normally restricted from general viewing highlights the careful and detailed negotiations that were pursued in the commissioning process for this programme. Such negotiations involved the community's right to preview the unedited programme and legal contractual agreements concerning copyright and production investment. The establishment and conduct of protocols and legal agreements ensured that the *Jardiwarnpa* production avoided many of the pitfalls which befell the ABC programme (Langton, 1993).

Here as elsewhere in the field of documentary representation of indigenous people, the 'Aboriginalization' of documentary – access by indigenous communities to the means of documentary production – becomes an aspect of the strategic process of decolonizing the image. The need to 'decolonize the documentary image' points, on the one hand, to the fact that documentary has been implicated with the historical, political and cultural practices of colonialism and, on the other hand, to the ways in which indigenous documentary contests the contents and conventions of documentary film and television. In this way, 'indigenous documentary' emerges as a series of procedures, practices, policies, and protocols – among them, the perspectives studied in this chapter – which hold the capacity to remake documentary representation.

CHAPTER 5

The Truth of the Matter: Cinéma Vérité and Direct Cinema

Cinéma vérité – a form associated with developments in France – and direct cinema – work associated with the United States – have, since their inceptions in the early 1960s, constituted profound influences on documentary filmmaking.[1] Cinéma vérité, 'film truth', drew on Vertov's description of a kino pravda, a cinema or film dedicated to representing truth in ways not achieved in the fictional cinema. Direct cinema, a misnomer in terms of the fact that most work in the category comprised journalistic reports produced for television, aimed to reveal the truths of human existence residing behind the surface facts. Film historian Eric Barnouw (1983: 255) summarized the forms by describing what he saw as their essential differences:

> The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the ... *cinéma vérité* artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of the involved bystander; the *cinéma vérité* artist espoused that of provocateur. Direct cinema found its truth in events available to the camera. *Cinéma vérité* was committed to a paradox: that artificial circumstances could bring hidden truth to the surface.

Against such a description, another film historian, Richard Barsam (1992: 303), emphasized the similarities of the two forms. Barsam noted that cinéma vérité and direct cinema share objectives and characteristics: 'Both cinéma vérité and direct cinema are similar in that they are committed to ... the advantages produced by the use of lightweight equipment; to a close relationship between shooting and editing; and to producing a cinema that simultaneously brought the filmmaker and the audience closer to the subject.' Barsam's description of overlap and intersection between cinéma vérité and direct cinema forces a reconsideration of the putative differences between the forms. Indeed, a history of the two forms suggests that the polarities listed by Barnouw reflect claims made by cinéma vérité and direct cinema practitioners on the efficacy of their respective methods, claims not necessarily borne out in practice. These claims stem from the different factors in France and the United States that contributed to the development of portable synchronized sound cameras, the technology that made possible the innovative filmmaking practices referred to as cinéma vérité and direct cinema. In the United States, demand for such technology issued from television journalists dismayed at the static quality of much television reportage, who sought ways to 'get close to the action' while remaining committed to journalistic objectivity and observational practices. In France, social scientists, particularly ethnographers, looked to new ways to record their subjects. From within these differing traditions practitioners developed varying theoretical claims for their work – cinéma vérité, it was claimed, provoked subjects into action while direct cinema, it was argued, filmed life as it enfolded before the camera. These differing aspirations – provocation and observation – continued to inform the theories of cinéma vérité and direct cinema, even as their practices converged on key points: cinéma vérité was provocational *and* observational; direct cinema was observational *and* interventionist.

For the practitioners of direct cinema and cinéma vérité questions of theory and issues of practice centred on the crucial issue of 'truth', which in this context refers to the camera's capacity to depict or reveal authentic moments of human experience. Truth in these terms hinges on the question of behaviour modification, specifically, the degree to which behaviour is altered in the presence of the camera. This issue informed the development of both cinéma vérité and direct cinema, feeding demands from within television journalism in the United States and the social sciences in France for a new camera technology that could be used to capture truth. This chapter examines the factors contributing to the development of new camera technologies as the informing context within which the distinctive representational forms of cinéma vérité and direct cinema were established. The claims and practices circulated by practitioners of direct cinema and cinéma vérité based on this technology are also examined. The analysis focuses on the differing formal qualities and methods of two films, *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un été*, 1961), a foundational work of cinéma vérité made by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, and *Don't Look Back*, a prominent example of direct cinema made by D.A. Pennebaker in 1966. Both films raise questions concerning the place of performance within observational and interactive modes designed to reveal truth. The analysis considers this issue and the ways in which a performative element structures the newer, post-observational forms of documentary representation.

Technology and supervening necessities

New camera technology occupies a privileged place in histories of cinéma vérité and direct cinema. Prior to the late 1950s, film production was largely dependent on a studio rigged to accommodate heavy 35 mm cameras linked by cables to huge sound recorders. The technology restricted location shooting, and the requirements of a large boomed microphone connected to a stationary camera frequently denied the spontaneity and movement demanded by a growing number of documentary filmmakers. The invention of a mobile camera synchronized to a sound recorder was an innovation that permitted multiple applications and filmmaking experiments.

The utility of the new technology is, however, emphasized in a number of written accounts of direct cinema and cinéma vérité to the point where in many descriptions the technology is interpreted as *the* factor that made possible the new work. A crude technological determinism operates in such accounts, one which, in effect, argues that new technology created new documentary forms. Such a conclusion overlooks important non-technological factors, what Brian Winston (1996) calls 'supervening necessities' and what Allen and Gomez (1985) call 'generative mechanisms', which facilitated the emergence of the new technology. In the United States the supervening necessity that led to and informed direct cinema was television, in particular the requirements of television news reportage. In France the supervening necessity took the form of the practical and academic demands of the discipline of ethnography.

In the late 1950s television journalism in the United States consisted, typically, of still and moving images accompanied by a didactic voice-over. A number of filmmakers and producers, displeased by a form that resembled that of 'illustrated lectures', looked for new ways to present information within the documentary format (Winston, 1995: 157). One such innovator, Robert Drew, inspired by the tradition of photojournalism exemplified by *Life* magazine, sought a camera technology which would enable him to capture events as they unfolded. In early 1960 Drew's employer, the Time–Life company, provided Drew and his colleagues funds to develop equipment for this purpose. Drew had assembled at Time–Life various associates who shared his enthusiasm for creating an innovative form of television journalism. Drew's team included a number of talented young filmmakers, many of whom went on to noted careers in direct cinema production, among them Richard Leacock, D.A. Pennebaker, Albert and David Maysles, and Gregory Shuker.[2] Near the end of the 1950s, after a series of experiments with camera and sound equipment, Drew and Leacock developed a lightweight, portable camera with synchronized sound based on a modified 16 mm camera. Accompanying the innovations in camera and sound technology, new sensitive film stocks permitted shooting in low lights, thus replacing the need to illuminate the subject with multiple spotlights. The 16 mm film was loaded in magazines which could be replaced in seconds, thereby reducing the downtime spent reloading the camera.

The new equipment was first used to film *Primary* (1960), a programme by Robert Drew, Terry Filgate, Richard Leacock, Albert Maysles, and D.A. Pennebaker which follows John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey as they campaigned in Wisconsin for the 1960 Democratic presidential nomination. *Primary* was screened on a number of television stations owned by Time–Life and impressed executives at the ABC television network who saw the potential of the new form as a way to compete with the rival CBS and NBC news operations (Winston, 1995: 153). The ABC network contracted Drew and his associates to produce further synchronized-sound documentaries, including *Yanki No!* (1960), an account of Castro's Cuba, *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963), a study of the confrontation between the Kennedy federal administration and Governor George Wallace of Alabama over the desegregation of the state's universities, and *The Chair* (1962), which deals with the legal appeal of a man sentenced to death by electric chair. Through the use of the new technology, the films Drew and his associates produced for ABC broke new stylistic ground by permitting the filmmaker a degree of proximity to events unmatched by earlier news reports. Such an innovation did not, however, lead the filmmakers to abandon established journalistic traditions and, indeed, the form of direct cinema developed by Drew and his associates was deeply implicated with the established discourse of journalistic objectivity. In the early 1960s Leacock, for one, referred to his filming practice as 'film-reporting' and to himself as a reporter (in Bachmann, 1961), an identification that counts in large part for his subsequent insistence on the place of objectivity within observational direct cinema filmmaking. The emphasis on a journalistic objectivity was reinforced by other direct cinema practitioners, many of whom collaborated with Leacock in the production of news films for Time–Life and the ABC network.

Running concurrently with technological developments in the United States, in France a film and sound engineer, André Coutant, developed a portable, self-blimped (mechanically quiet), 16 mm camera which was marketed commercially in the early 1960s as the Eclair. The camera enabled sound to be recorded free of interruptive camera noise on newly developed battery-powered magnetic tape recorders synchronized to the image track of the camera. Coutant's impetus to develop a portable camera stemmed from the demands of social scientists for a workable tool for ethnographic purposes. Such a tool, it was argued, would reduce or banish a baleful subjectivity which many ethnographers felt had crept into the anthropological literature and ethnographic field notes, thereby subverting the basis of the objective discipline of anthropology and its subdiscipline ethnography.[3] For many ethnographers committed to a visual anthropology the motion picture camera was an instrument that would bring cultural reality into objective focus. The demand for objectivity entered ethnographic filmmaking in various ways. Certain ethnographers, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson among them, relied on 'record footage', the filmic equivalent of field notes, as a useful source for research. The unscripted, unedited, unstructured nature of such footage reinforced its acceptability as a neutral and impartial record of actions and events. Editing was to be avoided as a potential source of bias. Karl Heider's set of rules in his book *Ethnographic Film*, quoted in Chapter 3, includes the dictum that ethnographic filmmakers depict 'whole bodies and whole people in whole acts', a prescription that seeks to install an objective filmmaking practice by reducing or denying editing and its traces of subjective decision-making (1976: 7).

Despite such injunctions, other ethnographers recognized the limitations of the camera as an objective recording device. Certain ethnographers noted that the ideal of objectivity was frequently compromised by the presence of the camera that altered a subject's behaviour even as the filmmaker attempted to remain distanced and impartial. A number of critics argued that detached social observation is impossible given that the ethnographer inevitably brings prior knowledge and a subjective point of view to bear on the profilmic world. Colin Young (1975: 67–8) extended this point in his description of a filmmaking practice in which the ethnographer accepts that a camera alters a subject's behaviour and thereby openly and actively intervenes within the filming process. Within this method it is understood,

> That the normal behavior being filmed is the behavior that is normal for the subjects under the circumstances, including but not exclusively, the fact that they are being filmed. If we observe, as a matter of fact, that our filming CHANGES the behavior, then we have to decide whether or not that change is relevant to the total portrait we are trying to make. In one set of circumstances, the subject might have to be abandoned or postponed. In another, the alteration introduced by the camera might have to be accepted … [and if so] then the … participation of the filmmaker in the events … might turn out to be the most revealing method to adopt.

Pursuing a similar stance to that described by Young, the ethnographer Jean Rouch abandoned the pretence of objectivity and, using the newly developed camera technology, actively participated in the events he filmed. Rouch's practice in *Chronicle of a Summer* largely defined the tradition of what the subtitle of the film refers to as 'an experiment in cinéma vérité'.

Chronicle of a Summer: the provocational camera

A seminal film in the history of documentary film in general and cinéma vérité in particular, *Chronicle of a Summer* was made in Paris in the summer of 1960 by Jean Rouch and his colleague, the sociologist Edgar Morin. Rouch had established a career filming among peoples of Africa and wanted to make a film about 'the strange tribe that lives in Paris', as he described it in his film *Petit a Petit*. In this way, Rouch and Morin conceived a film that was to be, according to Morin (1985: 6), an 'experiment in cinematographic interrogation … "two authors in search of six characters" … a sort of psychodrama … which through filmed conversations of a spontaneous nature would get in touch with fundamentals'. The six subjects were all friends of Morin: Marceline, a survivor of Auschwitz, Jean-Pierre, a philosophy student, Landry, a student, Regis, a political science student, Marilou, an Italian woman living in Paris who has had a succession of ill-fated love affairs, and Angelo, a union militant. With the participation of these subjects, the film examines life in a modern city in the mid-twentieth century. The questions motivating the filmic 'experiment' are those which the filmmakers ask Marceline in the film – 'How do you live?', 'What do you do with your life?' – and which Marceline asks passers-by on a Paris street: 'Are you happy?'. The questions raise a number of issues concerning the place of work and the ability to find a meaningful occupation in a complex modern mass society, and whether happiness, or personal fulfilment, is achievable in such a society.

Various aspects of these themes are addressed within the film's three parts. The first section introduces the subjects whose experiences will form the basis of the experiment. Rouch and Morin also appear in the film asking questions on-camera of the subjects. The opening sequence in which Marceline asks people if they are happy extends the interactive component beyond the questions asked by Rouch and Morin. Marceline's encounters with bemused passers-by and their refusal or inability to answer her question betrays a lack of happiness and satisfaction in the lives of people living in the large modern city. This theme is explored by Rouch and Morin in their conversations with Angelo, Marilou, Marceline, Jean-Pierre and the married couple, Jacques and Simone Gabillon. The emphasis on job satisfaction and work is extended in the first section in a day in the life of Angelo, a car worker at Renault. The detailed observational sequence replaces talk – the frequent conversations of the other scenes of the first segment – with the noise of the factory. Concerns about meaningful work and happiness are here focused on the mechanized routines, regulation and discipline of modern factory life. Angelo's response to the situation expresses itself in a militancy that is alien to Marilou, who is introduced near the end of the first segment. Marilou's experiences have resulted in introspection and her current emotional turmoil – she appears to be on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

Marilou's life typifies yet another response to the questions of work, happiness and satisfaction explored in the first part of the film.

The second section of the film begins with a meeting in which Morin seeks to open the film to current political issues, thereby going beyond the focus on what Rouch called the 'personal' stories of the lives of its subjects. To this end, Morin tries to initiate discussion on the French colonial war in Algeria, which was then in a critical phase. Marceline's recollections of her experience of deportation during the Second World War, the other major segment of this section of the film, extend the reference to warfare raised by Morin. The third section of the film depicts the summer vacation period and follows Landry, the 'African adventurer', in St Tropez investigating the 'strange tribe' of Europeans at play in the south of France. Near the end of the film Rouch and Morin gather the subjects together for a screening of a rough cut of the film's footage and seek their comments on the filmmaking process. The film ends in the Musée de l'Homme, Rouch's employer, as Rouch and Morin discuss the film and attempt to anticipate its critical reception.

Within its various approaches and innovations, the experiment that is *Chronicle of a Summer* exemplifies central aspects of the method and formal components the filmmakers refer to as cinéma vérité. A notable feature of the film is its various editorial manipulations, which Rouch called 'a whole series of intermediaries'. Rouch acknowledged that he and Morin 'contract time, we extend it, we choose an angle for the shot, we deform the people we're shooting, we speed things up and follow one movement to the detriment of another movement' (quoted in Eaton, 1979: 51). The film bears the marks of the filmmakers' presence in other ways, most obviously in the fact that both Rouch and Morin appear in the film. In certain shots the camera appears reflected in windows and mirrors and occasionally a microphone boom can be seen in frame, a radical reformulation of conventional fictional and documentary filming methods which seek to deny traces of the cinematic apparatus. For Rouch the camera is to be acknowledged and foregrounded as a way of inspiring action. Rouch explained that he quickly 'discovered the camera was ... not a brake but let's say, to use an automobile term, an accelerator' which pushes 'these people to confess themselves' (Eaton, 1979: 51).

The essence of cinéma vérité as Rouch conceived it is a method that does not film reality as it is, but 'truth' as it is provoked, stimulated, modified or catalysed (all terms Rouch used in his writings) by the very act of filming. 'Not to film life as it is, but life as it is provoked', he argued (Eaton, 1979: 51). In one way, being provocative is the simple act of placing the camera before subjects, an act which inspires a response which the camera captures. In another way, provocation can be confrontational and challenging, a practice reflected in Morin's technique of questioning which, on certain occasions, becomes a form of 'bullying' (at one point in the film Rouch refers to Morin as 'the bully'). Morin's method is depicted in a segment at the beginning of part two in which he seeks to turn the discussion toward the French war in Algeria:

> Rouch: We've reached the point where the film, which up to here has been enclosed in a relatively personal and individual universe, opens up on to the situation of this summer of 1960.
> Voices: Yeah, yeah ...
> Rouch: So, shall we go ahead?
> Morin: Yes, but I'd really like to know what they think [of the war].
> Morin advances the topic by addressing the participants: 'Okay, let's go ... if I were a student ... old enough to do military service, I'd be thinking about events in Algeria ... You don't give a damn about this issue, about the war in Algeria, do you?'

In place of Morin's aggressive form of provocation, Rouch was willing to try alternate, subtler, forms of questioning in his attempts to provoke responses and gain insights. Rouch's method is exemplified during a lunch at the Musée d'Art with Marceline and a group of African students. As the conversation turns to the topic of anti-Semitism, Rouch directs the attention of the African students to the tattoo on Marceline's arm and asks what they thought of it. The students, with their differing historical experiences compared to the Europeans, do not recognize that the tattoo had been forcibly inscribed on Marceline by the Nazis. From the basis of their own experience of tattooing, the students interpret Marceline's tattoo as a bodily adornment, with one student asking Marceline if it was her telephone number. This scene effectively depicts separate historical experiences and differing cross-cultural interpretive strategies. For Rouch the encounter demonstrated the capacity of a provocational intervention, in the form of his directives and questioning, to produce 'evidence' of a remarkable reality (Feld, 1989: 239).

In each case, such interventions reflect the 'guiding hand' of Rouch and Morin as they construct situations and propose lines of discussion. The various forms of provocation do not, however, deny subjects an active role in decisions concerning the film. A basic strategy employed in *Chronicle* is one which Rouch referred to elsewhere as 'shared anthropology', a practice in which subjects actively collaborate with the filmmaker in a form of participatory cinema (as discussed in Chapter 3). In *Chronicle of a Summer*, the resultant 'dialogue' between the filmmakers and the subjects is illustrated in the fact that certain scenes suggested by the participants are included in the final cut. One such sequence is Marceline's emotionally powerful and profoundly moving reminiscences of the loss of her father in the Nazi Holocaust and her own deportation to Auschwitz, a sequence which Rouch points to as exemplary of the essence of cinéma vérité – the revelation of subjective feelings and thoughts which is equated in the film to truth. Given Rouch's emphasis on this scene within the cinéma vérité method it is quoted here at some length:[4]

> *The image of the Place de la Concorde appears, almost deserted. It is August 15th, morning. From the centre of the square, Marceline is coming towards us, slowly. She's walking with her eyes lowered. We hear her voice speaking slowly and sadly:*
>
> 'And Concorde is empty, too ... as it was 20 years ago, or was it 15 ... I don't quite remember, now ... "Pitchipoi", my dad said, "you'll see, we'll go there, we'll work in the factories, we'll see each other on Sundays". And you answered my questions, and said, "You are young, you'll come back, but I definitely won't." '
>
> *She hums,* Ti ta ti ta ta ti la la, *and walks more quickly. The camera tracks in front of her, looking back at her.*
>
> 'And now, here I am, there, now: Concorde ... I came back, you stayed there ... (she sighs). When I saw you, we had already been there six months. We threw ourselves into each other's arms, and then ...'
>
> *Wide shot Marceline, who continues to walk.*
>
> 'That dirty SS man who hurled himself on me, who hit me in front of you ... You said "But she's my daughter, my daughter." Achtung! He threatened to give you a beating too ... you were holding an onion, and you thrust it into my hand and I disappeared ...'
>
> *Another setting. A crossroads. Marceline keeps walking, and gets further away from us. We hear her humming* 'The Big Swampy Meadows.' *She sighs.*
>
> 'Daddy ... when I saw you, you said to me "And mummy? Michel?" You called me your little daughter, and I was almost happy ...'
>
> *We can recognize the arches of Les Halles, the markets. The camera, which is again in front of her, quickly distances itself from her, and Marceline is soon nothing but a small silhouette alone in the vast emptiness of Les Halles, gloomy and huge, while we hear her voice:*
>
> 'To be deported with you, loving you so much ... daddy, daddy, how much I would like to have you here now ... I lived there thinking you would come back ... when I came back, it was hard ... hard ... (she sighs). I could see everyone on the platform, mummy, everyone. People kissed me ... my heart was a stone ... it was Michel who moved me. I said, "Don't you recognize me?" He said to me "If I can believe it ... I think you are Marceline" ... oh, daddy ...'

Soon after this scene was filmed Rouch and Morin screened it for Marceline, who in the words of Rouch speaking in an interview, 'said that none of that concerned her! Now what did that mean? She meant – "I'm an excellent actress and I am capable of acting that!" But that's not true. Morin and I are persuaded that when she said those things, it was the real Marceline, terribly sincere, who was speaking of all that – exactly as she felt it, as she was' (quoted in Macdonald and Cousins, 1996: 270). Rouch's claim is based on his notion of the provocative potential of the camera. Rouch insisted that:

> contrary to what one might think, when people are being recorded, the reactions that they have are always infinitely more sincere than those they have when they are not being recorded. The fact of being recorded gives these people a public. At first, of course, there is a self-conscious 'hamminess'. They say to themselves 'People are looking at me I must give a nice impression of myself.' But this lasts only a very short time. And then, very rapidly, they begin to try to think – perhaps for the first time sincerely – about their own problems, about who they are and then they begin to express what they have within themselves. These moments are very short, and one must know how to take advantage of them. That's the art of making a film like *Chronique d'un Été*.... (quoted in Macdonald and Cousins, 1996: 269)

Marceline was obviously aware of the camera (it was she who suggested the scene), though in Rouch's philosophy the camera holds the capacity to reveal or, to use Rouch's much-quoted word for the process, provoke, sincere and authentic reactions. As Rouch's observation highlights, cinéma vérité works with the assumption that people are always adopting roles, constantly performing impressions of themselves. However, as Rouch argues above, the camera can also inspire honest emotions and thoughts. In this way Rouch understood cinéma vérité to be a practice which documents a performance *and* which has the capacity to take the subject (and the viewer) beyond or through performance to an authentic and truthful revelation of being.

Within the context of a work of provocation the film also contains a number of moments of a different representational order in which the camera observes behaviour, not provokes it. In many of the dinner table scenes, for example, the camera lingers on the face of a guest listening to another guest speaking. In these shots observation replaces any emphasis on the responses provoked by the filmmakers or other guests. A notable example of 'pure' observation occurs in the Renault factory segment and its attention to the faces and hands of workers as they go about their tasks, seemingly unaware of the camera. The camera's presence is downplayed here, an effect achieved in the fact that certain shots used within the scene were made with a telephoto lens which unobtrusively captured action from a distance.[5] For Rouch and Morin cinéma vérité aimed to capture 'the authenticity of life as it is lived', the 'truth' of life behind the performance (Morin, 1985: 4). To this end the camera was deployed as both provocateur and observer. Rouch did not subscribe to the critical distinction between cinéma vérité and direct cinema which suggested that the former was exclusively provocational and the latter refrained from provocation. Rouch considered the direct cinema filmmakers to be also engaged in 'cinéma vérité' (Rothman, 1997: 87), an assessment that did not, however, sit well with direct cinema filmmakers.

A fly on the wall and a can of worms: direct cinema and the practice of observation

Direct cinema filmmakers in the United States were critical of the participatory and reflexive approaches employed in *Chronicle of a Summer*. For Leacock and other practitioners of direct cinema, Rouch's film moved toward 'theater' and supplied 'answers' as opposed to objectively reporting events (in Feld, 1989: 258). Leacock felt that *Chronicle of a Summer* did little more than document its own filming (1963: 18). According to the early practitioners of direct cinema, filmmakers should not intervene in the filmmaking process – that is, they should not be in frame, and keep contact with subjects to a minimum. The filmmaker should not manipulate the documentary mise-en-scène for the purposes of the film. Direct questioning of subjects on camera, or directives to subjects on or off camera, were to be avoided. Voice-over commentary was also disparaged. Leacock (1996: 253) summarized the essence of these injunctions as: 'No interviews. No re-enactments. No staged scenes and very little narration.' The philosophy or theory of direct cinema also emphasized that editing should ensure that the order of events in the final film followed the sequence of events as they were filmed. Though there was considerable variation in their work, practitioners of direct cinema in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1960s upheld a theory of observational 'purity' which maintained that the filmmaker should be an unobtrusive observer or, in the phrase popularized to describe the method in the United Kingdom, a 'fly on the wall'.[6]

The theory was, however, zealously overstated and its exaggerated claims contradicted in practice, as numerous critics have pointed out. The deflation of direct cinema's claims to unique observational status reveals it to be a form which in its interventions and manipulations and interpretations of its subject matter is closer to the practices of cinéma vérité than was often acknowledged. As film theorist Noel Carroll has noted, 'critics and viewers turned the polemics of direct cinema against direct cinema' by pointing out 'all the ways that direct cinema was inextricably involved with interpreting its materials'. Carroll summarized the situation by commenting that '[d]irect cinema opened a can of worms and then got eaten by them' (1983: 7).

In an illuminating essay, Jeanne Hall (1991) explicates various ways in which the theoretical claims made for direct cinema were contravened in practice. Regarding the claim by direct cinema filmmakers that they did not use interviews, Hall notes that Robert Drew and his colleagues routinely conducted interviews, and then edited the interviewer's questions out of the final cut. Other moments, such as a subject's look to camera, were cut in order to preserve the illusion of an unmediated scene. Elsewhere in the films made by Drew and his team subjects talk directly to the filmmaker on camera, thus contradicting the notion of the filmmaker's unobtrusive presence. The direct cinema filmmaker was, it was argued, a neutral observer who did not take sides or espouse a particular point of view. Contradicting the claim, Hall identifies various instances of polemic and argument within direct cinema. The programme *Yanki No!*, for example, begins with the announcement 'This is a film editorial', and concludes with an open plea for increased aid to Latin America. *The Children are Watching* (1960), an early programme by the Drew team dealing with racial segregation in the South, refrains from announcing itself as an editorial, though its criticisms of segregation are openly polemical.

Assertions that the filmmaker was unobtrusive were reinforced in claims that a person involved in a crisis was unlikely to be aware of the presence of the ever-present camera. The result, allegedly, would be the revelation of the subject's true nature captured on film. This logic was translated into a number of direct cinema films which chose as their subject matter situations liable to result in crises. The dramatic potential created by impending or unravelling crisis was exploited within the so-called crisis structure or crisis moment of various films made by Drew's team. The technique was pursued in *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* and *The Chair*. *Primary* defers to the technique by choosing to follow presidential candidates involved in a hectic round of electioneering. Richard Leacock, one of the team responsible for shooting the film, argued for the efficacy of filming subjects involved in critical situations when he stated that as he filmed John Kennedy in a hotel room 'I retired into a corner and got lost, sitting in a big comfortable arm-chair with the camera on my lap. I'm quite sure [Kennedy] hadn't the foggiest notion I was shooting' (in Winston, 1995: 150). The statement points to a problem inherent in the assumption that a subject will, in certain situations, be too preoccupied to register the presence of a camera. In this particular case Leacock denies the fact that it was highly unlikely that Kennedy, who at that time in his career was already a practised and astute politician fully aware of the power of the media, would 'forget' or overlook the presence of the camera and its operator.

The discrepancies between the theory and practices of direct cinema are further evident in *Salesman*, a film made in 1969 by Albert and David Maysles. *Salesman* is a record of the daily routines of four itinerant Bible salesmen which focuses on Paul Brennan ('The Badger') as he makes his door-to-door rounds among the Catholic communities of New England and Florida. Direct cinema's commitment to documenting reality without interference on the part of the filmmaker is compromised in a scene in *Salesman* in which a friend enters her neighbour's kitchen to find it is occupied not only by her neighbour but also by an unfamiliar salesman and two filmmakers. The absence of any look of surprise on the face of the woman as she enters the room strongly suggests that the scene was re-enacted for the camera.[7] The myth of the unobtrusive filmmaker is further exposed through reference to a photograph used to promote *Salesman*. The image depicts Paul, seated in the living room of a (potential) customer, displaying a leather-bound Bible for the customer's inspection. Another photograph taken at the same time, though not as commonly reproduced, shows Albert and David Maysles holding a camera and tape-recording gear as they stand close to the seated Paul and his customer.[8] The looming presence of the two men, replete with camera and sound recording equipment in the cramped confines of a small living room belies the assumption of a fly on the wall. In this case, the startling presence of the filmmakers is more accurately characterized as an elephant on the table!

Don't Look Back: performing the documentary

Another form of direct cinema – the rock concert film, the so-called rockumentary – raises further issues relating to the direct cinema presumption of the non-disruptive presence of the camera. The rockumentary, a popular and commercially successful documentary subgenre, is, according to the influential film historians Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell (1994: 668), 'The most widespread use of Direct Cinema.'[9] Despite its broad circulation, rockumentary has received scant critical attention in analyses of documentary film.[10] This situation is a curious one given that many of the most notable works in the subgenre, including *Don't Look Back* (1966), a film which inaugurated the meeting of rock and documentary, *Monterey Pop* (1968), and *Gimme Shelter* (1970), were made by filmmakers associated with the early phases of direct cinema – D.A. Pennebaker (*Don't Look Back* and *Monterey Pop*) and the Maysles brothers (*Gimme Shelter*). In making these films the directors did not necessarily abandon their theoretical commitment to notions of detachment and neutrality, though, increasingly, the films they made in the rockumentary subgenre stretched the contradiction between the theory and practice of direct cinema. The Maysles brothers' *Gimme Shelter*, for example, relies heavily on reconstruction of events and the inclusion of reflexive moments to construct its narrative of the Rolling Stones' 1969 tour of the United States and the disastrous concert at Altamont. More particularly, the presence of performance in the rockumentary complicates the emphasis by direct cinema filmmakers on pure observation.

As with other works of direct cinema, a rockumentary presumes to be an objective record of an event, in this case musical concert performances and off-stage actions. As a species of direct cinema which focuses on performance, the rockumentary begs a number of questions concerning the effects of the camera on a subject's behaviour. The notion of a subject's 'virtual performance' (Nichols, 1991: 122) inspired by the camera is something that direct cinema, with its emphasis on unreconstructed action, seeks to minimize or banish. This point is of particular relevance to Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back,* a film which features multiple levels of performance. *Don't Look Back,* a record of Bob Dylan's triumphant 1965 concert tour of the United Kingdom, includes a number of Dylan's onstage performances amidst scenes of life away from the spotlight. The intriguing aspect of *Don't Look Back* is the degree of attention the film gives to depicting the exploits of Dylan and his entourage in 'off stage' environments such as hotel rooms. Such scenes constitute another level of performance in which Dylan continues, in effect, to perform for the camera away from the stage.[11]

The film's prologue, which was suggested to Pennebaker by Dylan, exemplifies Pennebaker's willingness to abandon pure direct cinema by foregrounding off-stage performance as one of the film's central concerns – not as something to be minimized or banished, but as an activity to be encouraged and highlighted. The segment features Dylan, standing in an alleyway in London flipping though large cue cards inscribed with hand-lettered words of his song 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', which plays on the soundtrack. During the sequence Dylan stands facing the camera flipping through the cards, the first inscribed with 'BASEMENT' (in the song Dylan sings 'Johnny's in the basement mixing up the medicine ...'), continuing with others which bear various lyrics from the song: 'LOOK OUT!', 'WATCH IT!', 'HERE THEY COME!', 'LEADERS???' and so on. Dylan discards the cards one by one as the song continues to play. Dylan's act is replete with knowing looks to the camera which also depicts the alleyway in the background, empty except for the brief appearance of a bearded figure carrying a staff (the poet Allen Ginsburg). At the end of the segment, as the song is fading on the soundtrack, another man (Dylan's friend Bob Neuwirth) enters the frame, nods at Dylan, and the two walk away in opposite directions, with Dylan heading down the alley without looking back.

The prologue is a fully contained segment within the broader film, and it approximates what later became the 'rock clip', short interpretative works produced to accompany rock songs on television in formats such as those on MTV. (Indeed, Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman, had conceived of Pennebaker's film as an opportunity to produce promotional clips for Dylan's songs.) The segment positions Dylan 'centre stage' within a self-conscious performance. In these terms the prologue can either be considered out of place, even inappropriate, within the context of observationalism, or, alternatively, an indication that performance – an abandonment of the pretence of naturalism – will supersede the demands of a direct cinema committed to naturalism and observation. It is clear as the film progresses, and as Dylan continues to act for the camera, that Dylan's proposal to include the segment, and Pennebaker's agreement to do so, signals an emphasis on the performative which extends beyond the realms of the stage. William Rothman, in his lengthy and dense analysis of *Don't Look Back,* suggests that the purpose of the prologue is to announce that the film is not merely a 'documentary'; it is, instead, a 'collaboration in which filmmaker and subject are co-conspirators'. In this way, the prologue functions as a marker that the body of the film will also be a 'performance by co-conspirators' (Rothman, 1997: 149). This is not to suggest that Pennebaker consciously set out to 'defraud' or deceive the viewer. The 'collusion' between Dylan and Pennebaker does, however, point to a manipulation, or transgression of the codes of direct cinema. The prologue, as with the rest of the film, constitutes Pennebaker's willingness to abandon 'pure' direct cinema, and to give reign, with Dylan's participation, to performance – both on and off stage.

Another indication of this willingness occurs during an interview between Dylan and a Jamaican correspondent for the BBC, one of the many interviews in the film. The interviewer asks, 'How did it all begin for you, Bob?'. Dylan mumbles inaudibly and the film cuts to footage of a young Dylan singing 'He's Only a Pawn in Their Game' at a civil rights rally in Mississippi. As the scattered crowd at the rally applauds his performance, another cut introduces Dylan onstage during the 1965 tour singing 'The Times They Are A-Changin'.' The cuts from contemporary action to the past depicted in archival footage, back to contemporary action, disrupts the temporal and spatial continuity that narratively orders observationalism, replacing it with the non-narrativized presence of performance. Elsewhere, Dylan's musical performances are structured into the narrative as he heads north to Manchester and back to London though, ironically, the narrative lacks the 'honesty' and 'integrity' of the Mississippi performance, a function of Dylan's constant performing off stage. Within these performances there is no way to get 'access' to 'the real' Dylan.

The rockumentary convention of 'backstage' has developed in reaction to such a difficulty, offering supposedly unmediated glimpses of the 'real' person behind the performance. The convention, operative in a range of rockumentaries including *Woodstock* (1970), *Gimme Shelter*, *The Last Waltz* (1978) and Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop*, exploits the hand-held camera of direct cinema and its capacity to film in confined and poorly lit spaces such as dressing rooms, concert hall corridors, the back seats of limousines, and hotel rooms. Erving Goffman, in his sociological and psychological study of selfhood, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, examines various behaviours undertaken in particular social environments, among them 'backstage', the physical space behind or off stage in which a performer can relax and 'step out of character' (Goffman, 1969: 98). Such an understanding informs the convention of backstage as it operates in the rockumentary where, as Jonathan Romney argues, it is

> the most potent of all concepts designed to separate performer and fan. It is a space of privacy, a world behind the curtain in which the *real being*, the ineffable precious essence of the performer's self, supposedly lies shielded from sight... The audience is not normally permitted behind the sacred veil, but it is a convention of the music documentary to include scenes which take us backstage and offer us tantalizing glimpses of the reality behind the show... [Such scenes] offer us a fantasy 'Access All Areas' pass, one of those areas being the artist's very soul. Above all, they promise access to the truth, for backstage is imagined as a far more 'real' space than the stage in which the artists do their work. (Romney, 1995: 83)

The convention creates a distinction between the public space of the stage, where a performer presents a persona constructed for the purposes of entertaining an audience, and the private spaces off-stage in which the mask of the performer is dropped and the person behind the performer is revealed. *Don't Look Back* includes a shot which clearly indicates a separation of stage and

backstage – a shaky tracking shot following Dylan and his companions as they flee a concert hall by running along corridors, up and down staircases, past fans in the street, and into a waiting limousine which will take them to the secluded space of a hotel room. (The shot, which mirrors a famous shot made by Albert Maysles for *Primary* in which Kennedy is followed into an auditorium of waiting well-wishers, has since became a rockumentary cliché parodied in *This is Spinal Tap*, 1984, in a scene in which the fictional band gets lost in a similar set of corridors and stairs.)

While *Don't Look Back* replicates the two domains of onstage and backstage, the film does not fully reproduce what are in other rock documentaries the attendant meanings of public and private space. We are permitted backstage, but not granted access to the 'real being', in Romney's terms. Off stage, Dylan continues to perform, particularly in the presence of the many interviewers who appear in the backstage spaces. At certain times, Dylan seems to take delight in the interviews, and at other times, he appears to be annoyed by interviewers, but both reactions seem to be calculated. Dylan appears as a masterful role player, an obfuscationist, indulging in word games and gambits, willing to spin stories which are clearly fabricated at the interviewer's expense. In one particular interview, with Horace Judson, the London-based arts correspondent for *Time* magazine, Dylan launches a verbal attack on Judson and steps out of the role of interviewee by asking Judson unanswerable questions. The scene is unsettling – Dylan, the man of peace indulging in verbal aggression – and it is difficult not to wonder whether it was another example of Dylan's performance. Judson felt that the scene was contrived as an entertaining sequence for the film to compensate for the fact that the recorded interview had gone flat (Sounes, 2001: 175).

In other, less overtly dramatic moments, the film captures, if not Dylan acting for the camera, then his awareness of the camera's presence revealed, however fleetingly, in glances at the camera. Having thrown a hotel assistant out of the room, telling him to go to his 'fop manager', Dylan looks to-camera. On another occasion, while playing music and talking with Alan Price of the Animals, Dylan starts a song and then looks directly at the camera, annoyed, it seems, that Pennebaker is at that moment still filming when, for once, Dylan would prefer he wasn't (Pennebaker, 1990: 27). In these moments, and particularly during his interactions with interviewers, the camera reveals or inspires performances which are, in effect, an acknowledgement of the camera's presence. The camera does not capture the man 'behind the shades' (Heylin, 1991); as Pennebaker (1971: 192) pointed out, Dylan 'knew that the camera was recording [him] in a way which [he] elected to be recorded. [He was] enacting [a] role ... very accurately.'

Don't Look Back effectively documents a consummate performer, and extends the opportunities (in the prologue and throughout the film) for Dylan to perform. Pennebaker is implicated in this process not as neutral observer but as co-conspirator colluding in Dylan's performances. By privileging and, in effect, licensing Dylan's off-stage 'performances' for the camera *Don't Look Back* complicates the direct cinema rhetoric of detached observationalism and the claim that the presence of a camera does not modify a subject's behaviour. In this way *Don't Look Back* points to the essential paradox that underlines the direct cinema claim: the notion of a subject 'acting naturally' in the presence of the camera.

Post observationalism

The rockumentary has continued as one of the most commercially successful cinema release documentary forms (one which also features in the large-screen IMAX format; *Rolling Stones: At the Max*, 1991, is one such work). Various films which followed *Don't Look Back* contributed further revisions to a basic observationalism. The Maysles brothers *Gimme Shelter*, for example, marries observation with a Rouchian reflexivity in a scene near the end of the film in which the filmmakers appear in frame to replay footage for Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of the Stones' Altamont concert (at which a fan was killed by a member of the Hell's Angels, an event that is evident in the footage). Prior to the rise of docusoap and gamedocs and their reworking of observationalism (see Chapter 10), the rockumentary contained some of the most radical disruptions of the observational mode.

Beyond the rock documentary a 'purer', more conventional in terms of observational practice, form of non-interventionist direct cinema persisted. Notably, productive output in this line has tended to outstrip works informed by cinéma vérité's reflexive approach (though, confusingly, the terms 'ciné vérité' and 'vérité' have come to be used interchangeably with 'direct cinema' to refer to work in the field). In the United Kingdom, Paul Watson's *The Family* (BBC, 1974) and Roger Graef's 13-part television series *Police* (BBC, 1982) made significant contributions to a 'direct cinema' approach.[12] In the United States, the 12-part series *An American Family* (PBS, 1973) drew large audiences to its detailed daily observations of the Loud family of Santa Barbara, California. In episode one of the series the producer Craig Gilbert speaks in voice-over, introducing the series and its concerns.[13] The segment was one of the first instances of exposition melded to sequences of observation and it anticipated a subsequent increasing move toward the incorporation of narration within the context of observation. Other prominent observational works from the United States include the theatrically released *Hoop Dreams* (1994), *Crumb* (1995), *The War Room* (1994) directed by Pennebeker and Chris Hegedus, and *StartUp.Com* (2001), which was directed by Hegedus and produced by Pennebaker. In Australia the observational films of Robert Connolly and Robin Anderson (*Rats in the Ranks*, 1996, *Facing the Music*, 2001) and Dennis O'Rourke ('*Cannibal Tours*', 1987, *The Good Woman of Bangkok*, 1992, and *Cunnamulla*, 2001), like *Crumb*, openly incorporate off-camera comments by the filmmaker and, at times, moments of direct questioning of the subject by the filmmaker.

The increasing integration of aspects of exposition within an observational context has broadened to the point that many works, particularly those in the docusoap format, commonly rely on interviews and voice-over to provide additional information as part of a practice of revising what a number of directors see as the limitations of conventional observational methods. Another development in this regard has been an increasing admission of performative 'set pieces' in works which playfully revise observation through references by subjects to the presence of the camera and its effect on their actions. Corner cites *Sylvania Waters* (BBC/ABC, 1992)[14] in this regard, a work of what he calls 'neo vérité', which dispels a detached observationalism in the first episode when the son of the household introduces the viewer to the 'characters' the viewer is 'going to get to know'. Here the 'intensity of the vérité gaze' applied to a small familial group elicited a histrionic performance from participants (Corner, 1996: 51). A knowing and open recognition by subjects of the filmmaker's presence is a persistent feature of contemporary forms of neo vérité such as *The Osbournes* (MTV, 2002).

In a similar vein, subjects in the docusoap often offer asides to the camera, thereby implicating the viewer in action which is self-consciously performed for the camera. It is within and through performative methods that docusoaps and other forms of popular factual programming (see Chapter 10) constitute a significant recent revision of observationalism. Performance and observation interact to a heightened degree in contemporary gamedocs such as *Big Brother*, for example, in which an unrelieved observational gaze inspires and warrants a performative element. Observation is here extended to a form of provocation reminiscent of its operation in cinéma vérité. Where the makers of *Chronicle of a Summer* regularly gathered subjects together (typically over dinner) to draw out their responses, *Big Brother* routinely invites subjects into a 'diary room' for a focused session of questioning. In one way, the increasing prominence of performance within particular observational contexts tends to render moot, or at least mitigates, the early debate concerning the role of the camera in revealing or provoking essential, *unperformed*, 'truths' of human behaviour. In another way, however, an acknowledgement of the place of performance in contemporary documentary representation points to a reinvigoration of the debate concerning the possibility of filming people who, though openly aware of the camera's presence, display 'natural' or 'authentic' behaviour.

CHAPTER 6

The Camera I: Autobiographical Documentary

'I thought it was real'; 'I try to keep track of the days'; 'dear diary'. The styles and language of written autobiography are familiar to us. The expression of the self – through use of the first person 'I' – characterizes a written form which reflects and focuses various 'personal' or subjective issues and agendas. A move from written autobiography to filmed self-representation has extended the possibilities for the depiction of 'first person' topics and created new styles and forms available for such representation. In turn, new camera and sound technology has further contributed to the growth of the autobiographical mode. The camcorder diary, for example, is now a popular and expanding form of self-authored work which has impacted on the visual language of the autobiography, creating new visual styles that situate the viewer in an intimate relationship with the subject of the autobiography. Other issues beyond new camera technologies have impacted on the development of autobiographical film and video. The rise in various Western countries in the late 1960s and 1970s of social movements committed to promoting personal issues of sexuality, gender, 'race' and ethnicity have, by popularly expressing and thereby foregrounding these issues, contributed to the expression of self and identity in autobiographical forms of filmmaking.

The 'imaginative singularity' which we call our self (Smith, 1988: 101) is expressed in and through our thoughts and feelings. The intensely personal and individual subjective sense of self is not, however, inherent; we learn or develop such a sense of self as we grow and interact within society. In this way, our subjectivity,

Documentary Screens

Non-Fiction Film and Television

Keith Beattie

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For my mother, and to the memory of my father,
Reginald Joseph Beattie (1922–1998)