

ONE-MAN VIDEO VERITE:  
THOUGHTS ON SCENES FROM UNDERGROUND

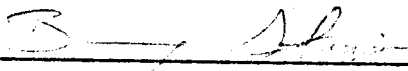
by  
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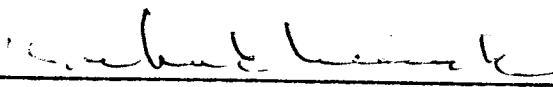
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ONE-MAN VIDEO VERITE: THOUGHTS ON SCENES FROM UNDERGROUND

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the making of a documentary videotape on the Red Line Subway Extension project in Cambridge and Somerville, Massachusetts entitled Scenes From Underground. It traces my initial plans for an expository 16mm film on the Red Line construction work occurring alongside Harvard University in Harvard Square. It then tells of how the influence of one-person cinema verite filmmaking resulted in the similar use of light-weight video tape recording equipment, and the subsequent utilization of this equipment in the tunnels and subway station construction sites of the Red Line Extension project.

The paper asserts that the video medium is ideally suited for a non-preconceived approach to documentary work and that the rules and conventions governing observational filmmaking are applicable to video.

The videotape Scenes From Underground is 37 minutes long and was originally shot on 1/2" VHS and 3/4" U-matic cassette. It has black and white and color sequences, and the sound track is in English.

Thesis Supervisor: Richard Leacock  
Title: Professor of Cinema

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## INTRODUCTION

In The Hidden Injuries of Class, Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb examine the internal conflicts blue collar workers struggle with when they compare themselves to the educated classes above them. Their findings, which are based on extensive interviews with men and women from the Boston area, reveal a troubling aspect of lower class standing. For working people, even those who are remunerated well for their labor, feelings of denied freedom and dignity prevail in their lives.

In a wide variety of contexts where Boston manual laborers sought to pinpoint what they might lack personally that would make them feel so vulnerable in the face of people of a higher class it was always notions of mind and intelligence that they resorted. . . .

. . . yet the people speaking above all feel that they never enjoyed the freedom to really develop themselves inside--the freedom that<sup>1</sup> they think middle class people have had.

Sennett and Cobb go on to show how these men and women endure the indignities of class, and the emotional and psychological toll it takes on themselves and their families.

The many ideas and insights into human nature and aspiration in The Hidden Injuries of Class have interested me since I first read the study in 1980. Scenes From Underground, a documentary videotape on the Red Line Subway Extension

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1. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 118.

Project in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is the subject of this paper, grew out of an early impulse to apply the Sennett and Cobb thesis to an environment where blue collar work and higher education were, and still are, pronouncedly juxtaposed.

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The Red Line subway extension work in Harvard Square is part of a larger public works project to extend the seventy-four year old subway line 3.5 miles northwest of Harvard University. Over the past six years, adjacent sections of the square have been excavated and roofed over as a new subway station has been built, piecemeal. The station is now nearing completion. It connects the tunnels of the new branch, which begin on the northern perimeter of Harvard Square (under Flagstaff Park), with the original Red Line track, which had terminated in the center of the square.

During my first year in Cambridge, from 1981 to 1982, I passed through Harvard Square frequently. I became familiar with the construction areas and would watch the laborers. A deep excavation site had been created at the base of Harvard University's Lehman Hall,<sup>1</sup> revealing the Red Line subway cars entering and departing the square.

Lehman Hall is an impressive neo-colonial building that is visually at the center of Harvard Square, where Massachusetts

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1. This site would eventually be the corridor through which subway cars entering the new branch would travel.

Avenue turns north, and is emblematic of the University itself. That year it stood directly over the construction site, seemingly balanced on a precipice, though actually supported from collapsing into the work area by an underground slurry wall that had been poured a year earlier. Viewing this rising and falling cityscape, one got the impression that the hierarchical relationship among two social classes was being illustrated: Harvard University and the members of its community on the street above, and blue collar workers on the Red Line construction project in the ground below.

I had noticed that the members of these two respective milieus would cross paths in the square but would never meet or interact. During the warmer months, some of the laborers would sit by the Holyoke Plaza across from Harvard Yard during their lunch break and ogle the attractive co-eds who passed by on the sidewalk. I wondered if on another level they experienced frustration because of the class distinctions implicit in this setting. The laborers I encountered and began speaking with in the fall of 1981 did not confirm this. Affable men like Carmen DeLuca, a 50 year old Perini construction worker, took pride in the Red Line effort, which, in the close quarters of Harvard Square, was an engineering feat. James Bordon, an older black machine operator, seemed indifferent to the fact that a prestigious university was within arm's reach.

I did not feel that their responses were conclusive or even representative, for I had not spoken to, nor did I even know how to approach the younger college-age laborers at the site. Questioning them about heightened feelings of "denied dignity" as a result of working near Harvard University seemed presumptuous.

#### SHOOTING: FIRST ATTEMPTS

Even though I hadn't proven the Sennett and Cobb thesis, I set out in the winter of 1981 to begin a short film that would portray the adjacency of the Harvard University and Red Line environments. The documentaries of Leo Hurwitz were an influence at the time, and I envisioned creating a film that would convey my ideological perceptions of the setting through the synthetic use of image, sound, and narration. Hurwitz's film on the Detroit Institute of Art, The Island (1968), seemed an appropriate cinematic model. By intercutting images of paintings (such as Van Gogh's self-portrait, a Goya, a Picasso) with static shots from the surrounding Detroit slums, he conveys through montage the museum's role as a sanctuary while also implying the social awareness of the respective painter and painting.

The juxtaposition of two dissimilar worlds as achieved in The Island was what I had in mind for Harvard Square. I

had not prepared an elaborate shooting script before filming, as I knew Hurwitz did with great care,<sup>1</sup> nor was I using a tripod to achieve stable, illustrative shots. I must have sensed, without wanting to fully admit to myself, that a preconceived approach in which I would illustrate a script was inappropriate. It would not result in an interesting film.

The projected rushes from the first days of shooting that winter were a confirmation of my ambivalence. I had only documented the general appearance of the excavation area with the men at work in it. In a subsequent shoot, Neal Baer (who assisted with sound) and I focused in on Carmen DeLuca, a laborer with whom I had spoken three months earlier who was working at the bottom of the construction site. We only exposed a few hundred feet of film, but I realized that a documentary on a laborer or a group of laborers who worked in the site could be interesting. It had to be allowed to acquire its shape over many days and weeks of filming, and this meant more hours of film stock than I could afford.

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1. In a film course two years earlier, I had listened intently as Leo Hurwitz discussed his shooting scripts for films that he had made in the 1960s and had screened for us. I greatly admired the time and breadth of thought that he invested in them. However, these "poetic documentaries" now seem more pictorial than cinematic, and the narration more didactically staid than poetic. His earlier films, such as Native Land (1942) and Strange Victory (1949), are not without cinematic value, as a close analysis of key montage sequences attests to. The Young Fighter (1953), perhaps the progenitor of the cinema verite film, is of historical interest.



It was at this point that I began to consider working in video, but not only because of its nominal cost. I had seen Joel DeMott's one-man, or rather one-woman cinema verite documentary Demon Lover Diary (1980) in early December of 1981<sup>1</sup> and wanted to experiment with using video equipment in a similar, independent and revelatory manner. It did not occur to me that I was undergoing a change in cinematic sensibility.

The following spring I made a videotape about Debbie Callas, the secretary at Architecture Headquarters, in which I shot and recorded sound alone. It foreshadowed the work I would do a year later but with lighter equipment when I returned to the Red Line Subway Extension Project. In making this tape I learned that my role behind the camera was contingent on what was happening in front of it and the number of people involved. In situations of "intense sociality,"<sup>2</sup> as in the sequence where Debbie is having a voice lesson, I was able to shoot and go virtually unnoticed, even though I was only five feet away. At other times my presence was acknowledged because I was either addressed by Debbie, or I intervened to ask a question; or in certain instances the situation simply lacked the requisite intensity to make my presence irrelevant. These were not mutually

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1. It was shown at MIT Film/Video on Tuesday, December 1, 1981 as part of the Visiting Artist series.

2. Edgar Morin

exclusive and, in fact, there were moments when my role vacillated from being inconspicuously to being conspicuously present.

### BEYOND HARVARD SQUARE

Increasingly, filmmakers are bringing their relations with the subjects into the foreground of their films. These encounters can develop into formal exchanges quite different from interviews. As the filmmaker is drawn further into the subject area of the film, the audience is drawn into the position the filmmaker originally occupied.

--David MacDougall<sup>1</sup>

The speech . . . is filmed in one shot. We feel we know where we are . . .

--Colin Young<sup>2</sup>

My discovery of the new branch north of Harvard Square during the first week of February 1983 diverted my attention from the construction activity in the square itself. Here was a fascinating underground environment--comprised of two adjacent tunnels 3.5 miles long and adjoining subway station construction sites--that had its own unique and evolving aesthetic. One could gaze down the long, foggy stretches of tunnel and try to locate the origin of voices intermingling with construction sounds, or watch as laborers slowly approached from afar or

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1. Royal Anthropological Institute News, June 1982, no.50.

2. Ibid.

receded into the diminutive distance. Even the round tunnel walls which were being treated with a highly textural sound-proofing compound and were stained rust and yellow and white from water that had seeped down from above were the stuff of art.<sup>1</sup>

I walked underground from Harvard to Porter to Davis Squares, and part of the way to Alewife Brook Parkway<sup>2</sup> and back and wondered about the excitement I had missed two and three years earlier when the tunnels were being dug. When I returned with video equipment a week later, Jim Brown (who appears in Scenes From Underground) described the fifteen foot high tunnel digging device that was used, called "The Shield," and commented, "You should have been here then, you would really have had a film." Indeed.

During my initial visits to the new branch and even after I had returned to videotape a crew of Perini laborers who were

1. Seven months later, I would learn from one laborer of his fears that the men who had built the tunnels, himself included, and had inhaled the mist and absorbed through the skin the strange water and acid substance that had such a colorful effect on the walls, and was also dissolving parts of the track base, would suffer because of it in the future. I could not use this sequence in Scenes From Underground because of the conjectural nature of his views. I am troubled, though, by its potential truth.

2. The stretch of subway corridor between Davis and Alewife was created by a "cut-and-cover" process so that it was actually dug out from above and is not cylindrical like the rest of the tunnel, but rectangular. In February 1983 this section was the furthest from completion. It can be seen in the closing sequence of Scenes From Underground when the test train enters it to "turn around." "Have you gone 600 feet yet? 600 feet okay. Knock it off . . ."

pouring concrete, I was in a quandary over whether the subject of the tape should be the branch as an environmental space or the people at work in it. I considered creating a tape in which the camera would explore the new branch by tracking through the tunnels at varying speeds, past the subway station and other construction areas and even slowing down to a meditative pace to take in the abstract water stains described above.<sup>1</sup> In retrospect, a visual documentary of this sort would have been kinesthetically exciting but unrevealing of the laborers who were at work there. (As it turned out, I was able to integrate kinesthetic imagery into the structure of Scenes From Underground.)

The footage that comprises the first segment of "Beyond Harvard Square," with Wayne and then Wayne, Jim and Ronnie, who is being laid off, was shot the morning that I returned to the new branch after a two week absence. The success of my earlier shoots, in which I videotaped other members of their crew, were thwarted by inadequate battery power. I could not tape underground for more than 40 minutes and decided to wait for a cable to be prepared that would enable me to power the VHS deck and newvicon camera with the Cine-60 battery belts.

I encountered Wayne sweeping the track early that

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1. The incessant tracking camera movement in Alain Resnais's L'Année Dernière à Marienbad was an influence at the time.

morning and did little in prompting him to talk about his experiences in the tunnel, which he did un-self-consciously and with a certain eloquence. I was a bit surprised by this, since shooting with a wide angle lens required that I get as close as possible, and my obsession with good sound in the tunnel required that I hold the microphone nearly as one would hold a foil. Furthermore, I hadn't spoken with Wayne previously so that I was really a stranger to him.

In videotaping him, I decided to give prominence to what he was saying through the use of long, uninterrupted camera takes. I would not try to anticipate potential editing points by either changing camera angle and focal distance (the latter would mean stepping back and an increase in the audio signal-to-noise ratio) or by panning away from him, the only logical place being down to his feet. Such an in-camera editing strategy seemed inimical to the credibility of this "direct-address" situation and the respect it demanded for spatio-temporal unity.

David MacDougall, in discussing the filming of the Ugandan Jie, relates a similar concern:

What we were trying to give was a sense of being present in a Jie compound, a situation in which few of our viewers would find themselves.

By intercutting shots from two or more camera positions we found that we were taking away from the immediacy by invoking a style of fiction filmmaking incompatible with the idea of real people sitting in a compound

filming other real people.<sup>1</sup>

I decided I would edit the sequence of Wayne by using only the most verbally interesting segments and, if necessary, by inserting black, which would acknowledge time lapses and avoid disconcerting jump cuts. However, editing was actually facilitated by Wayne's decision to go behind me, and look through the camera. I panned to him, which in the editing served as a reverse-angle shot before cutting back to him on the other side--a jump cut nonetheless, though one that is not excessively distracting and conveys through its careful timing the passage of time.

I had not anticipated that Wayne would want to see what I was seeing through the newvicon, and I initially hesitated when he walked behind me. (He comments, in Scenes From Underground, "Where are you going, where you going?") I realized, though, that given my interactive approach to shooting, this was a legitimate part of our encounter. To do otherwise, or even to turn the camera off would be a denial of that encounter, lessening the credibility of the sequence. In any case, it would be unfair to Wayne, since he had already given me so much by making himself accessible. An intriguing self-reflexivity results, when the broom is held in front of the lens. Whereas previously we observed Wayne on the screen and were not overtly aware of the video camera as a

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1. Royal Anthropological Institute News, June 1982, no.50.

necessary intermediary, his gesture reminds us of this fact as we see and hear him seeing himself.

In the following sequence, Wayne tells of a friend who was injured on the job and is now in a coma. This sequence was recorded from the side of the track and lacks the arresting sense of depth and space of the previous shots. I was aware of this while taping but couldn't get onto the track without looking away from the viewfinder. Subsequently, I strove to shoot from a vantage point that emphasized the tunnel's depth.

While the sequence with Wayne was predicated on our encounter and can be considered a "camera-created reality," the following sequence in which Wayne, Jim and Ronnie converse would have taken place even if I hadn't been present with the camera, but in a different form, since I intervened by questioning Ronnie about where he was going. My intention was to elicit the necessary information, "without changing the situation intolerably."<sup>1</sup> As it turned out, the query led to an interesting exchange between Wayne and Ronnie about the likelihood of Ronnie returning to work in the tunnel after his Florida trip.

In recording their conversation I refrained from excessive movement because of the width of the track and the deep and hazardous gullies that I again feared stepping into. I also

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1. Herb DiGioia, as quoted by Colin Young in an unpublished paper on observational cinema.

didn't want to distract them by drawing attention to myself, though whether this would have happened is problematic.

While close physical proximity was necessary for me, I was surprised to notice that the preservation of "personal space" was not a concern underground, as this sequence and the previous ones of Wayne attest to. Given the narrow width of the tunnels, I assumed that the opposite would be true, despite the noise levels.

Two weeks after this segment of Scenes From Underground was shot, the Perini construction crew that Wayne, Jim and Ronnie belonged to was transferred to the Garfield Street air shaft which was under construction between Harvard and Porter Squares. Ronnie had not been rehired, and videotaping Wayne and Jim was now impossible, for they were working inside the 120 foot shaft on a scaffolding. I sought them out one afternoon when they ascended to the street for their lunch break and realized, with some compunction, that they had, in a sense, already served their purpose. I would have to find new subjects.

Ideas about how to structure the footage recorded in February began to occur to me when I learned that the new branch would be joined to the extant track of the Red Line over the Labor Day weekend in Harvard Square. After seven years of construction, subway cars would finally utilize the branch for the purpose of turning around. (However, the extension would not formally open until December 1984,



when the subway stations at Porter and Davis Squares and Alewife Brook Parkway had been completed.)

A subway travelling through the outbound and inbound tunnels was the perfect visual resolution to the earlier video material. In anticipation of the procedure I returned to the extension in July in a final search for subjects and events that might be incorporated into the tape.

Ethel, an MBTA safety inspector and one of only two women whom I ever saw on the Red Line job, told me that a temporary track "throw" was going to be made on August 6. It would enable a string of subway cars to enter the new branch and test the track for a month prior to its actual use. Suddenly, the dramatic pay-off I had anticipated and was preparing for in advance was about to happen.

I decided to shoot the August 6 track throw with the Ikegami color camera and 3/4" deck. If this process was going to mark the culmination of a 70 million dollar public works project, then it seemed befitting that it be recorded in color and with the highest resolution possible. Sharad Shankardass agreed to assist me by taking sound.

Upon arriving that evening, I immediately felt that we were too conspicuous and were the source of considerable curiosity and perhaps disdain on the part of the men at work on the track. We were prohibited from leaving the platform and could only do so later in the evening for a few minutes, escorted by an MBTA police officer. Frustrated, I was

acutely aware that the process shooting Sharad and I had to resign ourselves to doing from the platform was hardly adequate. It wasn't the event that was important but the people involved in it who were literally at our feet and yet were inaccessible. Henceforth I would use the little newvicon camera and shoot alone, retaining only the 3/4" VTR because of its higher resolution and audio monitoring capabilities.

The subway cars that accessed the new branch on August 6 and tested the track at night remained dormant in the new Harvard Square subway station during the daytime. In late August I was finally allowed by the MBTA to ride through the outbound and inbound tunnels. The footage that resulted from that night ride has been used to preface and end Scenes From Underground.

I was interested in observing the five motormen who would be seeing the extension from the front of the test train for the first time. I also wanted to convey the kinesthetic excitement of moving through the completed tunnels at high speed and from different parts of the train. The sequence thus represents an attempt to reconcile divergent approaches to shooting an event I had long awaited. On the subway that evening my attentiveness to one concern meant the neglect of the other. It was the test train's rush through the tunnels and my desire to use the newvicon to record scintillating impressions of light that finally won out.

BEYOND HARVARD SQUARE, PART II

The grail had been found--"actual material" as mined from life, fresh and vivid before your very eyes. Yet the need for "dramatization," rooted as it was in millenia of storytelling, had not gone away.

--Brian Winston<sup>1</sup>

The broken pump sequence recorded in mid-August in the tunnel was the ideal event to observe because it only involved four people whose respective temperaments and personalities were revealed through a process and its resolution. In the electrical room, Tom, BB, Kevin and John were mostly unconcerned with my presence, and I took advantage of this by observing and not intervening in what they were doing. I tried to enclose an action in one uninterrupted camera take. In the two low-angle close-up shots at the end of the electrical room sequence where they are standing and then hunched over the pump, I was able to convey, though the composition of the shot which shows an entanglement of arms and bodies, their total involvement in its repair.

In the editing of this segment a concern for "narrativity" finally prevailed. I chose to exclude a sequence that I had used in earlier cuts of a young black laborer who was doing electrical work near the airshaft that afternoon. He did not reappear in the segment and detracted from its focus.

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1. Sight and Sound, Vol. 48, no. 1, Winter 1978-9, p. 2.

In the final version of the tape, John is seen riding through the tunnel on a cart immediately after the two opening shots of Tom and BB struggling with the pump. Parallel action is suggested by this arrangement of shots and, admittedly, one could take issue with it. It could be argued that it detracts from the credibility of the sequence, which is predicated on an awareness that only one camera is being used and that the person operating it is restricted in time and space.

Brian Winston has pointed out that in documentary films the need for narrative structure "contradicts the notion of unstructured actuality."

The idea of a documentary, then and now, is sustained by simply ignoring this contradiction. Paul Rotha therefore could sum it up thus:  
"Documentary's essence lies in the dramatization  
of actual material." 1

In films such as Family Business (1982), this concern for dramatization becomes particularly self-defeating for the filmmakers. Simulated parallel action sequences in the "Shakies" pizza restaurant stand out as just that. To cite one of many examples: Dad is seen instructing the oldest son in the kitchen in the first shot. In the second shot another son is in the dining room helping with a birthday celebration. The filmmakers then cut back to the kitchen where Dad is still

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1. Brian Winston, Sight and Sound, Vol. 48, no. 1, Winter 1978-9, p. 2.

instructing the first son. The audio from the previous shot in the dining room trails underneath, implying simultaneity. Ultimately, this structure helps the film "play," but at the expense of its credibility.

LABOR DAY WEEKEND 1983 HARVARD SQUARE

I had thought that the Labor Day weekend track-joining procedure would play a lesser role in the completed videotape. It would be part of the visual resolution to the earlier tunnel footage. Its importance and potential interest as an event was realized as the summer progressed. The August 6 track throw had given me an idea of what would transpire that weekend. The test-train shoot had allowed me to record the most important part of the resolution beforehand. I could now focus my attention on the two days of track work that would result in the extension's actual use.

Unlike the August 6 shoot I was determined to be at the junction area early so that my equipment-laden presence would immediately be known by the laborers and foremen who were working that evening. I actually arrived in the late afternoon to videotape the last trains entering and departing from the Harvard Holyoke subway platform. In this instance, the taping of moving subway cars was not inspiring. It was the type of process shooting one did to be "covered" in the

editing. I did not realize that I would be doing more of it by necessity as the evening progressed.

At 10:00 p.m. the third rail was turned off, and MBTA and Perini Construction Company laborers began converging on the junction area. Soon there was a great deal of heat, noise, dust, and smoke as the outbound scaffolding leading into the Brattle Station was cut away. My initial strategy was to locate two or three laborers whom I could observe. This quickly came to seem impractical, for they were hard at work on the track with jack hammers and welding torches. Communication was done by sign language, and the few words that were spoken were not audible enough to be recorded. While I was not restricted to the platform on this occasion, it seemed pointless and potentially dangerous to get too close to the track. My shooting approach became therefore a response to the situation. I videotaped the procedure and tried to take advantage of the moments when a laborer stepped onto the platform by asking a question that would result in a conversation. The sequences from Friday night and Saturday morning with Michael the welder are exemplary of this "interventional" approach and succeed because of it. However, Michael also possesses a modicum of what D.A. Pennebaker has referred to as "spiritual energy." It is an elusive admixture of charisma and personal appeal that in these shots is abetted by my close proximity and use of a wide angle lens. In contrast, Steve, another laborer I videotaped,

completely lacked what Michael exuded, so I wasn't able to use any of the footage of him.

I did not want to miss anything that might happen that weekend and was determined to stay awake. By 4:00 a.m. on Saturday, this proved physically impossible and I went home. I realized that it was not necessary, nor auspicious to be present at the junction site every minute, especially if I wasn't shooting. I would have to rely on cursory visits and intuition to determine whether there was something worth videotaping. When nothing was happening at the site Saturday afternoon, I went back into the tunnels of the new branch for the last time.

The "custodial caravan" sequence represents the most visually expressive shooting that I did Labor Day weekend. When I met up with this crew of Perini laborers near the Davis Square subway station, they were about to make a final trip through the outbound tunnel to Harvard Square and back. In the travelling shots on the pick-up truck, I tried to visually convey their identification with an environment they helped create. For example, the shot of the laborer standing in the back of the moving truck was recorded from a low angle to suggest his dominance over the tunnel. In the following shot, the pan from the seated worker to the Porter Square construction area and then back again links him to this awesome work site, underscoring the pride that is evident in his expression. I only spent an hour and a

half with them and never got past the mugging-for-the-camera stage. It is particularly disconcerting in the shot where Scott grabs the microphone from me, even though what he has to say is revealing.

They let me off in Harvard Square. As they backed away into the tunnel it occurred to me that if I rode with them to Davis Square I might learn more. But how could I integrate subsequent material into the structure of a sequence that had just achieved such perfect closure without rearranging the chronology? Would the credibility suffer if I did change the order of shots? And should this be a concern? These thoughts raced through my head as they turned the corner and were out of sight.

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Basically in these films you're groping, searching--and you must realize that the act of groping is precisely what makes the film interesting. The moment you stop groping, you've lost. The films are a process of perception.

--Richard Leacock<sup>1</sup>

By Sunday, the temporary outbound scaffolding had been completely removed at the junction site, and the noise had subsided. It was now possible for me to videotape a crew of twenty-five MBTA laborers who were on the lower, outbound

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1. From a Leacock-Pennebaker, Inc. flyer.



track, struggling with a resilient rail that had to be fitted to a curve. I was determined to shoot on the track and to discover what was actually going on. They did not welcome me with open arms. The men had been there for more than ten hours and were under pressure to complete the junction that evening. I sensed that some of them resented me and didn't like being videotaped while they worked under conditions that were stressful and unpleasant. They were also being watched from the platform by the MBTA official who in Scenes From Underground reprimands me for interviewing the two laborers. It was the intensity and concertedness of their track-heaving effort, in spite of their apparent exhaustion, that I found fascinating--so fascinating that I got too close and was asked to get off the track by the MBTA official. A shove from behind convinced me to leave the junction site for awhile.

When I returned later that evening they were pouring gravel ballast, and soon I was shooting from the track. Butchy, the bearded MBTA foreman who appears in this part of the tape, seemed to be the most interesting person. He was not forthcoming in making himself accessible, and I had to settle for taping him as he directed the laborers and Pettibone trucks on the track. Conversely, James, the black laborer, was very accommodating, and the sequence with him succeeds because of the competence he exudes as he patiently explains the signal work he is doing.

Early Labor Day morning they ascended to the square. For Howie, the heavy-set black laborer, exhaustion gave way to exuberance when he encountered his Cambridge police officer friend Lance. The excited conversation that ensued was what I had been waiting for all weekend long. After I explained my intentions to Lance, as I already had to Howie, they both ignored me and I videotaped them.

#### CONCLUSION

In shooting Scenes From Underground, I have used light weight video equipment in the spirit of European and American cinema verite filmmaking as a tool of participatory observation and non-interventional observation, respectively. During my visits to the new branch I sought out people who were involved in the process of its construction and could reveal themselves through their conversations with me or interactions with each other. I believe that working alone and with a camera that was inobtrusive because of its size facilitated the videotaping of conversations and personal disclosures. For instance, Wayne would probably not have spoken as un-self-consciously had another person been present or if a larger color camera had been used. In this sequence, the free associative quality of his monologue suggests that the videotaping became a *raison d'etre* for him to consider

his own experiences. The sequence evokes Marceline's walk through Les Halles, the marketplace in Paris in Jean Rouch's Chronique d'un Ete (1960), where the making of the film becomes a pretext for her soliloquy on her concentration camp internment. It is in this type of personal revelation that a unique poetry exists. To quote David MacDougall:

It is the richness of human behavior and the propensity of people to talk about their affairs past and present . . . [that],<sup>1</sup> allows this method of inquiry to succeed.

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Still, the power of the educated to judge him, and more generally, to rule, he does not dispute.

. . . and in accepting the power of educated people he feels more inadequate, vulnerable,<sup>2</sup> and undignified.

I began this paper by explaining how Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's The Hidden Injuries of Class had served as the impetus in the winter of 1981 for a film that would depict the adjacency of Harvard University and the Red Line construction environment. At the time it seemed that if there was any credence to their argument (which is exemplified by the excerpts above), then the Harvard Square setting would be a particularly unpleasant place

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1. Paul Hockings (ed.), Principles of Visual Anthropology (New York: Houton, 1975).

2. Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, op. cit., p. 78.

for a blue collar worker. Although the film was never realized, and I never found out from the college age laborers how they felt, my interest has remained.

Clearly, the laborers who appear in Scenes From Under-ground take great pride in the environment they helped create. This is evident. But in the videotape we also hear Wayne remark, "I myself have a few college credits from \_\_\_\_\_ College in Worcester--I was going to try and get that associates degree . . . which is more than most of the guys down here have . . ." And when Scott grabs the microphone from me, he immediately announces: "Actually, all these guys are highly intelligent . . ." and Michael the welder was surprisingly self-deprecating when we spoke Labor Day weekend in Harvard Square. (This sequence has not been included.) These statements don't prove any sociological theses, but it is curious that they were made at all.

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