DIRECT CINEMA:
Filmmaking Style and its Relationship to "Truth"

by

Bernice K. Schneider

B.A., Art History
University of Massachusetts
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Signature of Author _____
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Certified by _____
Glorianna Davenport
Assistant Professor
Film/Video Group Media Lab

Accepted by _____
Stephen A. Benton
Chairperson
Departmental Committee for Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of two sections: Direct Cinema and its relationship to "truth", and the making of the movie Harlem.

The first section of this thesis focuses primarily on observational cinema as a style and as a method of communicating "truth." I begin with a brief discussion of writings by Andre Bazan about the ambiguous relationship between photography and "truth." According to Bazan, photography and the cinema "actually contributes something to the natural order of creation instead of providing a substitute for it." I then move on to a background discussion of the cinematic method of Robert Flaherty in order to lay the foundation for an understanding of the principles of observational cinema. My discussion of Flaherty's methods is followed by an analysis of the works of Richard Leacock and of his style which emphasizes observational and noninterventional filmmaking as a method of communicating "truth." Leacock's approach was modified by Ed Pincus and Frederich Wiseman. In contrasting Leacock's approach with Pincus' interventionalist style, I am particularly concerned with Pincus' need to express his and his subject's emotional states of mind. Finally, I turn to Frederich Wiseman whose filmmaking focus is an exploration of the relationship between individuals and the institutions they inhabit.

In the second section I discuss the making of a personal documentary about my father who lived and worked in Harlem for most of his life. This section is a description of my own exploration of "truth" guided in part by the methods of the filmmakers mentioned above, with particular influence given to Richard Leacock's observational style.

Submitted with the written portion of this thesis is a 20 minute 3/4" video transfer of selected sequences of the thesis film.

Thesis Supervisor: Glorianna Davenport
Title: Assistant Professor
Film/Video Group Media Lab

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INTRODUCTION:

This thesis explores five different concepts of "truth" /"reality" in documentary cinema. The focus of my exploration is: How is "truth" manifested in personal documentary film. Webster defines truth as: in accordance with fact or reality." My thesis examines the notion that a filmmaker pursues "truth" in order to define his perception of reality. Thus, it is the filmmaker's quest for truth that I seek to explore. I will show that the filmmaker uses the film making process as a vehicle for discovering personal reality as well as uncovering truth about others.) Although, not always intentional, this discovery is implicit in the filmmaking process. Each filmmaker's unique style allows the process of self-discovery to unfold at varying times during film production. In documentary cinema, the original intention, or idea, is constantly redefined and modified when the filmmaker combines his past experiences with his exposure to the attitudes of those he observed and with whom he interacts. To the extent that the film form embraces the steps toward discovery, this journey becomes a metaphor with which the viewer vicariously lives. The objective of documentary cinema is for the filmmaker to identify those themes to which a viewers can relate and interpret.

PART 1. DIRECT CINEMA : A VEHICLE FOR DISCOVERY

1. "Truth" According to Andre Bazan:

Historically, the photograph has been linked with "truth"

> "originality in photography as distinct from originality in painting lies in the essentially objective character of photography. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of Man." [Bazan, pg. 13]

What is clearly important here is that the personality as well as the social and political biases of the author are expressed in the photographer's selections of images are framed and why certain images are selected as opposed to others. Similarly, a filmmaker reflects his own personality onto the screen. Often, without knowing why, we take what we see in documentary filmmaking as objective and credible. Bazan asserts that

> "in spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced."[Bazan. p. 13]

There has always been a need to preserve life in one form or another. Bazan continues:

> "Egyptians placed terra cotta statuettes, as substitute mummies which might replace the bodies if these were destroyed. It is the...primordial function of statuary namely, the preservation of life by a representation of life."

Representation varies depending upon one's personal and cultural experience. Understanding this representation helps us to interpret and create order in the world surrounding us, and to determine origin in ones own life and thus representation is a vehicle, a tool set, which we are able to use to create meaning. In traditional cultures

> "the chosen images, depicting events from history or myth, gave meaning to the existence of the individual". [Goethals, pg. 34].

2. Robert Flaherty: "Participatory Camera"

Robert Flaherty was the first notable filmmaker to document real life using real people and real locations. Perhaps he began the romantic tradition. His films are humanistic statements not political ones. He intuitively sensed the limitations of the impersonal camera and the restrictions of the formal frame. By involving himself in his material, he established a cinematic principle that parallels Werner Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle" in physics: the idea that the observation of nuclear particles alters the properties of these particles. I think one of the most beautiful moments in cinema was recorded in Nanook of the North when Nanook, smiling acknowledged the presence of Flaherty's camera in his igloo. Flaherty was not spying on Nanook nor was he just attempting to capture Nanook's life in the raw. Rather, he was collaborating with Nanook on representation.

Flaherty's purpose was to explore, document, and celebrate life, not to make propaganda. His work was poetic and lyrical. According to Richard Barsam, Flaherty tried to understand

> "his environment with a greater sensitivity to human problems and relationships between man and nature." [Barsam, pg. 126]

John Grierson said of Flaherty that his films time and again

> "induce a philosophic attitude on the part of the spectator, it is real, that is why." [Jacobs, pg. 26]

Flaherty treated film personally, revealing details of daily life that reflect human spirit. Flaherty engaged his subjects in the filmmaking process [as in Nanook and Moana]. Like an anthropologist he tried to understand the problems of his subjects and to live and suffer with them. When he staged sequences, he always maintained a sense of rhythm paralleling the rhythm of life.

Flaherty reached beyond observational cinema and created the first example of what is known as "participatory cinema." In participatory cinema, the filmmaker acknowledges that his entry in to the work of his subjects can provoke a flow of information about them. This style allows the filmmaker to adapt himself to the action, to generate a reality rather than

let it unfold. Flaherty's use of the participatory method goes back to his filming of Nanook where he was "constantly thinking up new hunting scenes for the film." Certain scenes were set up by Flaherty to create a balance between the natural and dramatic. Flaherty's clear vision and respect for Nanook is revealed. What becomes apparent to me is Nanook's and Flaherty's shared dedication.

> "Nanook, who urged the most perilous sequences, may well have sensed in the aggie a kind of immortality for the Inuit and himself." [Barnouw, pg. 43]

The intimacy which Flaherty was able to invest in his films translated into an understanding of the integral part of daily life, be it Nanook's life or Samoan life in Moana. Flaherty interprets what he sees and experiences giving it life "from the inside." It is a kind of observation that is an honest and direct way to get at the larger truth and complexity of Nanook's situation. Flaherty was deeply invested in the subjects of his films. He spent a year in the Samoan Islands before shooting a foot of film there. This was a period of reflection, mutual understanding and learning. When he did begin to film Moana he was sure to project his rushes in the village each evening. This helped him organize, win the confidence of the people, and establish a greater sense of intimacy. He could then use the camera not as a detached observer, but as a filmmaker with a vision and sense of human compassion.

3. Leacock: A Discussion of "Truth" - Noninterventional and "Observational" Approach

Many of the important events of the 1950's and 1960's were only known through network and news documentary programs. This limited and somewhat censored source of information led to an increasing distrust of the "official voice," and for many, enhanced a perception of a widening gap between establishment rhetoric and the reality of life in America. There became a growing doubt of the truthfulness of commercial mass media. Eric Barnouw characterized the network documentaries as follows:

> "In structure, the documentaries were authoritarian. Narration by newsmen, omniscient in tone was the cohesive factor. It proclaimed objectivity. It quoted dissent, but regularly paired it with official refutation. Through

mazes of controversy newsmen walked a tightrope labeled truth." [Barnouw, pp. 226-227]

In the late 1950's Leacock and Robert Drew formed a collaboration under the sponsorship of Time-Life. Their strong desire was to break with forms of repressive authority and cut through network deceptions and to experience directly the "truth" of what really was happening "out there." Their hope was to create a new kind of film which would take documentary into the street. It is impossible to talk about this new style of filmmaking without mentioning the crucial development of portable film technology: the brilliant marriage of the lightweight 16mm camera and portable tape recorder which records synchronous sound and operates independently of the camera. Instead of huge crews, two people sufficed. And two people could be mobile, flexible and spontaneous. Multiple two person crews could be used when a story took place in more than one location simultaneously. They were each able to create sequences independent of the other, the magic happened back in the editing room, when for example both sequences could be seamlessly intercut. In Crisis: Behind A Presidential Commitment, Leacock filmed sequences in Alabama and Pennebaker filmed sequences in Washington D.C. In the films Primary and Crisis, a new set of rules were successfully set into action. Leacock said,

"For the first time we were able to walk in and out of buildings, up and down stairs, film in taxi cabs, all over the place and get synchronous sound." [Mamber, pg. 30]

There was the need to reveal truth in the world, to film real people in situations as they were happening.

"You have to see it to believe it." [Jacobs, pg. 413]

These films were not scripted and one comes away with the feeling that they are "truthful."

From 1960-63, the Drew Associates made many films, which formed the "Living Camera" series as Leacock named it. Crisis, Mooney vs. Fowle, and Eddy Sachs was each built around a notable event, a crisis situation and public figures dominated the action. Each film has a narrative structure, reflected in Drew's basic idea of

> "being there when things are happening to people who count." [Mamber, pg. 118]

This structure assumed that a crisis happened and each film's construction had to have a resolution. The framework of climax" and "resolution" was used to generate the television audience's interest in documentaries. It worked because this structure made the films accessible to an audience who might otherwise overlook wonderful "slice of life" moments. Unfortunately many of the films in the "Living Camera" series were not shown on TV

> "in conformity to their policy against documentaries made by others." [Barnouw, pg. 238]

However, this style was important not only for the structure of the "Living Camera" but because it told stories of important figures of the day, and leaders making crucial decisions. Life and death situations were revealed "truthfully." I am not saying that because films were made in the style and structure of direct cinema that universal or absolute truth was achieved, but it was a promising way to treat subjects in an honest way.

When Leacock left Drew Associates in 1963, he continued to make films that flowed from camera to screen with brilliant ironic camera work. It is difficult to separate his work from that of his contemporaries like D.A. Pennebaker, the Maysel brothers and Frederich Wiseman. They all dealt with bringing human insight to the screen, and although there styles and subject matter varied their importance has shaped the direction of the documentary. Leacock and Pennebaker were now pursuing portraits about great performers and they became even more interested in person to person relationships.

Leacock's camera penetrates the world of the participant, interacts with them, and illuminates/reveals the world of the subject. Does Leacock intrude? Of course, by his mere presence, but his style is based on nonintervention thus allowing the events to unfold naturally while searching for those magical moments which reveal man and his environment through his actions. Two such films in which gestures and actions are shown to be more eloquent then verbal statements are Eddy Sachs and Community of Praise.

Leacock's films have within them enough structure so that the film itself takes on a natural rather than enforced continuity. The problem arose in whether the subject fits the form. The "truth" of an event is revealed when using cinema verite technique when the event or subject is evident and to a certain degree self-structured.

In Happy Mother's Day (1963), later recut by ABC under the title of Quint City, USA, the information no longer is fit into a crisis structure - the film is extremely revealing and is shot with a wonderful sense of humor and irony. Yet there are moments where we see the family in a natural (as well as unnatural) context - many times not concerned with Leacock's camera. The most unexpected and delightful scene in the movie happens when the filmmakers "just happened" to "be there" to witness the birth of kittens in the barn. This allows the viewer a chance to see a private moment in the Fisher's lives. This was achieved by not only being there, but by intuitive shooting. We get to see this family in a variety of situations, which leaves the audience with the sense of knowing the characters through a remarkable series of details of their lives. Leacock achieves this intimacy by maintaining a direct contact with his subjects. He shares this dedication to his subjects with Robert Flaherty. Leacock doesn't tell us about the contradictions in American society, but rather infers them. For example, by showing the moment when a community leader tells Mrs. Fisher about the flowers she is to wear at "her" luncheon and "her" parade, all the while ignoring her needs. Leacock makes the events surrounding Mrs. Fisher appear ridiculous and humorous.

Leacock joined Pennebaker in 1963 and together they made Monterey Pop (1968) which is as much a great rock movie as a look at American culture of the 60's. This film offers the viewer a texture and a sense of history in the making, a context and perspective. Once again their noninterventional style was the method for revealing a cultural view of the times. Although observational in approach, the process of filming and selection reflects the artistry and exuberance of the performers, the crowd as well as the filmmakers.

One of Leacock's intimate portraits of a great musician is A Stravinsky Portrait. The viewer has the rare experience of watching a brilliant musician create, discuss and conduct his work. We see intimate moments in his life with his wife and

friends; in discussion with Robert Craft. We see him planning a ballet scenario with George Balanchine. Through the illuminating camera work and sound recording Stravinsky's work and personality is revealed. An entire moral attitude is involved, one that demands communication between filmmaker and the people being filmed. What matters is no longer some piece of fiction that emerges, full-grown and finished, from the mind of an individual filmmaker.

> "Cutting no longer consists in short-circuiting irresponsibly filmed material according to some subjective whim, but in integrating a deeply subjective personal perception of life with the objective reality of what is seen." [Marcorelles, pg. 32]

What makes Leacock such a master is his sensitivity to the subject matter. The ideal for Leacock was not necessarily to pretend that the camera was not there (the fly-on-the-wall technique) but rather to try to record "normal" behavior. This perception is successfully captured when the action or event is of central importance to the character. The fact remains that filming changes the behavior of the subject to a degree.

> "The very fact that a man is filming reality means that he is altering the contents of reality." [Marcorelles, pg. 56]

The filmmaker must decide whether or not that change is relevant to the total portrait. If the change produced, radically changes the behavior of the subject, the filmmaker has to rethink his approach, perhaps to abandon or postpone the filming. In other situations the alteration is acceptable. What remains common to all such approaches is that the

> "mandate is coming from the subjects, not some preconception of the subjects introduced by the filmmaker." [Hockings, pg. 68]

What is so important is that the filmmaker respect, yet not influence the person he is filming. It's important to be aware of the effect the filmmaker has on the subject. Are you "bugging" your subject? Is the camera an invasion of privacy? Certainly in Happy Mother's Day the Fishers felt beleaguered by all the exploitative attention they were being awarded, and so Leacock decided to let the Fishers alone and wait for an

important aspect of their lives naturally reveal itself. Leacock says one will find out

> "some important aspect of our society by watching our society, by watching how things really happen as opposed to believing the social image that people hold about the way things are supposed to happen. And by seeing discrepancies, by revealing the things that are different from what is expected." [Jacobs pp.411 & 412]

In this way people can find out something very important about themselves. For every film there exists new complicated problems to solve. During the process of making a film there is a point where the filmmaker's involvement with the subject and/or events being filmed crystallize. Film is about the process of discovery, this is what gives them their life. The sense of discovery through non-manipulation of subject, film, and viewer permits "truth" to be revealed with a greater sense of authenticity.

Important to later developments in documentary cinema, it is worth noting that in France, interesting developments were taking place. Filmmakers like Jean Rouch were also concerned with the process of discovery, but more often from behind the camera rather then in front of the camera. Cinema verite, as practiced in Europe by filmmakers like Jean Rouch and Chris Marker, differ fundamentally in its approach. The Europeans intervene, probe and provoke situations that could reveal something. These filmmakers tended to want to stress the subjective point of view. Here, the making of the film becomes a process of learning in which all are involved (subject, audience and filmmaker). Eric Barnouw says that Rouch "maintained that the presence of the camera made people act in ways truer to their nature then might otherwise be the case." He acknowledged the impact of the camera as a catalyst to reveal "inner truth" not accessible by the observational method. I'm referring to Rouch's Chronicle of a Summer, made with his collaborator Edgar Morin. This method influenced other documentarians into exploring another genre. The filmmakers like Rouch, and Marker used direct cinema to deliberately draw attention to the process involved in the making of the film. They were not interested, as the Americans were, in preserving the natural order of the reality.

For example, in Chris Marker's Le Joli Mai, the camera is clearly the provocative agent - one which not only records events but also creates them. Marker combines interview and personal evocation in a novel way. Jean Rouch believes in this confrontational approach as well and uses direct interview where the interviewer is visible or at least partially visible in the frame he says that this style is

> "particularly useful because it allows the cameraman to adapt himself to the action as a function of space, to generate reality rather than leave it simply to unfold before the viewer." [Hockings, "The camera and man" Rouch, pg. 92 & 93]

4. Ed Pincus: Participatory Approach

American Direct cinema filmmakers like Ed Pincus and David Hancock found such methods a distortion of reality and preferred the real flow of events. In David Hancock's Chester Grimes, one of my favorite films, the successful attempt of the camera to be an unnoticed observer reveals the un-self-consciousness of the subject. Here Chester Grimes, acknowledges the camera and directly addresses it, yet is not provoked by the filmmaker to do so. Pinola too treats and acknowledges the camera's presence and is un-selfconscious. The camera is able to capture unprovoked reality.

To what extent does the mere presence of the camera provoke? In Ed Pincus' Diary, the camera by its mere presence provokes, but it is Pincus behind the camera who is provoking as well. At the beginning of Diary, his wife says that she feels she should be acting and she doesn't like the idea. Ed does not seem to be listening, and continues to film. He continues placing those around him in uncomfortable situations. After his affair with Ann is over he asks her how she feels and she says in our present lives any interaction we have is heavier for me than for you." He mumbles something, but the viewer is left with the feeling that his subjects, through his need to reveal and control his surroundings become victimized. He prods those close to him and encourages his subjects to speak to him and reveal their feelings. He specifically asks them questions which are very revealing and uncomfortable, all the while revealing as much about himself and his subjects.

"You as a filmmaker have a tremendous amount of information." [Levin, pg. 333]

And the choice is a conscious one as to how much to provoke. The process of making a film, for him, means that the characters and filmmaker are to be aware of each other and feel free to communicate and interact. You might say it's a "self-referential" attitude, compared to Jean Rouch's philosophy, in his film Chronicle of a Summer which is a "participatory" one. Here questions were probing deeper and deeper into personal problems and the subject's view on the world problems. Then the subjects viewed themselves, which was later incorporated into the final film. This type of method creates exceptional circumstances; it is not often that one has the opportunity of coming face to face with oneself on film.

The approach taken by philosophies dictates a particular shooting style. Pincus says his "haphazardly composed images often reveal more than carefully composed images". However, the way he reveals the information and the way it is presented requires the audience to undergo an emotional experience. While a non-preconceived approach to the subject matter leads to an observational attitude in the shooting, it may also lead to certain problems. Often the solution to this problem is a more participatory attitude. We see that in the stylistic evolution of Pincus. In Pinola (1970) and Black Natchez (1967) his choice was observational where as in Diary (1971-1976) his choice was participatory.

This "pretense not to be there" as Richard Leacock says, or this look of "truth" poses certain problems. It can be just a style with prejudices and altered realities. There are reasonable doubts about camera-consciousness on the part of the subject especially if they are filmed by professionals with the presence of crews with lights and ponderous equipment (Network news shows.) Freedom in documentary has its limits. The Cinema Verite approach invites the assumption that we are viewing the whole "truth;" but this is not necessarily the case at all. It is dangerous to extrapolate from situations which must be influenced, to some degree, by the presence of a television camera and crew. It is sometimes more interesting to deal with the notion that people are acting up for the camera. It is therefore difficult to achieve all the fresh, exciting and unpredictable things that verite allows. The reality and meaningfulness of an event can also be in question. These

limitations and difficulties, are then the limitations and difficulties of the entire tradition. There will always be a debate about objectivity and ethics in direct cinema.

Leacock says objectivity has to do with

> "Am I causing this to happen or is this happening irrespective of my being there?" [Blue, "One Mans Truth" an interview with RL, pg, 407]

The filmmaking process is more concerned with selection. In Flaherty's work, as in most personal documentaries, specifically in the work of Leacock, the Mayseles, Wiseman and Pincus - the use of selection is crucial. Not only does this give the film its style and structure, but it is a process through which the viewer is able to get to know the subject. What we care about is the person, if he is confronted by a problem, for example in Chester Grimes; we live through it with him. The problem is not irrelevant.

> "The issue is there, but it is not the starting-point; the human being is the starting point." [Jacobs, pg. 497]

In Pincus' film, Panola is not just a character trying to deal with the situation, he's a real human being and the viewer becomes very much involved with how this human drama will unfold. Pincus keeps the camera running He becomes caught in the events he explicitly engineered. You come away with having witnessed something very personal. Having the viewer believe in what the filmmaker is presenting is crucial. The filmmaker's choices and selection process which begins with how the film is shot, carries through to the final stages of editing. This unshakable faith in a kind of objective or "truth" on the part of the filmmaker is translated into authenticity. If the audience cannot believe that what it sees has really happened is authentic, then the audience has a right to suspect the truth of the film. Once this happens the audience becomes so preoccupied with checking the film's reality against its own reality, that the initial point of the film becomes lost. What is both familiar based on our life experiences and what we have learned from print, film and television help guide us.

5. Frederich Wiseman: The Relationship Between Individuals And The Institutions They Inhabit

Frederich Wiseman's films are deeply absorbing and unusually persuasive. They contain purity of tone, clarity of purpose, there exists the intensity and versatility of direct cinema. These films attempted to establish dramatic continuity by recording the "reality" and truth" inherent in human personality and human relationships. The viewer is presented with complexities and makes his own discoveries.

Titicut Follies, an expose of conditions in a Bridgewater mental hospital, presents a situation in an institution, and the inter-relationship of doctor and patient. The brutal treatment by the guards and unsympathetic prison boards are shocking. We are left with a harsh reality - one which the viewer must interpret for himself. However, the way the information is presented first requires that the audience undergo an emotional experience. Wiseman's films are not easy to watch, they are not easy to experience. The triumph in his films are that he is able to get incredible unstaged shots of inhumanity that contain the power to inform.

Wiseman says he starts his films:

> "with an ideological view, then I try to have that change to the extent that it does change as a consequence of what I have experienced and felt about the institution. I try to remain open." [Levin, pg. 316]

If the filmmaker remains open to the material there is less a chance that it will be propaganda. Wiseman says:

> "It may be propaganda anyway, but at least it represents your subjective, hopefully thought-through approach to what you've seen and felt and observed, and not the imposition of an ideology on the experience, or the twisting of the experience to fit the ideology." [Levin, pg. 316]

Wiseman's approach is a matter of selection,and choice and is based on the filmmaker's view of the experience while filming. This alone does not make the film work. In order to make the film work, it is not only the experience, but the relationship of the sequences to each other.

> "The structure of the film is the filmmaker's theory about the event or the events that constitute the film." [Levin, pg. 318]

Wiseman's films are a fair reflection of the experience making them. As with many films of the American Direct Cinema genre, the films look objective, unmediated and direct but, underneath the films were subjective, biased expressions of the individuality of the maker.

Guided by the practice of not interfering with the subject matter, certain rules of direct cinema carry into the editing process. Direct cinema filmmakers choose to edit the film in such a way so as to respect the events filmed. Although there will always be a need to manipulate sequences, this manipulation is minimalized by first respecting events and by filming in an unbroken manner that often favors chronology of events. Later I will discuss my film in which reordering and manipulation of events is necessary to reveal reality.

To summarize an article by Peter Graham entitled Cinema Verite in France, both the French and American direct cinema filmmakers have one very important quality in common. They use reality as a means to their various ends. They do not use actors and a studio, but use real people and actual events. Although these directors aim at the truth, this

> "of course does not mean that the end is automatically any truer than a film using artificial or fictional means." [Film Quarterly, pg. 30]

> "If film is an art its purpose is not merely to record, but to select, organize and alchemize..." [Film Quarterly, pg. 30]

Flaherty, Leacock and Wiseman certainly replicate as well as share with the French cinema verite filmmakers artistic honesty and the courage of one's convictions. When Flaherty went to the South Sea Islands he had a romantic preconception that the native women would be wearing grass skirts. When he found that they were wearing cotton skirts, he made them change for the film. The reality of Moana is the subjective reality of Flaherty. Ironically it was Flaherty who first taught the principle of rejecting preconceived notions so that the shooting might be an "odyssey" of discovery.

Flaherty's subjective reality is very different from the subjective reality of Wiseman who is less a romantic, yet equally as flexible in managing to incorporate many points of view, including his own. His films are "more rigorously sociological" in their focus than the films of his contemporaries, and they are more consistently expressive of one man's vision of society. Wiseman said that he makes films primarily to please himself and that each film represents his

> "personal attempt to get a handle on this particular aspect of reality, really to organize it for myself." [Mamber, 1970, pg. 39]

Wiseman's politics are consistent with the ethic of nonintervention. His films affirm the ideals of the sovereign individual in terms of the values of autonomy and respect for the dignity of man. These ideals underpin Direct Cinema theory and methods. For Wiseman it is the process of discovery itself which holds the most meaning. Discovery in his films often means simplicity giving way to complexity. He does not accept institutional rhetoric. On the issue of why an institution would wish to have a sharp social critic make a film about it, Wiseman is uncertain, suggesting that it is a combination of passivity and vanity. In his film Titicut Follies, it is clear that he has cultivated an invisibility of technique giving the illusion that what is happening is occurring as if no one is filming. The subjects seem to be totally unaware of the camera. Perhaps this is achieved in part by the fact that Wiseman spends long hours in the institution filming - he appears to become the "fly on the wall."

> "I'm interested in normal behavior,...I'm interested in how the institutions reflect the larger cultural hues, so that in a sense it's like tracking the abominable snowman; in a sense that you're looking for cultural spoors wherever you go. He finds traces of them in the institutions. High School is a reflection of some of the values in the society. So is Titicut Follies. They are. They have to be." ["FW an Interview" by Donald E. McWilliams]

This gives the experience not of the film but of the institution itself. This brings the audience into direct contact with the events themselves, creating an immediacy that demands our personal reaction. In Hospital, Wiseman has offered us an

unusual choice: we may turn away or walk out, but if we chose to watch, it's impossible not to become involved with these people and caught up by their stories.

Wiseman practices continuity editing;

> "that is he tries to sustain within each sequence the illusion of real time and the unity of real space no matter how much footage has been cut down from its original length." [Jacobs, pg. 480]

He has many "stories" which are arranged for balance, contrast and thematic complexity. He does not use narration or music to enhance his story-line or to psychologically ease the viewer.

Wiseman says his films are fair,...

> "they're fair to the experience that I had in making the film. They are not objective, because someone else might make the film differently." [Levin, pg. 322]

Wiseman chooses the style of non-intervention and a pure observational approach. This technique is used because it is the least intrusive means to examine institutions, which gives insight into "normal behavior." Every effort in both the shooting and editing should contribute to a certain aesthetic,

> "things cannot be shown that do not grow out of internal dramatic logic of the structure." [Blue, Film Comment Fall Vol. 2 No. 4 1964 pg. 22]

In documentary, events have to have a certain "probability" or else the audience will not trust in the filmmaker and will lose interest in the film as it becomes too much to figure out.

> "Authenticity permits life to reveal its own truth, its own poetry..." [Blue, Film Comment pg. 22]

Whether people are for it or against it, like it or not, direct cinema has forced a redefinition and clarification of the film aesthetic. If nothing else it has to make us think, because these films draw us into the lives of people.

When we look at propaganda documentaries, they seem old-fashioned. John Grierson saw the filmmaker first as patriot and second as artist. He has said of filmmaking,

> "To command, and cumulatively command, the mind of a generation is more important than by novelty or sensation to knock a Saturday night audience cold; and the 'hang-over' effect of a film is everything." [Barsam, pg. 142.]

By "hangover" he meant the lingering ideological impression. Most of his films were propaganda films with heavy-handed narration.

However, Drifters, a beautifully shot and edited documentary about the herring fishing industry, is primarily concerned with the dignity of labor. This film is close to the artistic tradition of Flaherty in that it shows a transformation of everyday material into a film of great interest and drama. In fact Grierson said that its subject,

> "belonged in part to Flaherty's world." [Barsam, pg.43]

This Grierson films' message is loud and clear. Grierson begins his films with a preconceived idea and carries it out,filmmakers like Leacock, and Wiseman want the final film to represent their filmic experiences and not their prior preconceptions.

The direct cinema styles of filmmaking were a reaction to past traditions. At the same time that direct cinema was destroying some of the entrusted conventions of traditional filmmaking it was liberating the medium, forcing it into more highly creative areas.

One way to create a new and exciting style of documentary film is to deepen the passion for storytelling. It is important for the filmmaker to examine a person or group of peoples lives with

> "patience and skill and sensitivity." [Leacock, Personal Thoughts and Prejudices about the Documentary, pg. 10]

Leacock goes on to say that for something very special to happen filmically there exists

> "that hard-to-define and rarely-found quality of being a love affair between the filmmaker and image." [Leacock, pg. 10]

There also must exist an emotional and intellectual involvement. It is all about storytelling, and how one tells the story is ultimately the filmmaker's choice and style; be it personal portraiture or socially concerned documentaries. What becomes vital are the assumptions, values and purposes motivating a production. Styles deployed in documentary, like those of narrative film change. What was an acceptable style in the Grierson era seems like artifice to the Leacock generation. New strategies must constantly be tested. Take for example, the voice of the narrator: it could be used as propaganda, or a narration can be used in such a way so as to be a personal commentary or thread by which the viewer can effectively be privy to personal information. A narration can speak directly to the viewer, at the viewer or can act as counterpoint to what we are seeing or hearing. For example in Ross McElwees' Sherman March, the narration is clever an extremely personal, the filmmaker is speaking directly to the viewer. It is an effective and wonderful use of narration. His impressions of the events being filmed are clearly worked through and closely correspond to what we are witnessing. McElwees' earlier film Backyard has some of these qualities, although not as developed. This film opens with Ross playing the piano, saying something to the effect "my father always wanted me to be a pianist, but I could never play the piano." We immediately sense that we are witnessing the ever present conflict between parent/child-man, presented in a rather humorous yet serious way. His narration is an expression of a human essence we can all relate to.

The styles used: intervention, nonintervention, preconceived approach, the approach where the experience and process of making the film dictates the outcome of the film have certainly had a tremendous impact on how we view films and what we consider to be "truth." If a filmmaker has clearly cultivated a technique of invisibility, giving the illusion that what is happening is occurring as if no one is filming, is that any more "real" than a direct probing involvement with the filmmaking process? Clearly it is a matter of personal preference, one may bring the spectator into direct contact with the event, while the other can have a more powerful long lasting effect which may help produce insights, solutions and changes. It is a matter of selection and choice, based on the filmmaker's view of the experience.

PART 2. THE MAKING OF THE FILM

My experience is it is often easier to make a film about an unfamiliar subject than it is to make a portrait of someone we love. In 1986, I began making films about people who were very close to me. My most recent film, Harlem, is about my father. It is a film I felt compelled to make. That is the key: this is a story I wanted to tell. The first problem I encountered was to convince my father how important his story was. Initially I'd thought there was no crisis/resolution situation or central event in the films structure that would capture an audience. It appeared that the film would become merely a "slice of life" film. Richard Leacock says:

> "I think there is a real danger, a real temptation if you have the need to grab an audience, hold an audience and to hoke it up and conform to the audience's expectation - it's a real danger." [Levin, pg. 206]

I realized that filmmakers bring preconceived notions of memory, and experiences to the process. Ever since I was a child I visited my father in Harlem and had certain memories that were important for me to record. At a certain point in the filmmaking I had to relinquish expectations about past notions and experience what was happening, or decide to witness changes made possible in part by my presence. I had to be a catalyst as well as allow the events to unfold. I also wanted to test my memories against present experience and be able to share this experience and knowledge. I was faced with how do I to provoke memory in a powerful way so that the viewer does not just listen to old stories.

The first day we filmed in Harlem was an absolute disaster. This amorphous idea of mine, that great remembrances would flood the screen once on the streets of Harlem just did not happen. When we arrived at 125th Street and Lenox Ave. my father suddenly felt the need to take control of the film and tell me what he thought I would like to hear. He was carefully editing his life to reveal only what he thought was important. This is not what I wanted. What do I do, tell him this is not what I had in mind? I only knew that I did not want to direct him, I wanted him to "be natural" (with an Aaton pointed directly at him.)

A few weeks into the filming, my father suffered a serious heart attack. This became an important turning point in many ways. Our relationship deepened as did his own need to review his life and to show me what was important to him. He was not only hanging around the streets running into so many of his old friends and patients he was also in a way saying good-bye.

It was not until we spent many days together that he was able to get use to his daughter with the camera. Once he accepted being filmed there was a natural transition that happened from my father being dogmatic to him eagerly wanting to show me Harlem. He took me to 110th street where he was born, he showed me the candy store he went to, he showed me where he played stick ball, went ice skating, where he would leap from roof top to roof top. This was wonderful and unexpected information.

I decided the best way to portray my father in his environment was to use the observational approach. That worked only when he was more involved with what he was telling me and concerned with other people he was talking to than with the idea of being filmed. Whenever he became self-conscious, he revealed what he thought I wanted to hear, leaving out what I felt were more intense human moments. His self-consciousness was a major problem eventually remedied in part by changing my equipment. I began shooting the movie in 16mm film while taking sound with a Nagra 4. I stopped using a sound person with a Nagra. I worked alone with my father and had him wear a Walkman Pro (which recorded Clear Time) and a Tram microphone. I could leave the tape recorder running and he was often unaware when I was filming. This seemed to help capture more spontaneous moments. This worked well during while filming the scene with Queene, the sign man and my father. My father was unaware when the camera was running and gave up the notion of acting for the camera. He was able to visit with Queene, chat about different things and order the sign he needed. A one person crew was also beneficial in this situation because Queene's loft was small. I was allowed the flexibility to freely move around the space.

I chose film rather than video for aesthetic reasons. Filming on the streets of Harlem, I wanted to achieve a poetic and historical sensibility. I felt that video would produce an effect too much like Network News imagery. The decision to shoot in film was expensive but, the quality of 16mm was too

seductive to give up. Had I chosen to do the movie in 8mm video I might have been able to capture spontaneous scenes more easily, although, the final product, I felt would be have been inferior.

What I found so compelling about Harlem was not so much the people and places I encountered as it was my father's involvement, past and present with this particular context. Here is the story about a white man born in Harlem 72 years ago, who struggled to understand his political and cultural surroundings. His parents were Russian emigrants, steeped in socialistic thinking. I feel that this information was important to reveal only after we have a sense of who he is and how he relates to his surroundings. Then his motivation for being in Harlem provides a background and context for his intense involvement with the community. He was aware of how difficult it was for his parents as Jews to overcome certain prejudices and as a result was very sensitive to the prejudices of the blacks.

My father graduated from dental school in 1942, he was drafted into the army, and before going overseas he was stationed in Alabama. When given a choice to practice in a white clinic or a black clinic he said to his Captain, "I'd like to stay here, with the black troops; I like it here." After the war, he got a job in Harlem and opened his own dental office. Although Harlem was fraught with many racial conflicts he loved practicing there. In the late 1960's, as racial tension was peaking, he again made the choice to remain in Harlem; this time becoming even more involved with the community. He opened a methadone rehabilitation clinic, with the approval of Harlem Hospital and local politicians. He seemed to understand the forces behind the community's addiction problems and he wanted to help. He made friends with the people he worked with. He got to know the people on the street from the numbers man, to the politicians. To this day his manner is disarming as witnessed in the many street scenes in the film. One that comes to mind is when he says to a young man on the street: "I'm Dr. Schneider. It's good to meet the new generation."

There are several approaches one could take to make a movie about this situation. Knowing all I do about my father gave me inside knowledge to his character. At times I could be the knowledgeable observer and through witnessing his interactions the viewer would become more aware of his environment, the

people, and the mood of Harlem. I have access to people and places an outsider might not. Many of the situations I was filming were complex psychologically. At times I felt very much part of what was going on, there was a familiarity; there were other times when I sensed racial hostility and out of both respect, and fear I decided not to film. I am certainly more reactive to hostility on the street than my father is. Fear does not seem to be a word in his vocabulary. Yet he is certainly street smart and knows how to deal with complex attitudes. I never experienced hostility from those people who know my father, or from people who took the time to ask me why I was filming, only from those people who thought I was intruding on their territory.

Besides the overt racial hostilities, there were other obstacles to overcome. One of the most important obstacles was making sure that the viewer's perception of reality was dictated by a clear understanding of my point of view. My point of view, being an extension of my father's personal experience was, I hoped, illuminated by a series of carefully chosen imagery. For example, taken out of this personal context, the scene in which a former woman patient of my father dances to a well known street band could be perceived as stereotypic. However, within the context of my father's direct and my subsequent indirect involvement in Harlem, this scene is meant to be interpreted as reflective of ones knowledge of the street's reality. Once established, this pattern of imagery must be consistent throughout the film, in order to keep the viewer on the right track.

I had unlimited access to my subject. I should qualify that statement. The fact that I had a great deal of access to my father does not mean unlimited access. There were situations where he did not want me to film. I wanted to be respectful of his wishes. There were also times when I sensed he might be uncomfortable, perhaps I was invading his privacy. I could have pushed it, but chose not to. What I was always keeping in mind was that my father had just suffered a serious heart attack. I did not want to push him physically or emotionally. I could prod a little, but for the most part, my approach was gentle. After his heart attack, his tendency to view his life and those he had known for many years took on a heightened sense of importance. It is almost as if a crisis had manifested itself in the film, a psychological crisis. There is this

unpredictability in personal direct cinema - if portrayed with sensitivity that gives us insights into human experience. These insights become objects of contemplation. My father was reviewing his years. Did he have an impact in Harlem? He still questions that today, although he clearly left his mark.

For the type of spontaneous interaction I wanted to take place, my father had to feel comfortable with me and with the camera. Although he was quite honored by my wanting to make a movie about him, (and for many years had felt he could confide in me), somehow the presence of the camera changed the way he revealed himself. The times he felt most comfortable understandably, were times when he was immersed in comfortable surroundings and lively conversation. The times when he did not feel comfortable were when the presence of the camera became too overpowering for him; and he reverted to speaking outside of himself.

The power of Cinema Verite lies in the audience's ability to recognize and identify with the subject's vulnerability. It becomes the responsibility of the filmmaker to utilize this quality or "truth" in an ethical fashion. I did not purposefully focus on the pervasive poverty which surrounded me, because at the very least I did not want to present another stereotype, but more importantly I wanted to reveal a more positive side of Harlem, not often seen by outsiders.

The style in which I shot this movie was a synthesis between observational and interventional filmmaking. Clearly Leacock's observational influence had a profound effect on my filmmaking. After viewing the initial rushes, I felt what was needed was direct, powerful statements from my father. The only way to achieve this was to interview him. I was resistant to use interview at the onset of the filmmaking process, but had encountered unexpected gaps in the background content. The only way I could fill these gaps was with direct interview.

However, unlike Pincus' provocational approach, my line of questioning was intended only to elicit that information I thought missing. Where as I could have learned much from my father during these moments had I prodded him in a more direct and personal manner, I felt this type of information would be more valuable to me having been obtained off camera. As it

turned out I learned much more about my father and myself through the shared experience of making this film than I ever could have by provoking him with the camera.

Any approach, whether observational, interventional or a combination of the two, is ultimately dependent upon the subjects and their environment. In direct cinema documentary, as soon as the subject accepts being filmed, he is less likely to perform for the camera. This was the case in the Harlem movie.

I had to be constantly aware of shooting alone, carrying very expensive equipment in Harlem. This had an effect on my shooting style. Instead of long continuous takes, which is how I would have preferred to shoot, my shots were short and at times uncertain. The longer I was there, the more I was accepted, yet I was always aware of my safety and concerned for the safety of my father.

Having completed the shooting of the film, I was now faced with a whole new set of problems to solve. I had my subject. I had my context and methodology, but for a variety of reasons I did not yet have a story. Here again the process of growth and self discovery continued, as I tried to piece together the story. Because much needed information was missing I decided that narration would be added. This also gives the film a more personal quality. Since many scenes were so short, I had to structure the film in such a way to use the style to my benefit. Some scenes become vignettes, moments that are "slice of life" moments. Also, when I started to edit the footage, I realized early on that I could not stick to the chronology of events. For example, the impact of the effect of my father's heart attack I felt would be greater if the viewer was informed of this very early in the film. I used artistic license to reorder the sequence of events. This reordering gives the film added meaning. It is my choice what to select, thereby giving greater or lesser importance to certain events.

The final portrait works on a variety of levels. At its simplest the film is a story of a white man's intimate involvement in Harlem. At another more general level it can be seen as a vessel for the human spirit, while at another, it is a film about a father and daughter. And finally on a more personal level it is a film which reveals my experience as the filmmaker, for clearly its making was one of growth and self-discovery.

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ADDENDUM

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD LEACOCK SEPTEMBER 11, 1989

Prior to this interview, Ricky and I were sitting in my kitchen drinking tea discussing "truth" in personal documentary cinema.

Leacock: Now, because these days there are a lot of people especially the souls that see me out are the semiotics people, who get into this thing that there is no difference between observation documentary and theatrical films because everything is active on some level, the presence of the camera changes things, all these things. And I think you have to be careful of that, because to me there is an enormous difference between things that are genuinely observed and things that happen to the benefit of the camera. And you can't make very accurate rules about it. Um, there are certain times when things change like that. For instance, I was usually I was years ago making a, a TV commercial for a tea company in England that make sort of working class tea, whatever the hell that is. And so we were in the house of a working class woman with five working class kids and they all had to go off to school. You know it was the ten year old, the eight year old, the six year old, five year old, all the way down the line. And it was absolute bedlam. It was wonderful! Combing their hair, getting their breakfast into them, Making the tea, giving them the tea. Making sure their faces are clean, their hands are clean, that their shirts aren't stained. And then one by one they all went out one two three and all had to be on schedule and just as the last one runs out she turned to me and the camera and she said, "Now Mr. Leacock, what can I do for you?" And that to me said it all. From that moment on, nothing real could happen because all of a sudden I became the most important thing in her life and before that really getting the kids out was more important than whatever she existed to worry about. So it can change in a moment.

Bernice: Right.

Leacock: So let's say you have a thousand people in a room and a New York Times reporter walks in, it doesn't make much difference.

Bernice: Umhum.

Leacock: But if you've got one person in the water and a New York Times reporter walks in, it makes a whale of a difference if there's six people it's huge. And people ask me for instance when I was filming Kennedy during the election in Primary all by myself without my tripod, no lights nor this that and the other thing, um, there was another person in the room who was Teddie White. Who was a very, very famous writer. Yes, exactly. Teddie White's present, presence, was a modest emotion far more important to Kennedy than mine. But he knew Teddie White very well and he had accepted me sort of as another Harvard type and so I don't think either of us really made a damn bit of difference.

Bernice: Well you had established a kind of relationship.....

Leacock: You had to be established, yes. Um, I could usually tell when somebody is putting on the stuff for me. And then I usually stop. Um and in Community Of Praise, clearly at times they're saying what they wanted to hear. But, the other times you have to forget about them. You have to use your judgement as to which is which. But for instance, have your ever seen the steaks scene where they're handing the steaks around?

Bernice: Yes, it is incredibly funny and it was used to inspire a scene in a Hollywood movie.

Leacock: Well well - actors reenacted that and it is from The Candidate with Robert Redford. And the difference is enormous. Because in my version you know its for real, in the acted one, you know it isn't.

Bernice: Right.

Leacock: It just didn't happen. And so there are differences. Now I go with the analogy, I've had a smattering of physics, usually in physics and take crystalography there is all sorts of things that are known about crystals. A physicist when he finds what appears to be lure, he is working with those aspects, those things that he knows about crystal, that appear to be important, fundamental and that's what he bases his work on and his conclusions and the history of physics you'll find a lot of cases were subsequently they found out something that appeared not to be important that changed the whole picture. This happened in the case of the discovery of the crystal of the transistor and that they thought this unimportant abnormalities turned out to be quite important and so you get the same kind - now I'm not comparing social observations to physics - physics you can repeat the experiment precisely, social sciences you obviously can't. But there are certain guidelines that are similar and just as in social things you have an enormous amount of information and people have been studying The French Revolution for two hundred years and they are still arguing about what important and what isn't. Thank goodness, but have finally come to some more interesting conclusions in my opinion. In physics, you get the somewhat analogous situation in areas that are so complex that they defy integral patterns and that's why I think today they're getting more and more interested in chaos and in chaotic behavior and I think economists are interested in this. So, what bothers me most is that since I used to be a Marxist, I thought there was a simple explanation for both social behavior and economics and now I find that this doesn't seem to hold true. What emerges from my own work and from my friends work is that it is very hard to tell what is important.

Bernice: While your filming?

Leacock: While your filming and after. Now when I go back and look at films like Happy Mothers Day and Community of Praise or for instance some of Kennedy stuff what would appear to be trivial or

just sort of details, like in Happy Mother's Day the animals on the farms, the little boy, the most significant scenes to me; the guy smoking the cigar, the kids watching the parade, there are a lot of things that are not. If you were a television director making a documentary they are not what you would ask the cameraman to shoot and I think to me is getting to be very interesting. Tolstoy, as I remember, argued that you don't relay just one event do that. What happens is that in our lives we make hundreds of little tiny decisions which ultimately add up to you doing something, then looks like a big decision and is really made up of these little tiny things and the difficulty in arguing this is that then are you going to tell people to go out and just form the insignificant things. That would be silly. So that the real problem is, how do you do it and I think that that is why a great work of art is the ability to find out those that mirror the little things that add up to a whole and that's obviously very difficult. If it were just having the right answers that was the important thing, which is pretty much what the Marxists theme was, then you've got those awful plays and awful films which had the right answer and didn't interest anybody.

Bernice: Was it a conscious decision, let's say, when you were filming Happy Mother's Day that you knew when to go with those moments?

Leacock: It really is hunches. It really is hunches. I think so. What ever that means, you have to be intuitive, you have to follow your nose and you can be awful wrong and you're going to film a lot of garbage. A lot of things you think are going to happen, don't happen. I think the closest you can come to a generalization is that things that tend to repeat themselves, to reveal themselves in different ways and so its not that impossible. But, one of the reasons I love the video is that you can afford to do a lot of fishing.

Bernice: Do you think 8mm videos allows you a different kind of access than film because of the size of the camera, you're not as obtrusive.

Leacock: I think so. I like it. I've got to see what I can do with it. The image obviously being small and looking over at the television tube. I think certain things, you just work, a different way.

Bernice: Are you working alone now, or are you still working with a sound person because one of the things that interested me is let's say when you were shooting Stravinsky or Community of Praise, your sound person was very important.

Leacock: Yes. It was very important in that. My own feeling is that in most cases I prefer to work with a man and a woman, in certain cases you are going to have just a woman, in certain cases just a man. On some I've worked alone but, most of the time, since I'm working in France I have a deaf ear. I can't understand French well enough. I'm depending enormously on Valerie and Valerie is wonderful and she loves the kind of situations that I do. I am essentially a gossip. I love to gossip on the telephone. I love to gossip at the gas station with the lady who pumps the gas or the man. I gossip with shopkeepers, the cops, you name it, I love to gossip. It sort of small talk. Valerie loves doing that. We love talking to old ladies and old men and its just easy getting into situations.

Bernice: Let's get back to when you split with Drew. What year and what was that?

Leacock: 1963. He made a deal to go to work for ABC news. Penny (Pennebaker) and I didn't want to.

Bernice: And that was when you decided to doing films like Happy Mother's Day.

Leacock: Happy Mother's Day was the first.

Bernice: Then what led you to make Monterey Pop?

Leacock: That was Penny. It was his film. I worked on it. That was ABC. ABC came to us and said, I

forgot who said what to whom, but it was going to be for television and when we finished it the president of ABC had been changed. It had been a very nice guy, a friend of ours and then they changed it to Barry Diller. Barry Diller looked at it and in the end he turned to Pennebaker and said this does not meet industry standards. I remember I turned to him and said, "I didn't know you have standard's." That didn't help. Happy Mother's Day was turned down too. They wouldn't take that. It took us another year to reorganize the contracts. In that year I made a lot of money, in the meantime, he went into business with a guy was going solve all our business problems.

Bernice: So, your camera angle in Monterey Pop was decided before you all went out to shoot?

Leacock: Yeah. We changed places occasionally. The interesting one to me is, if you look at the shooting of Company, because the guy from Public Television, no it was the producer, he was going crazy because as far as he could see we had no organization, there were three of us shooting. He said take this and take that and we were wandering around anyway. Penny new what I was doing and I new what Penny was doing and we all new what the other guy was doing and it's amazing film. We were all aware of what everyone was doing. We were following our noses, it is risky. It's a weird way to do it. It's like the American legal system, everyone knows it has flaws but, let's find a better one. It's hard.

Bernice: Do you think of sequences while your shooting?

Leacock: I do all the time and how am I going to edit this.

Bernice: How do you define the sequence?

Leacock: It's very difficult. It's a visual telling of the story. I hate the word cutaway, because people think cutaway is something you can cut to.

But they think it's not important as a shot. As far as I'm concerned, a perfect shot. Whether or not you cut away, it has to be a vital important shot. You want to somewhere in the back of you head your thinking "How am I going to show the nature of this space?" "How am I going to show the relationships of the people in the room?" and sometimes you're stuck. There's a sequence when they are all playing music an singing in Community of Praise, I think is a good example. You can't go charging around there. But I used mirror, I used all sorts of ways gathering the relationships of people to each other and its extremely difficult because there's music playing. It's just very difficult. Sometimes there's a specific little thing like, this is terribly trivial but I was filming a couple getting dressed for a wedding and there was a canary bird driving me crazy singing all the time. Or how you had to get the canary bird involved without making an issue of it. It just sort of happens to be in the shot rather than having to "get a close-up of the canary bird". I remember some funny ones when we were in the courtroom, The Chair and Drew new, it was one of those electric fans, it was so hot, the sound was shitty. He wanted a shot of one of those silly fans. Really, I think that the reason that Flaherty gives us a lot to learn about, I think I learned it from Flaherty, is that there really are no rules about how you make a sequence. I think that he felt that every sequence was a unique problem and had to be handled differently.

Bernice: Okay, now once you have it, then how do you begin editing?

Leacock: Usually, in my opinion, that the reason why I think you that you should edit your own material. Though, many many people think you shouldn't, but then you get tied up in all sorts of prejudices. That generally upheld especially among elders, that an editor should edit the movie. I don't agree with that. It's just that then you get the wrong impression. Sometimes you shoot stuff that

you know is redundant then you shoot it differently later. I frequently shoot the same shot over and over till I get it to where it's right. But, I say every sequence, every important different situation. I know Flaherty, sometimes we shot the whole thing and then made a marvelous sequence and he would look at what he had edited and say "No, this isn't right." Like the final sequence of drilling the oil well (Louisiana Story). We spent months doing it, then we re-shot it at night and it was a difference that was absolutely wild because it was the all black around that somehow helped us to see what was going on. But, there were many sequences that we did with him that came after filming. I think almost all that is written about sequences is wrong. I think in general you will find books that say you should cut to a long shot, cut to a medium shot, get a close-up. Almost invariably you use, Flaherty saw the close-up shows detail but, it also withholds information, it withholds surroundings. So it causes you to want to see more and then you show more. Then again, you don't want to make a rule of that. I learned a lot from Flaherty. How do you convey the feeling of height. Something being high or your being high. How do you get the feeling of being on the edge of the precipice? It's very complicated. It's a very difficult thing. It's tricky to get involved in rules. They're not wrong, but they are guides to one thing and not to another.

Bernice: So then every time you shoot are you thinking of new ways to convey information?

Leacock: You should always be thinking about it and finding new ways to do things and see things. I'm amazed when I go to good art galleries. I think that the number of good paintings at most art galleries are very very few as far as I'm concerned. But when you do see one, you say WOW! Is television really, I think television is a disaster. How are we going to see films. I think its on video cassette. I just heard that finally Louise Brooks' Lou Lou in Berlin is in the local video store. Amazing. Amazing. Ain't nobody gonna get rich on those things.

Bernice: Do you think that the style of the documentary on television is evolving?

Leacock: I think more of what I've seen and I haven't seen that much, I very much like the one on _____. Most of the documentaries I see on television are propaganda films, people are filming propaganda for the right wing, and good documentaries for the left. I've seen some disgracefully bad films being praised.

Bernice: What are your working on in France?

Leacock: I think at the moment I'm very very low key. I think I'm more interested in how people love, play. I want to get involved in little things. We've done some lovely sequences of people going shopping and people collecting mushrooms, all sorts of things, people fishing. I'm not sure what I'm doing. I have the feeling that I have the opportunity to do a lot of experimenting and video editing. What I like about video editing is that you can take a totally different approach each day. You can say okay. here is a body of material, and today I'm going to try it differently. You can do some crazy things. I'll just have to find out.