

‘Uncontrolled’ Situations: Direct Cinema

Since the term appeared in the 1960s, ‘direct cinema’ has been a source of confusion for some, frustration for others. Not only is the ‘directness’ of direct cinema questionable, but the term is often used as the Anglo–American equivalent of *cinéma vérité* (the latter coined by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin in France in 1960 to describe their experiments in interactive documentary). For example, in 1971, Alan Rosenthal observed that the terms direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* were being ‘used interchangeably [in the US] in accordance with general practice’ (Rosenthal 1971: 2). Outlining precise divisions between the two approaches can be tricky, as they tended to overlap in many ways – especially as, over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, proponents of both direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* started to question and adjust their assumptions and practices.

Direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*, however, both have distinct origins and features; in particular I want to look at US direct cinema’s narrative traditions, style and audience expectations. William Rothman dismisses the term, since ‘direct’ implies ‘unmediated’ (1996: 7), but this is actually a reason I want to maintain it here, since as a movement the idea of sidestepping or minimizing mediation was paramount. With its shaky, hand-held visuals (‘wobblyscope’) and on-location sync sound (or ‘direct’ sound, usually supplemented by on-location ‘wild’ sound) direct cinema can deliver an impression of disordered immediacy and tactility that stands in sharp contrast to the deliberate scenes and soundscapes of more traditional documentary. Mobile tracking shots, on-the-spot interviews, integrated close-ups and cutaways home in on marginal, telling details: physical gestures, facial expressions, unexpected or awkward reactions. These techniques place viewers ‘in the position of vicarious witnesses’ (Corner 1996: 2), creating a sense of ‘being there’ while producing an imagined, intimate connection between viewers and on-screen subjects. Direct cinema thus has been seen as appealing more to emotional rather than logical or analytical viewer responses.

Moreover, the approach tends to present subjects as characters, focusing on individuals’ lives and struggles while embedding hand-held and direct sound effects within the storytelling conventions of popular film. This focus on individual personalities and lack of forthright interpretation has led critics to argue that direct cinema usually fails as trenchant social analysis. Jonathan Kahana asks whether much direct cinema simply ‘serves to reify individual personality as the site of social truth’ (2008: 153). Others have stressed that the approach is vulnerable to manipulation, disguising the artificiality of its dramatic structures beneath an overriding impression of unmediated access to the people and situations it represents. Still, with varying levels of effectiveness, many direct cinema documentaries manifested the 1960s mantra ‘the personal is the political’, striving to articulate social issues through a focus on highly personal accounts (Vogels 2005: 154).

For Rothman, direct cinema is also ‘the fullest inheritor of the concerns of America’s “classical” cinema’: the closest thing documentary has to Hollywood. Direct cinema has helped uncover the complexities of the mosaic nation, showing ‘the coarseness and ugliness of America’, but also ‘flashes of beauty, tenderness, compassion’ (Rothman 1996: 80). The filmmaker Albert Maysles saw in it the potential to revivify US democratic ideals, leveling hierarchies through direct access to people’s lives and bolstering shared national consciousness by letting citizens ‘know’ each other. ‘We had this possibility’, Maysles stated, ‘with this equipment and this philosophy, to transfer one person’s experience to another, so that the country could be transformed from a geographical entity into a nation’ (Maysles 2001). Known both for the ideals of its practitioners and for controversies over misleading claims to immediacy, direct cinema nonetheless came to define the look and feel of US documentary for a generation of filmmakers.

‘DON’T BE AFRAID, IT’S A MICROPHONE!’

The lure of direct cinema lies in the impression of intimate knowing, allowing viewers to feel part of the action, observing the unplanned and instantaneous, constructing a vicarious experience of ‘other’ lives. While facilitated by improvements to lightweight camera and sound technologies during the 1950s, its key inventors have continued to stress that the ‘revolution’ of direct cinema was not so much about the technological advances that became its hallmarks but involved a whole philosophy of filming. They were determined to ‘ditch the tripod’ and reproduce the spontaneity of real life (Leacock 2008 [2000]).

Keith Beattie cautions against the ‘crude technological determinism’ of some accounts of direct cinema’s early years, stressing the social and professional pressures that always underpin new technological developments (2004:

85).¹ In the US, an overriding factor supporting the emergence of lightweight, sync-sound equipment lay in demands coming from television journalism for flexible devices that could document news events with ease, on location and in real time. In France, through figures like Rouch (who trained as an anthropologist), the demand came more via the interests of ethnography and the need for portable and unobtrusive recording devices for anthropological fieldwork (Beattie 2004: 85). Both approaches sought what might be called a kind of camera pen: a means to employ the camera and sound recorder with the ease of note-taking, as in journalistic or ethnographic fieldwork.²

Also working against technologically determinist accounts of direct cinema and *vérité* is the history of non-fiction filmmaking itself, which shows us that both professionals and amateurs were always interested in recording everyday life using candid, unplanned scenarios, and that technology matched these demands. The Lumières' *cinématographe*, at five kilograms (a small fraction of the weight of an Edison camera), was designed to be transportable and uncomplicated in order to shoot actualities with minimal setup. Flaherty's Bell and Howell and Akeley cameras were chosen for durability and flexibility, so they could be taken on treks along the sub-Arctic coasts of Hudson Bay. Workers' Film and Photo League crews carried their cameras alongside unemployed marchers to capture the intensity of protest at street level. Amateur filmmakers too indicated a popular demand for lightweight cameras, for narrower gauges of film and, later, for video and digital technologies that could record, as cheaply as possible, everything from world travels to backyard adventures.

Direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* advanced these efforts by making it a professional priority to reproduce scenes from life with ease and efficiency. Photojournalism had been doing this for some time: candid scenes were regularly caught by the instantaneous flash of Weegee or the intuitive framing of William Eugene Smith, but moving pictures seemed only inconsistently to reproduce spontaneous, off-hand encounters. In particular, the later 1950s saw unprecedented efforts to unleash the heightened sense of realism that lightweight cameras and sync sound might provide, thus doing away with voiceovers and artificial post-syncing. Key challenges lay in developing quiet, portable cameras and lightweight sound technology to go with them. Richard Leacock recalled the frustrations of working with traditional equipment on *Toby and the Tall Corn* in 1954:

[*Toby*] was to be my final attempt to make a documentary using classical film industry techniques. A 35 mm Mitchell NC camera weighing about 100 lbs with its massive tripod and power-supply, a Reeves 35 mm magnetic tape recorder and its attendant vacuum tube amplifier at about 80 lbs (it was said to be portable and had handles on the two cases, we called it the knuckle-buster), and a hand-held Eclair Cameflex for pickup shots,

plus a vast array of lights and cables, a dolly and tracks [. . .] a truck full.
(Leacock 1990: 4)

Leacock, in spite of this 'elephantine' equipment, did manage to retain a 'trace of spontaneity' in the finished film. When screened as part of the CBS television series *Omnibus*, *Toby* caught the attention of Robert Drew, a picture editor and journalist at *Life* magazine who at the time was exploring the use of candid photography in motion pictures. Though Drew thought the narration in *Toby* was 'idiotic', he was struck by the realist dynamics of a scene showing a tent being put up (Drew 2008). Drew was interested in developing a documentary approach beyond what he called the 'propagandist' methods of Grierson, yet true to (and improving on) the 'naturalist' and dramatic methods of Flaherty (quoted in Saunders 2007: 9). By 1960, Drew and Leacock had teamed up with D. A. Pennebaker and Albert Maysles. The groundbreaking television documentary they made together, *Primary* (1960), is discussed in the next section.

The 1950s was a period of keen experimentation not only with film technology, but with conceptions of film's relationship to reality and its effects on audiences. Filmmakers ranging across popular fiction, documentary, journalism and anthropology were seeking out less cumbersome methods that could heighten impressions of immediacy and foreground film's 'indexical' relationship to the pro-filmic. The Second World War had precipitated key advances in lightweight cameras. The German Arriflex 35 was introduced in 1937 for newsreel photography and later adapted for military surveillance. Arriflex cameras taken by American soldiers were copied by the US military to produce its own camera for combat filming, the Cineflex PH-330, and Leacock famously used the Arriflex when shooting Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948). Other conditions and movements were having an impact on practice. After the war, social and economic pressures helped give rise to realist, minimalist approaches such as neorealism in Italy, where actors, directors and writers advocated stripped down aesthetics for telling everyday stories. The neorealist Cesare Zavattini argued for films that could offer people 'a direct approach to everyday reality' (1953: 64).

Starting in 1956 in Britain, the Free Cinema movement began to gain widespread attention, spearheaded by six film programs shown over three years at the National Film Theatre. The screenings aimed to be eclectic, experimental and edgy. From the US came Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery* (1956), an improvised drama-doc with a neo-realist feel, dealing with poverty and alcoholism on Manhattan's 'skid row' (John Cassavetes called Rogosin 'probably the greatest documentary filmmaker of all time') (quoted in Thurber 2000: B6). From France was François Truffaut's uplifting short *Les Mistons* (*The Brats*, 1957) and Georges Franju's searing, at times surreal documentary about the abattoirs of Paris, *Blood of the Beasts* (1949). Włodzimierz Borowik's

underground film *Paragraph Zero* (1957) offered an exposé of Poland's 'invisible' social problem, prostitution, against which there were no specific laws at the time. The camera and spotlight probe and examine the squalid alleys and back rooms inhabited by some of Warsaw's most destitute women. *Paragraph Zero* exemplifies the arresting visuals, marginal subject matter and sense of immediacy that Free Cinema encouraged.

Meanwhile in Canada, the National Film Board's (NFB) Unit B was using increasingly flexible technologies to capture life in the street while minimizing Griersonian didacticism. Wolf Koenig's *The Days Before Christmas* (1957/8) was a pilot for Unit B's flagship *Candid Eye* television series and used lightweight cameras and intermittent synchronized sound to offer a compressed 'city symphony' of Montreal in the run-up to the holidays. Koenig also produced *The Back-Breaking Leaf* (1959) with Terence Macartney-Filgate (an important creative force in the NFB), a film that revisits the theme of human struggle with the land, graphically depicting transient field workers harvesting tobacco at the height of summer. The actor William Greaves also made an impact at Unit B, working as an editor on Macartney-Filgate's *Blood and Fire* (1958), about the Salvation Army, while directing shorts such as *Putting It Straight* (1957), *Smoke and Weather* (1958) and *Emergency Ward* (1959). *Blood and Fire* generated debate in showing a destitute person weeping profusely – the shot's 'emotional nakedness' pushed the boundaries of ethical correctness but was kept in, heralding expectations of personal revelation and raw intimacy that would characterize direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* (Jones 1988: 143). Another NFB project, Michel Brault's *The Snowshoers* (1958) is a much-cited early example of dynamic hand-held camerawork, but also indicates direct cinema in its hands-off treatment of its subject (snowshoe races in Quebec) and its 'unprettified view of robust conviviality' (Ellis and McLane 2005: 211). Jean Rouch was impressed, and Brault would later act as cameraman on Rouch's own breakthrough *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961).

Rouch had first worked with direct sync sound in *La pyramide humaine* (*The Human Pyramid*) shot in 1958 and 1959 in Côte d'Ivoire, which led to pursuing similar technologies in *Chronicle of a Summer*, a film about his 'own tribe', Parisians. This was shot with sociologist Edgar Morin in the summer of 1960 with input from Brault on camerawork and remote sound. A few months earlier, Rouch and Morin had coined the term *cinéma-vérité* on returning from the first international ethnographic film festival in Florence, where *On the Bowery*, *The Hunters* (1958) and Free Cinema films like *We Are the Lambeth Boys* (1959) had made a deep impression. *Cinéma-vérité* was an homage to Vertov's *Kino Pravda* ('film truth'), but in fact Rouch and Morin employed the term more precisely, calling it '*nouveau* [new] *cinéma-vérité*'. It was in many ways the 'new' that they wanted to stress (Morin 2003 [1960]: 229–30). New *cinéma-vérité* retained a fidelity to *Kino Pravda*'s unplanned scenarios and

determination to get close to the spontaneous feel of everyday life, but at the same time Rouch recognized that *Kino Pravda*'s ideals were not universal, and that they occupied a specific time, place and purpose. What Rouch shared with Vertov, he often stressed, was the idea that film truth was not 'pure truth' but a kind of truth created with the assistance of cinema technology. Cinema initiated new forms of visual and aural perception that could conjure up parallel truths – 'filmically understood' truths – that might be comprehended through a 'new kind of audiovisual language' (Rouch and Feld 2003 [1973]: 98). In this sense, truth was produced by the presence of the camera and the dynamics that arose between filmmaker, camera and subject. Barnouw calls the camera a 'catalyst' for events captured in the *cinéma-vérité* scenario and the *vérité* filmmaker becomes a kind of 'provocateur' (1983: 255).

Along with Vertov, Rouch was 'consciously synthesizing' Flaherty's methods in the creation of new *cinéma-vérité* (Rouch and Feld 2003 [1973]: 99). Like Flaherty, he sought to establish close affinities and working relationships with his subjects. Specifically he adopted Flaherty's 'participating camera', or subject feedback method, which could demystify the filmmaking process for subjects and generate spontaneous ideas during filming, suppressing the demand for predetermined outcomes. Rouch's experimental films such as *Jaguar* (1954–5, released 1967) and *Moi, un Noir* (*I, a Black*, 1958), shot in western Africa, made this participation process explicit by recording the feedback of subjects and incorporating it as voiceover commentary. In *Moi, un Noir* the main actor, Oumarou Ganda, partly acts and partly lives out his daily life for the camera; the performance is then self-reflexively narrated by Ganda in voiceover. At its best the effect produces a kind of *mise-en-abyme* of self-fashioned characters reflecting the cinematic fantasies of real subjects, disturbing presumptions of documentary transparency (Geiger 1998: 3–8).

An early scene in *Chronicle of a Summer*, shot on the street, offers a somewhat fetishistic display of the new filming methods and technologies. Rouch's and Morin's assistants/subjects, Marceline Loridan and Nadine Ballot, conduct interviews with the microphone and portable Nagra tape recorder clearly visible to the camera. They engage passers-by with the question 'are you happy?' and elicit responses ranging from curious and fearful (a young boy), to diffident and amused (a policeman), to pretentious (a student flashes a book of philosophy). The novelty of the technology is clear: at one point a seventy-nine-year-old man looks confused by the object Marceline waves in front of his face. She explains: 'Don't be afraid, it's a microphone!' But *Chronicle of a Summer* was not just a technical experiment, it was also a social experiment, a self-critical examination of what truths the camera might provoke into being. Near the project's end, Morin and Rouch discuss the difficulties of communicating their feelings and intents through film: though they were catalysts and key players, the film became something separate from them,

producing essentially ‘filmically understood’ truths and audience reactions that didn’t always correspond to their own impressions and opinions of subjects they believed they intimately knew. ‘Nous sommes dans le bain’, states Morin finally, a phrase (translated in the subtitles as ‘we’re in for trouble’) that has since animated debates – such as Brian Winston’s – about the veracity and honesty of *vérité* approaches.³ Already, *Chronicle of a Summer* was pointing to both the compelling possibilities and the pitfalls of *cinéma vérité*. Audiences might take home an impression of direct collaboration and the distribution of control among filmmakers and subjects, but this apparent openness tells only a part of the story and in its own ways can disguise a film’s artifice and manipulation of ‘truth’.

Due to the ambiguities of truth in *cinéma-vérité*, Rouch would come to prefer the term *cinéma direct*, which seemed less constrained by implicit claims to absolute truth. In the US, direct cinema would never really aspire to the perceived openness and analytical self-awareness of Rouch’s approach. Robert Drew would note that, even as he was helping to reinvent television documentary in 1960, ‘Vertov had no influence on me, and I had never heard of Jean Rouch’ (quoted in Saunders 2007: 9). For Albert Maysles, Vertov was essentially ‘Soviet propaganda’ that lacked the immediacy of sync sound (Zuber 2007: 17). James Blue summed up the situation in 1964: while the French ‘probe, interview, provoke’, he noted, the Americans ‘are, for the most part, fundamentalists. They eschew intervention whatever its goal. They cultivate alert passivity. They seek self-effacement. They want the subject to forget that they are there’ (Blue 1964: 23). Portable sound, lightweight cameras and perhaps, above all, editing would help filmmakers and the filming apparatus disappear behind the scenes, to become flies on the wall.

CRISIS AND INNOVATION

Though a handful of filmmakers – especially Drew, Leacock, Pennebaker, Albert and David Maysles and Frederick Wiseman – are usually cited as direct cinema’s key innovators in the US,⁴ it is important to remember that these figures did not work in isolation. Scholars such as Kahana have looked beyond the usual suspects towards, for example, the work of Michael Gray and the Chicago Film Group (which included Lars Hedman and Mike Shea). Gray’s *Cicero March* (1966, not released commercially) documented Civil Rights protests against housing policies and real estate ‘redlining’ in the all-white suburb of Cicero (Kahana 2008: 156). An important retrospective at New York’s Film Forum in 1997 highlighted other integral figures in direct cinema’s advancement and diversification, including Allan King, Stephen Sbarge, William Greaves, Hope Ryden, Charlotte Zwerin and Joyce Chopra.

Direct cinema's roots go back to the interest in heightening the immediacy of documentary that grew during the 1950s. This came out of mixed demands – cultural, commercial, ideological, aesthetic and personal – to transform structural and practical relationships between documentary films, their source material and their audiences. As Kahana (citing Michael Curtin) stresses, direct cinema's 'seemingly autonomous innovators' in the US were working within larger cultural and technological frameworks. These included Cold War and nuclear fears, simmering political tensions at home (labor rights, the civil liberties abuses of the McCarthy investigations, Civil Rights, the recession of 1958), the rise of US commercial television (aimed at both domestic and overseas markets), and international developments in film technology and new conceptual approaches to film.

While often viewed nostalgically, the decade and a half following the end of the Second World War (Drew himself was a veteran, Leacock a combat photographer) was a highly disruptive period. The McCarthy 'witch hunts' had targeted the film and media industries, leaving a swath of fear but also simmering resentment that would further stoke desires for 'democratic' alternatives to conventional ways of negotiating and representing public and private life. The 1950s was a decade of profound paradoxes: Civil Rights protests were sparking violence and abuses of authority; media commentators were observing increasing cultural disaffection, particularly among younger people, giving the lie to the rose-tinted Norman Rockwell image of America long proffered in the pages of *The Saturday Evening Post*. Films like Rogosin's *On the Bowery* unveiled a scarcely hidden world of desperation and depravity at the heart of the nation's flagship city. When the film appeared, critics commented that it reflected the deep alienation felt in American society at mid-century (Thurber 2000: B6).

As for the media available to address these social pressures, the theatrical newsreel was a rapidly fading force and its reporting was usually superficially entertaining rather than insightful (Fielding 1972: 307–8). At the same time the new medium of the masses, television, was under fire for not meeting public service needs. Beyond the occasional spark of newscasters such as Edward R. Murrow, television was a 'vast wasteland' of 'formula' and 'totally unbelievable' entertainment, as Newton W. Minow's famous speech to the National Association of Broadcasters described it (Minow 1961). These concerns were later echoed in Lyndon B. Johnson's 'Great Society' speech (1964), calling on social institutions to rebuild an America 'where the demands of morality, and the needs of the spirit, can be realized in the life of the Nation' (Johnson 1964). Responsibility in television was seen as central to a project of national regeneration, and broadcasting reforms gathered strength among government policymakers and in the media industry itself.

Robert Drew, an editor at *Life*, was keenly interested in advancing the

cultural currency of documentary, in particular television documentary. Richard Leacock was a professional filmmaker, born in the Canary Islands, who had worked as an editor on Frontier Films' *Native Land* and as cameraman on *Louisiana Story*. Both were questioning the fundamentals of documentary practice. When Drew obtained the sponsorship of Time-Life Broadcasting, they formed Drew Associates, producing several films over the next few years. *Bullfight at Malaga* (1958) shows evidence of their efforts to find freer filming techniques. Perhaps more significantly, it exemplifies a key documentary narrative device: the conflict or 'crisis' structure (here manifested in a duel between two rival bullfighters). Produced through the choice of material and especially through editing, the 'crisis' structure would lie at the center of much direct cinema work that followed.

Seeking to maximize maneuverability and with no suitable equipment on the market, Leacock painstakingly developed, with Pennebaker, a 16 mm Auricon camera linked to a portable sound recorder, synchronized through the timing mechanism of a Bulova watch (Saunders 2007: 10). Other devices appeared around the same time: wireless microphones, increasingly sensitive film stock that reduced the need for complex lighting set-ups and film magazines that allowed for quick reloading. In 1960 Drew began work with a crew that included Leacock, Albert Maysles, Macartney-Filgate and Pennebaker, producing *Primary* (1960), the first fully-fledged example of a direct cinema ethos.

Dave Saunders calls *Primary* 'an important film in the documentary canon, but [. . .] not an especially good one' (2007: 21). Perhaps this assessment is a bit harsh. The film provides a well-paced account of John F. Kennedy's and Hubert Humphrey's competition in Wisconsin for the Democratic Party nomination. It depicts much of the uncertainty, artifice and awkwardness of the campaign trail. It also exhibits Kennedy at close quarters and at the peak of his charisma. He arrives on the campaign like a seasoned pop star, with screaming girls demanding autographs, an image contrasted to Humphrey's folksy, down home persona. Just as importantly, the film offers a palpable record of direct cinema coming into its own, with self-conscious displays of innovative camera and sound work. The excitement of working with new technologies is visible in segments such as the shoulder-mounted tracking shot of Kennedy arriving at a Milwaukee rally (shown twice in the film), conceived by Maysles and Pennebaker using a wide-angle lens to capture a maximum amount of peripheral detail. The shot follows Kennedy through the adoring crowds, up a narrow flight of stairs and on to a stage. The podium and crowd fan out before him; the back of Kennedy's head is at times so close it seems you could touch it.

Still, as Saunders argues, the film is far from perfect. The home-made equipment often failed to work and there is a fair amount of 'cheating' on

display, where the visuals fail to match the audio track. Leacock recalls the film's successes and its limits: 'For the first time we were able to walk in and out of buildings, up and down stairs, film in taxi cabs, all over the place, and get synchronous sound', but only, he claims, in the scenes he shot himself. Pennebaker and Maysles were still shooting with silent Arriflex cameras (Mamber 1974: 30, 36). The film also falls back on voiceover to plug gaps in the narrative. Beyond these technical considerations, there are shortcomings in the breadth of coverage: in spite of direct cinema's aspirations towards candor and previously unseen revelations, *Primary* reveals little beyond the prevailing image of Kennedy and Humphrey then available in the mainstream press. This is not quite the democratic dream of leveling hierarchies and intimately 'knowing' the nation's political leaders and the political machine. *Primary*'s scenes are essentially anecdotes and, as many have noted, it fails to provide a genuinely insightful study of the election process itself.

Moreover, in capturing a private glimpse of a public figure, as Saunders suggests, Drew was essentially caught in the middle. He was compromised in his ability to reveal complex truths about Kennedy and the campaign, wanting to 'court the favour of high-profile subjects' but at the same time needing to 'remain innocuous in his coverage for fear of being ostracised from a clique that was defending national interests' (2007: 23). This situation is aligned to what Stuart Hall calls the media 'double bind', where broadcasting implies 'open, democratic, controversial' reportage but in fact is constrained 'within an overall framework of assumptions about the distribution of political power' (1988: 359). This is the 'lie' of direct cinema's political and pop cultural exposés: on the one hand revealing the 'warts and all' lives of public figures, on the other needing to convey an illusion of observational objectivity and unbiased reporting while not damaging the filmmakers' personal and professional contacts. In the end, the approach maintains the status quo – a product of consensus packaged as unmediated direct access. To make things more complicated, some direct cinema filmmakers, such as Pennebaker and the Maysles brothers, would themselves edge closer to celebrity status.

Drew Associates produced nineteen films in all, most of them for network television. *The Children Were Watching* (1960), contrasting white segregationists with the experiences of a black family during the integration of New Orleans schools, was one of the first television programs to openly show the direct impact of racism. Themes of race and social division were revisited in *The Chair* (1962) and *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963), which stand out as exemplary of the Drew group applying their signature approach to volatile social issues. *The Chair* follows the high-profile appeal process of Paul Crump, sentenced to death in the electric chair. Rather than focus on a miscarriage of justice or on Crump's emotional state as he faces death, the film features Crump's defence attorney, Donald Moore, following the case

he makes for Crump's rehabilitation. The 'crisis' structure is clearly laid out: Crump faces execution in five days and Moore must save him. In a key scene, we witness Moore in his office, achieving a major step towards clemency by attaining support from the Catholic Church; he breaks into tears, a cathartic reaction that underlines the intensity of the crisis. The scene is intimate and discomfiting at the same time, eliciting a complex mix of voyeuristic fascination and sympathetic connection. Though Crump is the fulcrum of the plot, he serves more as a referential figure around which the crisis develops: the site of tension and viewer identification lies in the challenge of Moore's rescue attempt. *The Chair* won critical plaudits but it also had its detractors, including Jean-Luc Godard, who claimed that, in its emotionalism and lack of analysis, it was no more insightful than Robert Wise's Hollywood foray into capital punishment, *I Want To Live* (1958) (Mamber 1974: 102).

The Chair reveals a paradox amid direct cinema innovation: while shooting strategies were rapidly changing, the temptation to structure the material along conventional story lines remained. The new observational style still largely held itself to the cardinal rule of shooting and editing: the trappings of the filming apparatus should remain invisible. The raw material of the direct cinema documentary remained essentially useless in the public realm until it was manipulated into dramatic stories, crises, character motivations, causes and effects. In the case of *The Chair*, this meant a shooting to finished film ratio of over 30 : 1, similar to Hollywood productions. In this sense Godard perhaps had a point.

Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment would similarly rely on classical narrative techniques such as parallel sequencing, used here to establish familiarity with two 'camps' – North and South – hurtling towards a critical encounter. Attorney General Robert Kennedy attempts to implement the court-ordered desegregation of the University of Alabama, while Governor George Wallace intends to stop it (the former boxer Wallace is shown in close-up staring at the camera near the beginning of the film, already very much the villain). As in *The Chair*, *Crisis* invests itself in a conflict/resolution narrative, creating suspense in the lead up to the crisis: the meeting between Kennedy's Deputy Attorney General, Nicholas Katzenbach, and Wallace in Tuscaloosa. Wallace plans to personally block the doorway to the university building, literally and symbolically barring African American entry.

Recalling, while ideologically countering, the North/South parallel sequencing of *The Birth of a Nation*, each 'camp' in *Crisis* is associated with contrasting family values. In the Alabama Governor's mansion, Wallace's tiny blonde daughter is watched over by an African American servant. Wallace is heard expressing beliefs in the separation of the races, and anachronistically defends the Confederate cause; an imposing portrait of a Civil War general stares over him. Wallace's opulent quarters suggest a plantation house, con-



Figure 14. *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963). Drew Associates. Courtesy of the British Film Institute.

trasting with Robert Kennedy's chaotic, casual family setting (RFK already had seven children at the time). Throughout, cross-cutting constructs a privileged spectator position where the viewer knows more about the interlocked drama taking place in different locales than the characters do, creating heightened tensions.

A number of elements stray from the direct cinema ethos, not the least being the use of intrusive voiceover (*What's Happening!*, the Maysles' 1964 film about the Beatles, was the first direct cinema film without voiceover) and some scenes – particularly those in the Oval Office – appear 'stage-managed'. Though the oncoming confrontation creates simmering tensions, neither RFK nor Wallace has the compelling screen energy or accessible humanity of JFK and Humphrey in *Primary*, and the excitement of the campaign trail is replaced here with a series of protracted meetings and telephone conversations. But the fascination of *Crisis* at the time lay in the historical moment: the previous year riots had marred the entrance of African American student James Meredith to the University of Mississippi, leaving two dead and hundreds wounded (as briefly mentioned in voiceover). Except for short scenes with the students Vivian Malone and James Hood, the most notable figure is Katzenbach, intently strategizing as he drags on a dangerously burned down cigarette. A much-admired moment occurs when RFK's daughter Kerry takes

the phone from her father and briefly chats with ‘Nick’ Katzenbach (the sheer luck, Leacock recalled, of the Southern and Northern teams working on each end of the conversation without being certain that the other was still filming). The scene not only underscores the informality of the Kennedy administration, but is a reminder of how children are often ideal direct cinema subjects: conveying naturalness and injecting spontaneity even into scenes that are ‘a little bit flat’ (Leacock 2010).

Crisis was a popular breakthrough for Drew: the September 1963 issue of *Show* magazine declared, ‘A New Kind of Television Goes Backstage with History’. But the program was also criticized for dramatic manipulation. In the *New York Times*, Jack Gould accused key figures in the film of ‘an incredible bit of play-acting’ (Watson 1989: 40–1). Stephen Mamber, unusually, counters Drew’s defence that ‘the cameras did not, in anything that was seen in the film, influence people’s reactions’. Mamber acknowledges that the camera’s presence might ‘influence’ its subjects, and that those moments when this influence is most palpable can ‘often be the most revealing’ (1974: 102). In this sense direct cinema encounters the filming dynamics openly admitted in Rouch’s *cinéma vérité*.

After 1963, Leacock and Pennebaker left Drew Associates. Reflecting in part the need for commercial sponsorship, direct cinema projects gravitated towards what Mamber calls ‘personality oriented’ films. Best known perhaps is Pennebaker’s legendary *Dont Look Back* (1967), an exercise in direct cinema demystification that served only to enhance the mystique of Bob Dylan. Direct cinema observation was also the preferred approach for rockumentaries such as Pennebaker’s *Monterey Pop* (1968) and Michael Wadleigh’s *Woodstock* (1970) – films which helped elevate the rock music festival to the supreme filmic signifier of hippie communal ideals.⁵ Leacock’s first film after leaving Drew was *Happy Mother’s Day* (1963), made with Chopra, and suggested direct cinema’s potential for social observation and critique. The film deals with events in the lives of the Fishers, the nationally famous parents of quintuplets, and casts an ethnographic eye on their home town of Aberdeen, South Dakota. Leacock displays a fascination for social oddities and cultural curiosities, and spurned re-enactments in favor of patient long takes to capture seemingly offhand details. The film also subtly shows up interactions between camera, filmmaker and subjects (Mrs Fisher’s glance and brief smile at the camera is a classic – if ambiguous – instance of this).⁶

Telling moments reveal the Fishers’ unprecedented situation: confronted with so many children, and at the height of early 1960s consumerism and family values, their straitened circumstances are obvious. Their faded Model-T car is thirty years old; during a visit to a department store we are told that Mrs Fisher ‘has not had a store-bought outfit since her marriage’. Sponsored by the family-friendly *Saturday Evening Post* and Beech-Nut baby foods, ABC

would decide to broadcast a different version from Leacock's. The televised version included more shots of adorable babies, and fewer peculiar, critical and humorous observations of small-town America (Mamber 1974: 195). Indeed, Leacock's version went against Drew's formulas engineered for network broadcast. For Saunders, Leacock's film is 'a critique of the tendency of conventional journalism to invade, reduce, commoditise and exploit the province of those who have no possible redress or alternative, and a response to the formal demands of national television' (Saunders 2007: 33). As Erik Barnouw summed up the situation in 1964, television documentary was restricted by the hegemony of the 'big three' networks; filmmakers were usually 'more aware of inhibitions than breakthroughs', while sponsors, 'with logic from the point of view of the merchandiser, prefer to avoid programming that will exclude them from any major "market"' (Barnouw 1964: 16–17).

Despite commercial challenges to projects like *Happy Mother's Day*, direct cinema did find a place in the market. The combination of lightweight equipment and a philosophy of non-intervention meant that the shooting process was dynamic and hands-on – thus popular with filmmakers. Before long direct cinema was an established practice with a firm set of ideological, ethical and practical principles attached to it. Mamber offers a summary of the 'rules' that became a dominant – and, many would argue, privileged – approach to documentary. Documentary should capture 'uncontrolled situations' where actions and events unfold spontaneously. As Mamber puts it:

Uncontrolled means that the filmmaker does not function as a 'director' nor, for that matter, as a screenwriter. [. . .] [N]o one is told what to say or how to act. A prepared script, however skimpy, is not permissible, nor are verbal suggestions, gestures, or any form of direct communication from the filmmaker to his subject. The filmmaker should in no way indicate that any action is preferred by him over any other. The filmmaker acts as an observer, attempting not to alter the situations he witnesses any more than he must simply by being there [. . .] Interviews are also not employed, since their use, in effect, is a form of directed behavior. (1974: 2)

Mamber's version of the rules basically outlines so-called fly-on-the-wall documentary, with its expectations of non-interference, neutrality and invisibility. In this respect, ethnographic film in the observational mode overlapped on many levels with direct cinema, and practical and theoretical film courses often stressed their affinities: it was not unusual to find *Primary* and an NFB Unit B production screened alongside John Marshall's *The Hunters* (1962) and Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds* (1965).

Direct cinema rules occupied an elevated status in documentary circles

for many years. Mentors at major documentary teaching centers such as UCLA and the National Film and Television School in Britain encouraged the approach as *the* filmmaker's modus operandi. More traditional approaches were sidelined, 'drummed out', as James Blue noted, 'for having "used" life for the dissemination of a "selfish point of view"'. For direct cinema filmmakers, Blue stated, the 'only proper material is believed to be life itself – not as it is recreated, but as it happens. To these men, all else is heresy' (Blue 1964: 23). There was effectively a 'right' method of capturing reality, opposed to re-enactments, formal interviews ('talking heads') or directorial intervention. Of course an ideal of pure observation was always just that, an ideal, and direct cinema practitioners would find themselves, consciously and unconsciously, having to adjust these ideals.

By the 1970s and into the 1980s, critics such as Thomas Waugh (1976) and Brian Winston were articulating the disillusion that many felt with the 'philosophy of documentary purity' being promoted 'with the fervor of true believers' in film schools and on festival circuits (Winston 1988b [1978/9]: 23–4). Invoking Morin, Winston stressed important divergences between direct cinema and *cinéma vérité*, the latter characterized by self-analytical scenes and practitioners willing to put themselves on display alongside their subjects. Still, it should be said that direct cinema always betrayed a weakness in the facade of pure observation. Many filmmakers, such as Leacock, already had a healthy suspicion of documentary approaches that veered towards orthodoxy. As *Happy Mother's Day* showed, direct cinema could reveal striking and unforced insights, and the rules were less stable than many liked to admit. 'These are rules, not laws, and rules can be broken', Leacock later stated (Leacock 1997).

LIMITS OF PURE OBSERVATION

Direct cinema developed in opposition to what Bill Nichols calls the 'expository mode' of Grierson and the RA/FSA films – though Grierson did advocate for the 'special value' of 'spontaneous gesture' and the 'intimacy of knowledge' (Grierson 1946 [1932]: 80). Still, where a Griersonian approach stressed universals and interpretation for the greater good, direct cinema looked towards the particular, the individual, the minutiae. As such, direct cinema heightened impressions of immediate access to the private and personal, even (or especially) when its subjects were recognizable public figures. Professing to be unobtrusive observers, direct cinema practitioners strove for a sense of invisibly entering into the scene, a strategy that could produce a range of affects, from intimate viewer participation to invasive voyeurism. Long lenses caught candid behavior at a distance; zooms provided intense, revealing close-ups; cutaway shots homed in on awkward and nervous gestures; directional and

remote microphones captured whispered, offhand remarks. Such a fetishization of total observation works, as Corner suggests, to cover for the presence of the camera, fusing the idea of the 'putative event' (what would have happened without the camera's presence) with the pro-filmic event (what actually happened with the camera present) (Corner 1996: 20).

This implied personal connection between audiences and viewed subjects also helps to explain direct cinema's dependency on – and appeal to – television. Beaming directly into homes, television rapidly usurped the role of radio and became a familiar part of American life. Here the renowned celebrity and the average man-on-the-street could, in equal measure, be scrutinized at close quarters. Kahana, citing Rhona J. Bernstein, suggests that due to its 'location, its size, and its integration into social ritual', television provided an impression of personal and democratic involvement in the activities and concerns of the nation. Grierson observed that television could penetrate 'private emotional spaces and extend them unreasonably, making us care about people we will never meet' (quoted in Kahana 2008: 292–3). *Primary* and *Crisis* offer examples of this illusory levelling process, where political leaders are shown as glamorous and elevated, and mundane and accessible, often concurrently. In *Primary* we see the stellar JFK addressing an adoring crowd, watched over by a fastidious, somewhat shy Jackie, while Hubert Humphrey is serenaded by a band of children playing 'Davy Crocket' on accordions, then tucks into a humble dinner of 'ham, mashed potatoes, and string beans'. At the same time the coupling of direct cinema and television could transform ordinary people living ordinary lives into celebrities – a familiar by-product of more recent reality television.

Promising to offer honest and unobstructed access, direct cinema attempted to perform a double gesture: to observe people with whom audiences might identify and empathize, while offering 'simulations of depth' – getting behind or below the surface of the events and personalities represented (Kahana 2008: 297). These impulses are indicative of what Nichols labels the 'observational mode', which closely parallels the strategies of fiction films. Both observational documentary and fiction aim to produce a sense of absolute realism that offers 'unmediated and unfettered access to the world' (Nichols 1991: 43). Direct cinema thus strives 'to eliminate as much as possible the barriers between subject and audience' (Mamber 1974: 4), and as result these 'barriers' – the limits of the filmmaker and equipment as physical and technical presences in a particular space and time – are not normally visible in the finished film. Direct cinema masks the filmmaking apparatus, like classic Hollywood fictions, encouraging identification with characters and producing dramatic tensions that repress the contingencies of the spectator's location and the actual, complex dynamics of filmmaker, filming technology, subjects and filming conditions.

Take for example *Crisis* and its narrative produced via parallel editing, which creates a spectator position that transcends the perspectives of both the filmmaker on the scene and the subjects in the scene. Kahana notes that continuity editing in documentary can help to privilege an ‘individuated perception’ where the spectator occupies a position in which ‘he or she takes in the scene from the best possible vantage point’ (Kahana 2008: 294). Because the filmmaker in the observational mode remains an absent presence, rarely revealing him/herself or showing the filmed subjects’ awareness of the ongoing production, the camera/spectator becomes a sort of ideal observer, witnessing the hidden truths of everyday life. As Nichols acknowledges, the fact that the raw material is still based on real-time events does limit a film’s ability to create fully omniscient observers: the film content will always be partly restricted by actual events taking place in front of the camera. Nonetheless, ‘the expectation of transparent access remains’. The filmmaker’s absence ‘clears the way for the dynamics of empathetic identification, poetic immersion, or voyeuristic pleasure’ (Nichols 1991: 43–4). Technological innovations were meant to allow filmmakers to dispense with preconceived notions, but didacticism effectively went underground: direct cinema films are often driven by an underlying thesis or argument. We might attribute this gap between ideals, intentions and results solely to the interventions of obtrusive editing (such as the ‘crisis’ structure or the problem/solution story) but the issue really runs deeper. The processes of planning and choosing material, matched with issues of audience expectations, commercial imperatives and sponsorship – all of these are just a few of the many limits on ‘pure’ or direct access (Kahana 2008: 294–5).

The limits and ultimate progression of direct cinema are visible in the work of the famous partnership of Albert and David Maysles. In early films such as *Showman* (1963) and *What’s Happening! The Beatles in the USA*, the ‘crisis’ structure and heavier narrative elements were put to one side in order to stress what Drew called ‘picture logic’ – limiting context and background information to what the camera could ‘show’ or ‘reveal’. The direct cinema film intended to be legible, as fully as possible, via observation: what Mamber calls ‘revelation through situation’ (1974: 142). The Maysles brothers worked in what many consider the ideal direct cinema partnership: the two-person crew consisting of cameraperson and soundperson (for Drew, this translated to the ‘correspondent’ on sound and engaged with the subjects, and the photographer on camera). The two-person team appealed to direct cinema’s hands-on ethos and was small enough to be flexible and discreet. But even a two-person crew, meant to minimize interference, is hardly invisible. Filming in confined spaces and small rooms, Al and David no doubt often resembled, in Beattie’s words, ‘elephants on the table’ more than flies on the wall (2004: 97).

After the celebrity studies *Meet Marlon Brando* (1965, with limited release due to Brando’s objections) and *With Love From Truman: A Visit With Truman*

Capote (1966), the Maysles wanted to produce 'not just feature length [documentaries] but a feature with all the drama to compete with mainstream features in movie theaters'. The result, *Salesman* (1969, with Charlotte Zwerin), was hailed by the *Saturday Review* as 'one of the most important films ever made'. Still, Maysles recalled, 'PBS wasn't a bit interested, no one was interested, and cinema exhibitors weren't quite getting on to the notion that a documentary could be a feature' (Zuber 2007: 10). *Salesman* follows the hard and often seedy lives of door-to-door Bible salesmen, highlighting the dramatic potential of everyday encounters. In dramatizing quotidian experience, it shows an affinity to contemporary movements such as New Journalism, which Al often suggested paralleled the aims of direct cinema. Also like New Journalism, *Salesman's* classical realist style and focus on plot and character development (in particular on the hangdog figure of Paul 'The Badger' Brennan) reflect efforts to break documentary into the theatrical mainstream. *Salesman's* debts to narrative realism might be seen not only in its observational approach but in its use of parallel editing, the 'meanwhile' structure that unites disparate storytellers from D. W. Griffith to Capote.

David Davidson observes that, unlike Drew, the Maysles stressed 'psychology over sociology' (both Al and David had backgrounds in psychology), creating 'self-contained' character-centered worlds that underline direct cinema's reaction against an Anglo-American tradition that privileged documentary's role in 'advancing understanding' and 'bettering social conditions' (1981: 4-5). For Mamber, however, *Salesman* mixes brilliance with problematic backsliding: it is 'full of devices heretofore more the province of fiction film'; thus it is 'edging back into the kind of manipulation that American cinema verite was originally reacting against' (1974: 161, 167). Drama is indeed emphasized through the shooting and cutting choices. In one scene, as a Florida woman is 'badgered' by an increasingly desperate Brennan, the camera zooms in on her beleaguered face as she wrestles internally with the salesman's entreaties. The lingering shot involves us in her interest in the lavishly illustrated Bible; we also sense her embarrassment at expressing her financial troubles. Similar to fiction, absorption and voyeuristic fascination are mixed with identification and empathy. But other effects – the unusually long take, the persistent focus on the woman's face and gestures, Brennan's soft-sell monologue off-screen, the lowly state of the house, the harsh natural light, the slight shake of the camera – all work to create a claustrophobic and intensely psychological space drawn from and contextualized as spontaneous experience. *Salesman* creates a highly wrought documentary space but is not 'simply' mimetic fiction.

The Maysles brothers and Zwerin's more experimental and controversial *Gimme Shelter* (1970) further modified direct cinema's rules, drawing attention to the paradoxes of editing out or streamlining the rough patches and inconclusive fragments of documentary production. As Jonathan Vogels

observes, while remaining direct cinema's most ardent 'purists', the Maysles brothers manifested 'a surprising inconsistency between rhetoric and practice', developing an essentially modernist aesthetic that was 'sometimes more pragmatic, sometimes more widely experimental' (2005: 149, 12). In this sense (though Al Maysles contended differently [Zuber 2007: 13]) we might notice similarities between the Maysles' and Frederick Wiseman's work. Both have suggested that their work parallels New Journalism, though Wiseman's stated attitudes towards documentary purity tend to be more ironic than doctrinal, referring to his own work as 'reality fictions' (Wiseman 1994: 4). Wiseman's films largely but not exclusively have dealt with institutions and institutional life, ranging from *Titicut Follies* (1967), *High School* (1968), *Law and Order* (1969) and *Welfare* (1975), to *Public Housing* (1997), *Domestic Violence* (2001) and *State Legislature* (2006). Most were made with the support of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and from 1971 to 1981 Wiseman's contract offered him essentially *carte blanche* treatment – one film per year without constraints on the subject matter or running time. He thus has occupied a rare position for a documentarist, with reliable funding sources and broadcast outlets not wholly dependent on market economics.

Wiseman's early films are not openly reformist, but reveal the dynamics and abuses of power at the heart of public institutions. Part journalistic exposé, part experimental collage, the films raise questions about institutional efficacy, showing up flaws in the superstructure while homing in on individual lives caught up in rigid frameworks and managerial hierarchies. Rather than highlight public figures and celebrities, Saunders observes, Wiseman deals with what Michael Harrington called 'the other America': the nation 'populated by failures, by those driven from the land and bewildered by the city' (quoted in Saunders 2007: 145). In the tradition of Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine and social documentary more generally, the films probe both the mundane and horrific undersides of institutional life, examining the detached lawmakers and bureaucratic functionaries who enforce rules and those caught up in their web, unable to stage a protest.

Wiseman's films are largely realist with moments that verge on the surreal, and generally lack explicit analysis. They pay careful attention to visual and aural textures and to the allusive potency of formal and thematic continuities and juxtapositions. For the most part manifestly non-intrusive, their compact, sometimes amusing, sometimes shocking scenes are structured in a stream-of-consciousness, episodic manner. Nichols discerns a 'mosaic' pattern to the films, where the organizational links are motivated more by rhetorical or impressionistic means than by plot or chronology (Nichols 1981: 211). Saunders further links Wiseman's anti-narrative or 'anti-syntactical' sequencing to his scepticism of 'reductive' institutional schemes. Any illusions of easy continuity would simply reinscribe the generic institution's false sense

of ordering and containing the world (2007: 167–8). To achieve these free-flowing mosaic patterns, however, Wiseman has been known to rely on a very high shooting ratio (for *Juvenile Court* [1973] sixty hours of footage was edited down to two).

With a background in law, Wiseman chose to document in his first film, *Titicut Follies*, the grim day-to-day life at the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Bridgewater. A combination prison and hospital for the criminally insane, the facility was familiar, as Wiseman had taken his law students on public tours. He was encouraged to make a film by Bridgewater's superintendent and the lieutenant governor of Massachusetts in a public relations attempt to 'humanize' the troubled institution (Atkins 1976: 5).⁷ The results so alarmed officials that they called for a ban on the film which the State Supreme Court ultimately upheld.

Many in favor of the ban argued the film was sheer voyeurism, documenting private lives in order to exploit them. Still, Wiseman insisted that the film actually 'uncovered' nothing: everything in the film would have been visible on the public tours that officials themselves encouraged (Wiseman 1976: 70). Of course these comments are slightly disingenuous, as *Titicut Follies* is anything but a purely observational 'tour' of the facility. Self-reflexively framed by the 'follies' performed by inmates to entertain the prison staff, the film underlines the blunt ironies of institutional life through careful camera and sound work and associative juxtapositions that often border on horror film. In an unforgiving early sequence, we are shown emaciated prisoners lining up, stripped for inspection: frankly recalling a concentration camp. In another long take, a grinning prisoner is filmed in a harshly lit close-up, singing rough counterpoint against a television screen featuring the Greek chanteuse Nana Mouskouri. For *Variety*, such scenes appeared 'merely gratuitous' without advancing a social argument 'one whit' (Byro. 1967: 12). This was, however, effectively their purpose, to 'prevent us from maintaining a unified point of view' (Grant 1998: 242), to defamiliarize and disorient, challenging seemingly transparent cinematic modes that feed voyeurism and offer easy moral solutions. As we watch staff enforcing rigid compliance through degrading acts, amid this extraordinary world is a bleak, routine-like banality. Some inmates appear eminently rational, while guards are in turn kindly, automaton-like or borderline sadistic. As Kahana succinctly states, the film reveals 'banal and continuous forms of repression inside a generic institutional structure' (2008: 224).

Titicut Follies recalls the grim ironies of Franju's work, which offered oblique commentary on institutionalized violence in films such as *Blood of the Beasts* and *Hôtel des Invalides* (1952). In Franju's hands, the world's explicit and implicit horrors (animal slaughter and the memorialization of war, respectively) are wedded to moments of unexpected lyricism, even

dark humor. Similarly, in spite of *Titicut Follies*' harshness, Wiseman found glimpses of humanity: 'Even in *Titicut Follies*, the guards in their own way were more tuned to the needs of the inmates than the so-called "helping" professionals' (Peary 2004 [1998]). In one scene, as a prisoner removes his clothes to be searched, he appears compliant and passive, yet we learn that he has molested his own daughter, committed aggravated assault and arson, and attempted to hang himself. We see the guard lifting and turning over the nude prisoner's arms and hands, then briefly running a hand over his close-shaven head. While fleeting and incidental, the gestures are palpably tactile, perhaps reminding us of the lived presence and vulnerability of these bodies amid others in the film. Here the filmmakers (John Marshall working camera with Wiseman covering sound) (Benson and Anderson 2002: 28), while 'invisible', are nonetheless felt presences in the hand-held movements, deliberate shooting decisions and proximity of the camera to the bodies being filmed.

The scene is marked by subtle editorializing: as the prisoner is led to his cell, Marshall performs one of direct cinema's signature maneuvers, the traveling long take. In the midst of the shot, the camera unexpectedly tilts upwards to capture a television screen, where images of a body on a stretcher accompany news commentary referring to Vietnam. The camera movement explores spaces on the periphery; similar to a cutaway it encourages active associations, here in a single continuous motion. Its implications are various: indicating the symbolic interaction of 'live' and mediatized realities, reminding us that the world outside the prison walls is not necessarily safer, or saner, than the one inside. As the door closes behind the prisoner, the guard opens a peephole, taking a look inside before the camera zooms in to frame the man – naked, confined, alone – at the window. Such scenes remind us of direct cinema's tenet that pro-filmic reality – even when limiting context to the recorded event alone – produces complex metaphors and meanings that can parallel fictional constructs. As Colin Young saw it: 'A [documentary's] events will have the weight of general metaphor, but first and foremost they will have meaning within their own context' (Young 2003 [1974]: 108).

Compelling in its simplicity and completeness, even with its subtle editorializing, this sequence actually performs much of what direct cinema's advocates preached – an appearance of non-intervention, fidelity to subjects, narrative legibility without added contextual information, mobile camera, sync sound, natural lighting and settings, and so on – and it shows how involving this approach can be. Yet, as the tilt up to the television hints, there is no unified or 'unmediated' observational position, though there are meaningful engagements that can nonetheless speak through the film.

GREY GARDENS (1975)

As Beattie concisely puts it, while practitioners of direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* made strong claims for 'the efficacy of their respective methods', these claims were 'not necessarily borne out in practice'. Both movements contained elements of intervention and efforts towards 'pure' observation, and the films they produced often relied on overlapping techniques (2004: 84). The Maysles' *Grey Gardens* is a particularly interesting case of this fusion.⁸ The film was made under conditions that would confound attempts at non-interference and thus offers a glimpse of filmmakers who seem both at home and off-balance, adjusting to the capricious and sometimes anarchic lives into which they've arrived with their cameras.

As Charles Reynolds stressed in a mid-1960s interview with Al Maysles: 'Maysles's passion for recording life "as it actually happens" is equalled only by his sensitivity to the people and situations he films [. . .] [Maysles's] rule is never to tamper, never to impose on what is before the camera, but to watch and wait and react freely, approaching the scene spontaneously without preconceived ideas' (Reynolds 1979 [1964]: 401). If there were efforts at making *Grey Gardens* adhere to these principles, they were short lived. The film's restless and demanding subjects – 'Big' Edie and 'Little' Edie Bouvier Beale – required a good deal of attention, engagement and negotiation. An example of this appears when Big Edie, who has arthritis and is unsteady on her feet, says, 'I'm going to need David's hand to get up'. David, holding the sound equipment, moves into the filmed space to help her, and Al's camera briefly catches him in frame but quickly shies away, never showing David's face, finally zooming into an awkward close-up on the fabric of Big Edie's dress. Shots like this suggest the kind of compromise Jay Ruby refers to as "'accidental" reflexivity' (1988: 73). The Maysles are obliged to break observational rules (and Vogels reminds us that nearly every Maysles film violates these rules [Vogels 2005: 149]), but still avoid the more open stance of French *cinéma vérité*. Rouch stated that he was not interested in the 'cinema of truth, but the truth of cinema' (Rouch and Feld 2003: 14). *Grey Gardens* on the other hand seems committed to capturing more essential truths about the lives of its subjects that lie beyond contingent cinematic truths. Al claimed in numerous interviews that the camera's presence changed nothing about the Beales' behavior – we see the truth of their lives. But it is worth asking: do *Grey Gardens*' truths run any deeper than cinematic artifice itself?

The idea for *Grey Gardens* began in a project initiated by Lee (Bouvier) Radziwill, sister of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Radziwill hoped to make a film about her childhood memories on Long Island. As Al Maysles recalled, Radziwill was suddenly contacted by her aunt and cousin, who were facing threats of eviction by the Suffolk County Health Department, and she asked



Figure 15. *Grey Gardens* (1975). Portrait Films. Courtesy of the Kobal Collection.

at that point if the Maysles brothers wanted to film at Grey Gardens. Little Edie would later describe the health inspectors' arrival in October 1971 as a 'raid' that traumatized her and 'almost killed' her mother through shock (Graham 2001 [1976]). At that time the brothers shot one and a half hours inside what newspapers would sensationally report as a 'garbage-ridden, filthy 28-room house with cats, fleas, cobwebs, and no running water'. Radziwill was reputedly so alarmed by the footage that she confiscated it. A clean-up and refurbishment took place in 1972, with Jackie O.'s financial and (much to the media's delight) on-site assistance. The filmmakers returned in September and October 1973, having agreed to pay the cash-strapped Beales \$5,000 each and promising 20 percent of future profits from the film. The Maysles invested \$50,000 in equipment and preparation for the shoot. In six weeks they had filmed '80 to 90 percent of the film', emerging with seventy hours of film and forty more of additional sound material (Graham 2001 [1976]).

What resulted is an observational documentary that seems always on the verge of breaking the bounds of cinema's narrative and perceptual frames, exemplifying the transitions and experiments going on in direct cinema. Indeed, as Al claimed, the aim behind *Grey Gardens* was always far less about creating a fly-on-the-wall exposé than about 'having a relationship' with the Beales (Froemke et al. 2001), perceivable through the off-camera banter that punctuates the film. Edie reveals her need for interaction: she is a rest-

less interviewee, constantly pushing forward and stepping back (causing the camera to move forwards and backwards, struggling to maintain focus), running from well-lit rooms into dark corridors (forcing rapid adjustments to lighting – though Al recalled that the film stock, Kodak 7254, had a great ‘tolerance for error’ so that problems could be anticipated and later adjusted) (Froemke et al. 2001). From early on, Little Edie contrives much of the pro-filmic *mise-en-scène* and action, describing her ‘revolutionary costume’ and its rationale in detail, directing the crew to move through the garden and shoot from the top of the house. Highly conscious of the filming process, Edie urgently whispers ‘the movie, the movie’ to her mother when she threatens to take off her clothes in the sun.

At the same time the film reveals a meeting not just between observation and *vérité* interaction but between documentary – and its association with verifiable, factual discourses – and fiction. *Grey Gardens* is haunted by ghosts of gothic and romantic tales, and by Hollywood fantasy: the melodrama and the ‘woman’s film’. In the opening sequence, contrasting with its resplendent East Hampton neighbors, Grey Gardens exudes (even in its name) an overgrown, unkempt grandeur. A color shot of the house is intercut with a black-and-white photo, shifting to a sequence that outlines the Beales’ ordeal with the Health Department; the contrast of color and black and white shrouds the house in mystery and isolates it in time. Grey Gardens easily recalls Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Blvd.* (1950) where the character Joe Gillis encounters the faded glory of Norma Desmond’s mansion, with its overgrown gardens and decrepit swimming pool. The house evokes the figure of an abandoned, aging woman: ‘A neglected house gets an unhappy look; this one had it in spades’, states Gillis; ‘it was like that old woman in *Great Expectations*, that Miss Havisham in her rotting wedding dress and her torn veil, taking it out on the world because she’d been given the go by’. Norma is first glimpsed from behind a screen, sequestered and ominous (a similar image of Little Edie, speaking from behind a screen in an upstairs window, appears in Al Maysles’s *The Beales of Grey Gardens* [2006], which features previously cut scenes).

Intertextual references abound: the gentle 1930s melody ‘I See Your Face Before Me’ plays beneath the opening sequence, helping to associate Grey Gardens with a bygone era. The sequence was developed, according to the filmmakers, to avoid using voiceover, but it also helps to underscore the sense of lost grandeur and the notion of the woman frozen in time as the world passes her by. The Beales’ aristocratic connections are also emphasized, and ‘real’ royalty in the form of Jackie O. appears fleetingly in a photo where she is shown in the house assisting the clean-up. The fascination with celebrity extends to referencing the Maysles brothers’ own: the sequence ends with a news article about the two descending on Grey Gardens to make a film.

The film’s themes coalesce around the symbolic figure of the ‘vanishing

woman': in this case the aging woman deluded about her ongoing relevance while actually signifying a 'pathetic spectacle of loss'. Writing on *Sunset Blvd.*, Lucy Fischer suggests that the 'aging woman [. . .] was viewed by man only as a site of profound loss. And her sunset years stretched out as bleakly as the desolate Hollywood boulevard that presciently opens the film' (Fischer 1988: 112). For John David Rhodes, there are embedded social and symbolic connections between the Beales and the house they inhabit:

Grey Gardens materializes very concretely the horizon of possibility for the Edies' interaction with and intervention in the world, and it is hardly incidental that *Grey Gardens* is a film about a mother and daughter living together in the family home; no accident that Little Edie's brothers are nowhere in sight [. . .]. Given the limits – both historically and contemporarily – placed on women's autonomy, the female child, much more than the male, will be subject to the rule of the house and the domestic sphere which tend to define, limit, and circumscribe her range of actions within the world. (2006: 86)

Complementing the idea of the women's close, entrapped relationship to the home is the ghost of the faded belle in Southern gothic literature and drama. The Maysles refer to themselves as 'gentlemen callers', a term that evokes, as in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, empty promises of escape, faded youth, the pain of impossible romance and always the specter of madness (also associated with the feminine, as in the medical tradition of 'female hysteria'). Invoking one of Williams's most tragic heroines, the theatrical trailer quotes a critic from the *East Hampton Star*: 'The film promises to give Big and Little Edie as much a place in the life of our arts as Blanche DuBois has attained.' Little Edie herself underlines the comparisons when she comments, 'It's very difficult to keep the line between the past and the present, you know what I mean? It's awfully difficult'.

The filmmakers, who included co-directors/co-editors Muffie Meyer and Ellen Hovde and associate producer/co-editor Susan Froemke, were aware of these impressions and keen to make use of them. They recalled being struck by the overtones of 'aristocracy in decay [. . .] we kept talking about, "it's like Tennessee Williams, it's like Eugene O'Neill"' (Froemke et al. 2001). Even so, their dominant conceptions of the Beales were essentially the opposite of fading women isolated from the world. The Beales were 'not recluses' at all, and Hovde expressed an admiration for Big Edie, calling her 'strong and tough and willful and confident' and a dominant force in a tight-knit mother–daughter relationship. The Beales were 'nonconformists, they had made a stand' against suffocating cultural expectations and norms, they were 'courageous and inspirational'. For the filmmakers, *Grey Gardens* deals with 'feminist

concerns', documenting what Little Edie refers to in the film as 'staunch' women who remained fiercely independent in the face of social, marital and financial difficulties, and who refused to cave in to paternal and other social expectations (Froemke et al. 2001).

There is evidence of these ideas in the finished film, and understanding the pressures of gender, class and social demands in the postwar era certainly underlies any fuller comprehension of how and why the Beales lived as they did. Always in tension with the invocation of the feminine figure marked by entrapment and loss are the simultaneous pressures that the subjects themselves – in particular Little Edie – exert against these narrative frames. Little Edie is not simply a curiosity in a sideshow: she constantly violates the presumed safe space that separates on-screen character and camera, disrupting the delicate balance between filmmaker and filmed, audience and screen, voyeur and object of the gaze. She might be seen as 'the director of her own show' (Vogels 2005: 136). As she pushes her face into the lens, we might perceive the weight of her embodied presence and the hesitancy and disorientation of the body behind the camera.

In Little Edie's 'revolutionary' costumes, and in observing the fine line drawn between performed and real life, the film partly resembles other celebrity documentaries such as *Dont Look Back* or *Gimme Shelter*. But the Beales' performances also offer profound elements of excess and even of camp (as borne out, subsequently, by Little Edie's appeal to drag performers). Camp, as exemplified so flamboyantly in the early films of John Waters, is based on 'the great discovery that the sensibility of high culture has no monopoly upon refinement [. . .] camp taste supervenes upon good taste as a daring and witty hedonism' (Sontag 1991 [1964]: 109). These ideas in many ways reflect the dynamics of excess and the disruption of 'good taste' seen in the film, as well as suggesting a shared camp aesthetic that brings together the film's still increasing army of fans.

A politics of camp excess is hinted at in the scene acted out to Norman Vincent Peale's 'try really try' radio sermon. Little Edie mimics Peale's hortatory speech while at the same time offhandedly inspecting her white high-heeled shoe. Through her flattened delivery and disinterested stare, she seems to undermine the rhetorical and masculine force of the sermon, ignoring Peale's demands for attention. When Peale states that his listeners have to 'get on top and stay there', Big Edie intones, 'does that mean women too?' In the end, they both agree that the sermon was 'very good', adding perfunctorily that it was 'very long'. In the much-admired 'staunch' scene that follows, Little Edie's costume of the day appears to be battle fatigues. As she describes her defiance against social and family pressures, she pushes her face and body forward into the lens, threatening the presumed autonomy of the camera.

So why did audiences and critics often take away a different impression of

the Beales? Why would people argue, as Al recollected, that ‘Edie Beale, she’s senile, and the other one is demented; they’re incompetent, so they can’t be filmed’ (Pryluck 1976: 12)? As Vogels outlines, ethical concerns have long dominated discussions of the direct cinema approach (2005: 152–3) and many critics found *Grey Gardens* particularly exploitative. Relating it to a circus sideshow, one stated: ‘we are in the position of those crowds who came and paid to look at the Wolf Boy in his cage’ (Haskell 1976: 118). When recalling these reactions, the filmmakers have always dismissed them as opinions of conventional people taken aback by the Beales’ ‘unconventional’ and ‘nonconformist’ lives (Froemke et al. 2001). But perhaps the idea of celebrating the Beales, as emphasized by Al in interviews (and even by Little Edie herself, who often expressed delight in the film, stating, ‘thank god I met the Maysles’) (Graham 2001 [1976]),⁹ came up against *Grey Gardens*’ narrative frame, cultural allusions and marketing tactics that together worked to produce a rather different range of effects. As Jack Kroll stated in *Newsweek*, the Beales seemed to inhabit ‘a time warp of their own’. Indeed, the luridly fascinating spectacle of women trapped in time and the Beales’ uncanny similarity to classic American gothic fictions were among the film’s key selling points: both the Kroll quote and the Blanche DuBois reference appeared in a promotional trailer for the film.

As Al Maysles’s camera roves across Big Edie lying on her stained, bare mattress amid the refuse of bags, tissues and dirty dishes, ‘inspirational’ is probably not a word that immediately comes to mind. Yet Big Edie’s words suggest a challenge to any pigeonholing of her as a victim: ‘I love that smell’, she states; ‘I thrive on it. It makes me feel good. I’m not ashamed of anything. Where my body is is a very precious place’. Such comments imply a challenge to conformist beliefs about social and domestic order, gender, the body, age. They might even encourage readings that pose the Beales’ ‘savage’ lives as a subversion of antiseptic, bourgeois norms, their closeness to animals, both through association and lifestyle, being a case in point. Yet whether the film successfully empowers or celebrates the Beales remains an open question. Films always elicit competing reactions from audiences, but the negative and pitying responses generated by *Grey Gardens* cannot solely be pinned on narrow-minded audiences.

In examining *Grey Gardens*’ connotations, it is worth looking more closely at the film’s structure and how it was produced. As in many observational documentaries, *Grey Gardens* draws a ‘slight narrative’ out of the disarray and disorder of real life that was captured in dozens of hours of rushes. The editing process, in particular, was both painstaking and interpretive. Hovde recalled:

When the material came in we just let it wash over us. [. . .] You almost couldn’t tell if you had anything until you cut it, because it was so free flowing. Very repetitive. It didn’t have a structure. There were no events.

There was nothing around which a conversation was going to wheel. It was all kind of the same in a gross way, and you had to dig into it, try to find motivations, condense the material to bring out psychological tones. (quoted in Rosenthal 2007: 282)

Indeed, while edited into a certain coherence, *Little and Big Edie* seem to be free-associating much of the time, and certainly an interesting paradox suggested by the film is that of characters obsessed with lost time who actually seem to have nothing but time on their hands. For Davidson, this sense of repetitive or static temporality reflects the 'modernist' nature of the film, where 'one scene follows the next without respect for orderly temporal sequencing' (Davidson 1981: 8).

Amid a free-flowing, modernist rhythm, the film does develop a forward momentum: a sense of mystery or gathering conspiracy (Jerry and the 'Marble Faun') and a specific set of themes. As Meyer noted: 'In documentary one is taking reality and trying to squeeze it into a fictional form, a form that has a middle, climax, and end; certainly not one that life actually has' (Froemke et al. 2001). The 'slight narrative' of *Grey Gardens* thus mirrors impulses in representation to discipline, via rhetorical and narrative means, the unpredictable and disordered nature of experience. Moreover, as the film was geared towards theatrical release, there was a commercial imperative to appeal to audiences. With a final investment of close to half a million dollars, the Maysles needed to deliver a film with characters, tensions and experiences with which audiences could strongly connect.

Thus, though the narrative is hardly linear, there are tensions underlying *Grey Gardens* arising from framing strategies that seem to restrict rather than enhance the range of connotations that characters and events might generate. This tension is palpable in what the filmmakers referred to as the 'Pink Room' scene, which serves as the film's climax of sorts. So far, *Grey Gardens* has indicated Little Edie's lasting regrets and a simmering, long-term dispute between mother and daughter that here flares into open argumentation. Little Edie sings a song that dramatizes her infatuation with David, 'People Will Say We're in Love' (from the musical *Oklahoma!*), much to her mother's consternation. Edie's insistent, weird rendition has 'ruined breakfast', left Big Edie irritated and out of sorts and even precipitated a moment in which Big Edie's bathing-suit top falls off on camera. After calming down on the terrace, Little Edie re-enters the room and glances left at a portrait of herself as a girl (already shown in the bedroom when she recounted her days as a model and debutante). In the scene just before the 'Pink Room', Little Edie remarks that she sees herself 'as a little girl, Mother's little girl' living in *Grey Gardens*. Her glance at the portrait seems to trigger another, more violent bout of regret. A proposal of marriage, Little Edie claims, was ruined by her mother's

intervention, even though it had been her 'last chance' to get away from Grey Gardens' grip and an increasingly smothering mother–daughter relationship. She openly weeps at the Maysles: 'She wouldn't give me a chance. [. . .] I'm bored with these awful people'.

The scene hinges on the cutaway to the portrait. Michael Rabiger describes what he calls the 'legitimate' use of cutaways in the documentary context: 'Many times you will use eyeline shifts to "motivate" cutaways. [. . .] Frequently a person will show a picture, refer to an object in the room, or look offscreen at someone, and in each case he directs our attention to a legitimate cutaway' (2004: 366). In this sense, the cutaway here is legitimate, as it appears motivated by Edie's glance. But it is also an associative cut, what Eisenstein called 'a reconstruction of the laws of the thought process' (1949: 106). The effect is melodramatic and encourages speculation as to Edie's private thoughts while highlighting the persistent themes of loss and regret that encircle her. Though employing a fictional eye-line match the shot is actually poorly lined up: other shots in the scene suggest the portrait would have been hanging in front of Edie as she entered the room, and not to the left where she glances (although the zoom in to the picture from the left disguises this somewhat). The shot sums up some of the problems of transposing the techniques of fictional realism into nonfiction material: Edie's regret has already been potently portrayed, so the cutaway simply underlines our sense of gaining 'true' insights into her private life and past. On the other hand, the cut's lack of seamlessness might spark an awareness of our own capacities for belief in representation: how viewers participate in constructing myths as reality and fictions as truth.

The 'Pink Room' scene, situated as a climax to the film, offers further clues about how central the editing process can become in direct cinema. As Hovde recalled, though the scene comes near the end, it was actually one of the first the editors cut. They considered it to be the point where things 'came to a head emotionally [. . .] once you had that, you then began to understand how you were going to get to it' (Froemke et al. 2001). Elsewhere, Froemke notes: 'If we're lucky, one scene might suggest a strong ending, and that's what we cut first. Then you know what you're working towards' (Froemke 2003: 8). Essentially, then, much of the editing process involved constructing a comprehensible story around the 'Pink Room' scene, which could serve as an emotional climax. The raw footage would have been pared down to support the conflicts suggested here, with its themes of spurned proposals and Little Edie's sense of suffocated potential.

The film's final shot shows Edie dancing in the foyer, shot from behind a balustrade. The instrumental version of the song that opens the film, 'I See Your Face Before Me' ('crowding my every dream', the unheard lyrics would continue), accompanies the dance. 'She's inside her dreams', Al stated, noting that he was aware even while filming that the balustrade seemed to evoke a

prison, or a birdcage from which Edie could not 'fly away' (Froemke et al. 2001). A similar shot of Big Edie behind a balustrade opens the film. Again the final scene engages with intertextual references: Norma Desmond lost in her dream world as she dramatically descends her staircase; Baby Jane dancing on the beach, lost in reverie as the world watches in horror. Little Edie is dressed in black: she dances off screen into black space and silence as the music stops.

In spite of these framing devices, it is possible to see the Beales exerting certain pressures against any definitive reading of their lives and motivations. There is a mixture of exuberance and ironic awareness in their words and behavior, and clearly their 'actual' lives could never have been contained in a ninety-four minute portrait in any event. Indeed, much material that was left out – accessible in DVD special features and in *The Beales of Grey Gardens* – arguably better supports the filmmakers' conceptions of the Beales as independent and inspirational figures than does the original film. In one outtake, we see Big Edie tenderly entreat Little Edie to make a costume change (we discover that she made Little Edie change costumes as often as ten times per day). The scene captures the exceptional dynamics of a relationship based on mutual consent, familial devotion, fantasy and constant role-playing. We see how accustomed the Beales were to performing and dressing up for each other, and how they might have adapted this performance element for the camera. In the outtakes, the Beales' long-term financial difficulties are also clearer. (In the original, one of the few references to money appears in a scene where Big Edie is writing checks, conveying an impression that their shabby surroundings have more to do with eccentricity than financial need.)

Perhaps the 'real' Grey Gardens lies beyond the confines of the original film, and beyond demands to pare down the subjects of representation into a range of accessible themes, storylines and tropes. An open dialogue has developed between the film and an archive of outtakes, recollections, ephemera and other extra-filmic material that, via DVDs and the Internet, have become integrated into the *Grey Gardens* viewing experience. In this sense, *Grey Gardens* is an example of how a documentary – or any cultural production – forms part of processes of making meanings that are never static but constantly subjected to changing interpretations, audiences and viewing/distribution technologies. The two women have entered into cultural myth, attaining cult status through the film and, after Little Edie's death (in Florida in 2002), through a whole *Grey Gardens* industry that has included fashion lines, a Broadway musical (reputedly the first ever adapted from a documentary) and an HBO dramatization. *Grey Gardens* dolls, t-shirts, coloring books and holiday cards are available for purchase online, while Little Edie imitators draw thousands of Internet hits and enthusiastic comments from new fans around the world.

For Albert Maysles, direct cinema practitioners were idealists: ‘The most important revolution in documentary was the one I took part in’, he argued (Iseli 1998: 15). Yet one of the great chroniclers of the American scene, Arthur Miller, felt differently about direct cinema. After seeing the Maysles brothers’ *Salesman*, the author of *Death of a Salesman* expressed reservations about an approach that lacked insight, context and history: ‘you are stopped at the wall of skin’, he said (Canby 1969: C1). Perhaps a problem with an idealist version of direct cinema lies in a conflict between illusions of present-tense immediacy and the ‘authentic’ and intimate revelations it strove to convey. In retaining the explanatory functions of narrative and the sense of ‘seeing but not being seen’ that underlies the pleasures of voyeurism, the democratic ideals of direct cinema frequently broke down, essentially replicating the hierarchies, desires and demands for entertaining spectacle found in more traditional cinematic forms. But neither could the ‘pure presence’ of direct cinema really compete with the imaginative function of realism and suspension of disbelief in fiction, precisely because the pro-filmic stuff of documentary is always ‘real’ – contingent, interconnected, temporally displaced – far more complex and disorienting than shots, angles, zooms and even performance can relay. This sense of what is absent always haunts the documentary image, and in part defines its uncanny fascination; to suppress it is to initiate, even at the level of the subconscious, an impression of falseness.

In moving in this chapter from early experiments in direct cinema to *Grey Gardens* and its ‘modernist’ intertextual and cultural resonances, I wanted to suggest how direct cinema’s ideals of truthful immediacy came into productive interplay with the multiplicities and contingencies of truth that would begin to define postmodern documentary approaches. Noël Carroll suggests that accusations about direct cinema being interpretive – even fictive – came to widely ‘stigmatize’ all nonfiction films’ claims to truth (Carroll 1996: 225). Critiques of documentary truth intensified, accelerated by a backlash against ‘exploitative’ direct cinema that came with television series such as *An American Family* in 1973. For Jean Baudrillard, the Loud family in the series confirmed the collapse of public and private space: ‘the entire universe comes to unfold arbitrarily on your domestic screen’ like an ‘all-too-visible [. . .] obscenity’ (Baudrillard 1983: 130–1).

Still, direct cinema’s influence has persisted: in the US, Charles Burnett, Barbara Kopple, Jennie Livingston and Rex Bloomstein are just a few directors who have perpetuated and expanded the approach. Direct cinema stylizations still largely dominate the ‘look’ and structures of belief that define documentary: sync sound, rough continuity editing littered with jump cuts, the wobbly scope of handheld cameras – all constitute a key strand of documentary’s generic signature. As Dai Vaughan suggests, ‘after *Primary*, documentary was able to redefine its mission as the entrainment of the unrehearsed into

the process of signification; and from that point, the markers of spontaneity began to be understood as the markers of documentary per se' (Vaughan 1999: 147). As a result, mockumentaries also tend to favor direct cinema stylings: Jim McBride's *David Holzman's Diary* (1967), Mitchell Block's *No Lies* (1974) and rockumentary spoofs such as *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) copy its 'look' and key narrative strategies such as the crisis structure. *Spinal Tap* even references famous moments such as *Primary*'s traveling shot at Kennedy's campaign rally: in Rob Reiner's parody the shoulder-mounted camera doggedly follows the heavy metal band as they get lost in a series of corridors and stairways. Direct cinema's technical and stylistic keynotes have been widely adapted to mainstream industry practices, honed into 'real-life' news programming and innumerable reality shows. As Corner succinctly notes: 'Verité has been a central strand informing the newer styles of "infotainment"' (Corner 1996: 33), though primarily as a stylistic signifier of immediacy rather than as a comprehensive philosophy or mindset.

NOTES

1. Beattie references Winston's concept of 'supervening necessities' (Winston 1986, 1998) and Allen and Gomery's notion of historical and contextual 'generative mechanisms' (Allen and Gomery 1985).
2. Stephen Mamber states: 'the filmmaker is a reporter with a camera instead of a notebook' (1974: 3).
3. The phrase means literally 'we are in the bath' (or perhaps 'in hot water') and is translated in Rouch and Feld as 'we are in the know' (2003: 328). It might also imply 'we are implicated' or 'we are in the midst of things'.
4. See, for example, Mamber (1974), Barnouw (1983: 240–55), O'Connell (1992), Beattie (2004: 85–8), Ellis and McLane (2005: 208–26), Saunders (2007).
5. See Saunders (2007: 102).
6. See Saunders (2007: 34).
7. See also Kahana (2008: 222–5), Benson and Anderson (2002: 10–24).
8. The filmmakers have, in a general sense, referred to *Grey Gardens* as 'a *cinéma vérité* film' (Froemke et al. 2001).
9. Little Edie, never wholly consistent, could easily reverse her opinion, stating in 1998: 'I was so disappointed in *Grey Gardens*! It upset me terribly [. . .] I thought we were going to make some money, and we didn't make a thing' (Crain 1998: 43). The Beales were never paid their 20 percent since, Al argued, the film never turned a profit.