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# From Real to Reel: Entangled in Nonfiction Film

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## I. Introduction

Over the past twenty years, the nonfiction film has achieved a level of prestige and prominence unequalled in any other period of its history. Yet, for all the recent energy, thought and discussion devoted to this enterprise, the nonfiction film remains one of the most confused areas of film theory. Arguments of all kinds challenge the very idea of nonfiction film. The nonfiction filmmaker, it is observed, selects his or her materials, manipulates them, inevitably has a point of view and, therefore, cannot pretend to offer us anything but a personal or subjective vision of things. Objectivity is impossible if only because the medium itself -- due to framing, focussing, editing -- necessitates the inescapability of choice. Whether or not an event is staged, the act of filming involves structuring so that what results is an interpretation rather than the Real. The problem, according to this subjectivity argument, is not simply that the filmmaker can't jump out of his skin, one can't jump out of the film medium either.

A related set of arguments worries the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. On the one hand, it is charged that the nonfiction film shares narrative, dramatic and aesthetic devices, like parallel editing, climaxes and contrastive editing, with fiction films and that, consequently, it presents its subjects fictionally.<sup>1</sup> Or, in a variation on the strategy behind the subjectivity argument, it is proposed that filmmakers are trapped within ideology, both in their forms and contents; that the posture of objectivity itself is a pose, indeed an ideologically motivated one; and that documentaries belong to the genus of social fiction. Some commentators go so far as to suppose that because any cultural event, photographed or not, is structured (according to roles and folkways), recording one merely captures the ideological "fictions" of a given time, place and people.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most extreme denial of the boundary between fiction and nonfiction film has been voiced by Christian Metz -- he suggests that all films are fiction (purportedly) because they are representations, i.e., because, for example, the train you see on the screen is not literally in the screening room.<sup>3</sup>

To further complicate matters, there is a minority opinion that has it that all fiction films are actually documentaries;<sup>4</sup> Casablanca is about Humphrey Bogart in front of a camera as well as being an archaeological fragment of American

mores and styles of the early forties. In fact, at least one theorist, a proponent of Jacques Derrida's notion of différance, advances the nonfiction-is-really-fiction approach while simultaneously insisting that fiction films are documentarisee.<sup>5</sup>

The central concepts as employed in many of these arguments -- including objectivity, subjectivity, fiction, document -- are fraught with ambiguities and downright misconceptions. But before examining these problems critically, it is worthwhile to speculate about the way in which, historically, the discussion of nonfiction film reached its present state.

I think that the most important influence on the way that nonfiction film is currently conceptualized was the development of direct cinema (sometimes called cinéma vérité) in the sixties. The movement -- associated with the work of Robert Drew, the Maysles Brothers, D.A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, Frederick Wiseman, Allan King, Chris Marker and others -- proposed a new style of documentary filmmaking that repudiated prevailing approaches to the nonfiction film. These filmmakers eschewed, among other things, the use of scripts, voice-of-God narration, re-enactments of events, and staging and direction of any sort. They employed new, light-weight cameras and sound equipment in order to immerse themselves in events, to observe rather than to influence, to catch life on the wing. Many of the aims of direct cinema parallel the avowed objectives of the species of cinematic realism sponsored by Andre Bazin. Techniques and approaches were adopted that encouraged the spectator to think for himself, to take an active role toward the screen, to evolve his own interpretation of what was significant in the imagery rather than have the filmmaker interpret it for him. The new spontaneity of the filmmaker and spectator correlated expressively with some sort of new "freedom" in contradistinction to the "authoritarianism" of traditional documentaries. Often the new style was promoted as an epistemological breakthrough for cinema. Critics concerned with and, at times, participants in the direct cinema movement spoke as if the new techniques guaranteed the filmic representation of reality.

Of course, previous documentary filmmakers, such as John Grierson<sup>6</sup> and Dziga Vertov,<sup>7</sup> had never denied that they were involved in interpreting their subject matter. But for advocates of direct cinema, at their most polemical, that allegiance to interpretation, to telling the audience to think, violated their conception of what it is to be a documentary. As a result, upholders of direct cinema evolved a style designed to minimize the types of control exerted in the older styles of nonfiction film.

But no sooner was the idea of cinéma vérité abroad than critics and viewers turned the polemics of direct cinema against direct cinema. A predictable tu quoque would note all the ways that direct cinema was inextricably involved

with interpreting its materials. Direct cinema opened a can of worms and then got eaten by them. Almost concomitantly, a similar, and, in fact, related debate emerged in the somewhat narrow discussion of ethnographic film. Anthropologists who opted for filming in order to avoid the subjectivity of their field notes quickly found themselves confronted by arguments about selection, manipulation and eventually, by arguments about the inescapability of ideology. In regard to the anthropological debate especially, but also in regard to direct cinema, it was stressed that the very act of filming changed or was highly likely to influence the outcome of the events recorded. In order to grapple with both the arguments from subjectivity and related arguments about camera intrusiveness, some filmmakers, like Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin in *Chronique d'un Été*, included themselves in their work, acknowledging their participation, their manipulation and their intervention. In general, filmmakers and proponents of direct cinema now guard their claims. They have become the first to admit that they have a point of view, maintaining only that they are presenting their "subjective reality," i.e., their personal vision of reality as they see it. For example, Frederick Wiseman merely insists on the veracity of an honest, first-person statement for his work when he says "The objective-subjective argument is from my view, at least in film terms, a lot of nonsense. The films are my response to a certain experience."<sup>8</sup>

With the rise of direct cinema, two major wrinkles were added to the dialogue concerning the nonfiction film. First, direct cinema repudiated large parts of the tradition of nonfiction film because it was interpretive. Then, like a boomerang, the dialectic snapped back; direct cinema, it was alleged, was also interpretive and, a fortiori, subjective rather than objective (and, for some, fiction rather than nonfiction). The combined force of these maneuvers within the debate was to stigmatize all nonfiction film, both the traditional and direct cinema varieties, as subjective. Thus, we find Erik Barnouw concluding his history of documentary films with remarks such as these:

To be sure, some documentarists claim to be objective—a term that seems to renounce an interpretive role. The claim may be strategic, but it is surely meaningless. The documentarist, like any communicator in any medium, makes endless choices. He selects topics, people, vistas, angles, lens, juxtapositions, sounds, words. Each selection is an expression of his point of view, whether he is aware of it or not, whether he acknowledges it or not.

Even behind the first step, selection of a topic, there is a motive.

...It is in selecting and arranging his findings that he expresses himself; these choices are, in effect, comments. And whether he adopts the stance of observer, or chronicler or whatever, he cannot escape his subjectivity. He presents his version of the world.<sup>9</sup>

More quotations could be added to Barnouw's, which represents one of the more or less standard ways of coming to terms with the polemic and rhetorical framework engendered by direct cinema.<sup>10</sup> But that Barnouw's position rebounds so naturally from the direct cinema debate is part of the problem with it, because, as I hope to show in the next section, the pre-suppositions of that discussion are irreparably flawed.

## II. Nonfiction Films Ain't Necessarily So

### A. Nonfiction Film and Objectivity

Though many of the preceding arguments appear to be designed to deal with issues specific to the nonfiction film, a moment's deliberation shows that they are far more generally devastating in their scope. The possibility of objectivity in the nonfiction film is denied because such films involve selection, emphasis, manipulation of materials, interpretation and points of view. In fact, these features lead commentators not only to withhold the possibility of objectivity from nonfiction film; they also prompt commentators to reclassify such films as subjective. Yet, if these arguments have any force, they will not simply demolish the subjective/objective distinction in regard to nonfiction film; the lectures and texts of history and science will be their victims as well.

Historians, for example, are characteristically concerned with making interpretations, presenting points of view about the past, selecting certain events for consideration rather than others, and emphasizing some of the selected events and their interconnections. That's just what doing history is. Thus, if the nonfiction film is subjective, for the above reasons, then so is historical writing. Nor is science unscathed. It is hard to imagine an experiment without manipulation and selection, or a theory without emphasis and interpretation. In short, the arguments against objectivity in nonfiction film are too powerful, unless their proponents are prepared to embrace a rather thoroughgoing skepticism about the prospects of objectivity in general. The defense of such a far-ranging skeptical position would, of course, have to be joined on the battlefields of epistemology rather than in the trenches of film theory. Indeed,

if such a skeptical position were defensible, the reclassification of the nonfiction film as subjective would simply be a footnote to a larger campaign. I mention this because I do not think that commentators who conclude that the nonfiction film is subjective intend their remarks as a mere gloss on the notion that everything is subjective. But that, I fear, is the untoward implication of their line of attack.

At the same time, another danger in collapsing the distinction between the subjective and objective is that we will still have to distinguish between different kinds of endeavors -- in film, for example, between Frederick Wiseman's Hospital and Maya Deren's intentionally personal At Land -- even if they are all said to be under the enveloping bubble of subjectivity. But how will these boundaries be drawn? Most probably by reinstating something very much like the subjective/objective distinction. Perhaps Wiseman's film would be called "subjective-objective" in contradistinction to Deren's "subjective-subjective." But two points need to be made here. First, the nonitalicized "subjective" and "objective" represent the basic concepts which are indispensable in this particular context of classification; if they are momentarily dismissed, they must inexorably return; and this provides a good reason not to dismiss them in the first place. Second, the italicized "subjective" is conceptually lazy; it does no work, and it serves little purpose. It is all-inclusive, so lamentably, it is not exclusive. For if there is no italicized "objective" to counterpose against it, the italicized "subjective" is trivial. It is a piece of excess theoretical baggage, easily disposable because it says nothing more than the obvious, namely, that all research and communication is man-made. But more on this later.

As an initial response to my opening objections, a subjectivist vis-a-vis the nonfiction film might try to argue that there is something special about film that makes it inevitably subjective in a way that history and science are not. Thus, when it is said that Hospital is "subjective-objective," the italicized "subjective" is being meaningfully contrasted to the objectivity of the texts and lectures of history and science. But what is that "something special?" One of the candidates is the notion that every shot in a nonfiction film perforce involves a personal viewpoint or point-of-view whether the filmmaker is aware of it or not; in other words, a life history of attitudes, feelings and beliefs determine where the camera is positioned and aimed, what lens is chosen and how it is set. Consequently, all film, including the nonfiction film,

is necessarily personal, "subjective," in a way that historical and scientific writing is not. That is, each image is indelibly imprinted with the filmmaker's (or filmmakers') personality whereas there are certain protocols and stylistic canons of exposition in history and science that enable practitioners of those disciplines to subdue if not totally efface their personalities.

Bela Balazs, for one, seems to hold a position on composition in the single shot (which he calls the set-up) that is like the above, proposing that a representational image can't be made without conveying a viewpoint that is self-expressive of the filmmaker. He writes, concerning fiction and nonfiction film alike, that

Every work of art must present not only objective reality but the subjective personality of the artist, and this personality includes his way of looking at things, his ideology and the limitations of the period. All this is projected into the picture, even unintentionally. Every picture shows not only a piece of reality but a point of view as well. The set-up of the camera betrays the inner attitude of the man behind the camera. 11

For Balazs, a personal point of view in every shot is unavoidable. But will this wash? I suspect not, for several reasons.

To begin, the idea of point-of-view in film is really a bundle of ideas, which are often literally unrelated. "Point-of-view" can refer to a specific kind of editing schema (a character looks off screen, there is a cut to what he sees, and then there is a cut back to the character); it can refer to the position of the camera (the camera's viewpoint, or point-of-view, or perspective); or it can refer to the narrator's and/or the authorial point of view or both -- i.e., to the perspective of a character commenting on events in the film and/or to the implied perspective of the film toward said events -- or it can refer to the creator's personal point-of-view. Undoubtedly there are shots in which all five concepts of point-of-view can be applied simultaneously; John Wayne's Green Berets would probably be a good place to search for examples. Nevertheless, these concepts are quite discrete. And this suggests that at the heart of the position -- that a shot is, eo ipso, a point-of-view -- lies the fallacy of equivocation. It is true that each representational shot, save those where the image is drawn on the film, has a point-of-view or a viewpoint or a perspective in the sense that the camera must be placed somewhere. This might be thought of as the literal meaning of the cinematic point-of-view, i.e., the camera's vantage point. A personal point-of-view is yet another matter;



indeed, calling it a "point-of-view" is at root metaphorical, using the language of physical position to characterize the values and feelings of the film's creator toward the subject depicted. Proponents of the omnivorous point-of-view school conflate two separate ideas, fallaciously moving from the necessity of a camera viewpoint in each shot to the necessity of a personal viewpoint, suppressing the fact that the two phenomena, though bearing the same name, are distinct.

The debate, of course, does not end here. Rather, the charge of equivocation can be met with the claim that the two senses of point-of-view really are the same because the personal point of view determines the camera's view(ing) point in such a way that the resulting image is invariably and reliably symptomatic of the creator's underlying viewpoint. The viewing point inevitably betrays the personal viewpoint and, hence, is always revelatory. But this, it seems to me, is implausible. Cameras can be turned on accidentally, and their operators can leave them running without realizing it, thereby recording events upon which the creator has no opportunity to inscribe his personal viewpoint. Likewise, unexpected events can intrude into the viewfinder -- e.g., Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination -- before there is time for a personal viewpoint to crystalize, that is, unless we wish to ascribe lightning omniscience to the cameraperson's unconscious. Camera positions can also be determined by circumstances, like a police barricade, and a cameraperson pressed for time can shoot "wild," hoping to "get something" without having any idea about or attitude toward what is happening.

One could attempt to assimilate these cases by means of a rather extreme psychological theory, arguing that when shooting wild the cameraperson is in something akin to a trance, unconsciously selecting and expressively framing exactly the details that accord with subterranean interests. However, this sounds ad hoc, imbuing the unconscious not only with a kind of omniscience but also of omnipotence. Freud is clearly correct in saying that some apparently random gestures reveal hidden motives, wishes and attitudes, but no one has shown that all gestures are meaningful signals of the psychopathology of everyday life. It seems to me an indisputable fact that a cameraperson can set up and move cameras with random attention -- precisely like a remote-control video monitor in a bank -- and that the result need not develop into a coherent personal viewpoint. In regard to adverse circumstances, like constraining police barricades, it might be argued that the cameraperson will always take up the position, out of all the available ones under the circumstances, that best suits his personal point-of-view. This -- like the "trance" solution to "wild shooting" -- is ad hoc. In both cases, what are we to make of complaints that the results of shooting were not what the cameraperson wanted or needed? One might say that they got what they really wanted (without knowing it), but one says this at the cost of making the original hypothesis suspiciously unfalsifiable. Needless to say, a filmmaker could successfully attempt to make either a fiction or nonfiction film in which

every shot communicated a personal attitude. But it effronts credulity to purport that every shot in every film is necessarily of this variety.

Another problem with the set-up = personal vision approach is that often the "creator" of the film is neither the cameraperson nor the editor: so whose personal vision is being conveyed? And, more importantly, in both fiction and non-fiction film, directors and writers are typically assigned preordained points-of-view. Can't an atheist shoot and cut a reverential life of Christ, and can't a Blakean make an industrial film about computer technology without a glimmer of repugnance in any of the shots? Filmmakers, that is, can not only not have an attitude toward their assignment, but even if they have an attitude, it can be successfully repressed. There is a shot in Kineasica where the cameraman, according to the commentator, perhaps out of ingrained modesty, pulls away from the scene of a man making a pass at a woman. But this is neither evidence that all shots are under such guidance nor that the cameraman, contrary to his ordinary disposition, could not undertake a documentary film made up exclusively of squarely centered shots of public attempts at seduction. Perhaps it will be proposed that in the latter case a trace of disapproval or irony will always be viable, there to be unearthed by a complex exegesis. But such exercises in interpretation may actually be no more than face saving. The positioning of a shot is just not as indicative of a filmmaker's authentic point-of-view as some film theorists let on.

Lastly, even if the shot = a personal vision approach were true, it would pertain only to shots and not to films in their entirety. A theorist who moves from the putative fact that every shot in a given nonfiction film represents a personal point-of-view to the conclusion that every nonfiction film is a personal vision commits the fallacy of composition. For even if each shot were personally inscribed with a decision that fused the values and attitudes of a lifetime, such shots could be assembled and combined with each other and with commentary in ways that neutralize the attitudes inherent in the single shots. Most compilation films demonstrate that the supposedly intrinsic personal points-of-view in original individual shots don't add up to the point-of-view of the entire film that they inhabit. For example, The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty has no difficulty turning whatever positive sentiments czarist cameraman might have expressed in their footage of the royal family into criticism of the monarchy, criticism that does not seem describable as subjective.

The argument that nonfiction film is subjective hinges not only on confusions about the concept(s) of point-of-view but also about the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity. The charge of subjectivity, as leveled at the nonfiction film, appears to mean one of two, often elided, things: first, that

a film is personal, or stamped with a personal viewpoint; and second, that a film is not objective. When considering the first meaning of subjectivity, we must ask whether the way in which a film is said to be personal is problematic to the status of nonfiction film as objective as well as whether nonfiction films are personal in a way that distinguishes them from nonfiction writing.

If by saying the nonfiction film is personal we mean that any assertions or implied statements made by such films are epistemologically on a par with statements like "I believe that x," then we would be tempted to reclassify the nonfiction film as subjective in the sense that its assertions and implied statements are only to be evaluated as honest or dishonest. But the mere fact that selection and interpretation are involved in a nonfiction film does not entail the first person status of its claims — no more than those features suggest that all historical writing is subjective. We have intersubjective criteria for evaluating the selections and interpretations in both cases.

Undoubtedly because film is a visual medium, commentators are enticed (incorrectly) into identifying the imagery (and even its flow) as a simulacrum or reproduction of what its filmmaker saw; and they jump from this to the proposition that "That's how the filmmaker saw it" (where seeing is nonveridical and involuntary), which, in turn, is regarded as something indisputable and subjective. They also seem to treat shots as a sort of celluloid sense data. This plays into the confusions over the point-of-view of the shot and personal vision. As a result the filmmaker is left in a doxastic cocoon. But there is no reason to conceive of shots in film as celluloid sense data -- either passively received or as unavoidable results of unconscious structuring — nor does the camera's point of view necessarily have to correspond to a personal vision. The confusion rests with comprehending photography as nonveridical vision and the camera as an eye -- with the result that each shot is to be prefaced with "I see". Though a nonfiction filmmaker might adopt this metaphor -- consider Brakhage's The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes -- films are not typically made under this rubric nor are they presented in ways that necessitate the camera-eye (I) metaphor in order to be understood. The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes is an astonishing film in part because the camera strains for some sort of equivalence with the filmmaker's perception. Such a film may lead us to speak of lyric-nonfiction; but it does not force us to say that all nonfiction films are subjective.

In most cases, I believe, certain misconceptions about the photographic component in film supply the primary grounds for convincing some that nonfiction film is problematically personal in a way that verbal exposition in history and science is not. These notions arise (mistakenly) by equating the camera to nonveridical, involuntary perception. Without these presuppositions — camera point-of-view = personal vision, and

shooting = seeing — we are left with elements like editing, narration and commentary as the possible sources of the putative special subjectivity of film. Yet, the selectivity and interpretation involved in these processes seem no different and no more subjective than the practices of nonfiction writers, since we can challenge the selections, exclusions and interpretations of nonfiction filmmakers by means of the same considerations that we use to evaluate the nonfiction writer.

For example, in The La Guardia Story, a David Wolper production for his TV series Biography, the Little Flower's first election as Mayor of New York is presented solely as a consequence of his attack on the corruption of ~~Tammany~~ Hall. On the basis of the information on the screen, the implied interpretation is that the people of New York, appalled by the perversion of the American system, carried their indignation to the polls and overthrew the bosses. But this interpretation excludes a key factor in La Guardia's election — one that doesn't accord nicely with the civic lesson idealism of Wolper's account: namely, La Guardia's victory was an important part of an ethnic conflict between Jews and Italians, on the one hand, and the Irish, on the other, for political, social and economic power in New York; in other words, many voted for La Guardia out of ethnic self-interest. We are not compelled to accept the rosier version of La Guardia's election as indisputably Wolper's personal vision and leave it at that. We can also ascertain the objective weakness of the interpretation on the basis of intersubjectively available facts and modes of reasoning of exactly the same sort that we would employ when reading a scholarly journal or a magazine article.

At times, some commentators seem to argue that nonfiction film is subjective not because said films are unavoidably personal but because they are not objective. The logic here is that anything that is not objective must fall into the only other operative category; the subjective becomes the catchall for everything that doesn't suit the criteria of the objective. But what is objectivity? In film debates, three notions seem to determine the course of the discussion: First, "objective" means "true"; second, "objective" means "representative of all -- or at least all the major -- viewpoints on the subject at hand"; and third, "objective" means "having no viewpoint -- personal, political, theoretical, etc. -- whatsoever."

These three different concepts of objectivity do not fit together neatly, though in the course of an informal discussion after a nonfiction film disputants may slip willy-nilly from one to another. The second concept of objectivity sounds more like a political principle of tolerance — "let every voice be heard" — than an epistemic criterion. And save for cases in which there is only one uncontested and incontestable viewpoint, or those in which unavoidable indeterminacy rules (or those in which we have ascended to the lofty position of Spinoza's god),

the conjunction of all perspectives on a given topic amounts to cacophony, and contradiction rather than truth. Moreover, the second and third senses of "objective," as outlined above, are strictly incompatible with each other.

Nor does any one of these concepts of "objectivity" appear viable in and of itself. Canvassing every opinion on a subject may exemplify some ideal of fairness but historians can be perfectly objective in their discussions of Hitler's career without mentioning Heinrich Himmler's assessment of the Fuhrer. The idea that objectivity coincides with presenting a topic from no perspective whatsoever runs afoul of objections from two different directions. First, assuming a liberal notion of a perspective, it is impossible to conceive of a subject totally unstructured by any conceptual framework; there is no utterly "given"; the unadorned facts are both "unadorned" and "facts" relative to a conceptual schema or point-of-view. In other words, it is self-defeating for us to demand that a nonfiction film be "untouched by human hands." Second, in some fields a string of supposedly unadorned facts unayatematized by a theory would be the paradigm of random, subjective observation. Thus, Lucien Goldman attacks Chronique d'un Été exactly because it is uninformed by a theoretically based principle of selectivity.<sup>12</sup> Finally, objectivity cannot be equivalent to truth. Such a requirement is far too strong. The history of science is littered with false theories which nonetheless were objective. I can offer objective reasons -- perhaps based on statistics -- for the conjecture that there is intelligent life on other planets and, nevertheless, it could turn out that we are alone in the universe. In such an instance, my problem would be that I was wrong and not that I was overly subjective.

Though objectivity is not equivalent to truth, the two are related in an important way. In any given field of research or argument, there are patterns of reasoning, routines for assessing evidence, means of weighing the comparative significance of different types of evidence, and standards for observations, experimentation and for the use of primary and secondary sources that are shared by practitioners in that field. Abiding by these established practices is, at any given time, believed to be the best method for getting at the truth. With continued research, these practices undergo changes -- for example, after Marx economic evidence became more important in the study of history than it had been previously. Yet, even while some practices are being revised, others are still shared. Thus, in virtue of their shared practices, researchers still have a common ground for debating and for appreciating the work of their peers. We call a piece of research objective in light of its adherence to the practices of reasoning and evidence gathering in a given field. It is objective because it can be intersubjectively evaluated against standards of argument and evidence shared by practitioners of a specific arena of discourse.

With this in mind, we can untangle some of the conceptual knots that tether the nonfiction film. The nonfiction film

is not necessarily subjective; like nonfiction writing, it is objective when it abides by the norms of reasoning and standards of evidence of the areas about which it purports to impart information. This is not to say that a nonfiction film is one that always abides by said standards; that would be tantamount to proposing that the nonfiction film is necessarily objective. Rather, we should say that a nonfiction film is, at least, one that must be assessed against the norms of objectivity that are practiced in regard to the type of information the film presents to its spectators. Some may feel that this is not a very helpful definition; how will we pick out the nonfiction films from the fictions, on the one hand, and the purely lyrical films, on the other?

In defense of my partial definition, let me lead off by postulating that we can never tell merely by looking whether or not a film is a piece of nonfiction. This is because any kind of technique or verbal assertion that is characteristic of a nonfiction film can be imitated by a fiction filmmaker -- The Battle of Algiers and David Holzman's Diary are famous examples of this. Both are fiction films but both imitate the look of documentaries for expressive purposes. In Battle of Algiers the documentary look helps to heighten the gravity of events and thereby stokes the viewers' outrage at French colonialism. In David Holzman's Diary, the documentary conceit underscores the contemporaneity and specificity of the subject -- the movie-crazy sixties in New York at a time when the distinction between film and life passionately blurred for many. A spectator might be confused and believe, for a moment, that these films were nonfiction. But, like a sentence, a film cannot be classified at a glance as fiction or nonfiction. Rather, films are indexed<sup>13</sup> by their creators, producers, distributors, etc. as belonging to certain categories. When a film is indexed as nonfiction then we know that it is appropriate to assess it according to the standards of objectivity of the field of which it is an example. Different nonfiction films, of course, correlate to different sorts of nonfiction discourse -- newspaper articles, newspaper editorials, human interest stories, science textbooks, instruction manuals, anthropological field notes, psychological case studies, historical narratives, etc. "Nonfiction" is a term that is used in contradistinction to fiction but it would be a mistake to think it pertains only to one type of exposition. There are many different areas of nonfiction -- each with its own methodological routines -- and, therefore, there are a variety of types of nonfiction film, each beholden to the restraints employed in processing the kind of information the film presents. A nonfiction film can be mistaken; that is, it ain't necessarily so. Yet, such a film can still be objective insofar as its mistakes do not violate the standards of reasoning and evidence that constitute objectivity for the area of nonfiction which it exemplifies. To be a nonfiction film means to be open to criticism and evaluation according to the stan-

dards of objectivity for the type of information being purveyed. Interpretation, selectivity, etc, are, therefore, appropriate insofar as they heed intersubjective standards.

Where does this lead us? Does it imply -- as suggested by Rouch and Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino -- that nonfiction films must not traffic in aesthetic effects? Not at all. Nelson Goodman's philosophical writings are full of playful alliterations and puns, and Edward Gibbon in the The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire employs semicolons to create very dramatic pauses within long sentences. Yet, despite these effects, neither Goodman nor Gibbon are writing fiction. Similarly, the elegant juxtapositions in Song of Ceylon and the monumental compositions of The Plow That Broke The Plains do not disqualify those works from the order of nonfiction. Art is not the antithesis of nonfiction; a nonfiction filmmaker may be as artistic as he or she chooses as long as the processes of aesthetic elaboration do not interfere with the genre's commitment to the appropriate standards of research, exposition and argument. For example, a nonfiction filmmaker cannot invent new events or eliminate ones that actually occurred for the sake of securing an aesthetic effect where this falsifies history. Imagine a documentary called The Pearl Harbor Tragedy in which the filmmaker changes history a bit by having a PT boat with a broken radio racing to Hawaii just behind the approaching Japanese air fleet in order to warn of the impending assault. Undoubtedly with enough crisp parallel editing, this invented episode could produce a great deal of suspense. But I think that no matter how much suspense is achieved in this way, we would not accept the aesthetic effect as a justification for changing history. A nonfiction filmmaker must be accountable to the facts and the prospect of heightened effects does not alter that accountability. This, of course, is a major difference between fiction and nonfiction. In fiction, the past can always be rearranged in order to enhance aesthetic effects; but, though aesthetic effects are legitimate in nonfiction, accuracy cannot be suspended in the name of art.

A nonfiction filmmaker is committed by the genre to conveying the literal facts, where "literal" is defined by the objective procedures of the field of discourse at hand. Another way of saying this is that the nonfiction filmmaker makes reference to segments of possible worlds,<sup>14</sup> albeit ones that, at times, closely resemble the actual world.

Despite Vertov's caveats against staging, there is no reason why nonfiction films cannot employ re-enactments -- like the postal sorting in Night Mail -- or even historical reconstructions of types of events from the past -- e.g., a minuet in Baroque Dance -- or even reconstructions of a specific event -- e.g., the car robbery in Third Avenue: Only The Strong Survive. Likewise, re-enactments of the surrender at Appomattox, the Scopes Monkey Trial, the repeal of Prohibition, etc, can all be accommodated within the framework

of the nonfiction film as long as such reconstructions are as accurate as possible given the state of available evidence. This raises questions about the boundary line between nonfiction and some historical fiction, especially cases like The Rise To Power of Louis XIV. In this film, great pains were taken to insure the authenticity of detail as well as using actual memoirs and written documents of the period as a basis for dialogue. Yet, The Rise to Power of Louis XIV is still fiction because its creator, Roberto Rossellini, has invented a number of events in which historical personages mouth their writings at meetings and in imagined situations for which there is no historical evidence. In this way, Rossellini animates history, making the writings "come alive" supplying visual interest via intriguing background detail and character movement. History, in other words, is rearranged and altered for aesthetic effect.

The nonfiction filmmaker's commitment to objectivity does not disallow the use of devices like composite case studies. That is, one can make a nonfiction film of the experiences of the average army recruit, of the characteristic behavior of a schizoid, a representative case study of the plight of an unemployed (but composite) teenager, a day in the life of a medieval serf, and so on. The dramatization of corruption in Native Land is perhaps arguably an example of this sort of generalization. Such generalizing devices project theoretical entities meant to summarize the normal tendencies and types of events found in the kind of situation depicted. These devices are used in areas like journalism, history, sociology, and psychology, and they are legitimate in nonfiction film to the extent that they abide by the same constraints in their construction that analogous devices in nonfiction literature respect. Moreover, such devices are rooted in the attempt to portray the literal truth since they are generalizations subject to objective criteria in terms of intersubjectively accessible facts.

Throughout the preceding discussion I have relied on the idea that the nonfiction film can be objective, indeed that it is committed to objectivity, where objectivity is defined by the standards, routines and norms of evidence of particular disciplines and modes of exposition. To adopt this strategy, however, is to invite a predictable rebuke from Cine-Marxists who would claim that the disciplines I am invoking -- both in terms of their content and their methodologies -- are themselves so shot through, or, better yet, so contaminated with ideology that their purchase on objectivity is extremely tenuous.

The argument from ideology, like many arguments in film theory, is often underwritten by such inclusiveness in its central terms that it borders on vacuity. For many film scholars, ideology is virtually synonymous with culture; any nonfiction film is a cultural item -- in semiotic jargon both in its signified and signifiers -- and, therefore, it is



unavoidably suffused with ideology.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, under these assumptions, everything is ideological and, consequently, the concept of ideology is open to the same variety of criticism we leveled earlier at the italicized concept of subjectivity. Furthermore, were one to employ a narrower notion of ideology, it is not clear that we would be easily convinced that every existing institution for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge is irretrievably and necessarily ideological.

Another problem with the Cine-Marxist approach is that it tends to proceed as though there were two social sciences, the Marxist variety and the capitalist, and it assumes that these two schools are completely disjunct, sharing no common ground. In the case of ideology, some Marxists speak as if only Marxists were aware of the distortive potential of ideology. Yet, non-Marxist social scientists have embraced Marxist ideas about ideology and, in turn, they scrutinize each other's findings for the possibility of errors due to ideological bias. That is, non-Marxist historians and social scientists are sensitive to the dangers of ideology and it is part of their methodological framework to be on guard against ideologically determined mistakes.

When I refer to the standards and routines of different disciplines, I do not conceive of these as static and unchanging. Rather, these standards and routines are often revised, sometimes in response to discoveries within the field, sometimes in response to changes in adjacent fields and sometimes as a result of innovations in general epistemology. Such revisions themselves are open to intersubjective debate and can be evaluated in light of factors like the added coherence they afford both within a given field and with other fields, in the increased explanatory power they provide, the degree to which they block certain likely avenues of error, etc. In reference to the ideology argument, I would hold that an important part of the Marxist perspective has been introjected into the practices of history and social science to the extent that social scientists are aware as a matter of routine of the threat of ideological distortion, and are, in principle, able to correct for ideological error. It is always fair game, in other words, for one social scientist to examine the work of another for ideological prejudices. This is not to say that all social science is free of ideology, but only that social scientists, as a matter of course, must answer charges that their work is misguided because of its ideological presumptions. Thus, the existence of ideology does not preclude the possibility of objectivity since cognizance of it is built into the practices of the fields where it is liable to emerge.

The issue of ideology, of course, raises that of propaganda. I have argued that the nonfiction film is such that its practitioners are responsible to the norms of reasoning and standards of evidence appropriate to their particular subject matter. What of propaganda films -- like Triumph of the Will -- that intentionally suppress all manner of facts -- such as the

purge of the S.A. -- in order to endorse a given political position? Such films appear to be counterexamples to my characterization of nonfiction film, since they are expressly designed to violate standards of objectivity, using every rhetorical trick in the book to sway audiences to their viewpoint; and yet works like Triumph of the Will are classified as nonfiction.

To handle these cases we must distinguish between two senses of "propaganda." The first is derisory. We call something "propaganda" if it callously twists the facts for polemical ends. But "propaganda" can also be thought of as the name of a quasi-genre, cutting across the categories of fiction and nonfiction, devoted to persuasion, especially political persuasion. When "propaganda" is used in this second sense it need not be pejorative. A film may be successfully persuasive without bending the facts; I think that Battle of Chile and The Selling of the Pentagon are examples of this. Nevertheless, it is true that many films that are "propaganda" in the second sense are also "propaganda" in the first sense; unquestionably this is why the abusive meaning of the word took hold. But etymologies notwithstanding, it is important to note that propaganda films would only serve as counterexamples to my characterization of nonfiction film if nonfiction propaganda films in the second sense were necessarily propaganda in the first sense. That is, nonfiction propaganda films are problematic for my position only when the two senses of "propaganda" are conflated; by saying that nonfiction filmmakers are committed to objectivity, I have not implied that all of them respect that commitment; some lie, giving rise to the unsavory connotations of the word "propaganda"; but, in fact, it is only because it is possible to make nonfiction films of political advocacy that are objective -- a subclass of "propaganda" in the second sense -- that we bother to have the sordid name "propaganda" in the first sense. As a genre, nonfiction propaganda films are to be evaluated against objective standards just like any other nonfiction film. When they are caught out playing down and dirty with their materials, we castigate them as "propaganda" in the disdainful sense of the word.

For some, my attempt to connect nonfiction propaganda as a genre with objectivity may be unattractive. They might feel that propaganda as such is inimical to objectivity. There are at least two possible origins for this sentiment. The first harkens back to a concept of objectivity already discussed, viz., objectivity amounts to representing all points of view on a given subject. But, propaganda, by definition, champions one viewpoint, excluding contending positions. Therefore, propaganda cannot be objective. Secondly, one may feel that propaganda deals primarily with values rather than facts, and further hold that the realm of values -- ethical, political, sexual, social -- is subjective rather than objective. Again, the consequence is that nonfiction propaganda cannot be objective.

The first of these positions is questionable in respect to its concept of objectivity; it is really a principle of fairness rather than a principle with epistemic import. The second objection also seems mistaken in its presuppositions. Morality and, in the case of propaganda, politics are objective areas of discourse since they are governed by intersubjectively established protocols of reasoning. I do not say that we can easily resolve all our ethical (and meta-ethical) disputes, but we can pursue our disagreements objectively. Obviously, I cannot here satisfactorily develop an attack on the view that questions of value are inevitably subjective. But to the degree that that position is debatable, the argument that objective propaganda is impossible is unconvincing.

Besides propaganda, there are other genres of nonfiction that do not, on the face of it, appear well characterized by my formulations because the issue of objective standards for evaluating their claims does not seem relevant to the kinds of work they are. Two such genres are commemorations of events and people -- like The Eleventh Year, Man With A Movie Camera and Three Songs of Lenin -- and autobiographical films -- like Lost, Lost, Lost. But are these films beyond the bounds of objective criticism in terms of the knowledge claims they make? In the case of commemorations, and, for that matter, sponsored travelogues, I think it is perfectly reasonable to say that they are flawed as nonfiction when they overlook unpleasant facts. One thing that is particularly attractive about Man With A Movie Camera is that it celebrates the progress and potential of pre-Stalin Russia while at the same time acknowledging persisting social problems like unemployment and alcoholism.

Nor are cine-autobiographies epistemologically incorrigible. If we observe that Jonas Mekas is perfectly at home in the United States, that, according to reliable eye-witness testimony, he never evinced any sense of loss, and was a satisfied bourgeois, we would be in a position to raise objections against Lost, Lost, Lost. That is, there are objectively accessible facts that we could use to take the measure of the film. Of course, it might turn out in such a case that the purpose of the film was not to report Mekas' experience but to imagine the way a melancholic Lithuanian might respond to immigration and displacement. But then we are no longer dealing with a lyric nonfiction but with a pure lyric, which some commentators would argue is in the province of fiction proper.<sup>16</sup>

I have been falling back on the notion that there are standards of research, argument, evidence and interpretation incorporated in the routines and practices of the different fields of knowledge production. I have further argued that these constitute objectivity in a given area of discourse and that nonfiction films can be and are supposed to be objective in the same sense that nonfiction writing is. Such films, that is, are responsible to whatever objective standards are appropriate to the subject matter they are dealing with. This is

not to say that nonfiction films are always true or even that they always meet the relevant standards of objectivity. But I do deny that nonfiction films are intrinsically subjective, as many film theorists claim. I deny this precisely because nonfiction films can meet the same criteria that are met by nonfiction writing. I have not broached the problem that the standards of objectivity in any given area are not always easy to formalize nor have I offered a conclusive argument against the skeptical objection that my so-called standards of objectivity are really chimeras. But to attempt to grapple with these questions — important as they are — is beyond the scope of this paper, for these are issues about the possibility of objectivity in any form. My point is simply that there is no special problem of objectivity confronting nonfiction film because the concept of objectivity is the same for nonfiction film as it is for other nonfiction discourses. In fact, the standards of objectivity relevant to nonfiction film are bound to those of other modes of nonfiction exposition.

#### B. Nonfiction Film and Fiction

The arguments purporting to show that the nonfiction film is really or even necessarily fiction resemble previous maneuvers in the arguments about subjectivity. As such, they manifest many of the same weaknesses. A very liberal set of features, including manipulation, choice, structure, coding, the influence of ideology, is implicitly assumed or explicitly employed to define "fiction" in such a way that it is difficult to imagine anything that is not fiction. Jean-Louis Comolli, for example, virtually retreads earlier arguments, exchanging "subjectivity" for "fiction" in his assault on direct cinema. He writes:

In reality the very fact of filming is of course already a productive intervention which modifies and transforms the material recorded. From the moment the camera intervenes a form of manipulation begins. And every operation, even when contained by the most technical of motives — starting with the cameras rolling, cutting, changing the angle or lens, then choosing the rushes and editing them — like it or not, constitutes a manipulation of the film-document. The film-maker may well wish to respect that document, but he cannot avoid manufacturing it. It does not pre-exist reportage, it is its product.

A certain hypocrisy therefore lies at the origins of the claim that there is antinomy between direct cinema and aesthetic manipulation. And to engage in direct cinema as if the inevitable interventions and manipulations (which produce meaning, effect and structure) did not count and were purely practical

rather than aesthetic, is in fact to demand the minimum of it. It means sweeping aside all its potentialities and censoring its natural creative function and productivity in the name of some illusory honesty, non-intervention and humility.

A consequence of such a productive principle, and automatic consequence of all the manipulations which mould the film-document is a co-efficient of "non-reality": a kind of fictional aura attaches itself to all the filmed events and facts.<sup>17</sup>

This sort of argument attempts to have its cake and eat it too. It posits the celluloid reproduction of a ding-en-sich as the goal of nonfiction, notes the impossibility of the task and declares all film fictional rather than starting off with the obvious premise that in some sense all films are mediated and, then, attempting to ascertain which of these cases of mediation belong to fiction and which to nonfiction. In and of itself, following the above approach — that all films are fictional because they are produced — gives rise to the same vexations rehearsed in regard to the subjectivity argument. The only difference is that now we will be speaking of "fictional fictions" and "fictional nonfictions."

To see the line of counterattack in bold relief, recall Metz's assertion that all film is fictional because it represents something that is not actually occurring in the screening room. But if representation is a sufficient condition for fiction then Cyril Falls' book, The Great War 1914-1918, is fiction because there is no mustard gas in it. Metz's theory, taken at its word, implies that there are no books, or films, or speeches left that are not fiction, thereby making the concept of fiction theoretically useless.

This counterattack can be generalized to other versions of the fiction argument so that, pari passu, we can demonstrate that arguments based on manipulation, choice, coding, structure and the like lead us down the same garden path until at the end we discover the shrubbery growing wild and still needing to be separated into patches of fiction and nonfiction respectively. Perhaps the argument that all films are fictional due to ideological contamination is a bit more complicated since it generally not only assumes an expansive definition of fiction, i.e., fiction = ideology, but also an expansive definition of ideology, i.e., ideology = culture. Yet even with this addition, the moral of the story is the same; by theorizing with such undifferentiated concepts, nothing whatsoever is said. Even the argument that nonfiction films are fiction because they employ the same narrative devices as fiction suffers this liability. For narration is common to types of both fiction and nonfiction, and not a differentia between the two categories. To say nonfiction films are fictions because, for

example, they use flashbacks, is to sweep such historical writing into the dustbin of fiction.

Many of the apparently paradoxical conclusions film theorists seem to derive result from the use of ill-defined and overblown concepts. The declaration that all nonfiction films are really fictions is a sterling example. To rectify the confusion requires a clarification of the central terms of the discussion. Nonfiction films are those that we evaluate on the basis of their knowledge claims in accordance with the objective standards appropriate to their subject matter. Producers, writers, directors, distributors, and exhibitors index their films as nonfiction, thereby prompting us to bring objective standards of evidence and argument into play. We don't characteristically go to films about which we must guess whether they are fiction or nonfiction. They are generally indexed one way or the other. And we respond according to the indices, suspending objective standards if the film is marked as fiction but mobilizing them if it is called nonfiction.

Moreover, these responses are grounded in an ontological distinction between the two forms of exposition. Nonfiction refers to the actual world. Thus, in principle, there could be evidence for each of the knowledge claims that such a film makes. Fiction, however, refers to segments of possible worlds. Insofar as many of the entities in fictions do not exist, there is no evidence that could serve to establish knowledge claims about them; hence, the issue of knowledge claims is generally dropped altogether.

Furthermore, the possible worlds referred to by fictions are incomplete: there are questions that might be asked about fictions -- like the notorious "How many children has Lady Macbeth?" -- that in principle have no answer, even within the fiction. It is impossible to deal with such questions because fictional worlds are not fully articulated. Fictions do very often contain correspondences with actual persons, places and events, but they also contain descriptions of ontologically incomplete possible persons or places or events, or of variations on actual persons or places or events, that transform all the entities in the fictional world into ontologically incomplete possibilities. We cannot know who, for example, was the landlord of Sherlock's Baker Street digs in the film Pursuit to Algiers; although we know the address of the apartments, we can say little of their history, save what Watson tells us. Because fictions are by nature ontologically incomplete it makes no sense to evaluate them according to objective standards of evidence; no fiction is designed to be entirely answerable to the canons of proof that are applied to discourses about the actual world. Thus, we disregard such standards of evidence tout court because fictions are not the kind of objects to which such canons are pertinent.

A word or two about indexing is in order. In the main, films are distributed so that the category they are intended to belong to is public knowledge before they are screened.

A film is billed as a documentary, or an adaptation of a novel, or as (only) based on a true story, or as a romance, etc. Indexing a film as a fiction or nonfiction tells us what the film claims to refer to, i.e., the actual world or segments of possible worlds; and indexing tells us the kind of responses and expectations it is legitimate for us to bring to the film. In short, insofar as indexing fixes the attempted reference of a given film, indexing is constitutive of whether the given film is an instance of fiction or nonfiction, which amounts to whether it is to be construed as fiction or nonfiction.

Because issues of evaluation hinge on indexing, one would think it in the interest of producers, and distributors to be scrupulous in this matter. Since mistakes and errors are defects in documentaries, calling Star Wars nonfiction, a piece of intergalactic history, might have disappointing results in its critical reception. Yet, it does seem that there are cases in which we are tempted to say that films are indexed improperly. For instance, a nonfiction propagandist may stage an imagined enemy atrocity in order to drum up support for his country. Here we may feel that it is best to describe the initial indexing as incorrect and that it should be indexed as fiction. But I think that once it is indexed as nonfiction, it is more appropriate to say that the attributed atrocity is unfounded and that the film is being used to lie. The original indexing of a film is crucial; inaccurate nonfiction films cannot be rechristened as fictions in order to gain a second hearing, though a documentary director may take a long, hard look at the available footage and decide to cut it in a way different from what was planned and, then, initially index the result as fiction. From my perspective, the only time it is correct to speak of improper indexing would be when a comedy of mixed-up film cans results in something like Logan's Run being inadvertently screened on Nova. But in this case, we speak of that event as an instance of improper indexing because Logan's Run has antecedently and originally been indexed as fiction by its creators and promoters.

Films like Citizen Kane and The Carpetbaggers are indexed as fictions, but critics and viewers discover they bear strong analogies to the biographies of actual people. With such films it is easy to imagine a plaintiff suing for libel and winning. Here, one may be disposed to say that though the film was indexed as fiction, the verdict shows it is nonfiction. But I am not sure that we are driven to this conclusion. Rather, we might merely say that the film is libelous instead of claiming it is nonfiction where "libelous" means that the film, though fiction, affords a highly probable interpretation, based on analogies, that caused or tends to cause the plaintiff public injury or disgrace. What the trial proves is not that the film is nonfiction but that the film produced damages of a certain sort.

Ambiguously indexed films, certain docudramas like the TV series You Are There, also seem to raise problems for the

attempt to differentiate fiction from nonfiction. In this series from the fifties, a fictional reporter would travel into the past to interview famous personages embroiled in momentous historical events, e.g., Washington at Valley Forge. Both the interview and the interviewer were completely invented, and their introduction renders the referents of the show ontologically incomplete. For example, it is in principle impossible to answer the question of whether the interviewer had previously met Washington, say in 1756. Consequently, I am inclined to say that though ambiguously indexed as a hybrid of fiction and nonfiction, You Are There is fiction. This may strike some as perplexing because the program seems obviously designed to offer information about the actual world and it also in some sense succeeds in its purpose. But in response, we must note that the very use of the interview indicates that the series was also designed to entertain and that the desire to entertain was strong enough to encourage a high degree of poetic license on the part of its creators. Undoubtedly, this decision was motivated by educational as well as economic considerations, and it is true that education is often facilitated through entertainment. But the fact that You Are There is in part educational does not entail that it is nonfiction. People can learn things from fiction. That is, people can acquire new beliefs from fictions; what they cannot do is appeal to the authority of a fiction as a basis for justifying those beliefs.

In regard to the relation between fiction and nonfiction film I have addressed two basic points. First: the concepts of fiction employed by film theorists to show that nonfiction films are really fiction are unconvincing. Like the arguments for the necessary subjectivity of film, the arguments about fiction are advanced on the backs of overly broad concepts that deny the possibility of nonfiction in every medium and field of discourse. Second: I have tried to sketch briefly a narrower picture of the boundary between fiction and nonfiction in order to sustain the distinction between two kinds of film. Whatever inadequacies beset this latter attempt do not reflect on my first point; I may be wrong about the proper formulation of the concept of fiction and still be right that film theorists like Carroll need a much narrower concept than the ones they employ.

### III. Exposition and Evidence

The first section of this essay proposed that current confusions over nonfiction film arise from polemics about direct cinema. And though it is true that the debates about direct cinema brought these issues to a head, many of the preassumptions that energize the discussion are deep-rooted and long-standing.



One source of the invention of cinema was science, e.g., certain breakthroughs in the development of the motion picture camera resulted from work like Marey's in the recording of motion. Thus, the idea of film as a recording device has been with the medium since its inception. Early detractors dismissed cinema as a mere reproduction or automatic reproduction of reality. This dismissal was the bête noir of silent filmmakers and film theorists alike; in deed and word they strove to show that film could artistically rearrange the world rather than just slavishly and mechanically duplicate it. But with the influential writings of Andre Bazin the dialectic took a new turn.<sup>18</sup> The recording aspect of film was again seen as central, only this time around it was praised as a positive virtue rather than chided as a limitation of the medium. For Bazin, the crucial feature of film is mimetic photography which is defined as the automatic re-presentation of the world. Every film image is a trace of the past. It is this viewpoint on the nature of film that leads some of the theoreticians cited previously to claim that all film is nonfiction; Gone With The Wind yields evidence about Clark Gable insofar as it re-presents or is a trace of the man. For Bazin, it is the nature of film to re-present the world.

Bazin's position and its various reincarnations face stiff problems, which have been forcefully stated by Alexander Sesonske, in accounting for fiction film and animation.<sup>19</sup> But the position nevertheless has a special attractiveness for nonfiction film. The notion of the automatic reproduction of reality as part and parcel of the essence of film, for example, enjoined Cesare Zavattini to envision the ideal film as a storyless recording of ninety consecutive minutes of a day in the life of an ordinary man.<sup>20</sup>

Without question, the naivete of the view that the essence or destiny of film is to automatically reproduce reality provoked the subjectivity and fiction arguments reviewed already. But the problem with these responses is that in attempting to show that cinema does not automatically reproduce reality they go too far, insinuating that cinema can never faithfully record, document or bear evidence about the world.

In order to deal with some of the problems that muddy thinking about nonfiction film it is profitable to consider the basic modes of representation in film. Adopting some of Monroe Beardsley's terminology,<sup>21</sup> we note that each shot in a representational photographic film physically portrays its source. In Gone With the Wind, the shots of Rhett Butler physically portray Clark Gable. Every shot in a representational photographic film physically portrays its source, a definite object, person or event that can be named by a singular term. This is the point that Bazin is making when he says that film represents the past; the shots in a representational photographic film, whatever our account of representation, physically portray the objects, persons and events that cause the image. If shots are only used to physically portray their sources, they

are recordings in the most basic sense of the term. When we speak of films as evidence we primarily have physical portrayal in mind. The problem with various realist approaches to film theory is that they sometimes appear to propose that physical portrayal is the only use of shots, or that it is the essential or most important use.

But at the same time that a film physically portrays its source (some specific object or event) it also depicts a class or congeries of objects. A shot from Gone With The Wind physically portrays Clark Gable but it also depicts a man; likewise a shot of the White House physically portrays the White House but also depicts a house. Each representational shot in a film physically portrays its source and depicts a member of a class describable by a general term -- a man, a fire, a house, etc. Thus, in a given film, a shot can be presented via its context in a way that what is discursively important about it is not what it physically portrays but what it depicts. In Man With A Movie Camera there is an image of a hammer thrower. What is discursively significant about it is that it is an image of a Soviet athlete, not that it is an image of a particular Ivan. Because film images depict classes as well as physically portraying individuals, they can be used to stand for kinds in communication contexts where their relation to their specific sources is irrelevant.

Depiction, so to speak, prys the individual shot from its specific referent and in doing so opens up another possibility of cinematic representation. The shot physically portraying Clark Gable depicts a man, and given the context of Gone With The Wind, it also represented Rhett Butler. This form of representation, which we may call nominal portrayal, occurs when a shot represents a particular person, object or event different than its photographic provenance, due to its context as a result of factors like commentary, titles, an ongoing story or editing. In light of film history, nominal portrayal is the most important use of shots. Obviously it is the sine qua non of fiction films. But it is also indispensable in nonfiction films, even those other than historical re-enactments. The use of stock footage, for instance, of strike breaking in Union Maida or naval bombardments in Victory at Sea, is based on shots that depict policemen and battleships so that they can be contextualized in order to nominally portray the specific events the film discusses. Furthermore, a shot of the Capitol Building taken in 1929 might accompany a soundtrack that states that such and such a bill was passed in 1934. Strictly speaking, this is a case of nominal portrayal since it represents the Capitol Building at a time other than that of the making of the shot. We do not take this use of such a shot (which is common in nonfiction production) to be a matter of lying -- unless the commentary explicitly claims the shot was taken at the moment the bill was passed -- because we understand that shots can not only be used as recording units but also as expositional units. And nominal portrayal is the

representational practice that most facilitates cinematic exposition.

By distinguishing between physical portrayal, nominal portrayal and depiction, we can clarify some of the great debates of film theory. Realist theorists tend to overemphasize the importance of physical portrayal in film. Montagists, on the other hand, are proponents of nominal portrayal, especially of the way editing can function as an agency for this type of representation. The montagists did not invent nominal portrayal in film but they did aggressively conceptualize its relationship to editing. If the montagists erred, it is probably in their extreme deprecation of the photographic component in film. At times, in their enthusiasm, they seem to be not only denying the importance of physical portrayal in film but also claiming that a shot can be made to depict anything whatsoever (depending on its position in an edited sequence). But it is hard to imagine, given existing symbol systems, how any amount of editing could make a clean, medium long shot of Lenin depict an ice cream soda. In fact, what a shot depicts guides the montagist's selection of what shots will be chosen to nominally portray the persons, objects and events that comprise the subject of the film. Nevertheless, historically, the Soviets in de-emphasizing the importance of physical portrayal were more right about the direction of the cultural use of film than the realist theorists.

The distinction between different modes of cinematic representation also enables us to characterize a number of beliefs that sustain conundrums about nonfiction film. On the one hand, those who claim that every film is nonfiction do so on the basis that every shot physically portrays its source. But it does not follow that whole films made up of such shots are physical portrayals. Casablanca is composed of shots that individually portray Bogart, Bergman, Raines, Lorre, Dalio, Veidt, and Henreid, but it is not a recording of these people: to see Casablanca as a record of Bogart in front of a camera is as inappropriate as seeing a Catholic priest at the Offertory of the Mass as a toastmaster.

Arguments denying the possibility of objective nonfiction also often proceed from overemphasis on physical portrayal. These theoreticians presuppose that for a film to be an objective nonfiction means that the film will be a physical portrayal of its sources. Thus, they immediately suspect any use of nominal portrayal or depiction in a putative nonfiction film. Moreover, though it is easy to think of individual shots as re-presentations (in the sense of physical portrayal), the concept is not readily adaptable to whole films. This is one reason why editing presents problems to many nonfiction theorists, i.e., they begin to wonder how films can be said to genuinely re-present (physically portray) the past, given the ellipses of editing. Their problem, in part, is that they are using the individual shot, understood as a physical portrayal,

as a model for what a nonfiction film should be, and then they find all the candidates wanting. It would be better to drop the intuition that the shot as physical portrayal is the paradigm of cinematic nonfiction.

The typical nonfiction film mixes physical portrayal, nominal portrayal and depiction. A film is not nonfiction in terms of the modes of cinematic representation it does or doesn't employ, but in terms of its commitment to the standards of argument, evidence and exposition that are appropriate to the type of information it presents. My key point in this regard is that what is important but sometimes forgotten about nonfiction films is that in general they are expository, and are to be evaluated in light of the assertions they are used to make. This is not to deny that films and footage can also be evidential in the sense that the shots within the film are all used to physically portray their sources and that their sequencing is presented as a reliable record of an event. But this type of nonfiction film is neither the whole of the genre nor a privileged or central instance thereof.

In many nonfiction films, it is impossible for the viewer to tell by looking whether the footage is a literal physical portrayal of the objects, persons and events it purports to represent, so we are best advised to greet such images as nominal portrayals. However, this is not to say that films do not often present footage as a physical portrayal of its source, i.e., as straightforward recording. Where footage is proffered as a recording it is open to questions about its authenticity. In this regard it is no different than any other document. Ultimately, some questions will not be answerable in terms of what is on the screen but will require recourse to production records and witnesses. But the fact that it can be difficult to tell on the basis of the film itself whether or not it is a legitimate recording does not pose problems for the possibility of using footage as a record, since there are other means for authenticating its origins.

In some instances, footage will be used to provide a record of a specific event as well as evidence in support of an assertion about the situation it refers to. Here the footage is again open to questions about whether or not it is authentic as well as to questions about whether it is good evidence for the claims it is supposed to support. In Chariot of the Gods we are shown an image of a Mexican frieze that is meant to persuade us that Central Americans had knowledge of spaceships prior to the European invasion. The frieze depicts some whooshes sculpted onto the back of a chariot. But this is hardly enough to substantiate familiarity with interplanetary space vehicles, even if the footage is authentic.

Where sequences of footage are spliced together and are presented as reliable recordings of events, questions of authenticity arise again. The way the footage is edited can be open to dispute; the adequacy of an edited recording may be challenged in terms of witnesses and, as occurs in legal contexts, by a review of the out-takes.

In short, whether a nonfiction film is primarily expositional and uses its footage to nominally portray events or whether it presents its footage as physical portrayal, it is still responsible to established standards of objectivity, though in the latter case the film will be open to further criticism if it illicitly claims its footage is a physical portrayal of its subject.

#### IV. A Digression: Realism and Nonfiction

So far, I have stressed the shared rhetoric of the defense of deep-focus realism -- the cinematic style of Renoir and the Neorealists, advocated by Bazin -- and that of direct cinema. Indeed a recent anthology, Realism and the Cinema, at times shifts seamlessly from pieces on nonfiction to pieces on realism. The relation between the deep-focus style of realism and direct cinema, of course, is one of influence; practitioners of cinema-verite adopted and adapted Renoir's (and Bazin's) conceptions of framing, of the importance of camera movement and of the value of spontaneity.<sup>23</sup> The interplay of the theory of deep-focus realism and documentary practice gives the impression that there is a link between one style of filmmaking and truthfulness, and that in virtue of that link one style of filmmaking is more appropriate to nonfiction film than any other.

The style of deep-focus realism is defended because it encourages spectators to participate more actively in the construction of meaning in a film than, for example, the style of montage filmmaking. Directorial control appears to be relaxed so that the spectator appears free to assimilate the succession of imagery in his own way. This freedom is called realistic because it is analogous to the kind of choice and freedom we experience when we scan everyday reality for information about how things stand. Purportedly, this style of realism enables us to make up our own minds rather than molding the world according to the filmmaker's preconceptions. And, of course, the notion of presenting the world without preconceptions is particularly alluring to the practitioner of direct cinema.

Yet, the idea that the style of deep-focus realism is truthful or has a special potential for re-presenting reality is problematic. No cinematic technique in and of itself guarantees truth. For any film technique or set of techniques can appear in either a fiction or nonfiction film. Some techniques may be historically associated with documentaries; but they can always be incorporated for expressive effect in fictions, e.g., grainy, fast film stock. Deep-focus realism, in fact, is an ensemble of techniques that coalesced in fiction films, a strange place for a style that is truth-preserving to evolve.

The confusion between realism and truth is grounded in a misconception of what it means to consider a style of filmmaking realistic. In most writing, if an author calls a film or a style realistic, this is taken to signal a two-term relationship between the film and reality. Realism is thought of as a trans-historical category inclusively denominating any film or film style that corresponds to reality. Hence, if the deep-focus style is realistic, then it corresponds to reality, and insofar as the nonfiction filmmaker is committed to corresponding to reality, he is urged to employ this style.

But realism in film or in any medium is not a simple relationship between a representation and reality. First and foremost, realism designates a style and in this role it points to a difference between contrasting films, paintings, novels, etc. To call a film or a group of films realistic is to call attention to some feature that the items in question have that other films don't have. Rules of the Game, for example, employs a series of multi-plane compositions that induce the spectator to scan the frame for dramatic details and inflections. This differs from the type of composition found in Soviet montage or in the soft-focus of Hollywood films of the thirties. The term "realism" marks this contrast. But why is "realism" used to do the marking? Because spectator scanning, a possibility inhibited by Soviet montage or the soft-focus style, is taken to be more like our normal perceptual behavior than our reaction to the composition in alternate styles. But deep-focus realism does not correspond to reality. Rather it is more like some aspects of reality when compared to alternate approaches to filmmaking. A film or film style is realistic when it deviates from other specified films or styles in such a way that the deviation can be construed as like some aspect of reality that was hitherto repressed or merely absent in previous films or film styles. Realism is not a simple relation between films and the world but a relation of contrast between films that is interpreted in virtue of analogies to aspects of reality. Given this, it is easy to see that there is no single Film Realism -- no trans-historical style of realism in film. Rather there are several types of realism. There is Soviet realism which because of its mass hero and details of proletarian life deviated from the individualism and glamour of Hollywood narratives in such a way that aspects of reality, class action and lower class living conditions, were foregrounded. Deep-focus realism emphasized yet another dimension of reality in film. Its arrival did not force us to stop calling the Soviet films realistic but only to recognize that another variety of realism had been introduced. Because "realism" is a term whose application ultimately involves historical comparisons, it should not be used unprefixd -- we should speak of Soviet realism, Neorealism, Kitchen Sink and Super realism. None of these developments strictly correspond to or duplicate reality, but rather make pertinent (by analogy) aspects of reality absent from other styles. Furthermore, once

we abandon the correspondence conception of realism, there is no reason to presume that one cinematic style is correct for all nonfiction film.

This is not to deny the importance of direct cinema's espousal of the Renoir/Bazin ethos of deep-focus and camera movement. The expressive effects of this choice were (and still are) far reaching. The spectator's role in relation to the screen was redefined, encouraging in us the active and spontaneous play of opinion, judgment and decision. In a film like Warrendale, it is left up to us to decide whether the regime of that institution is barbaric and irresponsible, on the one hand, or curative and caring on the other. The relative freedom of the spectator and its precondition, the relative slackening of overt evaluation on the part of the filmmaker, may suggest one sense of objectivity -- namely that of making a place where all opinions may flourish. But this is a political -- in fact historically liberal -- concept of objectivity, not an epistemic one. And indeed it is as an expressive emblem of egalitarianism, a major preoccupation of the sixties, that direct cinema's adoption of the Bazinian creed is most significant.

#### V. Concluding General Remarks

My overall strategy in this essay has been to argue that there is nothing special or essential to film as a medium that raises unique problems for the notion of nonfiction film. I have constantly compared nonfiction film with nonfiction writing in order to answer the charge that in some way the inevitability of the modes of selection, manipulation, etc., endemic to cinema produce special problems for film in regard to nonfiction. My approach, here, is part of a larger conception of cinema. I believe that film, perhaps because it is a recent medium, invented within living memory, has developed primarily by imitating and incorporating pre-existing cultural practices and concerns. Cinema has been adapted to make narrative, to make drama and to make art as well as nonfiction. The medium, in short, discovers itself in the process of enlisting and assimilating previously established structures, forms, goals and values. Understanding film, therefore, most often depends on applying the concepts and criteria appropriate to the broader or older cultural projects that cinema mimes.

By urging this perspective I am going against the grain of much traditional film theory which centered on discovering and elucidating what is unique to film -- what is peculiarly (and essentially) cinematic. The notion that subjectivity flows from the special processes of the film medium is, in fact, a variation, though a negative one, on this traditional theme; rather than outlining film's peculiar, positive potential, it

seems to acknowledge film's special limitations. My position on the nonfiction film, in contradistinction, is that no special epistemological problems result from the distinctive features of the medium. On the issue of the essential nature of film, I hold that film has no essence, only uses, most of which are derivative and subject to analysis and evaluation according to the categories that apply to their sources — art, drama, narrative, nonfiction, and so on.

In emphasizing the relatedness of film to larger cultural projects, I am not claiming that there are no differences between film and the other media in which those projects are pursued but only that in comprehending film as, for example, art, or nonfiction, the conceptual frameworks of those institutionalized endeavors are more fundamental than questions about the nature of film as film. Undoubtedly, the vivid portrayal of time and process in Fishing at Stone Weir, the immediate intelligibility of the construction of the igloo in Nanook of the North, and the revelation of the intimate interplay of the rhythms, economy and society of the !Kung Bushmen in The Hunters would be difficult, if not practically impossible, to duplicate in written accounts. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words, though, of course, sometimes a single word can do the work of a thousand pictures. The upshot of this is not that some topics categorically belong to cinema and some to language and that these can be antecedently plotted by establishing the unique potentials or limitations of the medium. There is no subject or project that is inherently adverse to cinema. Rather some films fail and others do not. Films can be artistic, objective, dramatic, etc. Or they can fail in these attempts. But this is a matter of individual cases and not of unique features of the medium that dictate failure in advance.

To underscore film's indebtedness to broader cultural enterprises for its marching orders and to abandon the quest for the cinematic is not to deny that there is an important area of study called film theory. Questions still remain about how the film medium is able to incorporate and implement the larger cultural frameworks that it is heir to. For example, how does narrative editing function as a system of communication? Furthermore, as film develops, pursuing the aims of projects like art, nonfiction and narrative, it evolves new means of expression whose operation it is the task of film theorists to illuminate. At certain junctures, like the rise of direct cinema, the onset of new stylistic options precipitates a dialogue or dialectic with traditional forms of filmmaking that the theorist must unravel and clarify. Film does not have a unique destiny, set by its essential possibilities and limitations. But it does have a unique history as it is used to articulate the enterprises of twentieth century culture. And the rhyme and reason within that process is the topic of film theory.



## VI. Postscript: Miscellaneous Arguments

Since this article was completed several arguments against the nonfiction film have come to my attention which I had not encountered before, or which I had forgotten. I would like to review three of the arguments briefly because they are much in use at present.

I will approach two of the arguments by examining a passage from Stephen Heath's influential, recent book Questions of Cinema. The quotation pertains to making historical nonfiction films. Heath believes it is an idealist fallacy if such films pretend to depict the past accurately. Historical nonfiction films cannot achieve such a goal 1) because they are trapped in hermeneutic circles — i.e., such films always perforce are locked in a present standpoint, trapped in the needs and concerns of the now which distorts while determining the picture of the past that such films masquerade as portraying truthfully — and 2) because such historical films are in fact merely constructions of the past. Heath writes:

What needs particularly to be emphasized here is that history in cinema is nowhere other than in representation, the terms of representing proposed, precisely the historical present of any film; no film is not a document of itself and of its actual situation in respect of the cinematic institution and of the complex of social institutions of representation. Which is to say that the automatic conjunction of film and history as-theme, as past to be shown today, the strategy for a cinema developed to recover 'popular memory,' is an idealist abstraction, an ideal of film and an ideal of history. The present of a film is always historical, just as history is always present — a fact of representation not a fact of the past, an elaboration of the presence of the past, a construction in the present, for today....<sup>24</sup>

As I have already noted, there are at least two arguments in this dense passage. One of these holds that the researcher's point-of-view, rooted as it is in the present, blocks an accurate view of the past. This is an argument from selection of a type with which we are already familiar. Historians and filmmakers who make historical films select and interpret. They screen out certain facts and connect others. In doing this screening out, this selection and this interpretation, they are governed by the interests of the present. Thus, the films they give us are not replicas of the past but are perspectively skewed representations of the past, indelibly imprinted by the issues of the present. Moreover, we are ensnared in such views because we have no access to the past save through the optic of

the present. The historical filmmaker offers theses about the past from the concerns of the present and also selects his evidence for these theses on the basis of the concerns of the present. Countervailing evidence, not sensitive to present concerns, will be overlooked. We cannot accurately retrieve the past. We are frozen in the present and our historical films really reflect contemporary preoccupations more than anything else.

The first point to be made against this mode of argumentation is that historical films are not supposed to be replicas of the past. Indeed, what it would take to be a replica of the past is unclear. Would it have to be a representation of the past and past events depicted exactly as they were seen, experienced and cognized by peoples in the past? If so, then history clearly has little to do with such replicas. For history need not be restricted to the purview of the past. Just because the Allies at Versailles in 1919 failed to foresee the consequences of the stern terms of the treaty does not mean that a nonfiction filmmaker should not make the appropriate causal connections in his cinematic account of the rise of the Third Reich. In fact we might even want to argue that historical films -- as opposed to mere records -- in general are expected to connect past events and actions to consequences that the historical agents who performed the actions were often unaware of. History -- as opposed to chronicling -- is about making connections between events and in many cases the later events being connected to earlier events are unbeknownst to the historical actors. This doesn't disqualify a film as accurate history even if the film is not a mysterious something called a replica.

If history is a matter of making connections between events and if often earlier events are connected to events in the present, we have still not shown that historical films are necessarily mired in the epistemologically suspect present. For even if past events are selected and combined with other events in line with present concerns, it is not the case that the claims made by histories and historical films are substantiated on the grounds that they satisfy present preoccupations. Whatever causal connections or threads of events that a historical film purports must be supported by evidence. Satisfying the needs of the present, that is, does not warrant a historical claim. Only evidence will support whatever claims a historical film makes. Nor is it true that the only evidence available to us is the evidence that we will select because of our present interests. For even if on our own we could only find such evidence as our present needs and concerns guide us to, there is nevertheless a vast accumulation of unavoidable evidence that has been bequeathed to us by past generations of historians whose "present" interests led them to amass the many details that our historical accounts -- filmed or written -- must gibe with. (Moreover, I must also object -- hermeneutic circles notwithstanding -- that it is possible for researchers

to imaginatively transcend their ties to the present to conceive of the past from alternative viewpoints -- both those of different times and of different cultures).

The second argument found in the Heath passage does not apply only to historical films but to nonfictions in general. Films are said to be constructions, specifically representations. Within contemporary film theory, this, in combination with the fact that such representations do not internally acknowledge their status as constructions -- "...no film is a document of itself..." -- entails that a film is a deception. A nonfiction film of this sort necessarily could not be objective because it is necessarily a lie. That is, nonfiction films that do not acknowledge that they are constructions thereby mask the fact that they are construction. This is thought to be a deception that amounts to falsification.

Though this argument is very popular among contemporary film theorists, it is somewhat obscure. All films including nonfiction films are seen as falsifications unless they acknowledge that they are constructions by means of representations internal to the film (in the manner of the Godardian avant-garde). What does this mean? All films are constructions, it is said. "Constructions," one asks, "rather than what?" One answer is: "rather than the very events -- historical or otherwise -- that the film represents." Of course, this is true. Indeed, it is so obvious that one wonders why the point has to be made -- acknowledged -- within the film itself. Often nonfiction films do, in fact, refer to the process of production which resulted in the film we are seeing -- e.g., the arduous trip to such and such a mountain village is underscored. But even where this does not occur, wouldn't things like the title credits, advertisements, reviews, etc. tell normal viewers (as if they normally needed to be told) that the nonfiction films in question are constructions? Why, that is, is it necessary to represent or to acknowledge the process of the film's construction within the film itself? It simply is not the case -- as some film theorists might hold -- that viewers take films without such acknowledgments to be something other than constructions. And, as I have already pointed out, such films conventionally announce they are the construction of a team of filmmakers -- who employed processes of production like editing -- by means of the credits.

When many contemporary film theorists, like Heath, refer to a film as a construction or a production, they have in mind not that most films have been produced by a team of filmmakers -- a fact the films supposedly mask and which must be reflexively revealed -- but that films are constructed by spectators who make sense out of the films. Sometimes this process of making sense is called suture.<sup>25</sup> This suturing is unacknowledged or not represented within the film. Consequently, it is thought that this aspect of the film's construction is hidden from the spectator. Again, the charges of deception and falsification loom. The spectator thinks the film makes sense when in fact

the spectator ~~makes~~ (or constructs) sense out of the film. An edited nonfiction film like Turk1918 is constructed by the spectator comprehending the meaning of and making connections between the shots in the film. However, the film does not acknowledge that the spectator is performing this operation. Therefore, the film lies, deceptively ~~masking~~ that it is a construction. The film's veracity is called into question because the film does not remind the spectator — through some process of representation internal to the film — that he is deciphering the meaning of the film.

This argument seems to rely on a false dichotomy, viz., either the film constructs its meaning, or the spectator does. It is also assumed that if the spectator's interpretive activity, his suturing, is not emphasized by the film, then the film deceptively ~~imminates~~ that the film, not the spectator, is constructing its meaning. But clearly it is inappropriate to hold that there is a univocal sense to the phrase "construct meaning" such that we must decide a competition between mutually exclusive alternatives such as "either films or spectators construct meaning, but not both." A film is meaningful, intelligible, etc. in virtue of its structure. That is, the arrangement of its materials determines whether it has successfully "constructed meaning" in what we can think of as the message sense of that phrase. The spectator, in turn, in response to the film might be said to "construct meaning" where this signifies the operation of a cognitive process. We might call this the message-uptake sense of the phrase. Thus, it is compatible for the film to appear meaningful — to be the source of meaning — while it remains for a spectator to impute meaning to the film by mobilizing a cognitive process. That the film is meaningfully structured does neither preclude nor hide the fact that a spectator actively derives meaning from the film, i.e., "constructs meaning" (according to this mode of speaking). And surely every spectator knows that meaning in the sense of the spectator's recognition of meaning (i.e., message-uptake) requires a spectator's discerning and comprehending the structure of a film. That is, "the construction of meaning," where that refers to the experience — via cognitive processing — of intelligibility, obviously has a spectator's portion. So why must this be acknowledged within the film? Moreover, the legitimate though different and compatible sense of "meaning construction" (the message sense), which refers to the structure or arrangement of a film's materials, does not imply that the spectator's cognitive processing of meaning is in any way effaced or hidden.

I was reminded of the final argument against nonfiction film while watching the recent movie Lianna by writer-director John Sayles. In this film, there is a portrayal of a college cinema class, circa, it seems to me, 1970. The lecturer repeats a point that was a popular slogan in regard to documentary film in the sixties and early seventies. He notes that quantum physicists discovered that by observing sub-atomic

events they changed the course of the events they were studying by introducing unforeseen but necessary disturbances into the situation. Science shows, the lecturer in Lianna claims, that observation always alters the situation it strives to capture objectively. This generalization is then applied to film. Once a camera is introduced into a situation, the situation changes. People begin to behave for the camera, for example. Thus, the principle that rules the observation of the atom applies equally to the act of filming humans. No film can be objective -- i.e., can render an event as it is typically, sans camera -- because filming always changes events. This is, moreover, just one instance of a law that applies to every aspect and order of being in the physical universe. Observation must alter the behavior of whatever is observed.

This argument dubiously assumes that whatever holds as a matter of law at the sub-atomic level applies to every level and mode of experience. Therefore, since our presence can be felt drastically on the atomic level, it is hypothesized that it is also always felt drastically on the macroscopic level. In fact, however, the presence of an observer has little palpable physical effect at all on the macroscopic level. But this is not the most damning point to raise about the argument. For the argument proceeds by extrapolating from the physical effect of observation on an atom to a putative behavioral effect that a camera has on the people it films. But even if a camera did have some almost undetectable physical influence on every object in its vicinity, it need not have an influence on every person it films. The camera may be very far away or hidden, so that its subjects are unaware that it is observing them. Thus, it has no behavioral repercussions. Or perhaps the subject of the camera is habituated to the camera's presence and the subject acts naturally as a result. Maybe the subject is emotionally carried away and just doesn't modify his behavior because he doesn't care that the camera is nearby. These and hundreds of other reasons can be offered to show that in many cases the presence of an observing camera does not necessarily change the event from the way it would have been had the camera been absent. Nor can the discovery of the physical effects of observation on particles in quantum mechanics be used to support this claim. For even if the presence of the camera resulted in some physical changes in the situation, two adulterous lovers unaware of the private eye across the alleyway will not change their behavior despite the fact that a battery of cameras is pointed their way. I am not denying that the presence of a camera in a situation might change it. I am denying both that the presence of a camera must necessarily change a situation at the level of human behavior and that the claim that cameras must change human behavior can be gleaned from discoveries of the physical effects of observation upon atoms.

NOTES

1. This argument was made from the floor at the conference, "Film, the False Sociology," at New York University, 1980.
2. Michael Ryan, "Militant Documentary: Mai-68 Par Lui," in Ciné-tracts, no. 7/8. On pages 18-19 Ryan writes

What Mai 68 demonstrates is that even 'natural' life is highly technological, conventional and institutional. Its content and form is determined by the technology of language and symbolic representation. The so-called natural world of Mai 68 is as much a construct as any fictional object.

For example, the various actions of the different groups involved in the events — workers, students, police, union hacks, etc. — all fall back upon what can be called a 'scenario,' that is highly over-determined set of conscious and unconscious prescriptions, inscribed in language, modes of behaviour, forms of thought, role models, clothing, moral codes, etc., which give rise to and mark out the limits of what happened and what would have happened in May 1968. There was an unwritten rule that the students would not use arms. Likewise, the workers could not storm the National Assembly. Otherwise, the rule forbidding the police from mowing them all down would have been legitimately forgotten. The homes of the bourgeoisie were not to be broken into. The battle was to be limited to the streets and the factories, the prescribed scenes of revolution. The city was not to be set on fire....

Limits on action are determined by, among other things, role-giving concepts. The concept (in conjunction with the reality) "police" determines the behaviour of the men hired to carry out that epithet....

The role of 'fictional' constructs in determining 'real' history is most clear in terms of institutions and of language....

The events of Mai 68 then, even if they can, à la limite, be called a real referent, are themselves constituted as a play of representations. They are real, but not 'natural' and uncontrived. History, but a history which is constructed. At the limit of non-fiction is another form of fiction, just as the goal or limit of fiction (in film) is a seemingly non-fictionalized event....

My point, then, is that the presence of real history and objective fact which documentary supposedly renders is itself comprised of and constituted by representations. Fictional representation is shown to be historical. This would be the feature of reducing fictional film to documentary. It is the Marxist ideology-critical moment of the analysis. The deconstructive equivalent of this moment is to show that the supposedly natural referent of non-fictional film can be itself described as a kind of fiction, a complex set of presentations -- political, social, institutional, conceptual, physical, linguistic -- whose reference one to the other in history is open-ended."

3. Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier," Screen, Vol. 16, No. 2, summer 1975. On page 47, he writes "At the theater Sarah Bernhardt may tell me she is Phedre or if the play were from another period and rejected the figurative regime, she might say, as in a type of modern theater, that she is Sarah Bernhardt. But at any rate, I should see Sarah Bernhardt. At the cinema she could make two kinds of speeches too, but it would be her shadow that would be offering them to me (or she would be offering them in her own absence). Every film is a fiction film."

4. Richard Meran Barsam attributes this view to Andrew Sarris in Nonfiction Film: A Critical History (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1973).

5. Michael Ryan, "Militant Documentary."

Derrida's concept of différance holds that two polar opposites when examined closely, deconstructed, reveal traces of each other such that the dichotomy collapses as the terms become each other (or manifest elements of each other). This is a function of the common origin of the terms. In Of Grammatology, Derrida writes "This common root, which is not a root but the concealment of the origin and which is not common because it does not amount to the same thing except with the unmonotonous insistence of difference, this unnameable movement of difference-itself, that I have strategically nicknamed trace, reserve or différance, could be called writing only within the historical closure, that is to say within the limits of science and philosophy." Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p.93. In Positions, Derrida defines différance as "a structure and a movement which cannot be conceived on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. Différance is the systematic play of differences,

of the spacing (espacement) by which elements refer to one another." Ryan wants to use this concept and the method of deconstruction to show that fiction films blur into nonfiction and vice-versa. See the last paragraph of note 2.

6. See Grierson on Documentary, edited by Forayth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).
7. Dziga Vertov, "Selected Writings," in Avant-Garde Film, edited by P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978). On page 5, Vertov writes "My road is toward the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus, I decipher in a new way the world unknown to you."
8. Frederick Wiseman, an interview in The New Documentary in Action, by Alan Rosenthal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 70.
9. Erik Barnouw, Documentary (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 287-288.
10. See for example Peter Graham, "Cinema Verité in France," Film Quarterly, 17 (Summer, 1964); Colin Young, "Cinema of Common Sense," Film Quarterly 17 (Summer, 1964); Young, "Observational Cinema" in Principles of Visual Anthropology, edited by Paul Hockings (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1975). In these articles the authors, though arguing that film is necessarily subjective, do not turn this into a rejection of the prospects of documentary filmmaking.
11. Bela Balazs, Theory of Film (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), pp. 89-90.
12. Lucien Goldman, "Cinema and Sociology," in Anthropology - Reality - Cinema, edited by Mick Eaton (London: British Film Institute, 1979), p. 64.
13. A somewhat similar, though not identical, concept of indexing is used in regard to artworks in "Piece: Contra Aesthetica" by Timothy Binkley in Philosophy Looks at the Arts, edited by Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978).
14. The idea of segments of possible worlds derives from Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Worlds of Works of Art," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism XXXV (1976).
15. I recommend that film theorists use a narrower sense of ideology than they presently use. I would call an assertion -- like "Those who are unemployed have only their own



laziness to blame for their problems" — ideological when 1) is false and 2) is used to support some relation of social domination or oppression. Film theorists, of course, also want to describe entire symbol systems — like cinema or language — as ideological. Such systems are not true or false. But if an entire symbol system could be characterized as ideological, I think it would be because it 1) excludes or represses the representation of certain social facts or relations and 2) is used to support social oppression in virtue of the exclusions it entails.

Some Marxists have also disapproved of the global concept of ideology used by film theorists. In their criticisms of the Althusserian tendencies of Screen, Kevin McDonnell and Kevin Robins write that ideology should become "a less total phenomenon than it is for Althusserians who identify it with the cultural or symbolic as a whole. We take ideology to be an abstract concept, referring only to the fetishised forms assumed by thought which uncritically confronts the necessary constraints of capitalist social reality...." in "Marxist Cultural Theory" in One Dimensional Marxism (London: Allison and Busby Limited, 1980), p. 167. Though I disagree with much of McDonnell and Robins's position, I think their consternation with the reigning, inflated idea of ideology is correct.

Since the completion of this essay I have discovered another voice raised against the bloated concept of ideology used by film theorists — Terry Lovell, Pictures of Reality (London: British Film Institute, 1980). Like McDonnell and Robins, Lovell is a Marxist who is attacking the Althusserian mandarins of British film theory — apparently a sport of gaining popularity in England. Lovell's book is a mixed blessing. The account of trends in philosophy of science is not only turgid and questionably metaphoric but inept and riddled with error. For example, the definition of induction offered on page 11 is philosophically incorrect. On the other hand, Lovell has some salutary things to say about ideology. Lovell argues that ideology "may be defined as the production and dissemination of erroneous beliefs whose inadequacies are socially motivated." (page 51) Lovell also provides a useful service by showing that this conception of ideology dictates the form that ideological analysis should take, one which is reflected in Marx's method. "To establish that a given body of ideas or theory serve class interests is always insufficient to justify the label ideology. It is always necessary first to apply epistemological criteria to evaluate the work.... The common practice of discrediting ideas by reference to their social origin is not what

is meant by this critique. Questions of validity are always involved. We can learn a good deal here from Marx's own practice. His procedure is to first of all establish by theoretical analysis, argument and evidence, an account of whatever is in contention. He then goes on to show precisely in which respects a rival theory falls short of explanatory power. Only then does he attempt to relate those specific errors to class alignments and the class struggle. An example of this method is to be found in Vol. III of Capital where he considers the evidence given by bankers in the Report of the Committee on Bank Acts of 1857. He assesses this evidence in terms of its internal inconsistencies, and its theoretical and empirical inadequacies. He then goes on to argue that these views are to be expected from bankers within that structure of social relations because of the form which social relations take in general under capitalism, and because of the particular position of bankers within that structure of social relations and the interests which that position generates. His argument is, in effect, 'this is indeed how money and banking would appear to people so situated, and these are the categories they would require in their day-to-day conduct of their business activities....' This procedure is exemplary, but is seldom followed by people wishing to explore the ideological underpinnings of their opponents' thoughts." Hopefully this invocation of the master will shame Cine-Marxists into adopting a more rigorous approach to the analysis of ideology than the guilt-by-association (usually free association) tactics that are so prevalent nowadays.

In my own writings I have sometimes used a looser, Leninist concept of ideology in which "ideological" is interchangeable with "political." This is an acceptable, common usage. Under this variant, a Marxist might speak of "the communist ideology." Nevertheless, I think that the sense of ideology outlined in the preceding paragraphs is the most fundamental and correct. It is probably best to keep the critical edge to the concept. One should, therefore, announce that one is using the Leninist concept when one adopts it in an analysis.

16. Monroe C. Beardsley, The Possibility of Criticism (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970).
17. In Realism and the Cinema, edited by Christopher Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 226.
18. See especially vol. I of André Bazin's What Is Cinema? translated and edited by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

19. "The World Viewed," Georgia Review, Winter 1974.
20. According to Eric Rhode in "Why Neo-Realism Failed," Sight and Sound, 30, (Winter 1960/61).
21. Monroe C. Beardsley, Aesthetics (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958), especially Chapter VI, section 16. Also see Göran Herwén, Representation and Meaning in the Visual Arts (Lund: Scandinavian University Books, 1969) especially Chapter II.
22. Op. cit.
23. In Cinema Verité in America (Boston: MIT Press, 1974), Stephen Mamber writes "Cinema verite adopts Renoir's idea of the camera and uses it as a recording tool, so that the events themselves, 'the knowledge of man,' become the standard we use to judge the film." (p. 18).
24. Stephen Heath, Questions of Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 237-238.
25. For analysis and criticism of the concept of auture, see Noel Carroll, "Address to the Heathen," October, #23, Winter 1982, sections IV and VI.