

Home Movies

by

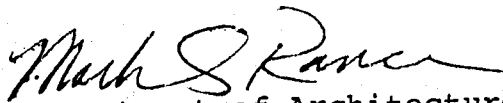
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B.A., Boston University
1975

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Masters in Science
at the
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

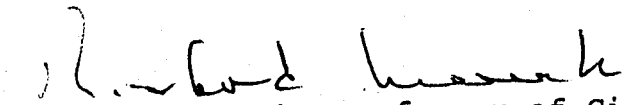
June 1977

Signature of Author



Department of Architecture, May 16, 1977

Certified by



Richard Leacock, Professor of Cinema
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by



Nicholas Negroponte, Chairman
Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

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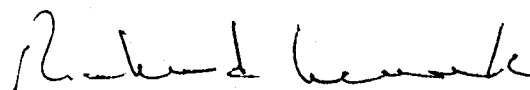
Mark S. Rance

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In general, documentary films are made by filmmakers working in crews. Films made in this way tend to relate to their subjects in terms of what is newsworthy about them. Filming what is personal or autobiographical is, for the most part, excluded by this method.

The scenes from the films submitted with this essay were made in an alternative style, shooting single-person. The films were an attempt on the part of the filmmaker to film more closely and more intimately his relationships to those people he filmed.

Thesis Supervisor:



Richard Leacock
Professor of Cinema

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In shooting single-person the filmmaker does not employ a soundperson, but takes sound for himself while filming. Removed from any bonds that teamwork imposes, the filmmaker has a terrific mobility and a certain spontaneity of movement. In this there is a general sense of intimacy.

On a simple level, the intimacy is relative to the physical closeness of the camera. I think the real nature of this style of shooting, though, goes beyond the closeness of the camera and is more about the complexities of personalities and relationships.

There are several ways of shooting single-person. One way is to simply mount the microphone on the camera. Ed Pincus has been using a radio microphone which is worn by the person he films. I used a method used almost exclusively by Jeff Kreines and Joel DeMott.

The equipment consists of a 16mm camera, a CP-16; a small tape recorder, the Nagra SN; power supply; microphone; and three or four four-hundred foot magazines. Carrying the camera loaded, the rest can be packed in a shoulder bag.

When you shoot, the microphone is held in one hand, while you hold the camera with the other. Ed calls this "southpaw" mic-ing.

It took Jeff and Joel about a week to teach me how to use

the equipment. I began filming in Chicago, August 1975.

The reason I wanted to shoot this way, to get so close, was that I wanted to make a film about my relationship to my family through the camera. I think it would have been impossible if I had brought someone with me and had worked as a member of a film crew instead of acting like a member of the family.

When I began filming, I had not been home for any length of time for four years. I had been away at college studying Greek. I was the only boy in a family of four, and I had tried to keep a distance from my parents.

It happened that as I was learning to film, I was also learning how to come back into the family.

As I was coming back, my mother was moving out. My relationship with her had always been a tumultuous one, but she had agreed earlier in the summer that I could film her as she left home and went to school in New York.

In spending so much time with her, I think she began to see us both as outcasts from the family. When I went with her to New York to film her fashion show at school, she treated me like her little boy, and her equal. She saw me as someone who was supporting her in her attempt to leave home. She felt that in her agreement, the film was to be useful to her and her career, that it would be something pleasing for the people she wanted to please. I was making the film for completely different reasons.

When it was clear to her that this was the case, I think she

felt that the common bond she had felt earlier had been violated. She felt totally alone and was afraid to see herself any other way. The reason she was so angry and so brutal was probably her own sense of frustration at her professional life, its dangers and the sense of being unsupported and a potential failure.

Being alone with her when things did fall apart gave her the opportunity to use our relationship to vent her anger and frustration.

The second film I did was commissioned by my mother's closest brother. He wanted me to make a film about his daughter when she came out at the International Debutantes' Ball. Her coming-out was a gift from him to her.

I filmed what I thought he wanted and what I thought was important to me. It ended up that there were two films, one I gave to him and one he probably will never want to see.

My relationship to my uncle, his daughter and his ex-wife was through a kind of intimacy that nephews, cousins, and distant relatives must suffer between themselves only because they are family. In this there was a greater feeling of closeness between each of them and myself than there was between themselves because of the year-old divorce.

My uncle saw me as his favorite sister's son and his friend, my aunt saw me as an impartial judge for her case, and my cousin saw me as a nuisance. My participation in each of their versions

of what was going on gave me the chance to make a film about their relationships to each other and to themselves as they thought I saw them through the camera.

The two finished films are the beginning of a long-term project involving the entire family. The immediate family is the main point of reference for filming members of the extended family.

Works in progress are films about my mother's visit to her mother, who is dying; my father's mother and her friend on vacation in Wisconsin; and a film about my twin sisters when they get their first jobs.

A significant element of single-person filming is the informal participation of the filmmaker. I think it would be disastrous if the relationship between myself and my family was defined merely in terms of filmmaking, putting me on the outside looking in.

The autobiographical and personal aspects of the filmmaking clearly rely on the camera being associated with one person so closely that the camera is forgotten and the relationship to that person continues. Filming single-person makes the filmmaker a character and an active participant in the film. The film becomes comparable to a written diary or notations in personal history.

[TEXT ACCOMPANIED BY VIDEOTAPE COPY OF
FILMS]

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I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Ed Pincus and Richard Leacock for their helpful criticism, guidance and support. I would also like to thank Melissa Shook, Tom Palazzolo, and Renata Breth for their help when things were at their worst and for reasons they all know best themselves. I would like to thank Diane Bohl, who typed this. And finally, I would especially like to thank Jeff Kreines and Joel DeMott, who taught me how to make movies.