

A Theoretical Critique of "Direct" Documentary:

The Case of Frederick Wiseman.



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**Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Arts.
Graduate Program in Communications
McGill University August 1979**

Abstract

This thesis is an examination of various aspects of "direct" documentary or "direct cinema" in terms of current issues and debates in film theory. It is structured around detailed discussions of issues such as history and cinema, film genre, narrative and non-narrative structures, realism, spectator-positioning, and editing and shot articulation. Each of these series of issues, which form the basis of the chapter divisions of the thesis, is focussed exclusively on documentary, on direct cinema as a sub-category of documentary, and on the American documentarist Frederick Wiseman as a preeminent practitioner of this particular form of documentary. Close examination of portions of each of Wiseman's films, together with a detailed examination of his first film, Titicut Follies, complement and focus the founding theoretical arguments. The argument throughout contests the widespread tendencies to either dismiss or valorise documentary and direct cinema.

Résumé

Ce mémoire examine divers aspects du "cinéma direct" ou du documentaire "direct" en fonction des débats qui nourrissent actuellement la théorie cinématographique. Sa répartition en chapitres correspond aux thèmes qui y sont soumis à l'étude détaillée; le cinéma et l'histoire, le genre, les structures narratives ou non-narratives, le réalisme, la position du spectateur, et le montage et l'agencement des plans. Chaque thème n'est envisagé que dans son rapport exclusif au documentaire ou au cinéma direct en tant que sous-catégorie du documentaire, et au documentariste américain Frederick Wiseman en tant que praticien prééminent de ce genre de documentaire. L'examen serré de certaines séquences tirées de chacun de ses films ainsi que de la totalité de son premier film, Titicut Follies, permet de concentrer et de compléter les arguments théoriques fondateurs. Le mémoire conteste de façon soutenue la tendance largement répandue qui est ou de négliger ou de valoriser le documentaire ou le cinéma direct.

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Introduction and Acknowledgements

This thesis has a number of foci. It is a working-through of a number of issues, approaches, or methodologies in current film theory within the terms of their applicability for a particular subgenre of documentary film, what might be called "direct" documentary or "direct cinema".¹ The pertinence of such a study could be put in general terms, in these ways, in two of the very first recent attempts to give substantial theoretical and critical elucidation of the documentary genre:

it is odd that so much theoretical attention should go to those areas where illusionism is rendered at least suspect by the film itself (narrative, and now experimental film) and so very little to documentary where the challenge of facing this illusionism head-on is greatest. . . . Despite the denunciation of various cinematic "realisms", this work has scarcely begun with documentary, and yet what better place is there to confront the challenge of realism than here?²

Discussions of the space film occupies within ideological discourse tend to dismiss documentary as irredeemably implicated in an analogical mode of representation and an ideological régime from which it can take no distance. This has meant that documentary films have scarcely begun to be treated in terms other than those they set for themselves, that is in terms of the extent to which they reveal a/the truth about whatever they are addressing. Where discussion of documentary film has been attempted, it has been frozen within its own ideological space, with the result that its operation with regard to the production of meaning - as a semiotic system - has remained taken for granted.³

By addressing itself directly and extensively to this lack, these questions, it is hoped this thesis will contribute to furthering a deconstructive and critical appraisal of documentary.

Another focus of interest is the work of the American documentarist Frederick Wiseman, seen as an increasingly preeminent instance within the field of direct cinema. Wiseman's films⁴ are now receiving quite widespread attention at the journalistic, educational and general non-commercial level, and to a certain extent, at the level of the academy.⁵ This thesis attempts to place Wiseman's work in a context in which it has hitherto not been placed in published work, except for Bill Nichols' "Fred Wiseman's Documentaries: Theory and Structure"⁶ -- an explicitly theoretical, analytical and critical context, informed by the need to apply an increasingly well-established body of film theory to the field of direct documentary. Thus it is as much an experiment in the appropriateness of certain methodologies, theories, as a concern to elucidate those several films which comprise Wiseman's oeuvre; an inquiry into current formulations of film theory and criticism as it might be focussed on these films. Thus, the thesis is structured around central problems in film theory in general and documentary in particular; questions of history and genre, narrative and non-narrative, realism, subject-positioning and cinematic articulations such as editing, representation and analysis.

The third focus of the work is a detailed analysis of some (neglected) aspects of the first and perhaps most controversial and "hybrid" of Wiseman's films, Titicut Follies.

Thus, the strengths of the work, it is hoped, lie in this consistent focus on a body of films and the critical material relevant for them, and on the manner in which this collection of texts, inter- and intra-texts, are to be constituted.

Acknowledgement is due to the Professorial Board of the University of Queensland, Australia, for the award of the generous Captain James Cook Travelling Scholarship and to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, for a Fee Bursary. Both of these have assisted financially during the period of work on this thesis. Zipporah Films, Boston, Mass., and Marlin Motion Pictures, Mississauga, Ontario, gave me access to Frederick Wiseman's films. Will Straw assisted greatly with budget-priced typing. Professor Peter Ohlin, McGill University, provided helpful supervision.

Notes

(References are cited in full when they first appear in the thesis. Subsequently, they are cited with author and short title.)

¹ The term "direct cinema", used for instance in Louis Marcorelles' Living Cinema (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973) has advantages over the more widely used term cinéma vérité, used, for example, in Stephen Mamber's Cinema Verite in America (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974) and M. Ali Issari's Cinéma Vérité (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1971), in that it avoids to some extent the metaphysical implications of the latter term, implications which have been strongly criticised by practitioners of such work themselves. The notion "direct cinema" itself, however, will be a focus of critique in the thesis. However, to avoid interminable reminders that such a term is indeed under scrutiny, it will be used henceforth without quotation marks. See Issari, Cinéma Vérité, pp. 17-18, for a list of various alternative names used for direct cinema.

² Bill Nichols, "Documentary Theory and Practice", Screen, 17, No. 4 (Winter 1976/77), p. 35.

³ Annette Kuhn, "The Camera I - Observations on Documentary", Screen, 19, No. 2 (Summer 1978), p. 71.

⁴ The Cool World (1963) (Wyseman was the producer of this film directed by Shirley Clarke), Titicut Follies (1967), High School (1969), Law and Order (1969), Hospital (1970), Basic Training (1971), Essene (1972),

Juvenile Court (1973), Primate (1974), Welfare (1975), Meat (1976), Canal Zone (1977), Sinai Field Mission (1978). Further production details of the films will be noted and discussed as they become pertinent. The best compendium of materials relevant for Wiseman's films is Liz Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman: A guide to references and resources, (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1979).

⁵ See Wiseman's account of major rental sources of his films in Ira Halberstadt, "An Interview with Fred Wiseman" in Nonfiction Film Theory and Criticism, ed. Richard Meran Barsam (New York: Dutton, 1976), p. 308. Wiseman's audience is discussed in Chapter 1.

⁶ Bill Nichols, "Fred Wiseman's Documentaries: Theory and Structure", Film Quarterly, 31, No. 3 (Spring 1978).

Chapter 1

History and Genre

The dominant mode of appropriation of direct cinema (and Wiseman) has been within the related fields of history, or tradition, and genre. In this chapter, common methods of placing direct cinema historically and generically will be critically assessed and alternatives posed. The specificity of these questions for a placing of Wiseman will then be raised.

A

Histories of direct cinema (concentrating on this while mindful of the wider question of documentary) are usually written within the problematics of teleological, linear, historiography. Indeed, most historical investigation collapses into the delineation of a "tradition" of direct cinema emerging ineluctably from the wider field of cinema history. Such accounts are similar to traditional formulations of genre in that both posit a series of "characteristics" (this often slides into essentialist notions: "necessary", "inherent" properties) of direct cinema which have been prophetically envisioned; aspired to; gradually acquired, along with failures, indirections, false starts, spectacular successes; matured, refined, extended. The reductio of such teleology is when direct cinema is posed as having consigned all other filmic practices to a "prehistory".¹

Histories of documentary can appear merely as a concatenated chronicle of developments.² Or, there is the repeated posing of the history/tradition of direct cinema as an oscillation between a fundamental dualism. It may be Dziga Vertov and Robert Flaherty (Vertov's specifically cinematic structuration over against Flaherty's effacement of camera presence):

Pour les ancêtres du cinéma direct, l'antinomie est clairement perceptible dans les deux Weltanschauungen de Vertov et de Flaherty. . . . Dziga Vertov déclenchait la caméra et attendait qu'il se passe quelque chose, Flaherty la déclenchait et attendait que se passe la chose qu'il attendait.³

Inserted into this foundational antinomy is then a series of synthetic moments which are posed as exemplary direct cinema, as "moments effervescent de cette aventure".⁴

Jean Rouch . . . a défini à plusieurs reprises son propos qui est de parvenir à une synthèse de ces deux tendances à travers toute une série d'ajustements.⁵

Any question of history here is displaced by a series of teleological recordings within an idealist dialectical movement.

Or history⁶ can be posed in terms of a number of precursors, founding, again, "two schools" of cinema verite -- the "French school" and the "American school". This then leads to the formulation of the

history of direct cinema following both Rouch and Leacock as "Variations on a Theme."⁶

- Reductio ad absurdum, the tradition can find its ultimate authorisation in the Lumière side of the Lumière-Méliès dualism:

From its very inception the cinema can be seen as divided into two main categories which remain essentially the same even today: the realistic (or documentary) film as represented by Lumière, and the fiction film as represented by Méliès.⁷

It can be mythologised effusively as both a return to primal modes of cinema -- "we are now almost back with Lumière again"⁸ -- and a transcendence of historical formation altogether -- "It [direct cinema] implies a new perception of reality, starting from which we shall have to reconstruct the entire cinema and invent a new dramaturgy. Perhaps what we have now been living through is merely the cinema's prehistory."⁹ All this is usually in terms of the construction of "un mouvement artistique cohérent"¹⁰ out of the materials.

Even in a substantial contribution such as Mamber's Cinema Verite in America the question of direct cinema's parameters as a genre is posed in idealist, ahistorical terms. At the outset, he states as his project envisioning "a certain ideal for this kind of filming": A model is proposed -- a certain type and use of cinematic technology, although "the essential element in cinema verite is the act of filming

real people in uncontrolled situations"; integration of the filmmaking process into "continuous steps in a single effort and not discretely assignable tasks"; stripping away "accumulated conventions of traditional cinema in the hope of rediscovering a reality that eludes other forms of filmmaking and reporting"¹² -- which then is inscribed into his investigations as a series of norms to which actual practices approximate to a greater or lesser degree. There is moreover an implicit auteurism in his criticism of Titicut Follies, for instance, as a film which is not characteristically "Wiseman" by a teleological reading of this early film through the later, normatively more accomplished, more typically cine-verite films.¹³

It should be emphasised that linear, teleological readings or constructions of history and tradition are quite congruous with idealist genre formulations. Their imbrication can be seen in Derrida's "definition" of teleology as "neutralizing duration and action [historical process] in favor of an illusion of simultaneity and form [genre]."¹⁴

Examination of the relationship of history and direct cinema (and particularly Wiseman) would necessitate a multiple articulation; as Nash and Neale put it, into "history of cinema", "cinema in history", and "history in cinema".¹⁵ The first two articulations are discussed in Sections A and B of this chapter, the third in Sections C and D.

Rather than a teleological diachrony or a structuralist synchrony,

the question of the history and specificity of direct cinema can be posed in the related terms of the "institution" of cinema¹⁶ and of discursive formations.¹⁷ Ellis distinguishes three major forms of institutionalised organisation of the cinema in its history -- the artisanal mode, the industrial form, and the "current form" of centralisation of power in distribution, diversification of production, increasingly diversified and specialised markets, etc.¹⁸ Clearly, direct cinema is an instance of the artisanal mode ("independance"; integration of relations of production by disputing hierarchised divisions of labour; non-theatrical distribution), yet it is particularly the case with Wiseman that this mode is inserted into the "current form" -- Wiseman's films are screened on PBS television and to specialised non-theatrical audiences. Direct cinema, and particularly Wiseman's work, thus comes to be often posed in relation to, for instance, television news and documentary.¹⁹ This imbrication of modes suggests a complex series of intertextuality:

la révolution du direct [est] opération diffuse,
renversement subtil, changement insidieux ...
ses premières manifestations ne font pas caduques
les modalités antérieures du cinéma - et même elles
passent tout à fait inaperçues, sinon de quelques
spécialistes: cinéastes, critiques, utilisateurs
privilegiés (télévision, sociologues, police).²⁰

Indeed, it is in relation to dominant cinematic and télévisual forms that direct cinema constructs itself. It is a refusal of certain

types of filmmaking (reconstructions, controlled pro-filmic events, direct address), a rejection of stereotypical structures and modes,²¹ an affirmation of certain "potentials" of cinema in the face of the diminution of such potential. This complex placing generates heterogeneity within direct cinema,²² dispersing any unilinear accounting of its tradition, and aligns it in shifting patterns of address and affinity with "neighboring" discourses of photojournalism, television news and documentary, ethnomethodology, ethnographic film, avant-garde film.²³

B

In his critical observations on formulations of genre, Alf Louvre argues that these usually are either technical and formal or extra-technical and extra-formal. Common to both, he says, is "the fixed nature of the relations posited between imaginative form and social determination".²⁴ These remarks suggest something of the problematic of the use of genre as a theoretical and methodological category -- that there are competing and contradictory accounts of genre but that these generally cohere in a more generalised project to fix the genre as object or phenomenon. Thus, with regard to direct cinema, there may be emphasis on the metaphysical claims of vérité, of parole vécu, of a neo-Bazinian respect for the complexity and ambiguity of the world-to-be-filmed; the "extra-technical, extra-formal". Or there may be emphasis on the technical, an emphasis carried in the preference for

the appellation "direct" over "vérité", in accounts of the technological developments in camera apparatus, sound recording and the synchronisation of the two, conceived in terms of making the whole enterprise possible. These two types of accounts usually complement each other in virtually all histories and discussions of direct cinema as a genre.

Genre can still be useful as a category to advance discussion of direct cinema, however. This is not by displacing anecdotal or teleological historical accounts -- the diachronic -- with exemplary formal genre descriptions -- the synchronic, but by interrogating further the founding notions of the historical and the generic as they both elucidate and mask determinations of direct cinema, advancing the account through deconstruction of criteria used to establish and demarcate the genre.

Thus Comolli, after attempting to account for the complex dualities operating in the relation of the real and the fictional in direct cinema, gives a working definition of the "genre":

On arrive par là à cette définition du cinéma direct, qu'il y a un rapport de proportion entre la manipulation du document (de l'événement filmé) et sa signification (sa lecture): celle-ci gagnant en richesse, cohérence et force de conviction à mesure que l'impression de réalité produite par le document est contrariée, faussée, par celle-là: tirée vers l'exemplarité de la fiction ou la généralité de la fable. Ce sont là évidences, sans doute, mais oubliées même et précisément des « théoriciens » actuels du cinéma direct, dans la mesure où longtemps enfouies au fin fond de l'histoire du cinéma.²⁵

This is a definition of process, in process, placing stress

on a certain dynamic traversing the field of direct cinema and disputing static notions of norms, ideals, boundaries. In tracing influences of direct on other forms of cinema, Comolli argues that it is not a question of debating the faithfulness or distortion of a replication of reality (the repetitive circularity of which is a dominating preoccupation of much of the literature on direct cinema) as the fundamental work of the direct cinema text, but examining the effects produced, effects which are produced out of the relationships of discourses which traverse the text.²⁶ The type of specificity which traditional genre accounts would confer on direct cinema would then be displaced.

This work of process is supported by investigations of convention and expectation which introduce into genre the question of audience and the text's inscription of audience or presentation of itself. Jonathan Culler's "structuralist poetics" gives the category of expectation and convention a theoretical and methodological centrality -- in a critical allusion to the classical account of genre, Frye's Anatomy of Criticism, Culler argues:

if a theory of genre is to be more than a taxonomy it must attempt to explain what features are constitutive of functional categories which have governed the reading and writing of literature.²⁷

However, again something of the difficulty of a purely applicatory,

"literary critical", thrust is seen in Culler's simple utilisation of the ensemble recuperation/naturalisation/motivation/vraisemblabilisation without critical assessment of the way these processes of "making sense" are also processes of fixing the text through the sliding of expectation into critical norm. "Recuperation" carries this connotation most strongly. Expectation is not to be reduced to a universalist move toward naturalisation, but may be posed as a shifting, uneven, historical construction and process of construction. As an example of this, narrativisation (a notion taken up in Chapter 2) can be posed as a category of expectation, but this is simultaneously to pose it as a category of suture, of binding, of closure. Heath interposes a necessary critical note:

The realisation of cinema as discourse is the production at every moment through the film of a subject-address, the specification of the play of incompleteness-completion... meaning is not just constructed 'in' the particular film, meanings circulate between social formation, spectator and film; a film is a series of acts of meaning, the spectator is there in a multiplicity of times.²⁸

The address of spectator/audience in film can be seen as an operation of preconstruction, construction, and passage.

Preconstruction, which involves "the ready-made positions of meaning that a film may adopt",²⁹ has as its major articulation genre expectations. For Wiseman and direct cinema, this involves the self-imposed ascetisms of no narrator, no exposition, minimal crew, the overriding

artisanal ethos; also the trading on "subject matter already in the public consciousness"³⁰ and, further, the films of Wiseman seen as projection devices, "Rorschach tests".³¹ Construction, the implications of which for Wiseman are taken up in Chapters 2 and 4, is the movement towards totalising or cohering of the variety of subject-addresses throughout the film into a unity. Passage marks the "performance" of the film, its diachronic articulations, which is discussed in Chapters 2 and 4 also.

Further stress on the dynamic and interactive in accounts which displace traditional genre readings is provided by arguments concerning modes of address and spectator positions in direct cinema. On the one hand, there must be greater specification of direct cinema insofar as theoretical models and critique of mainstream narrative cinema do not necessarily provide immediately appropriate methods of apprehending this specific film practice. For instance, the problematic of realism must be approached afresh, despite the thoroughgoing attention it has received in its inscriptions in narrative cinema (Chapter 3). Equally, however, there must be a questioning of such specificity, especially as it is manifested in "a movement away from texts and spectator-text relationships back towards the conditions of film production, a concern which is voiced in a degree of technological determinism, so that the technical features of documentary filmmaking are . . . elevated to the status of defining features".³²

The question of mode of address and spectator positioning can elucidate these various, and, within the terms of journalistic reviews and atheoretical accounts of direct cinema, endlessly replayed dualisms of subjectivity/objectivity, auteurist "vision"/technological determinism and so on. Bill Nichols raised these questions with regard to "the expository genre"³³ -- direct address documentary (which is not to be confused with indirect address documentary, or direct cinema). Annette Kuhn, noting the limitations of applicability of this generic specification for cinema verite, suggests that the latter can be generically marked as observational.³⁴ Kuhn distinguishes three "eyes" or looks at work in the observational genre and examines the diacritics of their relationship. Observationism is definitionally based on the hegemony of the visible: the "non-fictional", "real" world as mediated through the observational gaze of the individual direct cinema practitioner. This is the first position of the look. The "camera eye", within the terms of a minimalist, effaced, technology, comes to be situated as nothing more than an extension of the first look. The third place of looking is that of the viewer:

These are observational films: certainly in the sense that the observation process is inscribed in their shooting, but more importantly - especially with regard to differentiating them from other forms of documentary - in terms of the particular way in which they place the spectator or observer. It is this which constitutes the definition of observational film as a type of documentary: the space of such a film practice is marked out by a particular form of spectator-text relationship which holds the spectator

in the same position of observer as the camera operator and the camera.³⁵

(Further consideration of address and position is found in Chapter 4).

One can also start from within the self-understanding of direct cinema and work towards a deconstruction of the terms it sets itself. The predominant terms of direct cinema's self-understanding are variously its status as independent cinema, its non-narrative, non-fictional structures, the determinant centrality afforded the technical means of achieving "direct" footage, its status as renewed realism. To these can be added the formal or structuralist category of semantic constraint or binarism, which, in the case of Wiseman, could be posed as production of meaning across the binary poles individual-institution.³⁶ Such deconstruction is a major project of this thesis -- chapters which follow take up each of these marks of genre critically. At this point, the instance of "independence" is examined.

C

The notion of an independent film practice is usually meant to imply nothing more than a certain distance from highly industrialised, monopolised, sources of film funding and production. It seldom carries with it an interrogation of meaning production and of any presumed

process of independence from dominant semioses. Wiseman has demonstrated a concern for both, and, insofar as he has proceeded in both directions, his "independence" can be seen as one of the most strategically formative in recent filmmaking. (Further aspects of "independence" from dominant forms of meaning production are taken up in Chapter 2.)

Wiseman, practically from the beginning of his filmmaking, has been able to produce and promote his work with a high degree of independence. His company, Zipporah Films, is the sole owner of the films and handles most distribution and promotion.³⁷ The contracts (since 1969) with the New York PBS Station WNET (which also include screenings on most PBS stations in the United States), to produce films at roughly one-year intervals, are extremely flexible.³⁸ He thus has sole editing authority, control over choice of topic, and location; his company has control over distribution, promotion and copyright of films (no sales of film prints are permitted, only long-term leases) and the contract with WNET affords maximum freedom. This situation can be profitably compared to the "independent" status of several other documentarists -- Vertov, Grierson and associates, Leacock, Pennebaker and Maysles in Time-Life and Drew Associates, or cine-verite operating under the auspices of the Canadian NFB.³⁹ It is clear that in almost all cases, major documentary, and, as a sub-category, direct cinema production has been performed under much greater degrees of

collectivity, sponsorship, coercion, explicit propagandising, or accountability than is the case with Wiseman.

He has explicitly distanced himself from both dominant fiction film production ("I was fed up with Hollywood fantasies")⁴⁰ and from other varieties of direct cinema ("I want to get away from what I considered to be the typical documentary where you follow one charming person around or one Hollywood star around")⁴¹ and declares his films to be "totally subjective" and to be made with only himself as an imagined audience.⁴² Crucially, these several factors in combination afford Wiseman, at one level, a nearly unparalleled degree of independence.

However, this assumed independence must be viewed critically from a number of positions. There is, despite a sort of gestural romanticism of the "artist", a clearly marked potential and realised audience:

Wiseman: Somebody has to think through what the market is It's a question of the strategy and tactics of reaching the people who might be interested in the films.

Halberstadt: What kind of market are you renting to?

Wiseman: High schools, colleges, and libraries The films are used in film societies, in classes interested in the subject matter, in courses on American institutions, and by people who have a special interest in the subject matter, like professional schools that are concerned with the various subjects of the films. They're also used by people who are just interested in the issues dealt with in the films and by some film schools teaching documentary technique.⁴³

The predominantly educational and sociological concerns covered above would be complemented by the context within which the films are screened on television: The Public Broadcasting Service.

There is arguably a high degree of concordance between the films' structures and import and their mode of reception. This can be assessed with regard to commitments to openness, ambiguity, multi-perspectivism in the films' production and reception. The films' modes of address (increasingly so as Wiseman's oeuvre has developed) and the institutional locales in which the films are received have a certain congruence at at least their formal ideological position, that of liberalism, information process, educating. There is a discernable gap between highly charged sequences of oppression, despair, authoritarianism in the films (largely, significantly, in those films which deal with lower class, marginal, or destitute groups -- Titicut Follies, Hospital, Law and Order, Juvenile Court, Welfare -- rather than those dealing with middle class and special service areas -- Primate, Canal Zone, Sinai Field Mission, Meat, Essene) and the assumed subtlety, ambiguity, sophistication, even-handedness, "advanced sensibility"⁴⁴ of the overall analysis of the institutional locales in which such states are precipitated. There is thus a liberalist evaluation of class positioning of which Bill Nichols speaks:

Placement of the encounters between institutions and clients in these terms [those of class difference], however, is not attempted by Wiseman even though

the encounters themselves cannot be fully understood without reference to class and class struggle.

Politically, Wiseman's choice of an "ensemble of social relations" is extremely narrow and fails to examine the larger ensemble circumscribing the boundary between institutions and the public or the characteristics of class struggle found at that boundary itself.⁴⁵

An important contradiction arises here in that Wiseman's "independence", demonstrated in the films' strategies which challenge assumed readings of documentary and television programming (for instance, the length of the films, their refusal to use direct narration, their lack of colour, etc.) can be neutralised through the films' invocation of notions of observation and "information-gathering" rather than "point-proving".⁴⁶ This would suggest why Nichols can place Wiseman "in association with the experimental film-making tradition"⁴⁷ and yet for the films to be received on television (albeit public service television) and within highly formalised educational locales without crises of understanding.

On the one hand, the audience is addressed as voyeur or witness to "behind the scenes" in situations which middle class audiences would not normally witness, and this address potentially generates positions of knowledge, although held within the problematic of the "voyage of discovery" or the journalistic exposé with a certain shock value:

In each of Wiseman's dozen films the viewer went through much else along the way, each time by exposure to some institution, important, but yet not immediately experienced by many of us. ⁴⁸

But the audience is also addressed as equal, where Wiseman refuses to pander to the audience, making it work at generation of meaning so that the audience can perhaps go out and use this information indirectly, circuitously, for social change. But what is the structure of address and articulation of such "information"?; that institutions are very complex, ambiguous and resist any attempt to directly change their impetus!

This contradiction is an instance of a dominant problematic within mass media -- the interweave of entertainment and education. The "entertainment" of exposé, "expedition"⁴⁹ into unknown or suppressed conditions intersects with a proffering of information for educative purposes, confirming class and social position by contracting with liberal awareness and conscience. This is mediated strongly through Wiseman's films being seen virtually exclusively in middle class locales where education and information-process are the dominant formal values. Colin MacCabe speaks of a similar operation when he argues the continual reconfirmation of already-assumed class and social positions in a film like Altman's Nashville. (Altman's work, it has been suggested,⁵⁰ has many striking affinities with Wiseman). Insofar as there is a basic informational "interest" (in Habermas'

terms) in Wiseman (and not, for instance, a political "interest"), this is to return the "expedition" of the films to the appeal of and to liberal conscience or knowledge:

Insofar as this address necessarily presupposes knowledge, it is unable to offer any perspective for change. Insofar as we already know, it is evident that there is nothing we can do.⁵¹

A significant articulation of these contradictions is Meat. On the one hand, there is the "insider's" close-up shock value of long sequences, cut for strict spatial and temporal continuity (the most exhaustive use of such continuity in any of the films) accompanied by (virtually) no dialogue, of cattle and then, the process almost identically repeated, of sheep butchering. Wiseman's mise-en-scène (it is almost appropriate to use this term here in the context of the film's move towards purely visual plasticity) lingers over and arrestingly frames the visual detail.

On the other hand, there is a consistent refusal to place this "shock value" in any context but the one it sets for itself; such refusal thus becomes a very explicit example of the posing of the institution as a fait accompli. Wiseman's self-deprecating irony is symptomatic, when questioned on the posing of any possibilities of critique in the film: "I ate steak every night I was up there, usually something I met earlier in the day."⁵²

D

As a way of focussing these discussions of history and genre again onto Wiseman, his symptomatic use of the notion of "natural history" will now be considered. Wiseman's declared intention to be carrying out a type of "natural history"⁵³ in his successive "studies" of American institutions gives epigrammatically (it is never explicated in detail in any of the numerous interviews that Wiseman has given) a sense of the films' problematic.

The notion has a long and complex genealogy. One main strand of this genealogy was its use as a term for that type of investigation of social and natural phenomena in terms of a fascination with hitherto unknown species, practices, places -- a report of "voyages of discovery" in uncharted lands and peoples.⁵⁴ It also carries a sense of the archival spirit,⁵⁵ a concern to tabulate and preserve, to chronicle events in the natural and social worlds. This spirit of "information gathering" of the exotic, unknown, or strange implies a commitment to observationism, description, reporting; as Robert Brown puts it:

The border zone between the history of natural events and the sciences of natural events is occupied by the study known as 'natural history'. There is a similar zone between the studies concerned with human history and the studies we call the 'social sciences' . . . we shall refer to the social border-land by an awkward phrase: 'the natural history of society'.

In general, the natural historian is concerned with reporting and describing rather than with theoretical explanation. He identifies, classifies, and describes

what he observes. His chief interest is in finding out what has occurred, not in providing a scientific explanation of why it has occurred. . . . the generalisations which he contributes are records of observation.

. . . we have indicated that the phrase [social description] is also used to refer to the sort of investigation which is neither fully fledged history nor theoretical science.⁵⁶

Natural history is, in Brown's estimation, coincident with historical study insofar as it is concerned with events "in themselves" and not primarily with placing or explicating these events in the context of general laws or hypotheses, not concerned necessarily even with explanation as such. On the other hand, natural history resembles social science in that it is not concerned with past events as such, and makes no categorical distinction between past and present. Nor is it concerned with charting change and postulating elaborate causal connections between events in sequentia.

Brown, finally, establishes an interesting connection between natural history and ethnographic studies: ethnography, he suggests, is a "pure" form of natural history.⁵⁷

Wiseman has symptomatically chosen a rather antiquarian notion -- "natural history" is very much a superceded form of inquiry, an (ancient) predecessor of biology, zoology, social studies, history, an idealist conflation of the natural and cultural (historical). Its primitivism, however, is carefully mapped onto the declared primitivism

of the films' "language" (in a semiotic and rhetorical sense), preparation, physical construction. Wiseman's polemical populism and primitivism bear this out:

There's a lot of mystification about movies, a special vocabulary that takes about 25 minutes to learn which people use, just like any other special vocabulary, to exclude other people... I don't believe in doing much research beyond that spending a day or two trying to get a sense of the place because, in a sense, the shooting of the film is the research. There are usually no books that have been written about the particular place where I'm making the film, and in any event, I was a very bad student in foreign languages in college and so I have a great deal of difficulty in reading in the social sciences.⁵⁸

Wiseman further alludes to connections between his formulation of natural history and the direct cinema doctrine of non-preconception⁵⁹ and to its relation to operations of typicalisation in the films.⁶⁰ There is also reinforcement, in the use of the category of "natural history", of the argument that Wiseman is pursuing an "indigenous ethnography" -- employing the methods of a detached, alien observer of what is, quite atypically for ethnography, in fact the observer's own society ("a kind of hometown anthropology, a study of "this strange tribe living in Paris"".)⁶¹ This observationism has an archival, recording, tendance (the so-called "objectivity" of Wiseman's films), but also an enthusiast's fascination for the exotic, unknown, or bizarre (the "subjective"). The films are "voyages of discovery", "expeditions"⁶² into the unknown (in this case, the "unknown" is

constructed out of a certain rhetorically self-imposed innocence/ignorance, as Wiseman's statement, above, bears out). Thus, investigation of the use of "natural history" suggests one way in which Wiseman mediates the subjective/objective dualism, the dominant terms which direct cinema self-imposes. (Another way is the use of the phrase "reality fictions": "The form of the film is totally fictional but it's based on a reality situation.")⁶³

Notes

- ¹ Marcorelles, Living Cinema, p. 155.
- ² Lewis Jacobs, ed., The Documentary Tradition: From Nanook to Woodstock (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971).
- ³ Enrico Fulchignoni, "Preface" to Gilles Marsolais, L'aventure du cinéma direct (Paris: Seghers, 1974), p. 7.
- ⁴ Marsolais, L'aventure, p. 23.
- ⁵ Fulchignoni, in L'aventure, p. 7.
- ⁶ Issari, Cinéma Vérité, p. 10.
- ⁷ G. Roy Levin, Documentary Explorations (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1971), p. 7.
- ⁸ Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, The Technique of Film Editing (New York: Communications Arts Books, 1968), p. 300.
- ⁹ Marcorelles, Living Cinema, p. 155.
- ¹⁰ Marsolais, L'aventure, p. 15.
- ¹¹ Stephen Mamber, Cinema Verite in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976).
- ¹² Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, pp. 2-4.
- ¹³ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, pp. 217-19.
- ¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, quoted in Serge Daney, "Travail, Tecture, jouissance", Cahiers du Cinéma, No. 122.
- ¹⁵ Mark Nash and Steve Neale, "Reports from the Edinburgh Festival. Film: 'History/Production/Memory'". Screen, 18, No. 4 (Winter 1977/78), p. 77.

¹⁶ See Edinburgh Magazine 2, "History/Production/Memory", and especially the essay by John Ellis, "The Institution of Cinema".

¹⁷ See, for example, Michel Pêcheux, Les Vérités de la Palice (Paris: Maspero, 1975); Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture", Screen 18, No. 4 (Winter 1977/78); and Colin McCabe, "The Discursive and the Ideological in Film", Screen 19, No. 4 (Winter 1978/79). I also thank Will Straw for making his unpublished paper, "Genre and Formation: Two Studies", Carleton University, 1978, available to me.

¹⁸ Ellis, "The Institution of Cinema", p. 62.

¹⁹ See Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, passim; William A. Bluem, Documentary in American Television (New York: Hastings House, 1965), passim; and the consensual opinions expressed by innumerable reviews of Wiseman's films regarding the special interest and challenge of such a documentary on television.

²⁰ Jean-Louis Comolli, "Le détour par le direct" (I), Cahiers du Cinéma, No. 209, p. 51.

²¹ See Dai Vaughan, "The Space Between Words", Screen 15, No. 1 (Spring 1974), p. 77.

²² Cf. the divisions between Leacock and the Maysles, or the "American" and "French" schools.

²³ Relations between direct and avant-garde cinema are pursued in my unpublished "Direct and Concrete Cinema: A Working Paper", McGill University, 1979.

²⁴ Alf Louvre, "Notes on a Theory of Genre", Working Papers in Cultural Studies No. 4 (Spring 1973), p. 122.

²⁵ Comolli, "Le détour par le direct" (I), p. 50.

²⁶ Comolli, "Le détour par le direct" (II), Cahiers du Cinéma No. 211, p. 40.

²⁷ Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 137.

²⁸ Heath, "Notes on Suture", p. 74.

²⁹ Heath, "Notes on Suture", p. 74.

³⁰ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 221.

³¹ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 16.

³² Annette Kuhn, "The Camera I", p. 72.

³³ Nichols, "Documentary Theory and Practice", p. 35.

³⁴ Kuhn, "The Camera I", p. 73.

³⁵ Kuhn, "The Camera I", p. 78.

³⁶ cf. the attempted reconstruction of the categories of author and genre in terms of "cine-structuralism". See Jim Kitses, Horizons West (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969); Will Wright, Sixguns and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Peter Wollen, Signs and Meaning in the Cinema (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972); Thomas Schatz, "The Structural Influence: New Directions in Film Genre Study", Quarterly Review of Film Studies, 2, No. 3.

³⁷ See Ira Halberstadt, "An Interview with Fred Wiseman", pp. 306-7.

³⁸ "this sort of trust, this artistic carte-blanche", David Eames, "Watching Wiseman Watch", The New York Times Magazine, October 2, 1977.

³⁹ For Grierson and associates, see Annette Kuhn, "'Independent' Filmmaking and the State in the 1930's", Edinburgh Magazine, No. 2, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁰ Beatrice Berg, review, in The New York Times, February 1, 1970.

⁴¹ "High School", interview with Alan Rosenthal, The New Documentary in Action: A Casebook in Film Making (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 69.

⁴² Rosenthal, New Documentary, pp. 70, 74.

⁴³ Halberstadt, "An Interview with Frederick Wiseman", pp. 307-8.

⁴⁴ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 231.

⁴⁵ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", pp. 19, 27-28.

⁴⁶ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 219.

⁴⁷ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 27.

⁴⁸ Peter Sourian, "Television", The Nation, October 15, 1977.

⁴⁹ Wiseman, interview in Rosenthal, New Documentary, p. 71.

⁵⁰ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 23; and Stephen Mamber, "A Tribute to Frederick Wiseman", paper, The 1976 Los Angeles International Film Exposition.

⁵¹ Colin MacCabe, "The discursive and the ideological in film - Notes on the conditions of political intervention", Screen, 19, No. 4 (Winter 1978/79), pp. 38-9.

⁵² Quoted in James Wolcott, "Blood on the Racks: Wiseman's 'Meat'", The Village Voice, November 15, 1976.

⁵³ e.g., Wiseman, in Rosenthal, New Documentary, p. 70.

⁵⁴ This was the project of the classic Natural History (in 37 volumes) of Pliny the Elder.

55 "What I am doing is natural history. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a film about what it was like in a hospital during the Civil War?" Wiseman, in "Viewpoints: Shooting the Institution", Time, December 9, 1974.

56 Robert Brown, Explanation in the Social Sciences (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 34, 39.

57 Brown, Explanation, p. 36.

58 Wiseman, "Frederick Wiseman" in Photography in the Humanities, ed. Eugenia Parry Janis and Wendy MacNeil (Danbury, N.H.: Addison House, 1977), pp. 67-8.

59 "The film is a kind of natural history. I think it is a terrible mistake to go into a subject like this with a set of views which you impose on the material. What is important is to be able to respond to the material, and not distort it to fit a preconceived view or a stereotyped notion." Wiseman, in Rosenthal, New Documentary, p. 70.

60 "You call your films 'quests for natural history'. If I find a dinosaur, I'm likely to regard it as typical of a certain species. Do you see any danger of your films being untypical of the wider areas of the subjects you're studying?" Rosenthal, question posed to Wiseman, in New Documentary, p. 70. Typicalisation is discussed further in Chapters 2 and 5.

61 Eric Barnouw, Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 254.

62 Wiseman, in Rosenthal, New Documentary, p. 71.

63 Wiseman, "Frederick Wiseman", Photography in the Humanities, p. 72.

Chapter Two

Narrative and the Poetic

A

An array of thoroughgoing critiques and deconstructions of narrative has been established in modern narratology and related areas such as film studies.¹ Certain emphases of this project need to be recalled for our purposes.

The articulation of narrative in films has received close attention, as it has been given a privileged place, both historically and ontologically, in the cinema.² It has been argued that an intimate relationship existed between narrative structure and entertainment or intelligibility, as narrative provided perhaps the most powerful hermeneutic by which the welter of signifying processes at work in film could be organised into "levels" or codes, hierarchised, and thus selectively and uncritically read through the main code, narrative. Narrative worked effectively to "close" the text, to provide it with a way of constructing an imaginary symmetry, which thus has the effect of masking the way narrative-resolved non-narrative contradiction within this imaginary symmetry.

In these and other related ways, narrative readings of texts produced denotative, teleological, symmetrical results which were

shown to have extreme ideological complicity with the texts themselves and the easily consumable universe of imaginary plentitude they offered. Such readings remained within the self-understanding of the narrative and thus allowed the narrative to structure the response. The operations of narrative, in this form, transformed possible, though contingent, ways of manipulating or acting in the world into imaginary, though seemingly immutable, ways of being in the world, through identification-projection, catharsis and entertainment.

Given this deconstruction of the epistemological, psychological, semiotic and ideological bases of narrative, it is necessary that any self-critical or theorised practice in film would perforce need to include some moment or strategy of critique of narrative. Bill Nichols' remarks on documentary's relation to narrative fiction (p.1 above) take their place in this context. Moreover, Nichols gives extensive attention to the ways "Wiseman's own style departs from classical narrative." Wiseman's style is statistically divergent -- shot articulation is generally different from mainstream Hollywood narrative. Rather than being narratively ordered, the "whole" tends toward poetry rather than narrative. Only the parts have diegetic unity, and these parts form the whole, not by diachronic projection and displacement, but as the tesserae (or facets) of a mosaic form a whole, by supplementation and synchronic interrelation. For Nichols, the mosaic structure of Wiseman's films commits them to a poetic rather than assertive or narrative, a dialectical rather than mechanical, an associational rather than expository, mode

of organisation.³ (This is very much in accord with reviewers who have commented on this aspect of his work.⁴) However, Nichols fails to provide any extensive exemplification of such claims. His most extensive piece of analysis is of a "representative segment" of Hospital, where he concentrates almost exclusively on editing and shot articulation. Notwithstanding their suggestiveness, notions like "mosaic structure", "supplementation", "poeticity" receive no analytical substantiation. This is the more significant, given that they play a central role in Nichols' text descriptions and evaluations.

Nichols advances his notion of narrative as a derivative of Propp's functionalist-organicist model, together with Will Wright's model of narrative as essentially imposing a linear-causal relationship on narrative events as they are temporally arranged. This much is explicitly proffered in Nichols' theorisation, and it leads him to advance narrative as "a langue-like" code which is extra-cinematic and like an "abstract substratum" (he uses Propp's "A living language is a concrete fact - grammar is its abstract substratum. These substrata lie at the base of a great many phenomena of life" as an epigraph to a section of the essay). Narrative is fundamentally characterological (or "actantial" in that Propp sees essential narrative functions being carried out by dramatis personae or actants) and linear-causal -- in Will Wright's sense, that narrative accounts

for a change between initial and final states by means of an intervening description of actions or occurrences that account for that change.

This account of narrative is exemplary in its remaining within the self-understanding of traditional narratology. One cannot remain within this self-understanding, however, and still announce as one's project:

Traditional film theory has assumed a certain transparency between sign (language) and referent (reality) What happens, however, if we refuse to trust the image's transparency, if we refuse to take on faith this apparent re-presentation of reality itself? What happens if we hypothesize that this transparency is an effect produced by work in and upon a system of signs and codes, that it is the site of formal and ideological strategies of considerable significance in their own right?⁵

Traditional film theory has been definitively deconstructed according to a thoroughgoing skepticism toward, among other things, the reification of the object of study -- reality as unstructured "being", discoverable or uncoverable but always there; the film image as iconic; the mechanical reproduction of reality. No transparency, unilinearity, between sign and referent is allowable. However, this imperative works equally powerfully on the work of theory itself; it is not exempt from perturbation by "ideological strategies of considerable significance in their own right."

Thus, traditional film theory (like other realist theory) has assumed a certain transparency between sign (narrative structure as causal, grammatical, abstract, langue-like) and referent (reality). What happens, however, if we refuse to trust the theorist's or the theory's transparency, if we refuse to take on faith this apparent representation of theoretical reality itself?

B

Such critical refusal to allow narratology to remain within its own self-understanding (the scientific project to define and describe the structural operations of narrative functions, actants, semantic transference, that is, to establish a semiotic metalanguage) has issued in two, complementary, responses. On the one hand, there is the theoretical critique of narratology, a concern to recall systems, formulations, methodologies of narrative theory to their contradictory bases. Thus, for instance, such critique of Metz, Propp and Wright (the narratologists who Nichols uses) would render their uncritical application (even if only for heuristic purposes) questionable.

To be sure, this is a direction for which Nichols' article provides only one among innumerable instances, and is not centrally at issue in this work, although several moments of dialectical critique of theory must be posed to enable the work on Wiseman, on documentary,

and on film theory's applicability to these fields to surmount recurring obstacles, continually reproduced dualisms, impasses, deferments.

On the other hand, the question of narrative is seen to be no longer necessarily posed in terms of analogies to the organismic (Propp), as a self-contained system of semantic transference or transcoding (Levi-Strauss, Greimas), etc. Rather than narratology continually reproducing impasses between form and content, between authorial intention and control and the formal "play" of signifiers, between descriptivist metalanguages and normative critical judgement, an account of "narrativization", to use Heath's term,⁶ would concentrate on the subject positions constructed by narrative trajectories. These trajectories are to be conceived, not as a langue-like code to be systematized in a narrative grammar (Propp), nor a langage to be taxonomized as a concatenated syntagmatique (Metz), nor as only a homogenising impetus ruptured by privileged moments of tropic transgression, formal play.⁷ Rather, their theorization would attempt to specify "narrative economy" which is a continual movement towards disruption, disequilibrium, held, however, by similarity, equilibrium.

Narrativization takes in, comprehends, the complex series of operations occurring simultaneously in "the film-work"⁸ -- camera-work; the imbrication of the different types of "look": of the camera, of the audience, of characters intra-diegetically, and of the look

from the diegesis to the audience⁹ and the subject-positions implicated in these "looks"; character, etc. -- and thus contest the effective isolation of these operations from each other in formalist, structuralist, sociologicistic, film analyses:

These terms, as they have been described here, are the terms of a constant welding together: screen and frame, ground and background, surface and depth, the whole setting of movements and transitions, the implication of space and spectator in the taking place of film as narrative. The classical economy of film is its organisation thus as organic unity and the form of that economy is narrative, the narrativization of film . . . The narration is to be held on the narrated, the enunciation on the enounced; filmic procedures are to be held as narrative instances (very much as 'cues') exhaustively, without gap or contradiction.¹⁰

C

To return, however, within the context of these questions of narrative and narrativization, to Nichols' posing of the relations between narrative and non-narrative. Nichols employs narratologies which remain within the self-understanding of narrative, remain merely explicatory and descriptive of narrative, remain wedded to an uncritical acceptance of structuralist assumptions. The resulting reification or ontologisation of narrative allows a sort of "oppositionism" to set in, which is mechanical rather than dialectical

(and thus is in tension with Nichols' argued "dialectical rather than mechanical"¹¹ nature of Wiseman's theory of institutions). The fixing of narrative (the postulating, definition and accounting for it as an object of study) in the use of such narratologies impels the fixing of its "opposite": non-narrative. Thus, in a non-dialectical mechanical fashion, Nichols divides Wiseman's films into narrative "part" and non-narrative "whole":

Eschewing narrative on the one hand and the documentary mode of direct address on the other . . . , Wiseman adopts an alternative principle of organisation with a corresponding basic shift in assumptions about the arrangement of and relationship between events. This principle is: mosaic structure of the whole but narrative structure of the parts (the sequences).¹²

Second, Nichols sets up the analysis of Wiseman's films (as "wholes") through stipulation of a series of non-narrative categories which operate oppositionally to narrative categories. Finally, there is a conflation of non-narrative categories. The hypostatisation of narrative (dividing "what is" from its "opposite", "what-is-not") has as its undialectical corollary the conflation of non-narrative elements (collapsing the difference of "what-is-not" into an oppositionist "what-is").

First: Wiseman's films as mosaic in their overall structure but narrative at the level of the sequence. Nichols argues that

Wiseman's films fall within the experimental film-making tradition in terms of their overall formal organisation and within the narrative tradition in their local organisation (the level of the sequence).¹³

However, both the nature of "whole" and its engagement with narrative trajectory, and of the "part", in its difficult and varied, partial use, as well as displacement of, realist narrative conventions, need to be examined further. The "whole's" engagement with narrative trajectory is dealt with further in section D of this chapter. Nichols himself provides a substantial questioning of any facile recuperation of Wiseman's use of editing, continuity, word and image relationships, point-of-view and other camera articulations under realist narrative conventions at the level of the sequence.¹⁴ (This aspect is also taken up in Chapter 4.) One question can be posed now, however, within the terms of Nichols' treatment: in what sense can it be the case that "only the parts have a diegetic unity"?¹⁵ Nichols' reliance, in his analysis of editing and shot articulation, on Noël Burch's and Edward Branigan's taxonomies,¹⁶ leads into a twofold problem: on the one hand, these studies (and others like them), in terms both of their aesthetic (cinema as "art", as deployment of formal patternings) and the rigour with which that aesthetic is mapped over the film text, displace the realism or effacement of convention characteristically at work in the texts to which such studies have been, and could be, applied, through a stressing of the construction of film space and time. Thus, Nichols' analysis emphasises the constructedness of diegetic unity and continuity

in the Hospital sequences:

Wiseman's formal organisation relies heavily upon the ability to mask potentially high gaps in the real time of the pro-filmic event within sequences.¹⁷

Further, he speaks of the "ultimate ambiguity" of one of the articulations of images being "characteristic of Wiseman's films and of the imaginary continuity of diegesis generally", and of another articulation lacking "the guarantees found in narrative film".¹⁸

On the other hand, such use of these formal taxonomies leads to a containment of the analysis of constructedness as tropic, as localised devices, because these taxonomies (as the appellation implies) are essentially descriptive tools which give no account of the "whole" text as a construction, a series of imbricated and conflicting discourses, and thus bind the application of themselves into analysis at the localised level of the sequence, not the "whole":

That reality, the match of film and world, is a matter of representation, and representation is in turn a matter of discourse, of the construction of images, the definition of the 'views', their construction. It is the discursive operations that decide the work of a film and ultimately determine the scope of the analogical incidence of the images; in this sense at least, film is a series of languages, a history of codes.¹⁹

These remarks suggest a necessity for a better formulation of of the relation of "whole" to "part" in Wiseman's films. As has been

said, Nichols himself provides substantial critique of notions of diegetic unity at the level of the sequence. Such variations and dispersals of classical narrative economy in Wiseman as cutting on word logic, jump cuts, indefinite elisions, few establishing shots, etc., are yet contained in the larger commitment to the macro-space of one locale, one institution, filming "on location" at "Fort Knox" or "Metropolitan Hospital" (as the credits put it), which is proffered as the "subjective" record of an individualised inquiry. These discourses of containment, the implications of which are argued at greater length in Chapters 4 and 5, suggest the far wider scope of the operations of diegetic unity than merely that of the sequence.

Second: Nichols' stipulative use of a series of "non-narrative" categories which operate oppositionally to those of narrative. Nichols employs excerpts from the narratologies of Propp, Wright and Metz in an essentially non-critical, functionalist manner, using them to generate certain systematic descriptions of aspects of Wiseman's work, leading to two basic conclusions: that the kinds of agents the institutional code requires are very limited in number (from Propp and Wright) and that sequences in Wiseman tend to be of only two types: "scenes" and "descriptive syntagma" (from Metz).²¹ This is descriptivist. Its non-dialectical inverse, evaluative judgement, operates in the oppositionist use of "non-narrative" categories which Nichols uses to compare Wiseman, favourably, with the "experimental film-making tradition", with Godard, Snow and Sharits;²² to argue that the poetic,

metaphoric effect in Wiseman achieves "a displacement of the comfortable on-looker positioning of the spectator that dominates classical narrative",²³ and that Wiseman's films issue:

the political challenge to gauge the significance of his focus upon constraints more than linear causality and the relationship of this focus to historical materialism. . . . His films also issue a challenge to examine some of the overly generalised and at least potentially elitist critiques of narrativity and realism that have recently emerged, especially in France and Britain.²⁴

These are all positive evaluations of the "worth" of Wiseman's films in Nichols' estimation. However, while narrative categories are used in descriptive, and non-narrative categories in prescriptive, senses, both are used relatively uncritically, oppositionally.

Thus, the films are said to be "associational rather than expository, or poetic rather than assertive or narrative", and "suggestive",²⁵ the textual system is "metaphoric (poetic) more than metonymic (narrative or expository) and supplemental or associative rather than strictly additive".²⁶ They are supplemental in two senses: the imbrication of facets into an overall mosaic structure is achieved without narrative closure -- the facets are relatively autonomous, exhibiting themselves as such and containing isomorphically the "overall design" of the mosaic.²⁷ The second sense is that of excess, of "surplus of meaning",²⁸ operating in descriptive sequences in Wiseman.

The implications of these categories are not pursued critically -- they merely operate as positive evaluations. I have argued elsewhere²⁹ the "problematic" of the poetic: the use of such a category as a field of liberation from narrative and semantic constraints, of "poetic excess" as an operation concealing another, equally powerful and developed, set of constraints.

This is the "problematic" of the poetic posed in general terms; specifically important to Nichols and Wiseman, however, are the ideological work of closure and containment and the manner in which non-narrative categories (in part because they are theorised oppositionally, non-dialectically) are conflated.

Third: the conflation of non-narrative categories. The most significant conflation is that of "mosaic structure" and "institutional code". Nichols thus conflates the filmic (mosaic, poetic) and the pro-filmic (the institutions filmed) levels in a way that he actually warns against in another context. (Discussing differences between social actors and the absence of "actors" in Wiseman, Nichols argues:

The process of identification between viewer and hero/actor/star that occur in most narrative films are side-stepped as well as the ideological consequences of fusing these three distinct realms into one seemingly coherent image... This reasserts a dialectical relationship between cinematic structure and social reality by refusing to subsume or conflate the two through imaginary unities like star.)³⁰

Contrary to this warning, there is a sliding from notions of

the filmic whole as non-narrative to institutional codes as non-narrative, and, at the level of the sequence, a mapping of narratological models of function, hero and complement onto institutional transactions in an uncritical way. Thus,

Wiseman's sequences are like narrative sequences diegetically, and thus can be roughly catalogued in Metz's taxonomy; but they are quite unlike narrative sequences in the nature and arrangement of the functions. "Since Wiseman's functions are in fact governed by social interactions in institutions, they differ from Propp's more "mythological" narrative functions in several ways.

If we say that agents carry out functions . . . and are individuated as characters, then these principles apply to Wiseman's films as well as to narratives. But in Wiseman's films the agents carry out functions determined by the institutional structure in which they are embedded rather than by a narrative structure. The institution imposes certain functions and excludes others; it acts like a code or langue similar to a narrative code. Like a narrative code it is extra-cinematic but capable of being recruited into a cinematic structure.³¹

Additionally, the institutional code governs the interaction of numerous heroes and complements inasmuch as it governs the relationships between existing social groups or classes.³²

A number of consequences follow from this conflation. Nichols accedes to the reality-in-itself of the institutions which Wiseman features, a reality anterior to Wiseman's interventions and presentations, anterior to the "pro-filmic event". (Thus, he discusses various theorists of institutions and institutional transaction -- Bateson, Durkheim, Marx, Althusser, Goffman, Potter, Berger, Brecher and

and Costillo). However, the reality-in-themselves of individuals is in principle denied -- Marx's "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" is used as an epigram heading a section dealing with the "dialectic of individual and institution".³³

Further, characteristics of mosaic structure and institutions are equated. Both are said to be associative, acting under goal-seeking and constraints more than determinism and causality; multi-causal and synchronous rather than diachronous, operating on paradigmaticity and typicality.

Thus, institutions come to be regarded as "poetic" structures. There is here a complicity with the self-understanding of institutional reality (and that preeminent mode of giving self-understanding to institutions -- systems theory and cybernetics). Marking the structure of institutions as synchronic commits Nichols to posing the question of change and contestation as lying outside such an inscription,³⁴ as indeed it must. The slice-of-life synchrony of Wiseman's (for instance, the pull-back in Hospital, discussed below) and Nichols' appraisals suspends institutions out of a temporal or historical modality, the apprehension of which would disrupt any balanced synchronicity or isomorphism -- historicity emphasises unevenness, contingency, hegemony, contradiction, possibilities for intervention, while the structure of the films "suggests themes of timelessness, circularity, changelessness".³⁵ Wiseman and Nichols give a systemic rather than

historical account of institutions. The notion of paradigmaticity or typicality supports this. Nichols suggests that Wiseman's films as wholes are remarkably similar to Metz's definition of one type of narrative sequence, the bracket syntagma:

A series of very brief scenes representing occurrences that the film gives as typical samples of a same order of reality, without in any way chronologically locating them in relation to each other. . . . None of these little scenes is treated with the full syntagmatic breadth it might have commanded, it is taken as an element in a system of allusions.³⁶

This is a veritable taxonomy of the terms of the problematic of the poetic: non-articulation, allusion, typicality.

For instance, a "typical" instance of "systematic inversion"³⁷ occurs in the insertion of typicality into a film discourse like Wiseman's which trades on the contingency of the pro-filmic. Another version of the (masked) relations between generality and particularity (which are discussed in Chapter 5) is here at work; relations of formal isomorphism which occult the articulation of the particular and the general. Jean-Louis Comolli posits that this problem is at the heart of any "definition" of direct cinema. The extremes of contingency, "l'hyper-objectivité",

l'exemplarité des personnages, des langages, des comportements rejoint celle des héros de fables, mythes et paraboles. La fiction triomphe du réel, ou plutôt elle lui confère sa véritable dimension

qui est de renvoyer aux archétypes, de solliciter constamment la morale des fables: c'est naturellement que s'opère le passage du particulier au général.

Le rôle de la manipulation dans le cinéma direct est donc de contrôler de tels glissements et basculements: c'est-à-dire de les provoquer en en mesurant l'ampleur et l'effet.³⁸

It is precisely the terms of "de contrôler" which are at issue here. Typicality holds and controls the work of and on filmic discourse to the "nature of things", rendering all critical intervention questionable under an ontologised vécu, réel, événement brut.

Another instance within Nichols' account of institutions and within the litany of the poetic, is that of supplementation. The mosaic structure (similarly, the institutional code) is not subject to completion "in any absolute sense" -- "Wiseman's films lack narrative closure itself".³⁹ There will always be an excess, a surplus, an allusiveness due to non-articulation, typicalisation:

In Wiseman's films such descriptive sequences are not full-blown: they are more suggestive than wholly assertive. Through their very brevity they acquire a surplus of meaning that takes off from the specificity of each shot and evokes the general milieu (the institution) from which they are taken.⁴⁰

This is Nichols' exploitation of "poetic potential", or Metz's "system of allusions", and it threatens closure at another, non-

narrative level: that of the continual affirmation of the essential ambiguity or complexity of institutions and poetic cinematic structures.

On the second, poetic cinematic structures, David MacDougall writes:

"It is possible that the sense of completeness created by a film also lies in the richness of ambiguity of the photographic images."⁴¹

Regarding institutions, these formulations threaten a complicity with Wiseman's own disarming liberalism on institutions -- that their ambiguity, or surplus, defies analysis and intervention.

.D

There are powerful trajectories of binding, of closure, operating across film discourses in Wiseman which can be seen in terms of narrativisation. (Other aspects of this "binding" are taken up in Chapter 4.)

Nichols notes that indirect address documentary (of which cinema verite is the most rigorous example, and Frederick Wiseman the most significant practitioner)⁴² "seems to invite risks of incomprehensibility"⁴³ due to its refusal of the classical marks of coherence provided by narrator, exposition, and the hierarchised levels of diegesis consequent on narration and exposition. Displacing the dispositio (the binding and hierarchising articulations achieved through exposition), in Wiseman, are the balance and comprehensiveness of sequence interrelationships and temporal and narrative trajectories,

which operate equally powerfully as binding, cohering agents. Reviewers can remark that "in its way, a Wiseman film is as stylized as a classical ballet",⁴⁴ that they can offer "the mathematical elegance of a neatly executed proof",⁴⁵ or "a remarkable under-structure which almost coerces the viewer into understanding".⁴⁶ (As Wiseman's oeuvre grows, there is also coherence through hypostatization of self-reference, an elaborate intertextuality:

It's a film [Canal Zone] that recapitulates all the other films I've done because I touch on every subject matter, and in a sense it is suggesting that if you want to know more about the police, see Law and Order. If you want to know more about hospitals, see Hospital. If you want to know more about the army, see Basic Training⁴⁷)

Balance: Wiseman's films have been "praised uniformly for their balance".⁴⁸ A "point" established at one moment will be qualified, subverted, questioned, by another. This "painstakingly balanced"⁴⁹ portrait of institutions can be seen as a challenge to "any certainties the viewer entertains during the course of the film".⁵⁰ Wiseman, although agreeing that the later films achieve this balance more thoroughly than, say, Titicut Follies or High School, nevertheless maintains that even in those films there is good evidence qualifying "imbalance".⁵¹ A white delivers a long (more than 15 minutes while the camera is motionless except for small pans) vengeful tirade to a listening black in Welfare, but it is the white, an applicant for welfare, who is powerless in relation to the black, who is a guard. This guard and fellow black guards throw the white out of

the welfare office. Or a preacher in Canal Zone inveighs against "Women's Lib" as a threat to marriage and family life, the relevance of which for a young family, shot in a reposeful, beatific, pose, can only be questioned. There are innumerable instances of such "balance" throughout the films.

Comprehensiveness: There is the recurring motif of the "comprehensive overview" of interrelating aspects of the institution. Thus, the "whole" school in High School is gestured toward: juniors/seniors, girls/boys, curricular/extra-curricular, teachers/students/parents/coaches, educational/social/recreational, and athletic, the range of classes -- languages, literature, science, anthropology, vocational, domestic. A more ambitious comprehension of an entire sub-culture is attempted in Canal Zone -- class, race, culture, age, sex, religion, vocation, recreation, law, education, family. The signification of symmetry through comprehensive overviews contributes strongly to the binding, the unity, of the "whole" text.

Temporal and narrative trajectories: Several films roughly follow a pattern from admission to departure. In Titicut Follies, there are opening shots of dressing in the institutional "uniform" (which is, for several inmates, no clothing at all); the only departure posited is at death. High School's opening is an entry into the school through neighbouring streets; the film "progresses" through juniors to seniors, to discussions of graduation, to those who have left the institution. Juvenile Court begins with a rapid succession of admission procedures,

contains several deliberations on whether cases at hand can be considered within the jurisdiction of a juvenile court, and culminates in a decided case which places a youth in a detention centre.

Some of Wiseman's films have quite explicit, conventional narrative structures -- Basic Training is the clearest example. Fresh recruits alight from buses, are put through a series of introductions and initiations into army life, gradually become more adept in their activities (signified through the use of a squad's marching practice as the film's coda -- the squad becomes increasingly disciplined as the film progresses), and finally "pass out" of "basic training" at a graduation parade.

Meat also has an explicit narrative trajectory. It is divided into a 16 minute "introduction" followed by two film "days" of roughly equal length (53 and 51 minutes). (Several of the films are edited into these "film days".) There is a morning and evening marking the parameters of the first film day, and an evening shot at the end of the film. The first film day follows virtually continuously (that is, it is edited for strict continuity) the process of butchering cattle, the second film day duplicates the process for sheep. A lunch break occurs roughly in the middle of the process in film day one, is preceeded by cleaning of machinery and uniforms, and is doubly marked by both executives and workers eating at the "same time". It should be emphasised again that Meat carries the most sustained

sets of continuity editing in any of Wiseman's films, an operation which is a classical work of narrativisation in Heath's sense, and which, mapped at another level onto the construction of "film days", doubles the narrative trajectory of the film.

Canal Zone has a similar, though more dispersed trajectory. There is an interlocking spatial and temporal trajectory: spatially, the film structures the operations of control and power at several interreactive levels -- levels of political control (Washington, devolution of power, the "non-political" governor and governing body -- the Panama Canal Company), legal control, law enforcement and detention, psychiatric control and counselling, the military, church, schools, fashion. These levels interlock (but in ways which don't easily suggest the metaphor of concentricity, or symmetry)⁵² -- a radio disc jockey is a soldier; tennis players stop and stand to attention at the playing of taps, the economic livelihood of the American Canal Zone Company is intimately linked with the politics of the host country and the home country -- Vietnam was good for canal traffic. Much of the interlocking (or overdetermination) of institutions is mediated through the various Bicentennial celebrations which take place (the film was shot in 1976) -- so many points of condensation of complex sub-cultural interstructures.

Temporally, there is a "progression" through the long opening "birth" sequence down the canal, to children, marriage, divorce, to the final "death" sequence at a Memorial Day ceremony at a cemetery.

There are numerous instances of breakdown, collapse, retirement, exhaustion, yet held within the parameters of the "tropic idyll", of a certain slowness or calmness (in terms both of editing and in this film's relation to others of Wiseman). However, this too is held within the opening discourse of the governor and the final cemetery scenes, both of which mark signs of irreversible decline.

"Book-end" symmetries like this can operate rather mechanically, as the virtually identical shots which begin and conclude Juvenile Court, or, as in Titicut Follies" use of the revue, toward a certain problematisation of symmetry.⁵³

Another mode of binding is exemplified by the concluding shot of Hospital. The shot articulation from penultimate to final shots (Ellsworth, shots 226-227)⁵⁴ comes over the singing in the hospital church service as it slowly fades out to the sound of rushing cars on the freeway from which the final shot, a zoom out from a close-up of the exterior of the hospital to an extreme long shot, is taken. This shot signifies similarly to the conventional long shot at the end of a western, for instance. However, in Hospital, rather than it marking the gesture of an imagined happy future, it marks the synchronic stability and comprehensiveness of the just-completed film text; the inverse of the establishing shot; the visualised synchrony of the "whole" institution -- here is the "whole" institution of which the film has shown "parts".

Finally, a generalisation can be made about trajectory, binding, narrativization in several of the films. There is a generally applicable "flow": establishing sequences, either outside the institution -- High School, Basic Training, Juvenile Court, Primate, Meat, Sinai Field Mission; or a marked, "definitional" aspect of the institution -- Titicut Follies, Canal Zone, Law and Order, Hospital; short descriptive sequences that introduce later protagonists, "typical" encounters; longer, central encounters, such as interviews, case histories, activities, expositions; out of certain of the central sequences usually develop "histories" of individual social actors, or more generalised institutional changes which form endings. This can lead to rare extra-institutional sequences (Titicut Follies, Meat, Primate), or the signification, or gesturing toward, the extra-institutional, or the "future" (High School, Basic Training).

Notes

¹ e.g., The Editors, Cahiers du Cinéma, "John Ford's Young Mr. Lincoln", Screen, 13, No. 3 (Autumn 1973), reprinted in Screen Reader 1, ed. John Ellis, and Movies and Methods ed. Bill Nichols; Stephen Heath, "Film and System, Terms of Analysis", Part 1, Screen, 16, No. 1 (Spring 1975) and Part 2, Screen, 16, No. 2 (Summer 1975); Charles W. Eckert, "The Anatomy of a Proletarian Film: Warner's Marked Woman", Film Quarterly, 26, No. 2.

² See Michel Cegarra, "Cinema and Semiology", Screen, 14, Nos. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 1975).

³ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", pp. 17-18. (Unless otherwise indicated, references to this article will appear as "Nichols, p. ____.")

⁴ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 216; Mamber, "One Man's Meat", The New Republic, December 4, 1976.

⁵ Nichols, p. 5.

⁶ Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space", Screen 17, No. 3 (Autumn 1975), p. 90.

⁷ See Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu", and Edward Branigan, "The Space of Equinox Flower", Screen, 17, No. 2 (Summer 1975), against which Heath directs some of his remarks in "Narrative Space", pp. 73, 104-6.

⁸ See Thierry Kuntzel, "The Film Work", Enclitic No. 3.

⁹ See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Screen

16, No. 3 (Autumn 1975), and Paul Willemen, "Voyeurism, The Look and Dwoskin", Afterimage, No. 6.

¹⁰ Heath, "Narrative Space", p. 90.

¹¹ Nichols, p. 18.

¹² Nichols, p. 18.

¹³ Nichols, p. 16.

¹⁴ Nichols, section of analysis of "a representative segment" of Hospital, pp. 22-27.

¹⁵ Nichols, p. 17.

¹⁶ Noël Burch, Theory of Film Practice (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973) (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973) and Edward Branigan, "Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot", Screen, 16, No. 3 (Autumn 1974).

¹⁷ Nichols, p. 22.

¹⁸ Nichols, pp. 24, 27.

¹⁹ Heath, "Narrative Space", pp. 73-74.

²⁰ Heath, "Narrative Space", p. 106.

²¹ Nichols, pp. 18-19.

²² Nichols, pp. 16, 27.

²³ Nichols, p. 19.

²⁴ Nichols, p. 28.

²⁵ Nichols, p. 18.

²⁶ Nichols, p. 27.

²⁷ Nichols, pp. 17, 27.

²⁸ Nichols, p. 18.

²⁹ "The 'Problematic of the Poetic' in Film Texts and Theory", Poetry and Film Conference, McGill University, March, 1979.

- 30 Nichols, p. 19.
- 31 Nichols, p. 18.
- 32 Nichols, p. 19.
- 33 Nichols, p. 21.
- 34 Nichols, p. 19, 21.
- 35 Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, p. 6.
- 36 Christian Metz, Film Language, p. 126, quoted in Nichols, p. 27.
- 37 For use of this notion, see Claire Johnston, Edinburgh Magazine, No. 2, p. 6, and, extensively, Anthony Wilden, System and Structure (London: Tavistock, 1972).
- 38 Jean-Louis Comolli, "Le détour par le direct" (I), pp. 49-50.
- 39 Nichols, p. 18.
- 40 Nichols, p. 18 (my emphasis).
- 41 David MacDougall, "Beyond Observational Cinema", in Hockings, ed., Principles of Visual Anthropology (The Hague; Mouton, 1975), p. 17 (my emphasis).
- 42 Nichols, "Documentary Theory and Practice", p. 41.
- 43 Nichols, "Documentary Theory and Practice", p. 37.
- 44 Alan Westin, "You start off with a bromide", Civil Liberties Review (Winter/Spring 1974), p. 53.
- 45 Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 226.
- 46 Ken Wlaschin, "Canal Zone", London Film Festival Programme, 1977.
- 47 Wiseman, quoted in Louise Sweet, "Canal Zone", Sight and

Sound (Winter 1977/78).

⁴⁸ Alan Westin, "You start off with a bromide", p. 54.

⁴⁹ Thomas R. Atkins, "The Films of Frederick Wiseman: American Institutions", Sight and Sound (Autumn 1974), p. 233.

⁵⁰ The Booklist, American Library Association, 72, No. 7, p. 522.

⁵¹ Alan Westin, "You start off with a bromide", p. 54.

⁵² Cf. Louise Sweet: "Wiseman edits sequences to reveal concentric circles of control", "Canal Zone".

⁵³ This is taken up in Chapter 6.

⁵⁴ Liz Ellsworth's Frederick Wiseman contains shot lists of four Wiseman films -- Titicut Follies, High School, Hospital and Primate. Where appropriate, references to these lists will be given to facilitate and confirm close readings of parts of the films.

Chapter 3

Realism

The inscription of Wiseman and of documentary in general within the generalised field of realism would seem quite uncontroversial, a donnée of attendant critical discourse. The remarks of Nichols and Kuhn with which this work began,¹ along with statements like "Wiseman is perhaps the one true realist currently working in American films"² can be taken as different instances of this situation. However, Nichols' and Kuhn's remarks suggest more than a simple equation of documentary practice and realism. On the one hand, the most thorough-going critiques of realism have been mounted with regard to mainstream "entertainment" cinema and this has either displaced the specificity of realism's imbrication with documentary or regarded it as a fait accompli -- documentary as "irredeemably implicated in . . . an ideological régime from which it can take no distance".³ However, this displacement or dismissal has permitted discourses of and around documentary to be predominantly within with its own self-understanding, within the -- marginal, specialised -- field it occupies, beyond the attention of mainstream cinema and its critics, documentary receives extraordinary homage or denunciation; often precisely on the basis of differing appraisals of its ongoing commitment to, and refurbishing of, "traditions" of realism. It is to this symptomatic unevenness of response around an indisputably central problematic for direct

cinema -- realism -- that this (brief) chapter is addressed. Arguments against a tendency toward both dismissal and marginalised valorisation, on the (shared, though oppositional) grounds of denunciation and invocation of realism will be raised.

Any facile homogenisation of an ideology, or filmic practice, of realism will not comprehend the complexity of relations across, say, narrative, documentary, independant, avant-garde. Raymond Williams, for instance, has stressed realism as "a highly variable and inherently complex term",⁴ and Christopher Williams, in a self-criticism of an earlier Screen piece, argues that realism can only be regarded as hegemonic, homogeneous, at the expense of a major reductionism.⁵ The contingent and variable inflections of realist film practices must be seen not as an endless reproduction of ideologies (of identification-catharsis, projection, mystification) but as a production, a working-upon, an inflection of, contradiction arising from such practice. "Films, then, are themselves processes rather than products",⁶ different configurations in different conjunctures.

In this vein, certain points can be made in regard to direct cinema's "realism". A distinction could be made, as Williams does,⁷ between conceptions of realism as types of codifications in process in texts or ensembles of texts, or conceptions which pose the degree of the text's relation to (uncodified) "reality". The great majority of

accounts of direct cinema's (and Wiseman's) "realism" would then be placed into the second category. This distinction could, for present purposes, correspond to Jakobson's distinction (and Willemen's use of it) between "progressive" and "conservative" realism respectively.⁸

This is not to suggest that direct cinema's self-understanding (particularly as it is manifested in filmmakers' statements and interviews) is necessarily "progressive", but to suggest that direct cinema and its precursors have inscribed themselves in various ways into realism,⁹ and that contemporary American direct cinema can be apprehended as a limit case of "purist"¹⁰ cinema, a practice of realism at its extremity, a doctrinaire commitment to the refurbishing of a jaded or neglected tradition or potential of cinema. Direct cinema might then be comprehended as an instance of realism carried to limits, wherein are revealed major constraining and masked elements of realism.¹¹

In this particular sense, a reading of direct cinema's interrelation with realism could place it as a "progressive" form, in that classic realism (in the nineteenth century novel, in bourgeois drama of the same period, in mainstream entertainment cinema) characteristically places itself as a mean between extremes, a narrative naturalisation of code and discourse, a containment¹² of disruption, difference. Direct cinema's engagement with realism is in excess in Thompson's sense that excess is an absence or insufficiency of motivation, motivation which maps itself over, naturalises, places, film events.¹³ Its doctrine of "uncontrol" of the pro-filmic leads to a tendency to ontologise the non-motivated, epiphanic, vérité, elements "captured".

The conflict of discourses this precipitates in work like Wiseman's is particularly pertinent, as Wiseman, virtually singularly in contemporary American direct cinema, attempts the ambitious task of analysis and presentation of institutional space, not the individuated space which is the common currency of both American direct cinema practitioners and mainstream cinema, and attempts it with a principled refusal of many commonly used resources such as narration. This places great pressure at the level of editing, large-scale structure, and choice of pro-filmic event to displace, on the one hand, the tendency for identification with or objectification of, individuals, and, on the other, any simplistic reading of the films based on visual impression rather than analysis of complex institutional reality.

This is another way of approaching the problematic of Wiseman's "reality fictions" -- a trading on the analogical, affective, transparency of the image; but also a scrupulous "manipulation"¹⁴ at the level of editing, shot articulation which is generally in tension with the former. A comparable case in some respects is the work of Straub/Huillet, all of whose films one writer regards as documentaries.¹⁵ Straub/Huillet inscribe certain realist modes (the long-take,¹⁶ period costume, elaborately detailed mise-en-scène, synchronous sound/image shooting and editing) into radically non-realist discursive levels through excess (the too-long take, the imperfect periodicity), gestus, painstaking intertextuality.¹⁷ Without suggesting more, there is at least a "family resemblance"¹⁸ at certain levels in these two practices.

Further, direct cinema (and, again, Wiseman in particular) is not, within the minimalist, "purist" terms of production it sets itself, easily or uniformly implicated in classical operations of realist narrative cinema of suture, continuity, the relay of binding looks, shot articulation. This "crudeness"¹⁹ in the employment of (Metz's) specifically cinematic codes poses questions, deflections, of the dominant models of such codification.

Qualifying and problematising this series of remarks (directed against "a tendency toward dismissal") are considerations which contend against valorisation of direct cinema's engagement with realism.

The distinction made by Raymond Williams between reflectionist and semiotic accounts of realism, is, of course, usually collapsed in the practice of, and critical discourses around, direct cinema. Kuhn spells out the implications of this in a dense dialectic:

In documentary films, it appears that the truth or authenticity of a representation turns precisely on an exclusion from that representation - or denial within it - of the means of its own material and semiotic production, which means that the truth or authenticity has to be taken at face value - ideology contemplating itself - without recourse to textual marks of authenticity. Nevertheless, a text may offer certain substitute evidence of its own 'truth' constituted in a set of codes which at specific conjunctures connote authenticity (black-and-white photography, unsmooth camera movements, focus-pulling, undifferentiated sound, for example) and

thus resolve any contradiction between an assertion of truth and a lack of evidence supporting that assertion by a displacement which constitutes a representation as a set of codes which in themselves signal self-evident truth.²⁰

Kuhn here shows that marks of authenticity like black-and-white photography and an unsmooth camera signify as such only within Culler's third level of vraisemblance, in terms of the conventions of the "genre" direct cinema. Given the terms of direct cinema's "purist" adherence to these conventions, however, their actual operation in film texts can be read as tending toward Culler's fourth level, where the text "explicitly cites and exposes vraisemblance of the third kind".²¹

However, direct cinema is only haphazardly treated in this way. Its engagement with realism does not need to be held within a representationalist problematic (a reflectionist view of the "content" of the image and an intentionalist view of authorial motivation held in an oppositionist dualism, the objective/subjective "debate" carried on in works on documentary) but it is, constantly.

Thus, while there is rigorous attention paid in Wiseman to the codifications, structurings, of the profilmic event,²² there is, except unevenly and within what MacCabe calls "moments" rather than "strategies" of subversion,²³ no inscription of a comparable awareness

of the codifications of the filmic.²⁴ This leads to Wiseman's work being placed within the terms of the problematic of realism argued by MacCabe:

A classic realist text may be defined as one in which there is a hierarchy among the discourses which compose the text and this hierarchy is defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth.²⁵

There is much emphasis in the Wiseman text on the presentation of several and varied partial (intradiegetic) discourses (indeed, again, this is taken to be one of the hallmarks of the films -- their "balance" and "comprehensiveness".)²⁶ The discourses which dominate these, however, those of observationism/"natural historical" research/liberalism, are not seen as discourses at all, but as the limit of discourse, the mediator of it (presenting "information" for consideration). Hierarchisation based on MacCabe's "empirical notion of truth" is clear in Wiseman's commitment to his films being a record of only what "I" saw.²⁷

Notes

¹ See above, p. 1.

² Gary Arnold, The Washington Post, quoted in Zipporah Films promotional newspaper.

³ Annette Kuhn, "The Camera I", p. 71, and see above, p. 1.

⁴ Raymond Williams, "A Lecture on Realism", Screen, 18, No. 1 (Spring 1977), p. 61.

⁵ Christopher Williams, footnote to "Politics and Production", Screen Reader No. 1, pp. 78-9.

⁶ John Ellis, "The Institution of Cinema", p. 57.

⁷ Raymond Williams, "A Lecture on Realism", p. 61. This definition can be refined further, yielding five levels of vraissement in a progression from Williams' uncodified reality to elaborate play upon realist codes:

First there is the socially given text, that which is taken as the 'real world'. Second, a general cultural text: shared knowledge which would be recognised by participants as part of culture and hence subject to correction or modification but which none the less serves as a kind of 'nature'. Third, there are the texts or conventions of a genre, a specifically literary and artificial vraissement. Fourth, come what might be called the natural attitude to the artificial, where the text explicitly cites and exposes vraissement of the third kind so as to reinforce its own authority. And finally, there is the complex vraissement of specific intertextualities

Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 140, and see pp. 140-160.

⁸ Paul Willemen, "On Realism in the Cinema", Screen Reader No. 1, p. 47.

⁹ For instance, Comolli, in his coup d'oeil of the history of direct cinema, points out that:

L'étonnant (mais logique) est qu'alors cinéma direct . . . et cinéma de montage étaient expérimentées conjointement: chez Vertov bien sûr, mais aussi chez Eisenstein

and that the two are not necessarily disjunct in modern cinema (e.g., Resnais, Godard, Straub). "Le détour par le direct" (I), p. 51.

¹⁰ Annette Kuhn, "The Camera I", p. 74.

¹¹ A method of dialectical critique practices especially by Frankfurt School theorists. See Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1973), p. 217.

¹² See Heath, "Narrative Space", p. 97.

¹³ Kristin Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess", Cine-tracts No. 2, pp. 54-55.

¹⁴ cf. Comolli's 'definition' of direct, above, p. 12.

¹⁵ Edward Bennett, "The Films of Straub are not 'Theoretical'", Afterimage No. 7, p. 9.

¹⁶ See Brian Henderson, "The Long Take" and "Towards a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style", both in Movies and Methods, ed. Bill Nichols.

¹⁷ See Nash and Neale, "Film: 'History/Production/Memory'", p. 87; Edward Bennett, "The Films of Straub are not 'Theoretical'"; and Martin Walsh, "The Frontiers of Language: Straub/Huillet's History Lessons", Afterimage No. 7.

¹⁸ See Edward Branigan's argument concerning the "family resemblance" of Fellini and Oshima, "Subjectivity under Siege - From Fellini's 8½ to Oshima's The Story of a Man Who Left His Will on Film", Screen, 19, No. 1 (Spring 1978), p. 38, and "Foreground and Background: A Reply to Paul Willemen", Screen, 19, No. 2 (Summer 1978), p. 136.

¹⁹ See Liz Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, p. 7

²⁰ Annette Kuhn, "The Camera I", p. 76.

²¹ Culler, Structuralist Poetics, p. 140.

²² Cf. "Nothing I know of in literature, including some of the best writings on organisational behaviour and total institutions, provides the microscopic and authentic detail of life in organisations better or more economically than Wiseman's films." Warren Bennis, SPSSI Newsletter, quoted in Zipporah Films, promotional newsletter. Wiseman speaks of the centrality of relations of power and authority in his films and of the gap between formal ideologies of institutions and actual practice (e.g., in Rosenthal, New Documentary, p. 71).

²³ Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses", Screen, 15, No. 2 (Summer 1974), p. 17.

²⁴ See, for a similar argument, Eileen McGarry, "Documentary, Realism and Women's Cinema", Women and Film, 2, No. 7.

- 25 MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema", p. 8.
- 26 See above, p. 51-2.
- 27 This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Positioning: Spectator and Text

A

A recurring question in this thesis has been the fundamental tension in Wiseman's films between what Nichols or Anthony Wilden would designate as the analog and the digital,¹ or, to put it in terms more congruous with the general problematics of the present work, a reflectionist realist discourse and a subjectivist expressive discourse. Another equally fundamental question is that variously approached as differences between voyeurism and inquiry, "invasion of privacy" against "the public's right to know", propaganda and bias against audience ability to come to various conclusions regarding the film material, identification against distancing, participation against observation. This veritable litany of dualisms suggests something of the unevenness, contradictoriness and yet extent of this particular problematic. What follows, then, is an attempt to further articulate some of these problems as they bear on Wiseman's work.

The strategic theoretical importance of this field of inquiry is well summarised by Paul Willemen:

Most definitions of cinematic specificity exclude from their considerations the complex interaction

of looks at play in the filmic process. On the contrary, the object-ness of the film text is emphasised in its autonomous, self-enclosed separation from the viewer - thus relegating the problem of the look to the realm of individual subjectivity. . . . Having split the cinematic operation into two distinct realms, film studies can be separated into on the one hand semiological study of the text as an autonomous object and on the other the psychology of the spectator.²

Brecht's "fundamental reproach" directed to film was that it permitted no distance to be taken by the spectator from the screen:

the film has monstrous weaknesses in detail which seem unavoidable in principle. there is the dislocation of the sound; the hearer has first to put every line of dialogue into a character's mouth. then there is the strict fixation of viewpoint; we only see what one eye, the camera, saw. this means that the actors have to act for this eye alone, and all actions become completely unilinear, and so on. more subtle weaknesses: the mechanical reproduction gives everything the character of a result: unfree and unalterable. here we come back to the fundamental reproach. the audience no longer have [sic] any opportunity to change the artist's performance. they are not assisting at a production, but at the result of a production that took place in their absence.³

Direct cinema and Wiseman take places within this general critique of film, within the inscription of the various physical processes and modes of address mentioned by Brecht. Arguments are made not only for a critical lack of distance allowed for the spectator. In Wiseman (for instance, the controversy over Primate,⁴

the problem of voyeurism and "invasion of privacy",⁵ particularly manifest in the Massachusetts court ruling on Titicut Follies⁶), but also for the opposite: "A displacement of the comfortable on-looker positioning of the spectator that dominates classical narrative is achieved."⁷ One reason for the extent of such dualism setting in around Wiseman is the confusing statements Wiseman has made which seem to conflate problems of distance and separation, at least as a Brecht would have posed them:

There's [to be] no separation between the audience watching the film and the events in the film. It's like the business of getting rid of the proscenium arch in the theatre, and, by analogy, narration is the proscenium arch because it immediately separates you from the experience of what you're going to see and hear, by telling you that it has nothing to do with you or by telling you what to think about it.⁸

Another reason is the level of uniformity or presumed universality at which critical statements are typically pitched. The emphasis of the present work, in contradistinction, is on the conflict and tension between competing and often contradictory levels and discourses at work in the films and criticism, on the different weightings of these conflicts in different instances, on heterogeneity within and across Wiseman's work.

There is then a need to distinguish different modalities of distance, and lack of it. A distinction is necessary between

a Bazinian "democratic" cinema where the spectator is allowed to formulate varied responses given the space generated by the plan-séquence and depth-of-field, and a Brechtian or Godardian distance where the text's constructedness is normatively presented.⁹ The predominant type of distance in Wiseman (particularly in the later films) is the Bazinian -- Wiseman points to the variety of response to the films as evidence of their respect for the audience; the later films' (particularly Juvenile Court, Welfare) deployment of the long-take/sequence-shot are arguably exemplary in a Bazinian sense. However, as the discussion of Titicut Follies (Chapter 6) demonstrates, there is also a strong use of a Brechtian mode of distance, and a concomitant use of montage in Titicut Follies, High School and also Primate. Exemplification of this is provided by Marshall and de Brigard when, in their commitment to "sequence filming" as normative for urban ethnography, they discount the early Wiseman films:

It's all right for audiences to be moved by Titicut Follies, High School, and Essene, but they are not permitted to think independently about them.¹⁰

This tension is often, as well, put by critics in a synthetic articulation: "Wiseman shows that a distanced filmmaker can still be a committed filmmaker"¹¹ and "the cultivation of detachment in the service of a passionate, extended design demanding patience from everywhere".¹² This is something of the dialectics or multiple

imbrications of, variously, distance and involvement, participation and observation, active and passive viewing, voyeurism and identification, to which attention should be paid.

Laura Mulvey provides a variation on the articulation of distance and involvement in her treatment of modalities of pleasure in narrative cinema. Two "contradictory aspects" of structures of looking in cinema are scopophilic -- the distance generated through objectification exemplified in voyeurism, and narcissistic -- identification with and projection onto the image through recognition of likeness.¹³ Willemen points out, in a review and critique of Mulvey, that these operations are as much at work in so-called non-narrative film.¹⁴ In *Wiseman*, rather than these looks being played out predominantly in relation to images of woman,¹⁵ as Mulvey argues for narrative entertainment cinema, they are often structured on class divisions. *High School* is said to be an almost "perfect projective device"¹⁶ for the middle-class audience of the film -- Pauline Kael's review of the film exemplifies this.¹⁷ Given the nature of *Wiseman's* audience¹⁸ operations of objectification will tend more often to occur with depictions of non-middle class subjects and situations.

However, the distinction between these mechanisms cannot be erected into categorical types of looks -- Freud's original formulation saw them interacting and overlapping.¹⁹ Mulvey argues for three

"looks" at work in cinema -- that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other -- the intra-diegetic look. The first two are effaced and subordinated to the third, Mulvey argues, in mainstream cinema.²⁰ This is one of the crucial strategies in the construction of realism in Wiseman's films as well, as the preponderance of interviews and other forms of verbal interaction testify (variously, school classes, counselling sessions, formal addresses and speeches, briefings, seminars, church services, hearings, etc.). The intra-diegetic interview is the nodal point of Wiseman's articulation of individuals and institutions. Its structuring and placement in the films exemplifies the dominance²¹ of the third "look" over the other two, involving and invoking the viewer as both necessary for the completion of the relay of looks and necessarily absent from, and therefore having privileged access to, the field of encounter.²² To repeat, the intra-diegetic interview in Wiseman (to be compared with the quasi-diegetic interviews in, say, Rouch and de Antonio and the extra-diegetic interviews in mainstream documentary) is exemplary in this process as the viewer is almost always positioned as "eavesdropper" on "private" conversations.

The dominance of intra-diegetic looks (and the resultant suturing effects) is broken at times, however, in Wiseman. Willemsen points out that this can be achieved through the inscription of a fourth look, the look from within the diegesis at the viewer. This

look is of a different order to the others as it breaks the diegesis and constitutes the viewer as visible subject, the viewing subject having remained invisible, absent, in the inscription of the other three looks. It is the look which "surprises me in the act of voyeurism and occasions a feeling of shame".²³ In Wiseman, there are innumerable instances of this fourth look (which should be regarded primarily as a look at the camera, and only then, and not necessarily, a look at the viewer, to preserve necessary distance between position of camera and that of viewer) -- fractional stolen glances, arrested gestures of recognition, the glance of the psychiatrist in Hospital to the filmmaker with the exasperated comment "She hung up on me!" (Ellsworth, shot 143), to the "exposition" sequences where, although there is a posited or actually presented diegetic audience, the monologues take on, through mise-en-scène, their placement in the film, and significance of the material for the work of the film, a sort of quasi-direct address.

Thus, in Primate (Ellsworth, shots 332-336), a researcher giving one of the only sustained expositions in the film, on evolution, seems to address the camera (shot 332). (The sequence is structured for irony in that the subject of the exposition is that "I do not subscribe to the theory that the living apes, chimps and gorillas closely resemble the ancestors of man" while the similarities between researcher and gorilla are visually foregrounded in intercuts during the sequence.) The last sequence in Essene is the sermon of the

abbott on the spirit and the law, the placing and thematics of which give it a coda-like quality (like the letter-reading of Dr. Howard at the end of High School). The shot holds (for 11:29) generally on the abbott in long mid-shot through close-up, excluding the diegetic audience; it is marked by rhetorical direct addresses: "Will you listen, really deeply, like Mary, sitting at the feet of Truth, that you may be happy? Will you listen, that the Father, the Spirit, and I may come to dwell within you?"; the abbott glances momentarily at the camera. In the second major sequence of Sinai Field Mission, an official delivers a long monologue on the role, structure and history of the mission, and the geographical, political and military aspects of the area. It is the most exhaustive establishing exposition in any of the films.

The dominance of intra-diegetic looks is also broken in Wiseman when, in the absence of dialogue and other forms of interpersonal behaviour, the looks of the camera or the viewer are less effaced. Steve Neale points to one articulation of Mulvey's "contradictory" modes of identification and voyeurism in documentary: the less the role of structures of identification, the greater the dominance of structures of voyeurism.²⁴ Character individuation or typicality, dialogue, interview, and other forms of intra-diegetic interpersonal behaviour, and various inscriptions of class consciousness are, it has been argued, the main structures of identification in Wiseman.

Q Their lesser role in films like Primate, Meat, and Titicut Follies give space for other articulations of looking.

Primate perhaps best articulates these questions. It is unique in its editing inasmuch as it has more than twice the number of shots as the other films²⁵ and much less dialogue. It is an experiment "to see to what extent you could tell the story just by pictures".²⁶ In this specific context, such a project works against traditional modes of interpretation -- Primate is Wiseman's most "controversial" film, except for Titicut Follies, mainly because it refuses the ordering of its levels of discourse by explanatory scientific verbal discourse.²⁷ The film inscribes and articulates the viewing subject across a temporal development which first entices with irony and comedy and then displaces and revokes that type of look as the film enters into a series of vivisection sequences. This section is in its turn displaced by questions of the human, social and technological implications of the foregoing. The general movement is from ironic and humorous voyeurism to the macabre and directly voyeuristic to the intriguingly futuristic.

Moreover, the usual articulation of identification and voyeurism is reversed. Human subjects, the researchers, are clearly seen as voyeurs (particularly in their monitoring of the apes' sexual behaviour) and this inscription of the voyeuristic look within the diegesis distances the viewer's look. On the other hand, it is the animals with which the film invites identification: in the way the camera shoots them in studied

close-ups, in terms of their human-like mannerism, appearance and behaviour, and in terms of their being experimented on.

Meat, like Primate, has relatively little dialogue and its continuity editing is the most extended of any of Wiseman's films. Neale's connection of voyeurism and spectacle is most explicit in this film. In his discussion of Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will, Neale argues that certain modes of mise-en-scène "are designed to exhibit the image for the gaze of the spectator and for the scopic drive that sustains it, designed, precisely, to 'catch' (to lure) the eye". There is marked "emphasis on spectacle and looking as a means, in the absence of a plot, of holding the film together".²⁸

Mise-en-scène in Meat is characterised by marked variations in the use of sound -- many parts of the butchering sequences are soundless or sound is oddly denatured as almost inaudible humming. There is a type of lavish choreography of inanimate objects (slabs of meat, heads on hooks, intestines, blood, tongues, butchering instruments) framed and shot as they swing, "dance", jerk, or as the machinery lies idle at the end of one session of butchering, some instruments still, though barely, moving. Frame angles are often extreme -- extreme close-ups, high angles, sharp right or left movements as objects swing into frame or move towards the camera. There are sharp lighting contrasts -- from dim long-shots of cattle grazing at dawn on trucks at dusk, to startlingly bright interior shots in the abattoir. Reviewers speak of the film's "hypnotic force", that it is Wiseman's

"most visually lacerating documentary",²⁹ of the "most extraordinary visual material in any of Wiseman's . . . films", which stays "most powerfully in the mind" over any of the questions of ethics, economics or politics which are raised in the film.³⁰ The film also foregrounds spectacle through satirising other types of film drama:

The idyllic opening shots, with their evocation of a natural harmony between men and beasts, remind us of dozens of Westerns, although this cattle drive ends rather differently from the one in Red River. The slaughterhouse sequences are a savage reversal of those vapid, advance-of-civilization documentaries on industrial processes . . .³¹

"Theatricality . . . is crucial to the particular mode of spectacle" Neale considers.³² It is Titicut Follies' inscription of performance, as well as its various moments of implication of the look of camera and viewer, discussed in detail in Chapter 6, which make it an exemplary instance in Wiseman's work of the relay of looks and the breaking of that relay.

All this suggests a greater degree of complexity and unevenness with regard to Wiseman's intersection with the relay of looks and and subject positions this effects than is allowed in Kuhn's account of direct cinema as observational. Her argument is that the viewer is placed by being fixed in an identical position, that of neutrality and observation, to that of the camera operator and the camera-filmmaker through non-participatory effacement (MacDougall's "ethical" problematic);³³ the camera through systematic disavowal of signs of

production, of denial of style³⁴ in favour of the presumed equation of vision and knowledge, or mechanical recording and analysis; the viewer through the dominance of an informational, observing interest only.³⁵

There are some significant disjunctions of these relations of uniformity in Wiseman. Instances of spectacle, "style" (instances which are systematic enough for one viewer to say "his style is one of the most readily identifiable signatures in the cinema"),³⁶ and intertextuality raise what for Neale is an important contradiction between discourses of documentary and evidence or "display" of these discourses:

such evidence and such display not only highlight the instance of the construction of a position of looking and visual command, not only highlight the instance of the construction of the visible itself, but also displace knowledge, the essential ingredient in documentary, in favour of the construction of a mode of visual pleasure. Spectacle is content neither with simply rendering visible the observable nor with inscribing the spectating subject simply in position as observer. It is much more concerned with the processes of rendering visible and of looking themselves.³⁷

This argument's applicability to Wiseman is even more significant than, in Neale's case, propagandistic documentary, given that Wiseman's films circulate within discourses and practices -- those around direct cinema and its reception -- which are resolutely non-propagandistic.

There is no question here of attempting to "balance out"

instances of suture and break of suture, observation and participation, information and spectacle, the binding relay of looks and disruptions of relay, in the interests of demonstrating an (auteurist) ambiguity, complexity of vision or artistry for Wiseman. On the contrary, the concern has been to show levels of contradiction and differential modes of address and positionings which cannot be (easily) contained within the demarcations of direct cinema, or Wiseman's self-understanding of his project.

B

Questions of suture or articulation in film texts can be crudely distinguished as large- and small-scale operations: the previous section of this chapter discussed aspects of the former, while this section considers small-scale -- sequential, intra-sequential -- articulations in Wiseman's films and their implications in terms of theoretical elaborations of editing and suture.

The basic terms in which Wiseman's editing and other articulations have been placed are that, on the one hand, "Wiseman practices . . . continuity editing; that is, he tries to sustain within each sequence the illusion of real time and the unity of real space, no matter how much the footage has been cut down from its original length"³⁸ and, on the other, that there is a certain "crudeness"³⁹ in the achievement of such continuity and related articulation. There are, importantly,

in Wiseman's work, breaks and dispersal of classic continuity and its attendant suturing of gaps, yet these are to be comprehended more within the terms of McCabe's "moments" of subversion as against "strategies" of subversion,⁴⁰ or Heath's transgression, not transformation,⁴¹ given the general large-scale operations of closure and positionality the films construct.

Nichols' work on Wiseman's micro-articulations is strategic in contesting the general homogenisation of and disregard for this level amongst critics of Wiseman. Assumptions about ascetic style tend to allow a homogenisation of work and tension at and between different levels and operations in the films, leading to critical notions of blandness, austerity, spareness: "his often stationary camera, his newsreel-like black and white images, his rare indulgence in anything but a medium distance shot";⁴² "his filming technique is about as straightforward and innocuous as a skillful home movie".⁴³

Nichols places stress on the tension inherent in "the use of some of the tactics of découpage derived from classic continuity editing of the image track but without many of its resources".⁴⁴ Wiseman can only construct continuity ex post facto, there is no formal ("director's") control over the pro-filmic event. Moreover, only one camera is used in any one film, thus Wiseman has no resort to modes of continuity, "flow", founded on the deployment of different though simultaneous camera positions. Consequently, there is a

comparatively frequent use of jump cuts and a high occurrence of indefinite temporal ellipses rather than the more common (in classical continuity) definite temporal ellipsis, or temporal continuity.⁴⁵ Also, near exclusive use of diegetically-motivated synchronous sound commits Wiseman to a degree of difficulty in the audibility and comprehensibility of dialogue.

These several indications of limitation (which are not exhaustive) might suggest a cinema dominated by basic structural "flaws"; a suggestion which would in itself be misleading. These limitations are self-imposed and strategic as a foundation for work at other levels. Wiseman places crucial stress on the construction of the film in editing, in contrast to doubts in ethnographic filmmaking concerning the viability and scientificity of editing,⁴⁶ and American direct cinema's general reticence to place editing in a defined place relative to other processes.⁴⁷ Editing of American direct cinema is spoken of in terms of the necessity to maintain strict shooting chronology lest "relationships [between events] fall apart", of the centrality of drama and pace,⁴⁸ of the best cinema verite being achieved when, "in terms of editing, . . . cutting sequences very close to the way they were shot", when "the footage is allowed to take its head".⁴⁹ Issari puts this position as doctrinairely as "The editing . . . should remain faithful to the actual event - its continuity, its relationships, and its entire character and atmosphere."⁵⁰

In contradistinction, Wiseman argues:

Some documentary filmmakers don't feel you should edit at all. I'm very much more interested in form than some other filmmakers, and in tight control of the material All the material is manipulated so that the final film is totally fictional in form although it is based on real events. Because it is a fictional form you have the same kind of problems that exist in writing a novel, or a play: problems of characterization, transition, point of view, etc. I am interested in the relationship between various forms because in many ways I think there are similarities in the techniques.⁵¹

And

One of the things that intrigues me in all the films is how to make a more abstract, general statement about the issues, not through the use of a narrator, but through the relationship of events to each other through editing.⁵²

This commitment to the introduction of tension between levels -- "direct" reportorial footage worked upon by an avowedly constructivist editing strategy -- deserves closer attention, attention which Nichols has justifiably introduced.

Editing in Wiseman marks a break with the dominance of the image-track as a basis for shot articulation. Given the limits of direct shooting principles, the sound track is used more often than the image track to articulate sequences; the opposite characteristically occurs in classical continuity editing and theories of articulation

based on it, such as Metz's.⁵³ Thus, the sound-track will often bridge cuts within and between sequences, introduce sequences by being audible before the diegesis is completed by the evidence of the image from which the sound originates. Such a "shift in the meaning of diegesis"⁵⁴ can lead to a contestation of the primacy afforded visibility, which is a central problematic in direct cinema.

However, this shift cannot be claimed uniformly for Wiseman's work. Films such as Primate and Meat deploy relatively little dialogue and other location sound often works in such films to undergird the affectivity of the visual, the image-track. Also, while micro-sequential, gradually accretive, breaks in continuity occur at the visual level, this is virtually normatively recuperated through the films' work within one macro-space, one institutional locale; the visual detail amounting to the order of an institution. Thus, in Welfare, sequences (with their highly particularised subject-histories) are held within the accumulative claustrophobia of a whole space -- the vast waiting room, the nearby interview cubicles.

Nichols' analysis of a segment from Hospital argues that readings of Wiseman's films require repeated operations of retro-activity and retrospection, in order to read continuity back into a developed sequence. This suggests a strong element of discontinuity at work within continuity, which is clearer in a comparison with the ordering of shots within sequences in "the classic Hollywood film"

which Edward Branigan outlines:

1. Establishing shot (major variant: detail of scene, then establishing shot)
2. Long shot (master shot)
3. Medium Two-shot
4. Reverse Angles (over-the-shoulder shots)
5. alternating Medium Close-ups (sometimes Point-of-view shots)
6. Cut-away (or Insert)
7. alternating Medium Close-ups
8. Re-establishing shot⁵⁵

This model has its general basis in the dialogue sequence;⁵⁶ dialogue sequences in Wiseman (although this holds for most other sequence-types in Wiseman) follow no particular order, and rarely, if ever, mark their autonomy by symmetrical relations of establishing-reestablishing shots or master shots. In his discussion of the Hospital segment, Nichols does not stress this displacement of establishing and master shots, a crucial and formative element of the necessity for "an active, and retroactive, reading of cues embedded in shots and their articulations"⁵⁷ in Wiseman. Against the "extreme importance attached to providing an overall view, literally the 'master-shot' that will allow the scene to be dominated in the course of its reconstitution as dramatic unity",⁵⁸ Wiseman's editing strategy consistently places the viewer in medias res in interview and other dialogue sequences. Titicut Follies, more consistently than the other films, deploys this subversion of continuity (as is discussed more fully in Chapter 6). Often it is difficult or impossible to determine who is being spoken to (e.g., Ellsworth, shot 46); a

formal "speech" is delivered for 25 seconds before its listeners are included (shot 64); a sequence which one reviewer calls the most "frightening" in the film, but also the "most restrained and bourgeois"⁵⁹ is structured by radically separate delineation of space, emphasising the radically separate "worlds" of the patient, the panel, and its functionaries. Throughout the sequence (lasting 8:40) there are no establishing shots.⁶⁰

A final stress should be placed on the variety of editing strategies deployed by Wiseman, which is the more significant given a minimalist and artisanal mode of production which has led to a (misplaced) critical consensus concerning the "blandness" of Wiseman's "style". Meat is predominantly cut for strict continuity on visual cues. Primate is heavily edited, again on visual cues; however, there is no classical continuity as in Meat, but a highly elaborate, constructed development of an argument through editing. Juvenile Court, Welfare, Canal Zone, Sinai Field Mission, the longest films, are exemplary for their "sequence filming", the absence of which in earlier films Marshall and de Brigard criticised.⁶¹ The centrality of long, autonomous sequences in these films aligns them with a sort of indigenous ethnography. Essene is edited basically on verbal cues. High School doubles its thematic structure by puns and repetitions on cuts.

In summation, it is helpful to return to Nichols' characterisation of Wiseman's articulation of the filmic whole as "mosaic". This

suggestive attempt to arrive at a specific model of the films as "totalisms"⁶² (notwithstanding the difficulties involved in such an attempt) shares characteristics of Brian Henderson's work against critical orthodoxies regarding filmic articulation being arranged around the oppositional exemplars Eisenstein (montage) and Bazin (sequence, deep focus, long take).⁶³ In this context, articulation in Wiseman's films should be approached not through one characteristic alone, or some "synthesis" of oppositions, but through stress on heterogeneity of "style", and the implications of this.

Notes

¹ See Nichols, "Style, Grammar and the Movies", Film Quarterly, 28, No. 3, reprinted in Movies and Methods, ed. Bill Nichols, pp. 607 f. and Anthony Wilden, System and Structure, esp. Chapter 7.

² Paul Willemen, "Voyeurism, The Look and Dwoskin", p. 41.

³ Brecht, Arbeitsjournal, March 27, 1942, quoted in Ben Brewster, "The Fundamental Reproach (Brecht)", Cine-Tracts No. 2, p. 45.

⁴ See Jules Asher, "Primate", APA Monitor, February, 1975.

⁵ See Calvin Pryluck, "Ultimately we are all Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filming", Journal of University Film Associations, 28, No. 1; James M. Linton, "The Moral Dimension in Documentary", Journal of University Film Associations, 28, No. 2.

⁶ See Alan Westin, "You start off with a bromide: Wiseman on Film and Civil Liberties", and the exchange between Elliot Richardson and Wiseman in Thomas R. Atkins, ed., Frederick Wiseman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), pp. 47-73.

⁷ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 19. Cf. "It's [Wiseman's camera] detached interest discourages a spectator from easy emotional responses". Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, p. 8.

⁸ Wiseman, quoted in Thomas R. Atkins, "The Films of Frederick Wiseman: American Institutions", p. 233.

⁹ See Brian Henderson, "Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style" in Movies and Methods, ed. Bill Nichols, p. 425.

¹⁰ John Marshall, Emile de Brigard, "Idea and Event in Urban Film" in Principles of Visual Anthropology, ed. Hockings, p. 138.

¹¹ Stephen Mamber, "A Tribute to Frederick Wiseman", p. 1.

¹² Peter Sourian, "Television".

¹³ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", pp. 8-11.

¹⁴ Willemen, "Voyeurism, The Look and Dwoskin", p. 44.

¹⁵ Although Eileen McGarry argues this with regard to Wiseman in "Documentary, Realism and Women's Cinema".

¹⁶ Edgar Z. Friedenberg, "Ship of Fools", The New York Review of Books, October 21, 1971.

¹⁷ Pauline Kael, "High School" in Frederick Wiseman, ed. Thomas R. Atkins.

¹⁸ See Chapter 1, Section C.

¹⁹ See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure", p. 10, and Willemen, "Voyeurism", p. 43.

²⁰ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure", p. 17.

²¹ A dominance which, of course, is not total. The important discontinuities within the predominant continuity of Wiseman's structuring of the interview are discussed, below, in section B.

²² The details of this process are elaborated in the important debate around suture. See Jean-Pierre Godard, "Cinema and Suture", Screen, 18, No. 4 (Winter 1977/78); Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema", Film Quarterly, 28, No. 1 and Movies and Methods, ed. Bill Nichols; and Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture".

- 23 Willemen, "Voyeurism", pp. 47-8.
 - 24 Steve Neale, "Propaganda", p. 30.
 - 25 In a running time of 105 minutes, it has 569 shots (Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, p. 157).
 - 26 Wiseman, "Frederick Wiseman", Photography in the Humanities, p. 71.
 - 27 See the various reviews of Primate which argue that "scientific" subjects are not amenable to Wiseman's style. Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, pp. 91-2.
 - 28 Steve Neale, "Triumph of the Will: Notes on Documentary and and Spectacle", Screen, 20, No. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 67, 83.
 - 29 James Wolcott, "Blood on the Racks: Wiseman's 'Meat'", The Village Voice, November 15, 1976.
 - 30 David Denby, "Wiseman's Commonplace Inferno", The Boston Phoenix, November 16, 1976.
 - 31 Denby, "Wiseman's Commonplace Inferno".
 - 32 Neale, "Notes on Documentary and Spectacle", p. 68.
 - 33 The same methodological ascetism that causes him the observational filmmaker to exclude himself from the world of his subjects also excludes his subjects from the world of the film. Here the implications are ethical as well as practical. By asking nothing of his subjects beyond permission to film them, the filmmaker adopts an inherently secretive position. . . . In his insularity, he withholds the very openness that he asks from his subjects in order to film them.
- David MacDougall, "Beyond Observational Cinema", in Visual Anthropology, ed. Hockings, p. 118.

³⁴ See Kuhn, "The Camera I", p. 72.

³⁵ See above, Chapter 1, Section C.

³⁶ David Rosenbaum, "Wiseman Sinai film foretells future",
Boston Herald American, October 21, 1978.

³⁷ Neale, "Notes on Documentary and Spectacle", p. 85. On the question of the "progressive" deployment of modes of visual pleasure (against Laura Mulvey's call for the destruction of visual pleasure as inherently oppressive, especially for women), see Stephen Heath, "Difference", Screen, 19, No. 3 (Autumn 1978), p. 92f.

³⁸ David Denby, "Documenting America: Hospital", The Atlantic, March, 1970.

³⁹ See Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, p. 7.

⁴⁰ MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema", p. 17.

⁴¹ Heath, "Narrative Space", p. 108.

⁴² Jay Gould Boyum, "Watching Real Life Problems", The Wall Street Journal, October 1, 1973.

⁴³ David Eames, "Watching Wiseman Watch", New York Times Magazine, October 2, 1977.

⁴⁴ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 22.

⁴⁵ See Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 23. The taxonomy of articulations used here, as in Nichols, is derived from Noël Burch, Theory of Film Practice, Chapter 1.

⁴⁶ See Karl G. Herder, Ethnographic Film (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), p. 63f.

⁴⁷ See Rosenthal, New Documentary, p. 86.

48 Charlotte Zwerin (editor of some of the Maysles' films), interview in Rosenthal, New Documentary, p. 86.

49 Patricia Jaffe, "Editing Cinema Verite", Film Comment, 3, No. 3, pp. 45, 46.

50 Issari, Cinéma Vérité, p. 26.

51 Wiseman, "Frederick Wiseman", Photography in the Humanities, p. 72.

52 Wiseman, interview, quoted in Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 22.

53 This point is made by Nichols, "Documentary Theory and Practice", pp. 38-40.

54 Nichols, "Documentary Theory and Practice", p. 40.

55 Edward Branigan, "The Space of Equinox Flower", p. 75. Cf. Raymond Bellour, "The Obvious and the Code", Screen, 15, No. 4 (Winter 1974/75).

56 See Reisz, Technique of Film Editing, chapter on "Dialogue Sequences", esp. p. 101.

57 Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 27.

58 Heath, "Narrative Space", p. 88.

59 Edgar Z. Friedenberg, "Ship of Fools: The Films of Frederick Wiseman".

60 See Appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown of this sequence.

61 Marshall and de Brigard, "Idea and Event in Urban Film", p. 138.

62 Nichols, Movies and Methods, p. 423.

63 Henderson "Two Types of Film Theory", "The Long Take", and "Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style", in Movies and Methods, ed. Nichols.

Chapter 5

Individuals and Institutions

A recurring concern of this essay is the attempt to work within the established problematic of Wiseman's project; this not for the purpose of being initially authorised and finally delimited by the status of the object -- film, oeuvre, the critical industry -- but because the problematic is replete with institutionalised contradiction and it would be disingenuous to pretend to "write" that away with the stroke of a critical pen. An attempt has been made to work dialectically within the established problematic of film and critical texts, to deconstruct operations of their mutual inter-legitimation ("The two discourses occupy the same ideological space, validating one another")¹ around fundamental dualisms such as documentary/fiction, objective/subjective, individuals/institutions.

A

Individuals/institutions . . . the classical liberal pairing; individual -- space of freedom, opinion, value, authenticity; institution -- rigidity, structure, fact, alienation. Much of the critical effort on Wiseman has been expended reiterating that Wiseman's films are "about" institutions, not individuals; this datum then being a point of comparison with both fictional texts and the majority of

documentaries. Thus, Wiseman:

I think the star of each film is the institution. I don't want you to come out feeling, for instance, that Dr. Schwartz in Hospital is a charming personable fellow. I want you to come out with a feeling of what a big city hospital is like, or a high school, a prison, a police department. I want you to switch your level of identification, from a person . . . to Metropolitan Hospital. That's really what I'm after.²

Examples of such opinion could, of course, be multiplied. However, it is considerably more complicated than these observations would suggest. The received wisdom is that Wiseman's engagement with institutions secures a more thoroughgoing documenting of contemporary social reality by dealing with the ubiquity and typicality of institutions as markers or "cultural spoors" in contemporary American society, and of the predominantly inter- and intra- institutional identities possible within that society. Thus, for instance, in Hospital (Ellsworth, shots 37-40), an interview sequence begins with a close-up of a piece of technology, a hearing-aid microphone, and after that tilts to the woman who is using it, an elderly woman. She has been hard of hearing for 40 years (Interviewer: "Since about 1929?" Woman: "No, since about 1919." The decade difference hardly seems to matter!) and has been reticent to take government aid because she wants to be self-supporting. The traces of a personal history existing completely within and between institutional locale unfold gradually (the sequence of 4 shots lasts almost 3 minutes) as she recounts

aid for a variety of needs -- diabetes, ears, eyes, government aid, military service, problems of employment: "It's been hard for me."

At the level of the body of Wiseman's films, intricate interconnections can be traced across different institutions. Religious services and activities appear in several films (apart, of course, from Essene) -- Titicut Follies, Hospital, Basic Training, Juvenile Court, Canal Zone, Sinai Field Mission, High School and Basic Training dwell extensively on the militaristic aspects of schooling and the school-like environment of military training.³ The same Miss Hightower of the earlier Hospital appears in Welfare.⁴ Repeatedly, references outside the institution at hand are to other institutions; welfare, hospitalisation, various forms of training, incarceration, multifarious meetings.

Thus, if Wiseman speaks repeatedly of "finding cultural spools" in institutions, of analysing contemporary problems as they are manifest characteristically in institutions, one cultural spool would clearly seem to be that individuals exist in inter- and intra-institutional space. Wiseman is thus held to have steered away, both from the "crisis narrative" structure and the tendency to individuation (which is said to lead to limitations on generalisation)⁵ in much American cinema verite, and also from fictional individuation.

The dualism individual/institution, like the dualism subjectivity/objectivity, dominates critical journalism concerned with Wiseman.

There are a number of ways, however, in which this simple undialectical dualism must be deconstructed in theoretical critique of Wiseman's films and their reception.

Wiseman does follow individuals. (An unsystematic list of "major" individuals in the films would include: the smoking psychiatrist, the chief guard, possibly Vladimir, the articulate "schizophrenic with prominent paranoid features" (Tifcut Follies); the Dean of Discipline (High School); some police officers (Law and Order); Dr. Schwartz (Hospital); Hickman, Lt. (then Captain) Richard Hoffman (Basic Training); the Abbott (and a number of other monks, as Essene concentrates on a very small "institution") (Essene); Judge Turner (Juvenile Court); the reproduction researcher (Primate); a few recurring clients in Welfare). The process of individuation occurs more frequently than Nichols, for instance, allows for.⁶ Nichols introduces functionalist narrative models, principally Propp's, to account for individuation in Wiseman's films. However, this account sits uneasily with Nichols' predominant concern to demonstrate the fundamentally non-narrative structure of Wiseman's films -- social actors only perform certain limited functions in a series of truncated micro-narratives, they do not attain to the individuated status of the "character" of a fictional text. Nichols' use of functionalist narratological models vitiates the way in which the dominant poetic (synchronising, typicalising, generalising) operations of the film generate character portrayals which are better analysed as "poetic", or at least non-narrative,

constructs, although, of course, this is not to say that all characters/individuals/social actors are structured uniformly throughout the films.

It is characteristic of most of Wiseman's films that certain individuals are structured as central points of coherence. This is achieved in several ways: through large-scale binding trajectories, protagonists are "introduced", and reappear in later, longer narrative segments, or are the subject of an intense series of closely aligned, perhaps sequentially aligned, segments or, as is the case in Juvenile Court, one individual (Judge Turner) can become, to all intents and purposes, the quite conventional "hero" of the film. To a greater or lesser extent, individuation is inscribed through the provision of information about background, history, family, etc., usually through interview or through that individual having various expository roles in the film.

However, the dominant mode of individuation is based upon "poetic", synchronous operations in the films, chiefly through typicalisation. Through typicalisation, the process of individuation can emerge in a more powerful way than in much narrative and direct cinema, where, for instance, "stars" such as Bob Dylan, Jane Fonda, the Stones, are followed. An argument contrary to that of Nichols' "processes of identification between viewer and hero/actor/star that occur in most narrative films" being sidestepped in Wiseman can be

made. Kuhn and Nash argue that distancing is generated within the star system inasmuch as here "the contradictions of naturalistic presentation are both manifested and contained, and where a dislocation analogous to epic acting, separating actor and role, is manifested".⁷ In contrast to this, doctrines of verite filming like this allow no space between filmic construct and pro-filmic subject:

The way I try to make a documentary is that there's no separation between audience watching the film and the events in the film. It's like the business of getting rid of the proscenium arch in the theater.⁸

Nichols speaks of the films operating "like Rorschach tests"⁹ in which individual audience responses are to an extent functions of recognition, identification, and predisposition rather than evaluation or analysis. Thus, to Kuhn's list of conventional "marks of authenticity"¹⁰ in direct cinema could be added the introduction of social actors in the context of the elaborate signification of contingency. The "found" nature of social actors and encounters allows only sufficient (synchronic) introduction of individual backgrounds, histories and gestural idiosyncracies to enable them to signify within Wiseman's films as typical persons and encounters, as allusions to a wider socio-political and cultural reality which, however, is never specified.

The assumed contingency, or lack of control, in these processes is problematic, however. Far from Wiseman participating in some kind of uncontrolled recording of unprocessed reality, there is a complexly

interrelated series of choices that are made. Wiseman speaks of clear criteria in the choice of institution,¹¹ and of the wider project, to plot the "natural history", to find "cultural spoors" of contemporary American life, which involves its own level of selectivity. The choices being made also are designed to evoke the affective response of a shared experience or shared lack of experience:

Partly because these kinds of institutions are familiar to most viewers and partly because of the film's structure, a strong tendency exists to read the films like Rorschach tests in which responses are a function of predispositions toward the institution.¹²

Another aspect of individuation is revealed in Nichols' use of Propp's hero-complement pair to describe basic interaction sequences in Wiseman:

The hero is roughly analogous to the fictional hero in structural analyses but the complement is unlike the fictional villain: the complement is the character necessary for the hero to carry out the functions assigned him by the institutional code.¹³

It is significant that virtually all hero functions in Wiseman are carried out by representatives of the institution under scrutiny. The argument that Wiseman is concerned to report the complexity and interrelatedness of any issue or encounter¹⁴ is vitiated by his clear commitment to situate himself within one

institution, or one part of one institution, for each film. Unavoidably, therefore, the dominant reality is that circumscribed by this institutional locale; the dominant roles, the "hero-functions"; are those performed by agents of the institution, not those who are mere "complements". This is one implication of the ideological choice to remain within one institutional locale, just as the choice of most other direct documentarists to remain within a certain individual's social matrix circumscribes and delimits them in specific ways.

• B

There are various dissensions from the general consensus that Wiseman's films are to be seen as studies of institutions. Numerous reviews of the films consist of selections of the most dramatic moments of individuation, while McWilliams declares straightforwardly that "to say that a Wiseman film is about the institution or is primarily about the institution is to be superficial and to ignore the complexity of his films".¹⁵

One explanation of this dissension is that Wiseman exclusively concentrates on "a particular aspect of institutions . . . - their interface or boundary with society at large".¹⁶ The "basic structural unit", Mamber says, "is an encounter between an institution employee and a person he must serve."¹⁷ Given obedience to the set of self-imposed

regulations for "direct" film-work (regulations which, it must be emphasised, are strictly conventional), Wiseman's "tactlessness", which, Nichols argues, "allows him not to be taken in by institutional rhetoric",¹⁸ concentrates exhaustively on the overloaded, chaotic, highly-charged space where the institution most directly deals with the individual. (A reviewer speaks of the films' "power . . . to convey at once the chaos of human activity in a society where the social machines are perilously over-loaded, and the makeshift sort of order that can sometimes be imposed by sheer force of good will.")¹⁹ Wiseman deals in the drama of this space, trades on the conflictual, the highly affective, the at-times identificatory to the extent of Nichols' describing the viewing process as "like Rorschach tests". All this is at the service of the presentation of individuals and at times, highly changed identification with them.

Over against this, a commitment to analysis of institutions would necessitate apprehension of how institutions, despite their chronic overload and chaos (itself an apprehension derived from the choice of locale -- the interface of institution and outside individual, Wiseman's shooting and editing style which is often "disorienting and claustrophobic").²⁰ are "moderated by direct feedback"²¹ such that they typically enjoy great longevity and lock together in powerful inter-supportive institutional "unities".²² Such analysis would perforce focus on the historical context of any institution, over against the synchronicity of Wiseman's accounts.

A commitment to an analysis of institutions, and their inter-relationships, must be further examined in the light of Wiseman's commitment to filming from the ideological space of observer, bystander, listener, viewer. This space is rendered ideological by its centering, channelling, all material through the individual perceiving subject, who thus becomes the Archimedean point of perception. That it could be thought that an institution is amenable to "analysis" in this way can be questioned on two grounds.

As Brecht put it, the social forces and relations in institutions cannot be apprehended through the display of images of them, the photography of them; for structures of social relations to be uncovered would require analysis, not simply representation.²³

Moreover, the guarantee for the maintenance of the realist illusion of the construction of characterisation was fundamentally the iconic presence of the actor. There is no parallel guarantee for the delivery to the screen of the presence of institutions. Wiseman is thus working within this complex tension; that he is employing various ensembles of established rhetorical codes, among these being some of which are fundamental to the maintenance of the space of individuation and visual spectacle, and he is using these modes to "analyse" institutions which by definition are transindividual and resist analysis through visualisation alone.

This is exemplified in the tension between the level of generality and typicality connoted by the titles of Wiseman's films, and the specificity insisted on by the repeated rhetoric of the films that this is merely what "I" have seen. Consider the case of Law and Order. It is perfectly clear, from the numerous interviews Wiseman has given that he has "learnt" to eschew tendentiousness of any kind. The process of filming, for him, is a discovery procedure, in which, hopefully, all preconceptions are modified. Law and Order does not show anything of the political functioning of the police (despite the film being shot in the spring of 1968, directly following the Chicago Democratic Convention), simply because nothing like that happened during his period of filming in Kansas City:

I went to shoot Law and Order right after the public rioted at the Democratic Convention in Chicago. It seemed to me a golden opportunity to "get" the cops by showing how they behaved like "pigs". But after I rode around for a few days (and eventually for more than 400 hours) I realized what a simple, naive view that was. The police are no different from the rest of us. The film dealt more with what people do to each other, the behaviour that makes police necessary. ²⁴

The question of the choice of city to film in, and of the level of the institution to focus on, are questions which render such observationism problematic. The film could not but be conceived as an apologia, by default as it were, as a result of the film's refusal to admit of any possible alternative perspective beyond individualised and idiosyncratic observationism, and its effective

disavowal of the historical and political context of its production. It is "effectively" a disavowal because there is a gesture towards the political in the film's use of the rhetoric of the election campaign Nixon was conducting at the time -- "law and order" -- seen in both the title of the film and also in the disjunct and seemingly (or operationally) extra-diegetic penultimate sequence in the film where we see Nixon delivering part of this election rhetoric: "it's about time that people in government work to re-establish respect for law and order." In the context of this film, these remarks can only function to suggest that any analysis of the political function of the police is an appropriation of their essentially humane and mundane role.

Consider the argument of Mamber concerning the level of generalisation in Law and Order:

Law and Order, and all subsequent Wiseman films, do seek through structure to lead an audience to more general evaluations . . . each sequence, by being out of chronological time, relates to others only through the accumulations of information about the event itself, through thematic rather than dramatic connections. Taken out of time, the films become less journalistic . . . the non-chronological structure argues that Law and Order is a film about the police and not a film about the Kansas City Police . . . Another element involved in the way Wiseman's films are structured as general arguments . . . has to do with the nature of the institution under investigation . . . In the case of the police . . . people do have certain pre-existing notions that they will certainly bring to the film. In other words, Wiseman concerns himself with subject

matter already in the public consciousness.

Finally, in this regard, and perhaps most importantly, the absence of personality orientation is a major element in extending the level of argument.²⁵

Mamber's argument exemplifies Wiseman's problematic as we have presented it with regard to individuals and institutions: Wiseman attempts to analyse institutions, but from the (classically perspectival) perspective of one controlling, observing, individual. Because that individual perspective is rendered non-contradictory, non-participatory, outside the process, and therefore outside the historical process of the institution, of institutions (including the cinematic institution of signification, of production of meaning) the only way this analysis of institutions can be achieved is by similarly rendering the institution synchronically, as outside history, the process of its specific history.

Notes

¹ Annette Kuhn, "The Camera I", p. 71.

² Quoted in Stephen Mamber, "The New Documentaries of Frederick Wiseman", Cinema, 6, No. 1, p. 39.

³ Mamber discusses this in detail in A Tribute to Frederick Wiseman, pp. 9-11, and Cinema Verite in America, pp. 234-40.

⁴ Joseph Morgenstern, "Probing the Kafkaesque World of Welfare", The New York Times, September 21, 1975.

⁵ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 218.

⁶ Characters, as represented by social actors, carry out functions and thereby give individuality to the agent types, but this relationship is not locked into a single mold; there are many characters, but there is no "star". The processes of identification between viewer and hero/actor/star that occur in most narrative films are side-stepped, as well as the ideological consequences of fusing these three distinct realms into one seemingly coherent image.

Nichols also quotes Marx's "The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" as typifying Wiseman's approach to individuals. Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", pp. 19, 21.

⁷ Annette Kuhn and Mark Nash, "Editorial", Screen, 19, No. 2 (Summer 1978) p. 5.

⁸ Wiseman, interview with John Graham, "There are no simple solutions", in Frederick Wiseman, ed. Thomas R. Atkins, pp. 44-45. This is not to deny that other, contradictory emphasis in Wiseman's

statements regarding the distanced, critical, evaluative stance encouraged for the audience. Wiseman alleges to invite both empathetic identification, "no distance", and distanced criticality.

⁹ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 16.

¹⁰ See above, Chapter 3.

¹¹ E.g., in the case of High School, the choice of what was considered to be a "good" school: Wiseman, in Rosenthal, New Documentary, p. 70.

¹² Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 16.

¹³ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 19.

¹⁴ e.g., Donald E. McWilliams, "Frederick Wiseman", Film Quarterly, 24, No. 1, p. 20.

¹⁵ McWilliams, "Wiseman", p. 23.

¹⁶ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 20.

¹⁷ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 217.

¹⁸ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 16.

¹⁹ David Robinson, The [London] Times, quoted in Zipporah Films promotional newspaper.

²⁰ Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, p. 7.

²¹ Nichols, "Wiseman's Documentaries", p. 19.

²² cf. "No theorists of the state, Marxist or non-Marxist, before or after Hegel, can effectively account for what is regarded as its most definitional characteristic, i.e., its unity." Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "In a State", Screen Education No. 30, p. 9.

- 23 The crux of the matter is that true realism has to do more than just make reality recognizable in the theatre. One has to be able to see through it too. One has to be able to see the laws that decide how the processes of life develop. These laws can't be spotted by the camera. Nor can they be spotted if the audience only borrows its heart from one of the characters involved.

Bertolt Brecht, The Messingkauf Dialogues (London: Eyre Methuen, 1965)

p. 27.

- 24 Wiseman, interview, in Frederick Wiseman, ed. Thomas R. Atkins,

p. 49.

- 25 Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 221.

Chapter 6

Titicut Follies

A

Titicut Follies is a rather "atypical" work of Wiseman. It is undoubtedly the most propagandistic Wiseman film. What follows is not an attempt to display the "idiosyncrasies" of Titicut Follies, in relation to the rest of Wiseman's work, but to examine some of the film's characteristic strategies (some of which are to be found in other films) which, in relation to later films, and direct cinema in general, take on particular significance.

Several critics have noted approvingly that such propagandising has been displaced in the later films by a greater subtlety and balance; by more "open" editing strategies, producing longer films with higher proportions of long scenes, each with their own integrity and complexity, producing exemplary Bazinian "democratic" cinema. Thus, Mamber refers to:

a structural difficulty Wiseman had yet to resolve, an interesting problem from a cinema-verite point of view because its solution has led him towards a more complete refusal to judge his material, which, in turn, has resulted in structures allowing more openness to audience interpretation Wiseman's refusal to work in this vein in subsequent films places him more squarely within a cinema-verite

tradition, . . . giving his later work a quality much more of information gathering than of point proving . . .

Titicut Follies, then, is well on the way toward a structure able to deal with the complexity of institutional relationships but still exhibiting tendencies of over-control, which Wiseman later reduced considerably.¹

In contradistinction to the normative (that cinema verite should exhibit a certain "openness", "uncontrol" or whatever), teleological (that Titicut Follies is to be read through the later films) evaluations of Mamber, there will here be a concentration on this film as a highly significant work within and against the conventions of the direct cinema "genre", on its mode of producing "didacticism" or "point proving" rather than the assumed facticity of such a judgement. Titicut Follies might be, to the contrary perhaps, a "brilliant work of art",² "a classic of American documentary filmmaking"³, but to remain within a purely evaluative framework (whether negative or positive) is not to advance the reading of this film in terms of its conjunctions and disjunctions within the problematic of direct cinema, its "narrative" economy and the arrest of such economy, the investment in the privileging look of the camera and the disruption of such privilege. In some sense, Titicut Follies is a limit case within direct cinema -- testing its limits, its disavowals, its economy.

While the following analysis of the maintenance and disruption of a certain narrative economy in Titicut Follies does not enter in detail into the debate in film theory⁴ around questions of narrative and other constitutions of textual "space", it does recognise its terms, its conditions, and attempts an application of them to the film. Thus, on the one hand, there must be recognition of the dangers of falling into such notions as "foregrounding" as guarantor of a certain modernist deconstruction. The attention to foregrounded moments in Titicut Follies is not to valorise the film's possible advanced complexity or self-reflexion, but to cite instances of dispersion and disruption within this film and this film's generic and historical contexts -- the documentary "tradition", the sub-genre cine-verite, the propagandistic text, Wiseman's oeuvre. On the other hand, there is a concomitant danger of "undervaluing" films which do not exhibit such dispersal, "deconstruction".⁵

To accept such new versions of critical judgement would be to fail to come appropriately to terms with the relation of Titicut Follies to the other films of Wiseman, to misrecognise the propagandising of Titicut Follies which is, in the course of the enactment of an inversion within the problematic of liberalism, renounced for rigorous observationism, less incitation and more information.⁶ It would also be to fail to account for the later films in their own specificity, which includes various reappropriations of Titicut Follies' strategies: for instance, the use of tableaux, screens within screens, the intra- and extra-diegetic use of song.

B

This is the context in which the gest (or set-piece, tableau, or Brecht's social gest) takes its pertinence. "The tableau-space . . . is intolerable in its particular fixity"⁷ when inscribed within the terms laid down early in cinema's history of the centrality of movement:

the transitions thus effected [of movement within the shot, of shot to shot] pose acutely the problem of the filmic construction of space, of achieving a coherence of place and positioning the spectator as the unified and unifying subject of its vision. It is this process of construction, indeed, which is often regarded as the power of cinema, and as defining the overall reality of film.⁸

The gest, the "distanced" gesture, is not to be equated with or reduced to merely a technique or strategy in which marks of production or authoring presence is inscribed in the text (a "technique" of self-reflexivity which "presents" a text's own processes of production).⁹ It is an interruption¹⁰ of the action and flow of the drama, of the performance, and an uncovering or "making strange" of conditions (conditions being a term which resists an easy collapse into "form" and "content", "textual" and "social" levels). The gest, the "quotable", which interrupts is not merely a formal technique, a "transgression", for instance, within conventions of filmic space or time, or privileged metatextual intervention, and is not done from a position beyond the

text's own problematic (as, for instance, a voice-over, extra-diegetic positioning, would be in Wiseman). Indeed, it is quite possible for the gestic material to be recuperated within a more traditional mode of reading. Rather, it is "going all the way in the representation", so that "representations are shown and distanced, seized in the complex of reality and attitude they produce".¹¹ This is, then, the approach to what is to be constituted as gest in Titicut Follies, an approach which recognises the terms of Heath's doubt regarding formal deconstructive operations in film texts or criticism as "an aesthetics of transgression" and the need for theorisation of, and attention to, work "at the limits of narrative within the narrative film [and the limits of documentary within the documentary], at the limits of its fictions of unity".¹² The work of gest, or the set-piece, in Titicut Follies, then, is not to be seen as moments of excess or typicalisation, but, on the contrary, as dialectically in tension with the film's inscription of realist and binding operations. This is not to say, however, that such disruption works uniformly throughout the film -- there is a marked heterogeneity in its operation.

This work of gest will now be examined in the context of a number of segments in Titicut Follies.

"Titicut Follies" Revue (See Appendix 2). These are the segments in which the revue "Titicut Follies" appears. The segments from the revue are placed strictly symmetrically (at this level of simple

symmetry, they are similar to other "book-end" devices in Wiseman, such as the identical opening and closing shots in Juvenile Court) as first and last segments in the film. Additionally the songs' lyrics in each segment act mimetically -- the first segment is from the opening number of the revue "Strike up the Band" ("On with the Show"); the last, from the finale ("So long for now, It's time to go"). This placing of the revue, however, is an over-determined gesture toward a reading of the film itself as a show, a production, by its overt appropriation of the revue's symmetry at the level of filmic "performance". Thus, a reviewer can say: "At the very end Bridgewater's temporary entertainers appear once again -- so that if we wish, if we can, everything that went on 'in-between' can be forgotten."¹³ The placing of the Follies revue proffers the film as entertainment, as spectacle. Thus, it is able to work as an illusionist, binding, device, but displayed as such, projecting onto the film, prospectively and retrospectively, an imaginary chronology -- of opening and finale -- thus putting the question of the relation between intra-diegetic (the revue) and extra-diegetic levels (the film as performance). Given the achronological relations obtaining between segments of the whole film, this imaginary chronology affects an important displacement of the tendency to read achronology in Nichols' or Mamber's fashion -- as a basis for typicalisation, generalisation, poeticalisation.¹⁴ Instead, it establishes the possibility of a reading of the film as a text with its own proffered expropriation of the revue. This is not to say that achronology cannot or does not operate in ways

like those Nichols or Mamber suggest in the films, but that the two -- predominantly achronological intra-diegetic relations and an "imaginary" chronology at the extra-diegetic level -- are juxtaposed dialectically: a type of montage at the level of the textual "totalism".

The operation of mimesis in this segment is supported by camera articulation -- most of shots 1-3 and 164 and all of shot 59 are shot excluding the audience of the revue, the diegetic audience. This is therefore similar to the image-within-an-image trope of filming a television screen, for example, such that its frame "matches" the film's frame. The two audiences are thus, textually, rendered "equidistant"; an example, therefore, of performance which includes the film's audience. This articulation throws into sharp relief the fundamental convention of direct cinema, that there is not to be performance for the camera. Interestingly enough, it does not do it as a breaching of this convention to signify excess and affective release from convention (this would only resignify the effective obedience to the code, its confirmation through momentary transgression -- MacCabe's "moment" of subversion) as is the case, for example, in the psychiatrist's addressing of the film crew in Hospital after his intense frustration with his telephone exchange with Miss Hightower (Ellsworth, shot 143). The convention that there be no direct address, that single diegesis be normatively maintained, is not broken here at all. Rather, the code is displayed in its relation with its masked ideological basis, namely, that there be no acknowledgement of audience. By its "matching" of the two audiences, it strategically collapses levels of the text, which,

for the integrity of a realist construction, must be read as separable.

Finally, the revue signifies different relations within the institution, given its "outlandish" presentation of sexual bravado, contesting the representation of sexuality in the vulgar Freudianism which is the dominant psychiatric model in the institution -- the women flipping their skirts, exposing themselves. This is held, however, within a resignification of control -- the chief warder still directs the show, and still retains his fat collection of cell keys on his belt throughout.

Such segments of the film as the "Follies" revue have attracted highly divergent responses from the film's critics: on the one hand,

For all the fuss that was made over Marat-Sade, the self-consciousness of that representation of life in a 19th century French madhouse diminished its force. It was always careful at dangerous moments to remind us of its artificiality, of the fact that these were just actors miming craziness and not to worry about them.

There are no such easy outs for us in Titicut Follies.¹⁵

and on the other,

Titicut Follies takes its name from a variety show performed by the inmates and guards. Wiseman

uses acts from the Follies as opening and closing sequences, also cutting back to it at other times during the film. The unnatural theatricality of the scenes permeates the rest of the film. Again, this is a tendency that Wiseman keeps under control in his later films.¹⁶

This wide divergence is symptomatic of the difficult inscription of theatricality, song, dance in the film. Any analysis of such inscription must also take account of the "difficult study"¹⁷ of literalisation or intratextuality spoken about by Benjamin regarding Brecht's use of song, placard, written text.

Heath suggests an apparent paradox regarding theatricality in film. On the one hand, film's decisive "uniqueness" was held by Bazin and others to be the illimitation of the "impression of reality" through the articulation of movement and space within the shot and across shots, and this "freedom" was a freedom from theatrical conventions. One way to contest this classic ideology of the cinema has been to restate cinema's own limitations through theatricalisation: "In other words, one mode of distanciation in film has often, and centrally, been the exact reference to theatre."¹⁸

The "unnatural theatricality" of Titicut Follies, with its revue, extensive use of song and the "performances" of inmates in front of the camera, is exemplary in these terms of distanciation, placing the film in a particularly unsettled relation with mainstream direct cinema,

and with other films of Wiseman. It is arguable that, in this film, gest is Brecht's "social gest" more consistently than in any other film.¹⁹ It is the "social" implications of discourses of power, domination and control, including those specific to cinema, that are presented most productively, rather than gests which exemplify personal or idiosyncratic states, as Brecht argued the merely expressive gest did.

"Performance" (See Appendix 3). An elderly inmate makes his only "appearance" in the film here. He appears left of centre in mid-shot, to the right of centre and in the upper corner is a television screen with Nana Mouskouri singing. A split-screen "effect" is created due to the darkened background and foreground, with the inmate lit frontally. The split-screen effect can be read to maintain diegetic continuity, as a darkened TV room, with the screen placed high above the viewers, and the inmate at the front of the room. This is supported by the passing of another figure between the foreground and background of the image, thus establishing certain spatial relations, and by the subsequent shot, 43, where these relations are confirmed. However, this is less important than the initial extreme difficulty in establishing vraisemblable spatial relations.

The mise-en-scène of the image can be read as a series of reversals and paradoxes: the TV monitor image is self-contained, a specular image, twice-an-image (and thus works similarly to the monitor

showing "admission procedures" in shot 35), yet it contains the well-known, the familiar, the presentable, the image of Nana Mouskouri. The unfamiliar, unpresentable, occupies the foreground, however, the image of an elderly inmate (and presumably a long-term resident). The familiar is rendered unfamiliar -- specular, twice-removed, her gaze (strangely for a television performance) directly off-right, not engaging the television audience, engaged in masking the performance by not acknowledging the audience. The unfamiliar, unacceptable, is rendered familiar. The inmate addresses the camera directly, delivering his lines in full acknowledgement of its character as performance by his jocular gestures to the camera -- his "tricks" of wiggling his ears and eyebrows, winking, glancing twice to his left in some acknowledgement of a double audience, situated out of sight of the film's audience and thus in another space. He copes with several levels of performance and reception far more subtly than Nana, whose space is the conventional and closed space of the professional performer.

The songs sung are also pertinent. The inmate sings songs of the "outside", of reverie and fantasy ("Chinatown") and of happiness ("Sunshine"). (Places outside the institution are often mentioned in songs and conversation -- Chicago, Budapest, Pittsburgh, "Chinatown" -- while the only possibility presented in the film of actualising such exteriority is at death, or while mourning death (Ellsworth, shots 159-62)). However, he delivers them off-handedly, distanced from their "promise" and "desire". In contrast, Nana's performance is one of involvement

and identification, not irony and distance." He is merely "performing" and this awareness is integral to his performance. The content of Nana's song, however, is of a quite different order, the theme words of which are "I love Johnny, but he never knew". The song's dealing with romance, sexuality and obsession would guarantee a certain dubiousness in the context of the asylum, given the dogmatic vulgar Freudianism which acts hegemonically in the interpretation of behaviour. Instead, in the context of the television performance, it is the conventional "love song" and confirms the singer as romantic, acceptable, moving. The song's double context, that of television and of Titicut Follies, raises the question of differential institutional structuring of reality and the enforcement which governs such inequitable structuring.

This single shot, in its relations with the film, raises a number of questions concerning itself, the film as a whole, the profilmic event. It is one of the very rare explicitly direct addresses in Wiseman. It poses the relation between this film's work and that of the work of television "entertainment", which includes the respective positioning of audiences. Both the lyrics and manner of presentation of the respective songs of the two crooners unsettle the question of normality and abnormality -- the inmate can clearly cope with a far more complex interweave of levels of reality than the professional performer.

Force-feeding (See Appendix 4). This segment, the force-feeding and flash-forward sequence, is unique in Wiseman. It is a rigorous

use of Eisensteinian "intellectual montage" with the possible qualification that Eisenstein's use of intellectual montage articulated spatially disparate (though still diegetically continuous) elements, whereas here Wiseman articulates temporally disparate elements, proposing a detailed comparison between the two situations:

Force-feeding

unshaven
surrounding noise
tears in eyes
drinking
into cell
naked, except for a cloth
over genitals
predominantly mid- and long-
mid-shots

Preparation of corpse

shaven
silence
drying the eyes
shaving
into fridge
clothed, well presentable
predominantly close ups and
extreme close-ups

Mamber again criticises this sequence as "editorial editing of a crude sort",²¹ yet its such explicit work of interruption of diegetic flow together with an equally "direct" inscription and recognition of the various looks marks it as an important disruptive gest. There is radical condensation of modalities of the look. Neither the mid-shot (the most naturalised shot articulation, and therefore the least easily read as voyeuristic), nor the close-up in this sequence is treated as innocent of implication of the structuring presence of camera and viewer. The camera in mid-shot pans along the body of the inmate as he is prepared for force-feeding, a cloth is laid over his genitals and eyes -- to protect him and his "privates" from what, the camera? (shots 87, 91); extreme close-ups of the inmate both alive and

dead precipitate a collapse of any "decorum", which is strengthened by the flash-forward intercuts being introduced in extreme close-up, in medias res -- not until shot 90 (the seventh shot of the flash-forward group), and then shots 93 and 95, is there a shot wider than an extreme close-up. There is thus an initial impossibility of clearly establishing the context of these flash-forwards, an impossibility which lures the gaze and then satiates it with a "lingering over horrors".²² Further, intra-diegetic looks are displaced by the "fourth look", the look of the camera: the eyes of the inmate are covered, the psychiatrist glances furtively at the camera, the long pan left down the body of the inmate leads to a tilt to direct gaze into the camera of a guard restraining the inmate.

Interrogation and Incarceration (See Appendix 5). These sequences directly follow the opening segment. One set of segments is of inmates undressing and dressing in institutional uniform; the other is an interview by the psychiatrist with a sex offender who has presumably just been admitted. The most obvious result of editing these segments together is to enact a comparison between the psychiatrist's discourses of domination as he "undresses" the interviewee psychologically and the physical undressing of the inmates:

Psychiatrist asks how many times inmate masturbates a day or a week.

Inmate: Sometimes three times a day.

Psychiatrist: That's too much What are you interested in, big breasts or small breasts?

Inmate: I never thought of it.

Psychiatrist asks about homosexual experience.

Inmate relates two such experiences.

However, editing of this sequence breaks the neatness, the balance of this reading by excessively reinforcing it with non-discursive elements breaking the "logic" of the interview. The inmate is first clothed in a singlet, then, through editing, he has a prison shirt on. The possible length of the interrogation is thus explicitly ambiguous. Further, the actual tone and direction of the psychiatrist's questioning changes markedly -- the inquiring becomes inquisitive and then positively inquisitorial, the breaks marked by editing.

At the height of this verbal violence, at shot 21, the psychiatrist poses a question which is not answered by the inmate, but "by" another inmate in a disjunct space, presumably that of the admitting room. The inmate stammers violently and almost incoherently -- a perhaps appropriate reaction to the psychiatrist's voyeuristic violence: "I told the doctor before I came here I didn't want my balls taken outta me."

Finally, through shot articulation and mise-en-scène in shots 32-35, there is further disruptive inscription of the look of the camera, and its complicity in the system of institutionalised voyeurism. (It should be emphasised here that such inscription of complicity is a partial answer to the several charges that Titicut Follies simply

trades on a certain voyeuristic shock value, or invades privacy.)²³

The camera, in a long take, follows (discreetly) behind the figures of the sex offender, who is now naked, and a guard. The inmate is very short, the guard is quite tall; the guard tossles the inmate's hair and appears to take him by the hand as he "looks him over", and leads him past a monitor screen and into a solitary confinement cell. The camera tilts to the monitor, gesturing, in a similar fashion to shot 42, to another image of hospital admission. It then tracks up to the door of the cell as it is closed, and to the observation-hole in the door. This diegetically constructed iris-shot, a type of deviant point-of-view shot,²⁴ is a daring trope for the voyeuristic gaze of the camera.

Notes

- ¹ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 219.
- ² Robert Coles, "Stripped Bare at the Follies", The New Republic, January 20, 1968.
- ³ Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, p. ix.
- ⁴ The main reference is here to Thompson and Bordwell, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu"; Branigan, "The Space of Equinox Flower"; Heath, "Narrative Space"; and Ben Brewster, "Editorial", Screen, 17, No. 3 (Autumn 1976).
- ⁵ See Brewster, "Editorial", pp. 5-6.
- ⁶ Cf. Neale, "Propaganda", pp. 10-18.
- ⁷ Heath, "Narrative Space", p. 86.
- ⁸ Heath, "Narrative Space", p. 85.
- ⁹ Jeanne Allen, "Self-Reflexivity in Documentary", Ciné-tracts, No. 2, p. 37.
- ¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?", in Understanding Brecht (London: New Left Books, 1973), p. 18, and see Heath, "Film Performance", Ciné-tracts, No. 2.
- ¹¹ Roland Barthes, "Sept modèles de Mère Courage", quoted in Heath, "Lessons from Brecht", Screen, 15, No. 2 (Summer 1974), p. 115, and see also p. 116.
- ¹² Heath, "Narrative Space", pp. 108-9.
- ¹³ Robert Coles, "Stripped Bare at the Follies".

¹⁴ Mamber himself recognises that Titicut Follies does not generalise in the way more "typical" direct cinema does. Cinema Verite in America, pp. 220-1.

¹⁵ Richard Schickel, "The Frightful Follies of Bedlam", Life, December 1, 1967.

¹⁶ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 219 (my emphasis).

¹⁷ Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?", p. 3.

¹⁸ Heath, "Lessons from Brecht", pp. 116-7.

¹⁹ Brecht, "On Gestic Music", in Brecht on Theatre, ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 104-6.

²⁰ See Appendix 5.

²¹ Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, p. 219.

²² David Bromwich, "Documentary Now", Dissent, October, 1971.

²³ See Ellsworth, Frederick Wiseman, pp. 176-8.

²⁴ See Branigan, "Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot", Screen, 16, No. 3 (Autumn 1975), p. 57.

Appendices

These appendices, shot lists of several segments of Titicut Follies, are based upon Ellsworth's shot list (Frederick Wiseman, pp. 14-33), although at several points material from my independent shot study of the film has been added.

Abbreviations:

ECU	Extreme close-up
CU	Close-up
MS	Medium shot
LS	Long shot
ELS	Extreme long shot
ZI	Zoom in
ZO	Zoom out
LA	Low angle
HA	High Angle
PR	Pan right
PL	Pan left
FV	Front view
SV	Side view
BV	Back view
FG	Foreground
BG	Background
(00:00)	Duration of shot in minutes and seconds

Appendix 1Shot No. VisualSound

Part 8: Trying to Get Out

118: ECU doctor on phone, ZO to CU,
ZO to LS of him and desk, woman
seated at right table, writing.
(1:12)

He arranges an appointment with
someone.

119: ECU doctor, hangs up phone.
(0:15)

Turns to desk: "OK . . . now."

120: ECU "Sane" inmate. (0:30)

Doctor tells him he will be
released when there is enough
improvement. Inmate replies it
is the institution that is making
him worse.

121: CU doctor, he inhales on cigar-
ette. (0:05)

Off camera, inmate: "I want to go
back to prison where I belong."

122: ZO to MS "Sane" inmate sitting.
=
120

Inmate: "I was supposed to come
down here only for observation.
My mind's perfect. I'm logical.
I've been here for a year and a half.
Every time I come in here you tell me
I look crazy.

123: CU woman (shot 122), looks away,
disinterested, inhales on cigar-
ette and blows out smoke, ZO to
MS inmate, FG, woman BG, ZI to
ECU inmate. (1:40)

Inmate argues that he needs peace
and quiet. That there are no sports
at the institution. He is losing
weight. "Everything that's happen-
ing to me is bad."

124: CU BV inmate, second doctor in
BG (0:04)

Inmate: "If you leave me here,
obviously that proves . . .

125: CU ZI to ECU doctor, PL as he
reaches to light cigarette, ZI
to ECU eyes, nose. (0:36)

. . . that meant you want me to get
harmd, it's just plain logic."
Doctor: "Well, that's interesting
logic."
Inmate: "Isn't that perfect logic?"
Doctor: "No, it isn't Vladimir."

126: CU inmate, ZO to MS as he gets up
and leaves with guards, PL, he
walks away from camera out the
door across the room, camera is
behind desk, doctor FG. (0:25)

Doctor: "Thank you Vladimir."

Appendix 1 (continued)

127: ECU doctor, ZO to CU. (0:30)

"He's been much better than this. Now he's falling apart." He prescribes tranquilizers.

128: ECU woman (shot 123). (0:13)

"He argues in perfect paranoid pattern. If you accept his basic premise then the rest is logical, but the basic premise is not true."

129: ECU doctor. (0:25)

Doctor says Vladimir was very closed before, but has opened up recently.

130: ECU older man seated at table.. (0:30)

Man says Vladimir sought executive clemency once, and got as far as the parole board at one time.

131: ECU woman. (0:03)

"I really think he's terrified of leaving."

132: CU doctor, ZI ECU. (0:30)

Doctor suggests he be put on tranquilizers to bring paranoid elements under control.

133: ECU second doctor (shot 124). (0:12)

He comments on paranoid behaviour.

134: ECU doctor dictating into recorder. (0:25)

He records diagnosis: Schizophrenic Reaction with Prominent Paranoid Features.

Appendix 2Shot
No.VisualSound

1: TITICUT FOLLIES (0:02)

"Strike Up the Band" sung by inmates, played by band.

(Reel 1) Part 1: Revue: "Titicut Follies".

2: CU ZO to LS of men (inmates) singing on a stage. Slow ZI to 3 shot, MS; ZI to CU of one inmate. Slow PR along faces, ZO to MS as they shake pompons. After song they walk off stage right. Shot is front bottom lit, black BG. 8 singers in two lines. Camera holds on most faces in PR.

Men (inmates) sing "Strike Up the Band."

3: MS master of ceremonies (The Head Guard who reappears throughout the film) waving on applause. ZI to ECU of him at microphone, bottom lit. He turns and exits through curtain. (1:03)

The Head Guard introduces next act and tells a joke about Father Mulligan (a chaplain at the institution who is referred to later in the film).

XXXX

59: Back to the Titicut Follies performance. CU 2 shot of Head Guard and partner swaying in time to song they are singing. Black BG. They wear glittered hats, the Head Guard leans his head on the shoulder of his partner as they sing. ZO to MS as they dance, ZI to ECU guard, PR to ECU partner, ZO to MS as they end song and shake hands. The guard points to his partner to encourage applause, then jumps to the center of the stage, spreads his arms and shouts: "And me!" ZI to CU Head Guard grinning. (1:35)

They sing "I Want to Go to Chicagotown."

Head Guard: "And me!"

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163: Titicut Follies show, LS eight inmates on stage, ZI to ECU inmate on left, slow PR along faces, slow ZO to LS, band

Applause, piano playing "So Long For Now", inmates sing along.

Appendix 2 (continued)

director in lower center. PL
as Head Guard enters left with
women aides, LS ZI to CU two
women. PR to Head Guard singing
into microphone, he holds out hand
to encourage applause, inmates
sing BG. ZI ECU Head Guard,
bottom lit, he mouths the song.
One choruser holds up a placard,
"Moe Shill Nominated in Oscar
Award 1966." Z0 to CU Head
Guard, PL to cast, Z0 to LS
inmates waving good-bye. Head
Guard enters right and shouts
"aren't they terrific?" ZI to
MS Guard and two inmates, one is
a young boy with a straw hat, ZI
to CU boy, he bows several times.
Z0 to MS Guard and boy, ZI to
ECU Guard, bottom lit. PL to
boy and across to women, Z0 to
MS as they throw something to
crowd, Z0 to LS women as they turn
and flip up skirts like a chorus
line, ZI to CU of two women.
(2:35)

164: ECU boy, clapping his hands, smiling. silence
(0:05)

Appendix 3Shot
No.VisualSound

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>42: CU older inmate, face lit brightly from right, black on left, BG black except for television upper left. Slow ZI to ECU inmate, television upper right. He finishes his song, wiggles his ears and grins into the camera. Slow, short PR and PL. Focus pulling to television and back. (1:40)</p> | <p>Inmate sings "Chinatown." This is counterpointed with the smooth love song of the television female singer: "I love Johnny."</p> |
| <p>43: Same inmate walks toward camera, leaving television room, MS to ECU, he passes camera and stares at it and it follows him to stairs, tilt up as he climbs stairs. Seen through grating of the stairs, he's silhouetted against light BG.</p> | <p>laughter off camera
footsteps</p> |

Appendix 4Shot
No.VisualSound

(Reel 2) Part 6: Force-feeding

- | | |
|---|--|
| 74: Psychiatrist from "Sane" inmate and molester interview scenes, CU, walks left and looks through small window in cell door, ZI to ECU of window, he enters right, exits right, CU window. (0:30) | "Mr. _____, come here a minute. If you don't eat food we are going to feed you with tube . . . through your nose." |
| 75: Office, ZI MS to CU of psychiatrist on phone, he sits down and looks at camera. (0:40) | He arranges to have two patients prepared for tube feeding. |
| 76: Tracking MS BV, three guards leading old, thin, naked inmate out of dark hall into feeding room, PR to psychiatrist standing next to inmate. (0:50) | Psychiatrist tells inmate if he doesn't drink the liquid, it will be "put through a tube through your nose into your stomach." |
| 77: CU inmate, ZO to MS guards as they tie restraints to his wrists and stand on either side. (0:19) | Guard: "Either drink it or he'll dump it down the tube through your nose." |
| 78: Psychiatrist, CU, guards BG, ZI to ECU as he lifts liquid to smell it. (0:03) | room noise |
| 79: HA MS chest and face inmate lying on table, PL to psychiatrist as he places a cloth across patient's groin. ZI to CU psychiatrist smoking a cigarette, ZO to LS, he wipes the tube around an empty jar to grease it. (0:43) | Guard, referring to jar: "Ain't much of anything left." Psychiatrist asks for "any other grease, or oil or anything." |
| 80: ECU inmate's head, ZO to CU psychiatrist's hand, tube is above inmate's head. ZO to MS psychiatrist tries to get grease out of empty jar. ZI to CU his hands and tube, tilt down to ECU inmate's head, psychiatrist pushes tube into nose. Eyes and genitals covered with cloth. (1:10) | Psychiatrist: "Any grease, butter?"

Guard: "Swallow, swallow, that's a boy." |

Appendix 4 (continued)

- 81: ECU same inmate, dead, his eyes open, mouth open, fly on forehead, soap on his face. (0:02) silence
- 82: ECU head of inmate, hands of doctor, Assistant: "The marker's way down ZO to MS doctor as he pulls chair over there, way down doctor." and puts one foot up on it. He holds up funnel and pours liquid into it. ZI to ECU funnel, ZO to CU psychiatrist with cigarette over funnel pouring liquid through smoke, LA. (0:45) Doctor: "Get some water, ok?"
Guards: "Did Sam work Friday?"
"No he didn't work all last week."
- 83: ECU mortician. (0:03) silence
- 84: ECU razor shaving corpse (0:04) silence
- 85: MS psychiatrist pouring fluid into funnel, cigarette ashes longer over funnel, squints through smoke, slow tilt down along tube to CU inmate's face, ZI to ECU. (0:32) Doctor: "You got more food?"
- 86: ECU corpse, eyes open, razor shaving face. (0:04) silence
- 87: ECU inmate in feeding room, PL and ZO along body, tilt up at feet to guard holding ankle restraints. PR to second guard, as he looks straight at camera, CU. (0:25) Voice: "Leave some for the other guy."
- 88: ECU dead inmate, mortician places cotton in eye sockets. (0:06) silence
- 89: ECU corpse, mortician adjusts lids over cotton. (0:04) silence
- 90: MS mortician and corpse, he adjusts lids over cotton. (0:04) silence
- 91 = tilt down and PR along inmate's end body to CU head with tube in nose, 87 ZI to mouth and nose, he swallows. (0:30) Doctor: "Please get this job over with."

Appendix 4 (continued)

- 92: ECU psychiatrist, long ashes of cigarette poised above funnel. ZO and tilt down to MS of him and inmate, doctor pulls tube out. (0:25) Doctor says something about "a little whisky." Laughter. Doctor: "Very good operation, very nice." Guard: "OK, Herr Doctor." "Hey, that wasn't bad at all, he's a veteran."
- 93: Mortician shakes out cloth after shaving corpse. LA, MS. (0:02) silence
- 94: Psychiatrist places tube to right. end (0:04) Doctor: "I think he's been tube fed before." "All right, that's it." 87
- 95: Flash to corpse laid out in suit. (0:01) silence
- 96: MS 2 shot doctor and attendant, PL and track LS after two guards leave room with inmate, down short corridor, turn corner to right, lead him to room, they close the door behind him. (0:23) footsteps
- 97: Cut on action, HA MS of coffin being slid into cooler. Attendant closes door and walks away. Camera lingers on door. (0:13) room noise door shuts

Appendix 5

<u>Shot No.</u>	<u>Visual</u>	<u>Sound</u>
6:	ECU inmate, ZO to CU of him (child molester) seated across what is later revealed as psychiatrist's desk. (0:22)	Off camera: a man with an accent questions inmate about his sexual relations with children.
7:	CU molester, ZO to MS over psychiatrist's shoulder. (0:20)	Psychiatrist asks if inmate was intoxicated when he committed sexual assaults.
8:	Long hold ECU child molester, he bites lip. (1:10)	Psychiatrist asks about crimes, inmate admits sexual relations with his daughter. Inmate: "The way I am right now, if I have to stay like this, I'd just as soon go to jail and stay there."
9:	Admitting room, MS ZI to CU inmate, PL to CU guard, inmates standing in BG. Inmate shields eyes from camera. Inmates undressed. ZO to MS of guard and inmates. (0:16)	Guards: "Take off your clothes."
10:	MS pile of personal articles on the floor. (0:05)	room noise
11:	MS BV naked inmate, guard left, ZI to CU inmate. (0:12).	room noise
12:	CU inmate from shot 11, he walks left. (0:02)	room noise
13:	MS guard emptying pockets of inmate's clothes, inmates in BG. Inmates glance at camera, also 14. (0:15)	Off camera: a guard calls Richard over.
14:	CU 2 shot guard and Richard ZO to MS, guard searches clothes. Richard undresses and holds out arms, turning to be searched. ZI to CU 2 shot. (0:37)	Guard: "Take 'um off, come on. Put your hands out, turn around, O.K., take your stuff and get over here. Get dressed."

Appendix 5 (continued)

- 15: Psychiatrist office, ECU inmate from shot 8. (0:04) Psychiatrist asks how many times inmate masturbates a day . . .
- 16: ECU psychiatrist. (0:02) "Or a week?"
- 17: ECU inmate, eyes, nose. (0:03) "Sometimes three times a day."
- 18: ECU psychiatrist, exhales smoke from cigarette. He glances at camera. (0:36) "That's too much." He asks if inmate is interested in "big, tall husky, luscious, looking female." He doesn't give time to answer. "What are you interested in, big breasts . . .
- 19: ECU molester, scratches head. (0:04) " . . . or small breasts?"
- 20: ECU psychiatrist, ZO to CU as he inhales on cigarette, squinting through smoke and looking at camera. (0:55) Inmate: "I never thought of it." Psychiatrist asks about homosexual experiences and inmate relates two experiences.
- 21: Admitting room: CU inmate (stutterer), unshaven, nods and jerks his head sharply. (0:25) "I told the doctor before I came here I didn't want my balls taken outta me."
- 22: Psychiatrist office, HA MS, ZI to CU molester. Molester wears a shirt. (0:15) "I know there's something wrong, otherwise I wouldn't do things like that. But that's the way I am."
- 23: Long hold CU psychiatrist. (1:03) He narrates inmate's criminal record. "And you still say you don't need help." Inmate: "I need help but I don't know where I can get it." Psychiatrist: "Well, you get it here, I guess."
- XXXX
- 32: MS 3 shot guards and inmate (shot 28) walking down corridor. Camera follows behind them, cells on right, ZI to 2 shot officer and inmate. (0:28). footsteps
Guard asks a question and inmate nods.

Appendix 5 (continued)

33: Reverse angle, they walk toward camera, past, and camera follows from behind as they pass through door, LA MS as they go up stairs and through door at top. (0:22)

footsteps

34: CU inmate, takes off clothes. ZO to MS inmate and guards, ZI to ECU inmate. (0:25) We follow him through shot 35.

Guards: "Got an empty one?"
"Number eight is empty."

35: Long tracking shot, ECU guards, ZO to CU guards and naked inmate (shot 34) walk down corridor, cells on right. Guards reaches down and looks at inmate's hands, puts cigar in mouth, runs hand over inmate's crew cut, checking hair. Camera tilts up to LA CU of television hanging from ceiling at end of corridor, showing admitting procedures in a hospital, tilts down, CU guards gesture for inmate to enter cell. He walks in and they close door, ZI to ECU over shoulder of one guard to "8" on door. Hand reaches in to open small window on door, guard peeks in and moves away, camera ZI through window to MS inmate silhouetted by light from window across room, he leans on sill, looks out, ZI to CU out of focus. (1:05)

footsteps

television sound

Off camera: we hear a trombone playing "Blue Heaven", mixed with sounds of guards and television.

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This bibliography is a consolidated list of works used in this thesis, together with most relevant additional material: It does not attempt to be exhaustive either in the field of film theory or in that of documentary or direct cinema. A comprehensive bibliography of film theory would take us beyond the scope of this thesis. Substantial bibliographies of documentary and direct cinema can be found in Eric Barnouw, Documentary, M. Ali Issari, Cinéma Vérité, Gilles Marsolais, L'aventure du cinéma direct, and On Film No. 8, pp. 32-36.

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