PERSONAL CINEMA

IN

FAMILY CRISIS SITUATIONS

By

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Personal Cinema in Family Crisis Situations

David Allen Parry

submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 9, 1979 in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Visual Studies.

This thesis discusses some of the issues encountered in the filming of
personal crisis situations and the treatment of self in cinema verite.
A state of disequilibrium may produce a new kind of film process.

Thesis Supervisor: Edward Pincus

Title: Adjunct Professor of Cinema

For the past year and one half I have been documenting personal exper-
iences surrounding the premature birth of my first child, who was 1 pound,
11 ounces and just under 27 weeks gestational age at the time of delivery.
The process of filming from a crisis vantage point placed me in a new po-
sition as a cinema verite filmmaker. I had filmed the "human condition"
of other people[1] but had never turned the camera on myself. As parent/
filmmaker I existed in two frames of mind throughout the course of filming.
I was caught in between the "distancing" of the mechanical act of recording,
which objectified the experience, and my involvement as an anxious parent,
which effected an emphathetic camera response. This relationship is at the
heart of personal cinema verite, but I believe that it intensifies under
disruptive conditions which characterize a crisis. My reasons for record-
ing this event were motivated (consciously) by the need to gain personal
access to information usually avoided in traditional medical/patient crisis
communication; and by the recognition that this was new subject matter for
film which should be made available to other parents in similar circum-
stances. This record is now ending, after two years and the birth of a
second child, and has put me in touch with some of the larger issues facing
the filming of intimate subject matter and the treatment of SELF in cinema
verite. This thesis addresses some of those issues.

The claim of "objectivity" in cinema verite (commercial and indepen-
dent) has been unconvincing to me since my involvement with film began.
Cinema verite, because it has evolved an elaborate set of rules for the

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1. My last film, "The Music Child," was on institutionalized
handicapped children.

authentic reporting of truth, is potentially more subtle in its deception

than the propagandist documentaries of the '30s and '40s. The audience is

trained to look at the subject matter but not the packaging. It has been

some 20 years since the making of "Primary," and the only thing which seems

to have made an impression is the technology, not the attitude. ATTITUDE,

which is a fundamental respect for "life as it is," is still missing. The

model is for the production values of "studio" lighting, technical gym-

nastics (crew), and rehashed formulas of "what life should be like." All

of this numbs our senses, we (audience) just lay back and know what's going

to come. We end up with quasi-encounter. Because of the immediacy of the

image we accept the illusion of reality, even though we know that the point

of view of the filmmaker, choice of camera angle, lighting, selection of

scenes, and editing can easily distort the actuality. We take the camera

eye for an "anatomical eye." Hollywood and commercial television are now

poking fun at themselves by addressing 3 issues which have found thematic

exploration in independent cinema verite: choice of mundane subject matter

(everyday life of everyday people), accountability of the filmmaker, and

exploitation of subjects. NBC runs a weekly program titled "Real People"

which exposes outtakes--bloopers off camera. At about the same time, Al

Brooks is offering a new release called "Real Life," which satirizes the

deception and exploitation issues raised by the Raymonds' "American Family."

The search for truth has engendered sharply divergent cinematic ap-

proaches: mind vs. body (Jean Rouch, "Chronicle of a Summer" vs. Andy War-

hol, "Sleep"); deliberate vs. spontaneous (Rouquier, "Farrebique" vs.

Leacock, "Primary"); self vs. the external world (Mekas, "Reminiscences of

a Journey to Lithuania" vs. Pincus, "Black Natchez"); and subjective vs.

objective (Brakhage, "Scenes from Under Childhood" vs. Wiseman, "Welfare").

We are currently caught up in a trend toward subjective truth as found in

personal cinema. Whereas the '60s attempted to be a fly on the wall, the

'70s is a fly in the mirror. Subjective truth has become the noblest of

specimens for examination, and autobiography almost a calling card.

The longevity of this subjective movement has been sustained by the

need for accountability, as well as by the very quest for a cinematic stra-

tegy which relates the moments of shooting and editing to the actual con-

tinuity of the filmmaker's life. The autobiographical wave has intensified

in the present decade because of a larger popular tendency toward INTROSPEC-

TION. The overriding issue of our time is IDENTITY, a need for personal

ENCOUNTER, social ENCOUNTER, and an honesty of experience. The rise of

autobiographical filmmaking expresses a need for SELF ENCOUNTER, as well

as a need for INTIMACY in FILM ENCOUNTER. It is a way out of the ossified

officialdom and "mid century senility" of our art toward a new sensibility.

Enter the age of accountability.

There is no such thing as a generic style or format in personal cinema.

"The conditions of autobiography furnishes only a large framework within

which a variety of styles or forms may occur."[2] Jonas Mekas offers the

following categories as a history of autobiography in film[3]: fictional

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2. Jean Starobinski, "The Style of Autobiography," in Seymour Chatman, Literary Style, A Symposium.

3. These categories were listed by Jonas Mekas, "visiting artist" at the MIT Film/Video Section, spring 1978.

autobiography (where actors stand for the filmmakers, Fellini's "Amarcord");
non-fictional or actual (where the filmmaker portrays himself either in re-
enactments or in real life footage, Jerome Hill's "Film Portrait"); struc-
tural or "formal" (where visual abstraction and montage serve as metaphor
for the mechanics of consciousness, Stan Brakhage's "Scenes from Under Child-
hool"); fictional diary (Jim McBride's "David Holzman's Diary"); actual
diary (Ed Pincus's 5-year diary); confessions/self-analysis (Joyce Chopra's
"Joyce at 34"); reminiscences (Bruce Baillie's "Roslyn Romances"); and
home movies (Taylor Meade's "My Home Movies").

If the surge in autobiographical filmmaking is a result of the need
for accountability and intimacy in FILM ENCOUNTER, there is another direc-
tion still, which may be gaining momentum: personal cinema verite in crisis
situations. Films about death (Maxi Cohen's "Maxi and Joe"), divorce (Ed
Pincus's 5-year diary), and medical crisis (my own film). These films re-
present yet another stage in the quest relating the moment of shooting and
editing to the PROCESS OF SELF in the act of becoming. These are new films
precisely because SELF is recorded in an act of disequilibrium which inten-
sifies the PROCESS at the point of self-revelation as it is happening, in-
tensifies the PROCESS of confrontation. These films herald the common
feeling that in EMERGENCY we find out "what man is." This is the hypothe-
sis of the contemporary existential humanists, who insist upon exploring
"extreme situations" for the truth of reality. Paradoxically, it is just
because of a condition of chronic low-grade emergency that our philosophers
maintain that only in ACUTE emergency is the truth revealed.

If the philosopher maintains that truth is revealed, the psychologist

maintains that pathology is revealed. In an effort to understand my own

crisis, I found an article titled "Maternal Reactions to Premature Birth

Viewed as Acute Emotional Disorder."[4] I was intrigued by this supposed

authoritative diagnosis of my true behavior. But the constructs meant

little to me, and so I decided to search for meaning in the event itself.

A few months after Blair's birth, I started a full-time graduate program

at MIT under the direction of Ricky Leacock and Ed Pincus, which had a

pronounced effect on my shooting style and no doubt influenced my choice

of one-person sync sound.

This simplified apparatus allowed a psychological disposition of inti-

macy and flexibility so that I could film my life in the PROCESS of being

lived. The solo approach freed me for the role of co-active supporter to

my wife, without disturbing the privacy of our anxious space. The ideal

position for recording the reality of our situation necessitated a cinema

verite condition of pre-commitment--of being in neutral--in the situation

of being at the indifference point of the continuum, poised in between but

aware and interested in the potential situation as it extends in either

direction. But the position of pre-commitment is impossible for the per-

sonal filmmaker because the orientation to diverse possibilities and actu-

alities occurs within an ACTION WINDOW,[5] limited by the mechanical demands

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4. Kaplan and Mason, "Maternal Reactions to Premature Birth Viewed
as Acute Emotional Disorder," in H. Parad (ed.), Crisis Intervention
(FSAA Publication, 1965).

5. Action window is a term borrowed from physics which applies to the
condition of bias incurred by merely observing an experiment. I use it to
mean the sum total of events in my upbringing which affects what I select
to shoot. My footage contains many scenes of happy-mother-child-father

of the camera and met by the fluency of cinematic vision. This fluency is

not unlike the experience of improvising with several members in a jazz

group. You are progressing in time with the situation as it unfolds, but

your presence/response defines the WHOLE, the total effect of the music

produced. The movement of the camera is like visual improvisation. The

flmmaker is recording reality but accepts and includes his effect on the

environment in the process. The skill of the camera is improvising moment

by moment with the developing situation, and the structure of the actuality

is ultimately determined by the intrinsic relationship of FIGURE/GROUND

(subject/filmmaker). What is progressively eliminated from attention is

the GROUND, and this is where traditional filmmakers have hidden. When you

film yourself in the act of becoming, you confront your process as film-

maker, you confront your "operation." When there is a need for filmic

devices such as close-ups, zooming, panning, unusual angles, the filming

process exists for an AUDIENCE, and you lose a certain amount of intimacy

by exerting FORM on it. By minimizing as much as possible the demands of

the camera, the filmmaker is freed for the role of participant.

Whenever possible, I preferred to shoot with 10mm focal length, with

the focusing set to the hyperfocal distance. This enabled me to disengage

my attention from constantly riding focus. Although it is not the quietest

camera, I preferred the ACL. It offers a brighter viewing system, faster

changing of magazines (5 seconds), small size and mobility (it is the small-

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interactions. In retrospect, I've come to see it as a glimpse of what I
would have wanted in my own infancy. I grew up without ever seeing my
father. The camera eye is essentially restricted to "yes-no, stop-go,
and on-off" (Brakhage).

est and most inconspicuous of the professional 16mm cameras), and the best
anatomical design available. You can hold it comfortably for long periods
of time. Because of the balancing and engineering, I felt that my shooting
was actually smoother. I recorded sound on a tiny Nagra SN. At times I
placed the SN near the subject, or I would mic myself, with the recorder
in my back pocket.[6] I did not wear headphones.[7] High speed film and/or
one that has a generous exposure latitute enables the filmmaker to penetrate
low levels of illumination. I've found Eastman color negative to be the
most versatile stock available. The stock isn't as fast as reversal but
has excellent shadow penetration in low light and excellent color correc-
tion range in printing. Also, the film can be rated at a much higher ASA
than the listed 100 speed. One loses camera consciousness when there is a
balance between all technical operations and elements. One can become more
of a human being with the camera; man can merge with machine.[8] Arnheim
has referred to certain filmmakers who practice the technique of karate
and Chinese gymnastics for the purpose of guiding the hand-held camera with
the smooth and concentrated motion that will come across the screen. It
sounds extreme, but this kind of discipline would obviously be helpful,
because it is clear that a bumpy image (and underexposure, grain, white
leader) disturbs the bonding/identification between viewer and subject.

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6. This approach of one-person sync sound was developed by Ed Pincus.
See "One-Person Sync Sound: A New Approach to Cinema Verite," Filmakers
Newsletter (December 1972), pp. 24-30.

7. Ricky Leacock advocates removing the headphones to minimize
intrusion upon the situation. Even the mere act of turning the camera on/
off, along with the sound of the motor, can intrude upon the situation.

8. Ed Pincus, op. cit.

On the one hand, you don't want production lighting which may prevent the intimate experience from materializing, on the other hand there is a margin of acceptability that viewers will tolerate. (Unless, of course, technically "unacceptable" passages achieve intentional effects.) After these problems are met, the second hurdle is to become so automatic with cinematic vision that you can get to a point of personal interaction and merge with the camera.

In order to minimize performance or "posturing" of the people I was filming, I had to establish a feeling of relaxation and ease. As Ed Pincus describes it, one must occupy "equal space" behind the camera. This is an interaction of an empathetic nature: participation not just as catalyst but as partner. I did not attain this equality of position overnight and found that my relationship with the camera developed through several stages because of the presence of AUDIENCE (editing) in the act of shooting.

I. I hide behind the camera. I am a viewer as witness,[9] I observe.

II. I feign participation and end up with interview: I am still caught up in becoming fluent with the machinery, or I am self-conscious about my "additions" of conversations; or I am dealing with filmic devices. "A bag of oats before the horse."

III. I build myself up: I am laid back; I look good behind it, anyone watching would get the feeling that everyone is relaxed. This is reality; this is the way it was. I sacrifice interchange,

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9. Vito Acconci offers a similar construct in a video poem in Schneider & Korot, <u>Video Art, An Anthology</u> (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p.8.

however. ENCOUNTER is missing.

IV. I take you in as partner: I am a viewer as believer, you can't change the world. We are totally involved; the camera functions on its own. We are balanced.

V. I point a gun: I am a catalyst, I am obnoxious in my persistence. I am probing and pushing against the delicate balance.

VI. I give myself over as subject: at first in times of homeostasis.

VII. I give myself over as victim: finally in the act of becoming (which is embarrassing to me).

VIII. I am "selfless": I don't care about my image.

One of the main problems in personal filmmaking is the reconstruction of SELF. It is too tempting in the editing to make yourself look good.[10] One omits process and edits for the end result. This is evidenced by a reluctance to view rushes. The mistakes, the innocence and vulnerability, are relegated to the outtakes. But more than this, it is the "action window" which prevents the real SELF from even appearing on the emulsion. What is omitted carries the essence of the SELF in crisis. Packaging as well as theme. I as subject am in the camera, and I as object am in the editing. I am at different times subject and object. But the ACT of camera often contains the act of editing. The act of perception which is direct and immediate contains the act of reflection. The act of ENCOUNTER contains the act of reminiscence. The act of information which is contin-

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10. Conversely, it is tempting to make yourself look bad, to heighten the feeling of honesty in the situation. Everyone knows that people look "together" and "foolish" under these kinds of filming circumstances.

uous and cumulative contains the act of editing which is reflective.
Throughout the course of filming, my camera alternated between a sympathe-
tic camera and an empathetic camera.[11] In the sympathetic experience the
SELF is separate. I identify vicariously and indirectly through associa-
tion with the situation at hand. In the empathetic experience, the SELF
merges with the other. I directly experience the same feeling simultaneous-
ly with the subject.[12] Even in crisis, the camera is not totally empathetic;
it is also sympathetic.

Crisis (or change) produces a state of disequilibrium. In disequili-
brium, one comes in focus with one's past and future self. (I cannot ima-
gine an autobiographical project being undertaken without some major up-
heaval occurring to SELF.) How I become what I am from what I was to what
I presently will be. Autobiographical films on the status quo (homeostasis)
where choice has been made ("Black Star: Autobiography of a Close Friend")
do not contain the act of disequilibrium or the PROCESS. It is the end
result, and therefore the discovery of SELF remains concealed behind the
camera. Autobiography is confronted in a past tense (memoir, reminiscence)
not in the present. Therefore the subject remains OBJECT and not truly
SUBJECT.

To observe yourself in "action" is ultimately to observe yourself as
victim and calls for techniques strikingly different from the non-personal
examination. The essential feature of crisis (or change) is the movement

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11. Max Schuller, On the Nature of Sympathy and Empathy (MacMillan
Co, 1920).

12. For example, the scene where my wife discovers that Blair has
been moved from an isolette to a crib, and taken off heart, temperature
and respiratory monitors.

of self into unknown waters (therefore "untrusted" on camera). But it is

also that of absorption, of being caught up in, of being wholly involved.[13]

This intensity of awareness is not necessarily connected with conscious

purpose. Heightened awareness is rather correlated with abandon and absorp-

tion. An intensification of the "action window" which is hardly at the

point of indifference or of being ideally poised in between. The assimi-

lating of this novelty (disruptive event) occurs in the present moment of

shooting the camera and coexists with the splitting of awareness. I went

back to my article on "premature birth" which headlines the psychic mecha-

nism of "denial" in times of crisis, and realized that both my wife and I

had avoided the possibility that our daughter might die or that her subse-

quent development might be delayed or handicapped. There is one scene of

my wife preparing breakfast in the kitchen where she argues, on the one

hand, that she now has some "psychological distance" from the event. In

another part of the same scene she insists that she never saw it as a cri-

sis. Almost off the cuff she says, "except for that one thing--you know,

the learning disabilities thing." The point is that I set out to do a film

on the coping mechanisms of parents in crisis, but there were never any

coping conversations between us, because we both avoided the subject. The

natural tendency was to anesthetize the anxiety. It is in the empty spaces

of the film that one comes to know the nature of crisis.[14] Most of our

anxiety was funneled into the daily morning ritual of phoning the intensive

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13. Rollo May, The Courage to Create (New York: Signet Books, 1977).

14. I.e., reversal of the decision to have an abortion at the abor-
tion clinic. The Caesarean operation of our second child was filmed by a
friend.

care unit for daily progress reports, which I always tape recorded. This in

itself became an extensive record of her three-month hospitalization. I

came to appreciate this magnetic diary when I started the editing process.

The denial of crisis feeds right into the filmmaking process of re-

moval. The ACT of the camera distances one from the event, reinforcing

disassociation from the emotional experience (sympathy). There is a need

to go inward but there is a need to escape. As a filmmaker, one has been

conditioned for filming peak experience, and when confronted with my own

crisis it was almost automatic that I picked up a camera. Almost coldly

scientific. I could not begin to accurately analyze my motives for taking

my 35mm Leica to the hospital the night of the emergency. This moved me

from a position of powerlessness and disorder to a position of power and

order. The mechanical act of filming provided an organized task, and the

creative act of filming provided a means of reintegration.

But to return to the observation of SELF in "action," there is a

paradox to contend with. If you don't address the PROCESS OF SELF (move-

ment or change) in the present moment of realization, you can end up with

self-deception, or self-glorification. If you do address PROCESS, you can

end up with self-indulgence and/or sentimentality. One example of PROCESS

is Maxi Cohen's crisis film "Maxi and Joe," about the relationship of a

daughter to her dying father. If there is a successful aspect to this film,

it.is that the problems of confrontation with SELF are met head-on. The

failure is that the PROCESS of self becomes the process of filmmaking,

which sacrifices ENCOUNTER with subject. The film stays at a pre-filmic

level of parent/child separation, and the scale tips toward "me and film-

making." It is this kind of thing that produces overindulgence, or "playing with your poo-poo." So what's new? How many films about filming do we need? When does the filmmaker say something original/unique about the process? One Campbell soup can is enough (or one film like "Sleep) and should not constitute a movement. It just points up the poverty of creative integrity that "statements" become movements.

Mark Rance's film "Mom" deals with the process of self and stance. However, we are able to get beyond the personal act of filmmaking in intimate situations to a more worthy subject: a portrait of a woman's mid-life identity crisis. It is precisely because he has resolved the issue of parent/child separation that the filmmaker is able to probe, record, and explore. But there is a removal and detached indifference that accompanies the recording process which borders on being exploitive. (It may not be exploitive, but to a viewer sitting in an audience it seems that way.) Herein lies a paradox in the personal format: that intimacy in film can only be achieved by the non-intimacy of relationship. Our relationship exists for the CAMERA (at that point in time). Over an extended period of time this can become problematic.

CONTRACT: How far does the camera go with "material"? What feelings are at stake to film such intimacy? When filming diary one enters into a contract with family members (or friends). When those around us do not share the same commitment to FILM and AUDIENCE there is a problem in maintenance of relationship. This occurs on both sides of the camera. Because diary is shot over an extended period of time, the issue of "public and private space" becomes intensified. My contract with my wife was that

I would not use material of her that she objected to, and that I would not push a delicate situation beyond human dignity. The ethics and morality of the filmmaker is in a temporary state of suspension because there is always a point where the filmmaker stops being participant and starts being observer/voyeur. It is always at the catharsis point or "peak experiences" or emotional turning points that one is committed to record and, by so doing, breaches the contract. The "private space" of the subject grows narrower and narrower. There are resentment/resistive issues to be dealt with and the process of "coping" becomes compounded with coping with the camera and the feeling of estrangement and abandonment. As a parent in crisis, I had a supportive role to play (as well as empathetic) which made the condition of moral precommitment exhausting. When the camera becomes a "catalyst" this becomes even more difficult. When "material" becomes more important than personal comfort the FILM overtakes you/me/us. The contract is necessary, but it is really only a formality and ultimately a manipulation. Private space is an issue precisely because you know the subject so intimately that you know HOW to extract the material most effectively; the subject can't hide. There seem to be several stages (not necessarily developmental) of coping with the invasion of private space:

Stage I: Novelty produces cooperativeness, willingness. Homeostasis produces similar attitude. Involvement produces independence from camera-consciousness.

Stage II: Subject "tolerates" invasion of private space and says less and less (does less and less).

Stage III: (in varying degrees) Exhaustion, annoyance, resistive-
ness followed by resentment. Usually after catalyst
ENCOUNTER. Fishbowlism, subject dreads the loss of
personal power.

Stage IV: Subject becomes director, usually in "talking heads"
encounter, and addresses some aspect of the resentment
issue on film.

Stage V: Habituating to the camera (desensitizing). The camera
becomes so much a part of everyday life that subject
grows disinterested in it, bored with it.

I found that the medium has a lot to do with the subject's flexibility
with the CONTRACT. Filming a crisis in video is different from Super-8 or
16mm. Sixteen millimeter, especially, EXISTS for AUDIENCE. Video is cheap,
smaller in size, quieter; video is home movies. In video, 1 plus 1 = 2; in
16mm, 1 plus 1 = 100,000. There is a relaxing of tension because the sub-
ject knows it can be erased; the commitment to financial investment is
minimized. (There were financial worries expressed by my wife throughout
the course of filming, which forced me into a deceptive, uncomfortable role.
"How many mags today?", and I would usually subtract one.)

The sign of spontaneous attention (creative precommitment) is the pro-
gressive forming of figure/ground. If both attention and excitement are
present and working together, the object of attention becomes more and more
unified/sharp against a more unnoticed background. The ground is EVERYTHING
that is progressively eliminated from attention in the experienced situation.

This is called a "good gestalt."[15] When filming as an equal, one achieves

the extension of figure into the space behind the camera, so that the audi-

ence becomes ground. Spontaneous/interactional camera means there is a

dynamic, free-flowing relation between FIGURE/GROUND. However, success

depends on the situation; if you tip the scale too far (by including too

much SELF as evidence that you are participating), you lose a good gestalt.

EVERYTHING depends on everything else. There is an appropriateness for

self in film. I wanted to avoid the standard cliches of mirror shooting

or "eating breakfast" (homeostasis) because of "posturing," and consequently

I appear very little in the film. My absence as image will have to be

dealt with in the editing process. The choices are: a narration voice-over

track (reconstruction), the tape recordings of intensive care unit phone

calls, diary readings, and still photos.[16]

I don't know how much would have been alleviated if I had had greater

access to equipment. Within the confines of a university program this seems

unrealistic. Or, if I had had a bigger shooting budget, I'm not sure it

would have affected the product. So far I have spent $5,000 on this film,

which brings up the issue: who is it for? When limited money enters into

this set, you have to expect a great return for film"time," so that you

tend to look for intensified experience.

The STYLE of shooting best reflects my SELF in PROCESS. In the begin-

ning footage of the intensive care unit, there seems to be a heightened

15. Fritz Perls et al, Gestalt Therapy, Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality (E.P. Dutton and Co., 1967.)

16. Simultaneously with the filming, we kept a journal of our exper-iences, which we've read into a tape recorder 1 1/2 years later.

sense of ORDER and non-commitment to point of view.[17] The balancing of

forces in the perceptual field and the outside control exerted by the film-

makers' motives is most obvious to me here: (1) most shots are wide angle

(non-commitment, safe); (2) peak experience in times of danger or loss

stops the functional operation of the camera; (3) filming is literal-

coherent (the intensive care unit is chaotic and inhospitable); (4) inter-

actional camera is at a minimum because the cameraman is not centered in his

own space (how can you open the space up if you are not centered yourself?).

When the filmmaker becomes VICTIM, the emotional involvement is such that

one must sacrifice the filmicness of it. Ultimately, in peak moments the

camera isn't even on. Hence, we get those all-too-familiar sections of

white leader.

The film flow of experience/tension is different from the life flow of

experience/tension. Your reconstruction of the PROCESS is different from

what you shot. Editing helps to clarify the reality of what you felt, be-

cause it combines memory plus analysis. Editing personal film takes a long

period of time to complete, because you need a certain amount of psycholo-

gical distance to sort out what your coping mechanisms were and how these

affect the "action" captured in the camera. The analysis of experience

seems to be more accurate than the images which are available to string

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17. Arnheim has written about the entropy principle and art, which
can be described as the tendency to reconcile the discrepancy between order
and disorder (2nd law of thermodynamics: disorder in the material universe)
by enhancing the equilibrium through tension reduction. Tension reduction
is achieved not through dissipating or degrading the energy, but by organi-
zing it according to the simplest, most balanced structure available to the
system. Rudolph Arnheim, Entropy and Art, An Essay on Disorder and Order
(University of California Press, 1971), p. 35.

together.[18] A voice-over track serves to plug up some of the holes (as does

pacing and juxtaposition of shots), but it has the effect of bringing the

film out of its present tense and takes "control" away from the viewer.

The viewer is not free to judge for himself, and we become aware of the

exertion of FORM on the phenomena. A similar problem arises with "talking

heads." It is generally agreed that man "thinks" in language. But the

verbal medium is not necessarily indispensable to thought, only the most

efficient medium available. Wordless imagery seems to occur at times of

peak experience (pleasant and painful). Therefore, to reduce the phenomeno-

logical capabilities of film (body language, action) to talking heads is

compromising the medium. Words assist the mind in stabilizing and preser-

ving intellectual entities that emerge from direct experience. Therefore,

words work best in REFLECTION. It would seem that the talking head inter-

view is capturing RESULT and not PROCESS. (This does not include argument

or "conversing," which is also process.) Language is linear, a progression

from one point to another; but emotion is vertical. Talking heads tend- to

seem honest/credulous because there are no opposing views. Control is again

taken away from the viewer.

Filmmakers often mention the aspects of "cheating" in editing as

either harmless (white lies) or purposely misleading. Even the simple

filmic device of a cut-away (from another scene) has come back to taint

what seemed at the time of construction an act of integrity. Cutting on

an intellectual/emotional idea is okay when you let the audience know

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18. My child's survival occurred within a historical context of my
wife's own experience as sister to a severely handicapped blind premie
born in 1950. This had a pronounced effect on our coping mechanisms.

you are jumping out of chronology. It becomes an ethical problem when you

know it's a cheat and do not inform the audience. These issues become

paramount in personal film because of the very choice of SELF for a theme.

Adherence to chronology in autobiography is an academic issue because you

can't film everything anyway. You end up with a chronological presentation

of selected (in shooting) scenes. One can even be deceitful by adhering

to chronology because you make it seem that that is all there was. Even

so, I'm compelled to arrange the material in sequence.

Some scenes are difficult to include because the public space they

open up is available to my children as well, and some years down the

road it might be painful. (This is especially true of the abortion

argument.) This may be an issue that other personal filmmakers have to

deal with, too.

Audience which was felt as a "presence" during the shooting phase

becomes more sharply defined in the editing phase. It has a face now.

I am well aware that social workers will want the film for parents of

clients in the intensive care units, a nursing supervisor wants it for

staff training, a medical friend wants the audio tapes for his book, and

a distributor friend wants it for the money. My experience is a commodity.

If meaning is the philosophical question, purpose is the social side of

the coin. Who is it for? At some point (I don't remember when), I started

to cut the film as a parent and not as a filmmaker. My self-discovery

became more important than artistic or commercial coherence. Once you

get into a film project it tends to exist for itself alone. It overtakes

the original motivation for its inception. Editing brings it back home

again. At this point in my editing I am inclined to make this document a reflection of what is important to me, not what I think the public should see. I consider it our home movie first, and if the public finds meaning in it, that would make me happy.

I have tried to come to terms with some of the problems posed in capturing the state of disequilibrium. I feel that this engenders a new kind of film process which has been exciting to me, but ultimately people judge your life and not your film.

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