects.

An important part of 1970s feminist documentary making, perhaps arising from the consciousness-raising techniques of feminism, dealt with self-reflexivity. Documentaries made primarily by women, notwithstanding the work of Leni Riefenstahl in the 1930s or Esfir Shub in the 1920s, were few and far between prior to the 1970s. In the later decade women found an unprecedented and distinct voice in North American documentary on personal, political, and professional levels.

Nana, Mom, and Me, made by Amalie Rothschild in 1974, confronts some of the same issues of relationships between mothers and daughters as Citron's *Daughter Rite*. Rothschild's work is not acted by performers, however, but rather captures unscripted interaction among three real generations of women—



Antonia Brico in *Antonia: Portrait of a Woman* (U.S., 1974, Judy Collins and Jill Godmilow). National Film Archive Film Stills Library

Rothschild, her mother, and her mother's mother. Canadians Claudia Weill and Joyce Chopra's *Joyce at 34* (1972) explores the conflicts Chopra faces as she juggles career, husband, and the prospect of a new baby. Both women later pursued careers in which they directed successful mainstream Hollywood fiction feature films. *Antonia: Portrait of a Woman* (1974), by filmmaker Jill Godmilow and singer/songwriter Judy Collins, profiles the fascinating career of symphony conductor Antonia Brico and her fight to be able to use her great skill in an almost entirely male profession. The film, in which we hear the voice of Godmilow and see Collins interviewing Brico, explores the career and artistic ambitions not only of the subject but also of the filmmakers.

Social and Political Emphases

Vietnam

The monumental event affecting American society in those years, and the rallying point for much of the social unrest, was the war in Vietnam. Documentary filmmakers were very much a part of articulating opinion about the war, particu-



Letters From Vietnam, photographed by Abbot Mills (U.S., 1965, Drew Associates). Drew Associates

larly for those who opposed it. The repercussions of the war, both direct and indirect, became central topics for some of the best nonfiction work of the 1970s.

The 16mm technology available by the late 1960s had become relatively easy to use, portable, and inexpensive; and film stock prices were low compared with earlier eras. Raised on post-WWII audiovisual media, both at home and in the classroom, hundreds of American baby boomers became infatuated with the power of film as a way to communicate personally. Attending film school in college slowly became a legitimate alternative to studying creative writings; theater, or other subjects in the arts. Filmmaking, especially documentary filmmaking, became accessible to a generation of affluent young Americans, and it evolved into a principal medium through which antiwar and "youth movement" values were promulgated. Hundreds of 16mm films that criticized the status quo of U.S. military and social policies were made and shown.

Letters from Vietnam (1965) is not an antiwar film by intent, but it becomes a questioning of U.S. involvement, even at that early date. Made by Robert Drew Associates, with Gregory Shuker as "correspondent" and Abbot Mills as cameraman, it was shown on ABC television. The film follows a young helicopter pilot as he flies missions over enemy territory; this was the first instance of synchro-

nous sound film being shot in a helicopter. We learn his story through the device of the audiotape letters he sends to his girl back home and come to feel his discomfort as he visits a Vietnamese orphanage and meets some of the child victims of the war.

The Anderson Platoon (1969) is actually a French television production, but with an English narration it was widely seen in the United States. French documentarian Pierre Schoendoerffer had served as a combat soldier in Vietnam in the 1950s, during the French colonial occupation. In the fall of 1966 he returned with a cameraman and spent six weeks with an American infantry platoon, a racially integrated combat unit led by an African-American West Pointer, Lieutenant Joseph B. Anderson. The film follows the infantrymen as they eat, sleep, fight, and die. According to Robert J. McNamara, then U.S. Secretary of Defense, "*The Anderson Platoon* doesn't tell you, it shows you, and this remarkable film resonates deeply."

Interviews with My Lai Veterans (1970) won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Short for filmmaker Joseph Strick (best known for his ambitious fiction film adaptations of *Tropic of Cancer* and *Ulysses*). It is a deep indictment of a highly publicized and controversial decimation of a whole Vietnamese village. With interviews of five veterans of this encounter, shot by Haskell Wexler, the chaos of warfare is revealed. Peter Davis's *Hearts and Minds* (1974) presents a detailed, compiled history of Vietnam going back to the French conflict following WWII and ending with a critical appraisal of the grievous hurt done to all sides by these wars. *The War at Home* (1979, Glenn Silber and Barry Brown) is about the increasingly violent student protests against the war as manifested at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Newsreel Collective

Like the Film and Photo League, which began in 1930, Newsreel Collective started in New York in 1967 then spread to other cities—Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. It quickly made many films, mostly short agitprop pieces running from six to twenty-six minutes. To sympathetic audiences, often on college campuses, these seemed to be telling it like it was; to others they seemed merely crude and strident. For example: *Columbia Revolt* (1968) documented an occupation by students of the administration building at Columbia University with great support for the student radicals. In 1971 in the founding New York chapter, after a series of "self-criticism sessions," Newsreel was renamed Third World Newsreel. It decided to focus its efforts on empowering people of color and added media training and audience development to its agenda. Produced during this transition by San Francisco Newsreel was Judy Smith's *The Woman's Film* (1971). Providing a sign of this new direction, it was one of the early feminist documentaries to deal with working-class women and their problems. Third World Newsreel continues to function, carrying on the



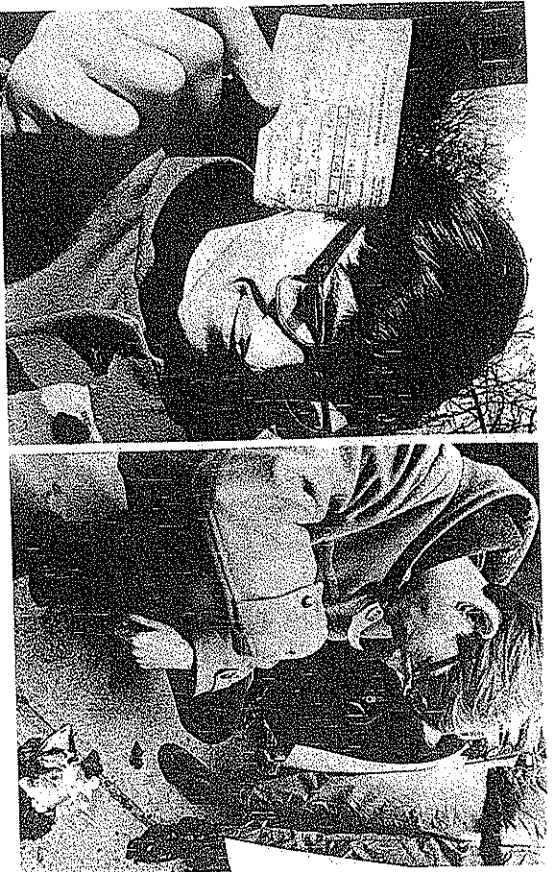
A famous shot of napalm victims in *Hearts and Minds*, released theatrically by Warner Brothers (U.S., 1974, Peter Davis). Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive

progressive vision of the founders. California Newsreel, founded in 1968, is the other remaining pillar. It makes and distributes educational video on "African American life and history, race relations and diversity training, African cinema, media and society, labor studies, campus life, and much more."

Challenge for Change

In 1967 the National Film Board of Canada began a project using documentary in a quite new way. Called Challenge for Change, it was first headed by John Kemeny. In 1968 George Stoney, an American documentarian (*All My Babies*, 1952; *How the Myth Was Made*, 1978), was hired as its head.

The concept behind Challenge for Change was to provide citizens access to the media to express their concerns and needs and to create a dialogue with agencies of government involved in social programs. This, of course, was closer to the Grierson idea of using documentary for social improvement than to the Flaherty one of recording existing cultures—hammer rather than mirror. Grierson, after all, had been the first film commissioner of Canada. But, unlike Grierson, and any other prior program, Challenge for Change was proposing that rather than communicating to the people, or even for the people, it would at-



A young man burns his draft card in *The War at Home* (U.S., 1979, Glenn Silber and Barry Alexander Brown), Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

tempt to make films *with* the people. Eventually this led to enabling the *people* to make their own films. Grierson characterized this program as "decentralizing the power of propaganda."

The first Challenge for Change project, begun in the summer of 1967, was headed by Colin Low, a seasoned NFB filmmaker (*City of Gold*, 1957; *Universe*, 1960, and later one of the pioneers of large-format filmmaking). The Fogo Island Communications Experiment, as it was called, addressed the economic and social problems of Fogo Island, off the coast of Newfoundland. A high proportion of its inhabitants were on welfare; others were moving out. Sociologists from St. John's Memorial University along with NFB filmmakers studied and recorded the situation, and some twenty hours of footage were shot and made into twenty-eight short films.

Out of a second Challenge for Change project came a film entitled *You Are on Indian Land* (1969). It resulted from the closing of a bridge across the St. Lawrence River at Cornwall Island, Ontario. A treaty in 1794 had given the Mohawk Indians the right to free passage across the river, and they regularly used the bridge. The Indian unit of Challenge for Change instigated a protest demonstration against the closing. While mass media coverage stressed violence in this confrontation, the NFB record shows this view as distorted—that almost everyone behaved humanely. Screenings were held for the Mohawks, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Cornwall police, the city administration, and representatives from Indian Affairs. This was the first time these people had ever sat down

together. Subsequent screenings were held in the Parliament Building in Ottawa. Eventually the decision to close the bridge was rescinded.

On the Fogo Island project the NFB crew did all the production. For *You Are on Indian Land* the Indian film unit and the Cornwall Mohawks were involved in the editing as well as the shooting. In subsequent Challenge for Change work, following the introduction of portable 1/2-inch videotape recorders around 1970, the people involved were taught to use the equipment and made their own tapes.

When George Stoney showed some of this Canadian work to U.S. welfare officials in Washington, they asked two questions: "Does the government know you're doing this sort of thing?" and, "How long do you think you can get away with it?" Eventually Challenge for Change was allowed to wither and die, but not before it had established a precedent for the use of media by citizen organizations.

Public Access Cable

In 1970 Stoney returned to the States to head the undergraduate film program at New York University. One of his first actions there, with colleague Red Burns, was to set up an Alternative Media Center to promote and support the use of public access cable. New York City public access channels began operation in 1971. In 1972 federal legislation reserved public access channels in all new cable installations in the hundred top markets in the country. It has seemed to Stoney, and to other advocates, that public access channels fit within the U.S. tradition of freedom of speech for all the people and nicely accommodated portable video technology. If Stoney can be called the "grandfather" of community access, its "godmother" is Dee Dee Halleck, longtime advocate of the populist voice in public media. Filmmaker and media activist, she was founder of Paper Tiger Television and cofounder of Deep Dish Satellite Network. She has been involved in alternative media since her work in the 1960s with children making their own films to a 1990s' analysis of the media activist phenomenon exploding across the Internet.

Independent documentary video production specifically for community access, often directly inspired by Stoney's teaching, sprang up in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Frequently the work was conceived as alternatives to television shows of the time which, it was felt, had failed to illuminate critical social issues. Many of the alternative media operations were cooperatives bearing names such as Videofreex, Video Free America, Raindance, and Videopolis. Nearly all of these groups saw their mission as one of revolutionary scope: to inform and educate the public toward action and social change. In this sense they were the video successors to anti-Vietnam War 16mm-filmmaking collectives such as Newsreel and California Newsreel, described above.

New York City was a center for this early public access activity, and with later organizations like Paper Tiger Television (founded in 1981) access ethos

continued strong there. Among Paper Tiger's best-known programs was *Herbert Schiller Reads the New York Times*, in which the U.C. San Diego professor delivers a funny and sometimes frightening interpretation of "all the news that's fit to print." When public access spread out into other areas of the country, it took on a community focus that has remained characteristic of its use. Ultimately public access produced structures such as Deep Dish TV, a national satellite network, which supports access producers and programmers, independent video makers, activists, and people who believe in a progressive television network. Offering material from producers around the world, Deep Dish transmits to community television stations and home dish owners nationwide. Self-envisioned as an alternative to commercial television, Deep Dish advocates diversity and aims to distribute creative programming that educates and activates. Its alternative to mainstream media approach has continued with coverage of the antiglobalization movement.

On another activist front, in 1971 documentarian Jon Alpert and his wife, Keiko Tsuno, started one of the country's first community media centers—Downtown Community Television Center. Alpert bought a used mail truck for five dollars, installed TV sets in the side, and began showing his videotapes on street corners in New York City's Chinatown. At first nobody watched, but soon their tapes about local issues began to attract small crowds. From the beginning they had a commitment to sharing knowledge.

The newly formed DCTV was the only place in New York City that offered production training and comparable services free. When funding from the New York Department of Cultural Affairs stopped for two years, the workshops went on. Even with the change in arts funding under the Reagan government in the 1980s, DCTV continued to offer free basic video training. Its goal to empower the community through media use remained one of DCTV's top priorities.

Other Emerging Organizations

One of the successes of 16mm, and later video, independent documentary making was the emergence of regional production units across the United States, which often made films on local as well as national or international issues. In the early 1970s a climate of government support in the U.S., fostered to a certain extent by the remains of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" programs, was one of the conditions that made such efforts possible. Two examples, in very different social settings, point to the vitality of this grassroots media movement.

Appalshop, a regional media center with strong grassroots activism, was established in 1969 in Whitesburg, Kentucky, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts. An example of its early documentaries is the fourteen-minute black-and-white film by Ben Zickafosse and Dan Moan, *UMWA 1970: A House Divided*. It documents the time when W. A. (Tony) Boyle, president of the United Mine Workers of America, was under indictment for misuse of union

funds and suspected of the murder of Jock Yablonski (outspoken advocate for reform of the union) and his family. By inter-cutting a speech given by Boyle at a miners' rally in Virginia with scenes at a mine and interviews with miners, the film contrasts Boyle's statements with those of the reform movement then growing among the union rank and file. The film's point of view is clearly with the workers and ties into another 1970s populist documentary trend, elaborating on labor issues in America, past and present.

Two Appalshop films that were particularly successful are *Coal Mining Women* (1982) and *Strangers and Kin* (1984), the latter by Herb E. Smith. *Strangers and Kin* examines the stereotyping of "hillbillies" through films, television shows, literature, and interviews with contemporary Appalachians. Elizabeth Barrett's *Coal Mining Women* is in the tradition of reclaiming women's history, with personal stories of the women who go into this totally male world. Not directly connected with Appalshop but filming in its region and sharing its concerns on her Academy-Award-winning first film, *Harlan County, USA* (1976), is Barbara Kopple, who has become among the most honored filmmakers to emerge from the social justice filmmaking of the 1970s.

Appalshop remained a viable production entity for regional media makers, with ongoing funding from the NEA. It has continued to produce hundreds of films and trained hundreds more people from Appalachia to use many types of art and mass media to express and share their own life experiences.

In Chicago, in 1970 and 1971, Gordon Quinn and Jerry Blumenthal, as Blumenthal put it, began to gather into their hyperactive, flood-prone basement studio a small band of like-minded progressive-thinking sorts: filmmakers, organizers, teachers, and students. This became the Kartemquin Collective. Kartemquin's reputation and numerous international awards stem from works such as *Home for Life* (1967), its first film. It is an extraordinary feature-length direct-cinema record of two elderly persons entering the Drexel Home for the Aged and adjusting to the changes in their lives. Other noteworthy productions include *The Chicago Maternity Center Story* (1976), about the closing of the service that was the subject of Pare Lorentz's *The Fight for Life*, on the grounds that modern medicine requires high-cost, hospital-based care; and *The Last Pullman Car* (1983), the story of the closing of Pullman Standard's South Chicago plant, the last factory in America to manufacture subway and railroad passenger cars. Working from an agenda of social justice and personal empowerment, Kartemquin has continued to successfully make documentaries, up to and beyond their most noted 1997 phenomenon *Hoop Dreams*, produced by Steve James, Frederick Marx, and Gordon Quinn (discussed in detail in chapter seventeen).

In 2004 Kartemquin made the ambitious series *The New Americans*, executive-produced by Steve James and Gordon Quinn. This truly cooperative series for PBS's *Independent Lens* used multiple filmmakers to document twenty-first century immigration to the United States. The stories of people from Nigeria, Palestine, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and India reveal the ways in which the



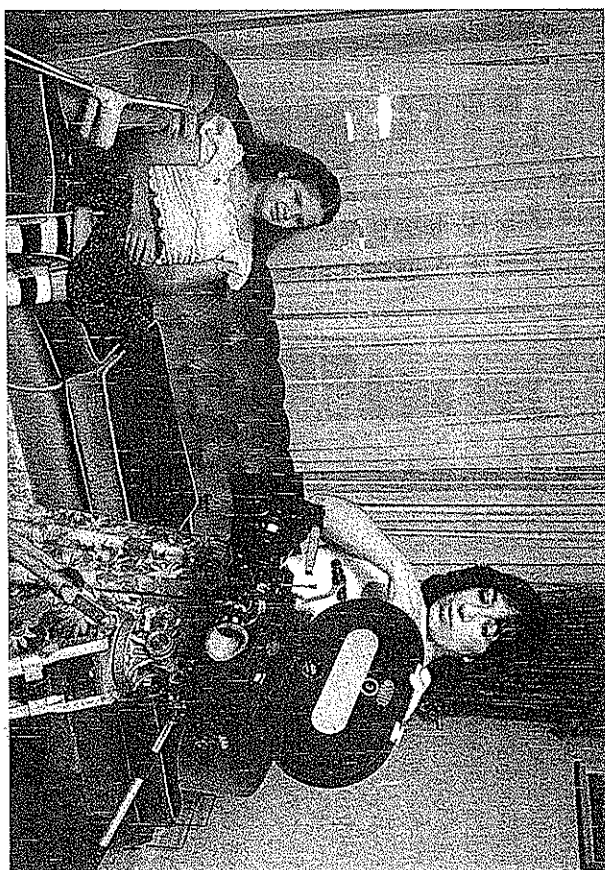
The New Americans (U.S., 2004, Steve James and Gordon Quinn, Kartemquin Films).
Kartemquin Films

cultural makeup of the country is rapidly changing. In this seven-hour project Kartemquin brought thirty-plus years of experience in social issue filmmaking to bear with the same thoughtfulness and thoroughness that characterizes all of their work.

By end of the 1970s a fairly broad base of such local grassroots film- and video-making groups existed across the United States. The National Alliance of Media Arts Centers was founded in 1980 by an eclectic group of media activists who felt that by joining together they could create a national organization that would support its institutional members and advocate for the field as a whole. By the late 1980s U.S. national political support for independent regional media all but disappeared, due in no small part to the shift from Democratic to Republican administrations. NAMAC renamed itself the National Alliance of Media Art and Culture, partly in response to such funding shifts, and continued to be an effective force. There remains today a strong twenty-year-plus history of populist activism through regionally based media making as embodied in NAMAC.

Feminist Institutions

One institutional example of rising feminist power was the establishment in 1974 of Studio D at the National Film Board of Canada as a separate woman-oriented production entity. Under the leadership of Kathleen Shannon, Studio D pro-



I'll Find a Way (Canada, 1977, Beverly Shafer). National Film Board of Canada

claimed a strong mandate of serving women, the aged, youth, and nonwhites, with a clearly articulated agenda of "integrated feminism." A direct, if unarticulated, line between Challenge for Change and Studio D is evident in the decision of both to put filmmaking into the hands of the disenfranchised. Shannon insisted that Studio D resources promote only women's perspectives, since she believed that other filmmaking entities already met the interests of white men. One of the studio's earliest successes was Beverly Shafer's Academy-Award-winning short *I'll Find a Way* (1977). This moving story of a young girl's struggle with the neurological disorder spina bifida was one of a ten-part series, *The Children of Canada*, all directed by Shafer. Studio D went on to create important work in the 1980s and 1990s, discussed in chapter seventeen. Shafer has had a continuous career at NFB, including an update to *I'll Find a Way* entitled *Just a Wedding* (1999) and the 2004 release of *Mr. Merzler's Gift*.

Another influential institution reflecting the growing force of women documentarians was the start of the feminist film distribution company Women Make Movies in 1972 "to address the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in the media industry." While in Canada government subsidy enabled the Film Board to allocate resources to female and other underserved documentary producers, in the United States it was chiefly the 16mm nontheatrical market that fueled a burgeoning women's documentary movement. Both the Canadian and American entities embodied "liberation" values of the 1960s; and while Stu-

dio D eventually became defunct, Women Make Movies continues to be important in the field, led for nearly twenty years by Debra Zimmerman.

New Day Films, another institution still operating in the twenty-first century, is a distribution cooperative that grew from meetings at the Flaherty Film Seminars in the early 1970s. Co-founders included filmmakers Annalie Rothschild, Liane Brandon, Julia Reichert, and Jim Klein. Feminist in origin, New Day was the first distribution company to be run entirely by and for filmmakers. In this it was a unique outgrowth of the empowerment movements of the era. Over fifty independents continue to use the New Day cooperative to market their work.

Historical Documentary

In 1970 previously classified U.S. government footage of the results of the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which was originally shot by Japanese cameramen in 1945 for the Japanese government, came to light, due in large part to the work of scholar Erik Barnouw and his colleagues at Columbia University. Suppressed for decades by the Pentagon, the document of destruction was almost unbelievable in its close-up horror. The film made from this declassified material, *Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945* (1970), showed the intimate results of the atomic blast for the first time to the public. This discovery was part of a long visual re-examination of nuclear war and nuclear power that remained a continuing thread in documentary for the next twenty years. The young adults who were making documentaries in the 1970s were the first generation for whom nuclear annihilation was a serious possibility, if not an assumption, and nuclear holocaust became a strong theme in independent documentary in the 1980s.

The repackaging of the A-bomb footage also helped jump-start a late twentieth-century boom in historical filmmaking that continues today. Compilation documentaries have a very long history, going back to Esfir Shub's work in the Soviet Union, and extending through the post-WWII reconstitution of combat footage in pieces such as *Victory at Sea* (1952–1953), the success of which inspired a number of successor series on American network television dealt with in chapter 12.

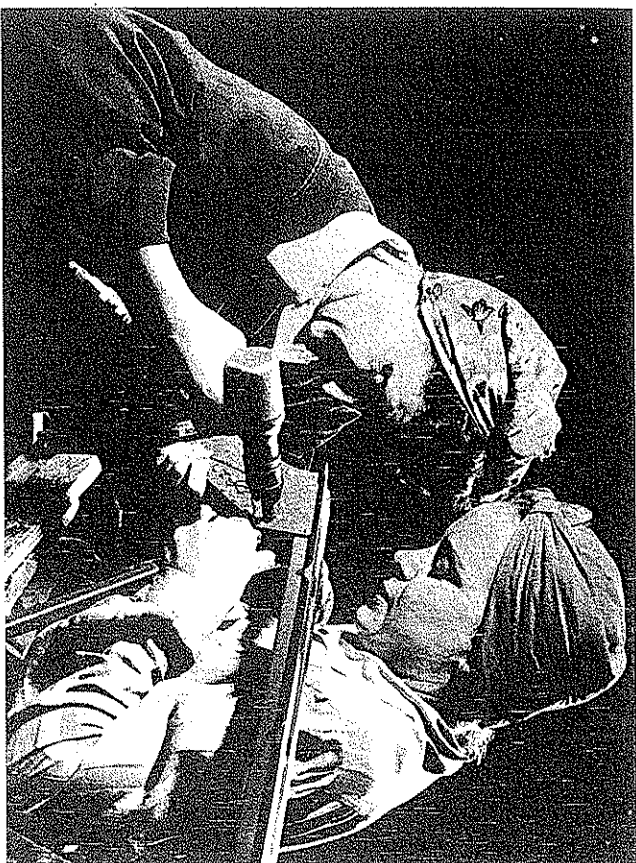
In Britain, in 1964, the BBC produced its first archival-footage-based mega-series for television. The twenty-six episodes of *The Great War*, produced with the Imperial War Museum and narrated by Sir Michael Redgrave, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War I and helped launch a new channel in Britain: BBC2. Made at a time when many could still recall its events, it evoked deep emotions about the First World War from Britons who were still recovering from the Second. For British television, *The Great War* remained a high point of historical documentary making for a decade. (It was updated, modified for a U.S. audience, and rerun on both BBC and PBS with great success in 2000.)

Although there were other British archival film series, *The World at War* (1975), spearheaded by producer Sir Jeremy Isaacs and narrated by Sir Laurence Olivier, was a landmark in historical television. Using archive film, photographic and other still images, and interviews with eyewitnesses, it broke up historical events into smaller, accessible story lines. These are occasionally supplemented by the use of location shooting to establish atmosphere and to fill a gap where archive footage did not exist. *The World at War* won immense critical acclaim and was highly profitable for Thames Television. It was purchased by broadcasters throughout the world for over twenty years, demonstrating that an historical epic documentary series could be of high quality, attract a large popular audience, and make a great deal of money—very much like the 1950s' *Victory at Sea*.

Born in Glasgow in 1932, Isaacs was educated at Oxford. He joined Granada Television as a producer in 1958 and worked for the BBC on the noted *Panorama* series. In addition to *The World at War* he has produced some of the other most significant British television documentaries. For example, Isaacs was also responsible for *Ireland, A Television History* (1981), and *The Cold War* (1998), made in conjunction with Turner Broadcasting.

Other filmmakers, working independently of major television funding, also turned to archival compilation to make social and political points. In the United States accounts of the labor movement and resurrecting women's history were a big part of the trend, as newly politicized young filmmakers approached history with revisionist eyes. They looked back at the archival record of previous social change and challenged how it had been traditionally presented. The following are some examples.

From 1905 to World War I members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), nicknamed the Wobblies, traveled across the country organizing workers into "One Big Union." The film *The Wobblies* (1978, Deborah Shaffer and Stewart Bird) integrates newsreel footage with music of the period and interviews with IWW members. Cultural, political, and legal events of the time are carefully documented, creating an exceptional record of one of the most exciting periods in American labor history. Another union, the United Auto Workers, which was at one point one of the most powerful in the nation, developed from a series of auto plant strikes in Flint, Michigan, in the 1930s. The women who participated in or supported participants in those strikes tell their story in Academy-Award-nominated *With Babies and Banners* (1978, Lorraine Gray). Again, archival footage from the period of the strike serves to illustrate the women's stories. *Union Maids* (1977, Julia Reichert and Jim Klein), also Academy Award-nominated, is about trade unionism, but it is even more about three extraordinary women. Their stories are intercut with one another and with period newsreel footage as they recall their lives as workers and union organizers in Chicago in the late twenties and thirties. *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980, Connie Field) arguably became the most widely known of these films of labor and women's history, perhaps because it dealt with a past still alive in the memories of many



The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter (U.S., 1980, Connie Field). OWI photo by Palmer, DCL © 2005, all rights reserved

in its audience. It re-examines the experiences of female war workers in America during the 1940s, especially their struggle for dignity and equality.

It almost seems that for the documentary world, the 1970s slipped into the 1980s unnoticed. Many interesting and important documentaries were being made as the decades changed, most still shot and shown on 16mm film. The aesthetic and ethical considerations of 16mm social issue documentary making had been well honed by filmmakers who came of age with cinéma vérité/direct cinema and who recognized the uses to which archival footage could be put. The social issues that forged identities for these largely college-educated filmmakers from the mid-sixties onward—gay rights, black power, feminism, the American Vietnam War, spiritual enlightenment, environmentalism, drug use, and youth culture—were still the background for many in North America. They learned ways to treat these and other themes in sophisticated films requiring a great deal of technical expertise. It required funding, cooperative work, planning, audience development, and a mastery of many crafts and skills to produce good documentaries. Hundreds of documentary makers had achieved this goal, opening the way for previously unheard voices. The situation in the United Kingdom was somewhat different, as will be explored in chapter seventeen.

The 16mm documentary community, and its public, also had established demanding aesthetic standards for image and sound quality, various editing

techniques, music, usefulness of films for education and for entertainment value, originality, and daring. Working with a medium that required intensive technical knowledge of cameras, lighting, sound recording, linear flabed editing, optical effects, mixing, and laboratory work, meant that documentary filmmaking was by no means a solo or a casual undertaking. Although video pioneers like cable television community access users, Jon Alpert's DCTV, and Alan and Susan Raymond were pushing accepted aesthetics with video, documentary was still basically the machine-based medium that Flaherty had used.

All of this changed dramatically in the 1980s. Video and then digital technologies seemed to sneak up on the documentary, hailed by its prophets and derided by classicists. Many things were gained in the shift away from the film medium, but many other things that had in some cases become the true art of documentary were lost.

Films of the Period

1968

David Holzman's Diary (U.S., Jim McBride and L. M. "Kir" Carson)

1969

High School (U.S., Frederick Wiseman)
In the Year of the Pig (U.S., Emile de Antonio)
Law and Order (Wiseman)

1970

Gimme Shelter (U.S., Albert and David Maysles, and Charlotte Zwerin)
Hiroshima-Nagasaki, August 1945 (U.S., Erik Barnouw)
Sad Song of Yellow Skin (Canada, Michael Rubbo)
Woodstock (U.S., Michael Wadleigh)

1971

Angela: Portrait of a Revolutionary (U.S., Yolanda du Luart)
Gertrude Stein: When This You See, Remember Me (U.S., Perry Miller Adaro)
Interviews with My Lai Veterans (U.S., Joseph Strick)
The Murder of Fred Hampton (U.S., Michael Gray and Howard Alk)

1972

Marjoe (U.S., Howard Smith and Sarah Kernochan)

1973

Attica (U.S., Cinda Firestone)
I. F. Stone's Weekly (U.S., Jerry Bruck, Jr.)
... No Lies (U.S., Mitchell Block)

1974

- Antonia: Portrait of the Woman* (U.S., Judy Collins and Jill Godmilow)
Hearts and Minds (U.S., Peter Davis)
Waiting for Fidel (Canada, Rubbo)

1975

- Grey Gardens* (U.S., Albert and David Maysles, Ellen Howde, and Muffie Meyer)
The World at War (U.K., Jeremy Isaacs)

1976

- The Chicago Maternity Center Story* (U.S., Kartemquin Films)
Harlan County, USA (U.S., Barbara Kopple)
Police Tapes (U.S., Alan and Susan Raymond)
Union Maids (U.S., James Klein, Miles Mogulescu, and Julia Reichert)

1977

- Georgia O'Keeffe* (U.S., Adato)
Men of Bronze (U.S., William Miles)
Word Is Out (U.S., Mariposa Film Group)

1978

- Daughter Rite* (U.S., Michelle Citron)
With Babies and Banners (U.S., Lorraine Gray, Lyn Goldfarb, and Anne Bohlen)

1979

- The Wobblies* (U.S., Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer)

1980

- The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (U.S., Connie Field)
Model (U.S., Wiseman)
Soldier Girls (U.S., Nick Broomfield and Joan Churchill)

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