

Cinema-Verite in America

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Part 1

At its very simplest, cinema-verite can be described as a method of filming employing hand-held cameras and live, synchronous sound. This is a base description, however, for cinema-verite should imply a way of looking at the world as much as a means of recording. *Cinema-verite* techniques are not the exclusive property of the non-fiction film, and have come to mean anything from a purposely shaky camera technique (as in the shots of the recluse Kane in the newsreel of *Citizen Kane* (1940)¹ to any attempt (however brief or half-hearted) at documentary verisimilitude in fiction films. Clearly, so all-embracing a term signifies very little.

Cinema-verite is a pretentious label that few film-makers and even fewer critics have much use for. In America, and to some extent in France, the term 'direct cinema' is preferred, although that too with some reservations. 'Direct cinema' has been so rapidly assimilated into critical parlance as a description of a technique which is seen to be evident in such disparate film-makers as Bertolucci, Jancso, Warhol, and Rivette,² that I prefer the French designation if only for its now traditional association with the non-fiction film. (Any use of the term 'direct cinema' in this study should be considered synonymous with this more limited application.) Cinema-verite shall be taken to mean that philosophy which has evolved around the term (as well as the techniques employed to express it), and is certainly not to be translated literally.

The essential element in cinema-verite (even above the technical requirements) is the use of real people in undirected situations. By 'real' I mean not only the avoidance of professional actors (unless, of course, we see them as actors) but even to the extent that non-actors are not placed into roles selected by the film-makers. This stricture may seem excessively limited, as it excludes many standard practices such as recreating events with the actual people who lived them, bringing people together for the purpose of filming, or even interviewing anyone (since that, in effect, is directing their behaviour). In fact, it even rules out the film-maker for whose work the term cinema-verite first gained popular currency in the early Sixties, Jean Rouch. So we use 'cinema-verite' under specially qualified circumstances, more in the context of what the American goals have come to be, and as I envision it, as a certain ideal for this kind of filming.

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Another term requiring definition is 'undirected situations', which means that any kind of prepared script (however skimpy), verbal suggestions, or gestures, is out of bounds. More subtly, perhaps, the film-maker should in no way indicate that any action is to be preferred over any other. The film-maker is to act as an observer, a gatherer of evidence, and ought not attempt to alter the situations he witnesses any more than he does simply by being there (along with, usually, another person recording sound). A concomitant requirement to the minimum interference dictum is that no special equipment be employed (in the form of lights, tripods, cables, or anything else that cannot be carried by the film-maker as he shoots).

Editing of footage shot this way should attempt to recreate events as the film-maker witnessed them. Since editing is, of course, a selective process, this does not mean that no attempt is made at shaping the material. Rather, it is the idea that the finished film will not contradict the events themselves through a false sequence of shots, juxtaposition of events that may lead to incorrect impressions, or any other manipulative device. The dull argument (too often heard, as it is the result of a snap conclusion without further thought) that cinema-verite is impossible because editing prevents a film from being the whole truth, misconceives cinema-verite in general and the role of editing in particular. No one is arguing that the cinema-verite film does not bear the selective influence of a film-maker. Instead, events themselves should shape the final film. Even though it is reality filtered through one sensibility, the film-maker is not forcing his material into a pre-conceived mould.

In line with this, some of the standard devices of fiction film and traditional documentaries fall by the wayside, especially music and narration. The former is never added (one of the few generalities about these films that almost always applies), and the latter, if necessary at all, should do no more than provide facts essential to following events on the screen. Whatever the film-maker's initial interest in the subject, the final film does not try to make the material seem as if it was observed for the purpose of proving a specific point. The lack of 'attitude' music and guiding narration are part of a general outlook which does not try to push the viewer in one direction and one direction only. Room is left for possibilities of complex response of as much depth as the situation itself.

Another natural but less insistent outcome of a cinema-verite approach is that it integrates the film-making process: selecting a subject, filming it, and editing the raw footage become continuous steps in a single effort and not discreetly assignable tasks. The most crucial bridge is between filming and editing, where there is a need to judge the footage as much by what is missing of the actual event as by what is present, in order to be true to what the film-maker witnessed. When editing is seen as a separate function,

left to people who did not participate in the filming, a whole new set of priorities and biases, based solely on the footage, can conflict with the obligation not to distort the event itself.

When editing is the responsibility of the one who did the filming, there is also a better chance that the editing will not be overly assertive, that the material will not be shaped any more than it must. A goal, I think, ought to be to refrain from overly conscious shaping of the material, to not depend on editing to give force to the film. The raw material should not be too exactly pared down, lest its final polish suggest a too deliberate use of the selective power of editing. Room should be left for situations that are meaningful in their own right, not solely as little pebbles that only take on meaning when the whole mosaic is developed.

Not only should the consecutive steps in the film-making process be under identical control, but also, ideally at least, this should be exerted by a single person rather than by any sort of joint collaboration. This corresponds to the journalistic notion of 'eye-witness report', instead of an assemblage of several reports given relative weights according to external priorities applied after the event by some means of compromise. In films shot by several crews, there is also a very real possibility of different camera styles clashing when edited together. So, this limitation is a recognition of the greater likelihood for success when one is aware of both the interpretive role of filming (which appears as a kind of 'camera style') and the intricate pitfalls of the editing process.

Cinema-verite as we are speaking of it, then, is an attempt to strip away the accumulated conventions of traditional cinema in the hope of rediscovering a reality that eludes other forms of film-making and reporting. Cinema-verite is a strict discipline only because it is in many ways so simple, so 'direct'. The film-maker attempts to eliminate as far as possible the barriers between the subject and the audience. These barriers are technical (studio sets, tripod-mounted equipment, special lights, costumes, and make-up), procedural (scripting, acting, directing), and structural (standard editing devices, traditional forms of melodrama, suspense, etc). While cinema-verite in the literal sense may not be the result, it is a practical working method based upon a faith in unmanipulated reality that is the special distinction of these films. Any kind of cinema is a process of selection, but there is (or should be) all the difference in the world between the cinema-verite aesthetic and the methods of fictional and traditional documentary film. It is a question of freedom, of refusing to tamper with life as it presents itself.

Unfortunately, some writers have claimed that cinema-verite practically makes other film methods obsolete.³ We should view such claims in a dialectical spirit, for while this kind of filming questions many assumptions of fiction films (as well as providing that way of film-making with new devices to exploit), it will cer-

tainly never displace fiction film any more than photography has destroyed painting. Still, cinema-verite is more than a mutant offspring of documentary techniques. It deserves a place of its own as an alternative kind of cinema – not documentary (as usually practised) and not fiction either (though often telling a story). Because it is relatively new (primarily due to the recent development of the necessary equipment) is no reason to assume that it is the wave of the future that will drown all past efforts. Nevertheless, it is more than a trickle that will soon die out. Cinema-verite, in short, must be reckoned with as an extension of the present limits of cinema.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr Mamber goes on to discuss ideas and approaches which anticipated cinema-verite methods, in the work of Lumiere, Vertov, Flaherty, Zavattini, Roquier, Engel, Ianelli, Renoir and Kracauer. Mr Mamber is concerned in that discussion 'to allay the suggestion, prevalent in studies of this nature, that the methods (of cinema-verite) popped up spontaneously and were without precedent'. What Mr Mamber does is to establish a kind of theoretical base for cinema-verite without however suggesting any simple notion of direct influence. The question of influence he points out 'would require a much lengthier analysis including among other topics, influences of written journalism, photo-journalism, and television, as well as a clearer picture of the traditional forms of documentary (including types popular on television), in order to understand how cinema-verite has developed'.

Tracing the roots and precedents of cinema-verite is a particularly arduous and hazardous task. The primary pitfall is the tendency to equate cinema-verite with some form of super-realism, and then to scan all cinema history (and other arts and means of reporting as well) with an eye on every attempt at non-fictional truth. While there is a good deal that can be learned from that broad approach, it does not, I believe, shed much light on cinema-verite itself. In such an examination, we find several important film-makers or movements seemingly headed in the same direction, but as often as not, they part company in certain crucial areas.

The two men primarily responsible for developing and putting into practice the methods of cinema-verite in America are Robert Drew and Richard Leacock. In the period of their association, from the mid-fifties to 1963 (especially during the last four years), they created what is still the most substantial body of work employing these techniques. Their films remain both pioneering landmarks and a standard for all future work in this area.

Made for television, their films get some attention everywhere and intense analysis nowhere. Some film critics do not even feel that their work is worth consideration as cinema. Andrew Sarris writing in 1966, well after these films had been discussed in such journals as *Film Quarterly*, *Movie*, and *Cahiers du Cinéma*, dismissed all the films in short order:

The cinema verite work of Ricky Leacock . . . belong[s] more to television than to cinema, and live television, not taped or filmed television. The process of editing imposes a moral responsibility on the director to search for a personal truth beyond the factual reality of the footage. As Agnes Varda recently observed, 'there is no such thing as objective cinema (Andrew Sarris)'⁴

In other words, because these film-makers tried, according to Sarris, *only* to record factual reality, in so doing they denied themselves the right to call their work cinema.

We shall examine the films of Drew and Leacock (and those who worked with them) in order to understand the nature of their commitment to reality, to consider their goals, and to determine the processes involved in their quest to capture their reality on film.

Primary

Primary (1960), now ten years old, is a landmark that is still genuinely appealing. Nearly everyone involved with the film does feel that it marked the real breakthrough. Drew, Leacock, Pennebaker, and Albert Maysles all recognise it as the turning point, and generally by reason of the equipment. Leacock, for instance, has said of the film: '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'.⁵ Drew makes a point of the equipment as well: '*Primary* was the first place where I was able to get the new camera equipment, the new editing equipment, and the new ideas all working at the same time.'⁶ There is much more to *Primary* than equipment improvement, however, and actually I don't feel that the improvement is felt so much here as in one soon after, *The Children Were Watching*. *Primary*, though, remains a fine example of their work, still as exciting to watch now as it must have been when first shown.

Primary is an hour film (the same length as nearly all the films, the fifty-five or so minutes of a TV 'hour' remaining after allowances for commercial breaks) on the Kennedy-Humphrey battle in the Wisconsin Democratic Primary election in 1960. The film is about evenly divided between episodes with each of the candidates (cutting back and forth between them, rather than splitting the show into separate full segments on each). We see them giving speeches, hustling on the street for votes, speaking on television, and waiting in their rooms on election night for the results. Kennedy wins, but not decisively, and they now must push on to West Virginia to start the struggle all over.

Drew originally had the idea for *Primary*, and with Leacock sought out Senator Kennedy to persuade him to yield to this new technique of being followed everywhere in the course of the cam-

84 paign. (It is interesting that Drew and Leacock felt the necessity for being able to shoot in private situations as well as public ones, for some of the most effective scenes in the film are views of the thoroughly fatigued candidates when they are out of the public eye.) Kennedy relented and Humphrey later agreed, so the film was set. Drew arrived in Wisconsin two days in advance and hastily made up a working plan, deciding which team would go where and how long filming would last. It was only at the last moment that the camera crews came in.⁷ As we shall see, this minimal preparation was typical, and quite unlike the planning behind most documentary films.

Leacock, Pennebaker, Al Maysles, and Terence Macartney-Filgate all did a good deal of shooting. Macartney-Filgate is an important name in cinema-verite, a major figure in the National Film Board of Canada, especially for the *Candid Eye* series in the late Fifties. Macartney-Filgate worked on this film and *X-Pilot*, but he took a dim view of the New York school of direct cinema, feeling that they were doing things then (around 1960) that the National Film Board had done several years previous.⁸ Drew, Leacock, and Maysles all acknowledge that he shot a good deal of *Primary*, although his name is often overlooked in references to the film.

For the breakthrough in cinema-verite, it is surprising what a small portion of *Primary* is shot with synchronised sound. Leacock has said that he was the only one to make extensive use of synch sound equipment, that Pennebaker and Maysles were shooting with silent Arriflexes.⁹ At this time, it was still necessary for him to use a wire connecting the recorder to the camera (though the cameras were much lighter than when he faced this same restriction while filming Bernstein in Israel, several years earlier). However, his ingenuity was abundant, and the technical bravura of his work is certainly a major reason for *Primary's* success.

The two most intimate glimpses of the candidates were accomplished under particularly difficult circumstances. In both cases, Leacock shot synch sound entirely on his own, with no sound man or other technical assistance. The first comes early in the film, a scene shot within Humphrey's car as he travels from one small town to another. He talks a bit about the countryside and then leans back to catch a few minutes sleep, as the windshield wipers tap out a monotonous rhythm on a rainy day. George Bluestone stated his case strongly, but in the proper spirit, when he wrote, 'That one sequence gives us more insight into the bone-crushing fatigue of a primary campaign than a thousand narrative assertions'.¹⁰

Leacock was sitting in the back during this journey, a microphone attached to the seat and shooting done with a small amateur 16mm camera. Leacock believes Humphrey didn't even know who he was that day, probably thinking he was just a friend of some-

one in his entourage. He was equally inconspicuous in filming Kennedy in his hotel room on the evening of the election. Since the Senator was sitting in the same place the whole time (clearly exhausted by the campaigning experience), Leacock hid a microphone in an ashtray (remembering to change reels on the portable tape recorder at the required intervals) and had another attached to his camera to catch other voices in the room.¹¹ Then, to quote Leacock, 'I retired into the corner and got lost, sitting in a big comfortable armchair with the camera on my lap. I'm quite sure he hadn't the foggiest notion I was shooting ..'¹²

There is much more to this scene than mere technical trickery. It demonstrates the special brilliance of a first-rate cameraman like Leacock (or as Al Maysles was later to achieve), the ability to transcend passive observation through a series of selections within single shots, but without losing the sense of actuality. Leacock pans quickly, from Jackie Kennedy whispering hello to a friend over to the Senator talking on the phone, Kennedy later dragging himself out of his seat to shake hands, and all the time we have a full sense of the room and the activities of the many people in it. The sound quality is poor; there is hardly any light; there are many quick pans and zooms, but it is still an outstanding revelation. Leacock is more than modest to say that he just sat there with 'the camera on my lap'. We shall often be noting his special talents, but this scene still stands among the best.

There is one shot in *Primary* that no writer fails to mention, a long tracking shot behind Kennedy. The shot begins outside a door to a building, where a small crowd is waiting. Jackie walks by and into the door, and then the Senator comes into the frame and heads for the door. We (the camera) stay right behind him as he walks down a long corridor, shaking hands quickly as he moves through the mass of people. We go into a door, up a small set of stairs, and onto a stage, the shot ending with a view of the loudly applauding crowd. It is exuberant and exciting showoff, that wide-angle lens sticking to Kennedy through thick and thin. (There is, though, a cut about one minute into the four minute scene that makes the sequence slightly less spectacular than it might have been.)

The shot's punch is also partially deadened by the use of a portion of it earlier in the film (an editing gaffe which occurred again in *The Chair*, when a similar long tracking shot down a hall to the electric chair is used twice). It is also part of a mixed view of what the film should be, either a re-creation of the feeling of what it's like to be a primary candidate (the same way you'd recreate a jet pilot's experience by aiming a camera out a cockpit window) or a study of two personalities locked in conflict. There is a confusion of purpose in *Primary*, coupled to an energetic sense of trying to do everything and be everywhere at once.

Albert Maysles, who executed this famous shot, is also respon-

sible for a particular device shortly after of a type that soon became outmoded in direct cinema, a cutaway close-up of a small action. The shot in question is a close-up of Jackie Kennedy's fidgeting hands as she says a few words to the audience. The problem with the shot is that this detail doesn't first become noticeable within a larger context; it needs to be zoomed in on instead of cut to. The distinction may sound trivial, but it is visually clear. Subjective details are fine, but we need to share in a sense of their discovery. Maysles understands this, and said recently that if he were to be shooting this now, he would try to integrate it into a lengthier shot to make the gesture more meaningful.¹³ This is an editing as well as a shooting problem, for the way the shot appears in the film, it could actually have been photographed days apart from the rest of the scene and simply inserted for dramatic effect. It is cases like this shot and the need generally for the filmmaker to understand the power of the tools at his disposal that make direct cinema a more delicate exercise than it might seem.

Besides the standout scenes, *Primary* is divided between fine moments, full of insight and some crude, ineffective ones. This wouldn't be worth noting, except that the good footage is all in synch and most of the rest was not shot with live sound. In the latter category I would place several long handshaking scenes, a clumsy montage of feet in voting booths, and a lengthy speech by Humphrey shown primarily in long-shot and in the faces of the audience so as to hide the obvious lack of synch sound. In the former group is an excellent scene of Kennedy posing for a studio photo (which cuts to a shot of the Humphrey photo on the front of his bus), Humphrey being interviewed on a local radio station, and good scenes with both candidates talking to people on the street. The contrasts between the two kinds of shooting suggest once more the absolute superiority of synch sound, for non-synch material becomes agonisingly artificial when placed in juxtaposition.

Seeing that much of the technical difficulties which hampered their earlier work is still present here, one has to conclude that the real breakthrough was a creative one: they began to comprehend the special strengths of their methods of filming. They realised the value of little moments that do not necessarily advance a story, and at the same time, they saw the potential drama in a situation they did not create. If our final judgment of *Primary* is favourable, it must be for the energy behind it, the unpretentiousness of its fresh approach, and the suggestion of later possibilities for these techniques. *Primary* humanises an impersonal process. It shows us a side of elections we rarely see, as opposed to giving us a 'more truthful' view. As Leacock admits, '*Primary* was a breakthrough, but in no way, manner, or form did *Primary* achieve what we set out to do, which was to show what really goes on in an election.'¹⁴ Regardless of the initial intentions, *Primary* fills in some gaps

which aren't (and couldn't be) filled by more traditional documentary forms or in journalistic reporting.

On that last point, there has been a good deal of argument as to the relative merits of *Primary* and T. H. White's book *The Making of the President 1960*. (Incidentally, White is clearly visible but never identified in the scene in Kennedy's room on election night, stalking about with a small pad in his hand.) The general opinion was that perhaps *Primary* was superior as a vehicle to show the noise and fatigue of campaigning (like the Humphrey scene that Bluestone thought was better than anything that could be written), but that on the whole the White book fills in more details and tells things the camera couldn't reveal that people should know. A not overly extreme case was advanced by one French critic, who took *Primary* to task for not pointing out the intricacies of Wisconsin voter registration (which permitted Republicans to cross over in primaries to vote for Democratic candidates), as White's book had done.¹⁵ (This is alluded to in the film, though, when Kennedy refers to the Nixon people who may have voted for Humphrey to hurt JFK's chances. This aside might not have been translated in the French subtitles.) Jean-Luc Godard, in a stinging rebuke of Leacock in particular and direct cinema in general, also denigrated *Primary* because it told us less about Kennedy than we could find in White.¹⁶

The book versus movie argument is one side of the cinema-verite squeeze, the other being cinema-verite versus fiction films. The temptation to compare the films with both written journalism and filmed fiction reveals something of the mixed qualities of cinema-verite, but the arguments usually find cinema-verite on the lesser side of either comparison. In the particular case of *Primary*, I think the only problem is one of intention. Whether or not Drew, Leacock, and the rest wanted 'to show what really goes on in an election', that they failed to do so by no means implies that the film is a failure. Just as *Primary* is not *Making of the President*, the converse is equally true. There is no reason one has to assume that the two are in competition, that their respective creators must achieve the same ends. Part of *Primary's* appeal is that it seems resolutely to avoid the more mundane electoral matters which fill up so much television and newspaper space during those periods. Rather than supplanting White, it supplements him considerably.

It is interesting that detractors had to cite a book in their argument, that there is no film, documentary or fiction, they could name which approaches *Primary's* degree of revelation on the workings of American politics. Surely David Wolper's TV version of *The Making of the President* (scripted by White) is precisely the type of documentary Drew and Leacock resolutely oppose: heavily narrated history lessons. Even here, though, it is possible to see *Primary* as an alternative, equally true and not necessarily contradictory. Unfortunately, *The Best Man* and *Advise and Consent*,

88 the best fictional films on recent American politics, are surely further away from any feeling for reality than even Wolper's film. Both fiction films are hopelessly burdened with contrived melodrama. In both films, for instance, a homosexual accusation is sprung as a key dramatic point. By pretending to give us the inside story, which they expect people to believe is sordid and perverse, they lose considerable claim to veracity. Despite common source material, the final product of each of the three genres (direct cinema, journalism, and fiction films) is hardly comparable.

Primary was shown on the four Time Inc television stations, the same limited circulation which their next film, *On the Pole* (1960) was to receive. ABC became interested in their work after these first two programmes demonstrated that this type of film had commercial possibilities, and Drew signed a contract along with Time Inc to co-produce four one-hour documentaries for the ABC *Close-up* series. John Daly, who was then in charge of ABC News, objected to the ABC-Drew arrangement, claiming that his authority as head of news and public affairs shows was being violated. Daly subsequently resigned.¹⁷ This kind of in-fighting is indicative of the network politics that later kept most of the Drew-Leacock films from reaching a large audience, and no doubt from this very beginning causing a dilution of quality for fear of running into network disfavour.

David

David (1961) is about an ex-addict living at Synanon House, a place where a group of similar individuals voluntarily join together to help each other stay away from drugs. We are with David for a week (or so we are told), waiting to see if the young trumpet player will be able to stay off heroin. His story gets sidetracked a couple of times by episodes about two other addicts, both of who eventually leave, presumably to return to drugs. This works neatly, suggesting only too obviously the possibilities for David.

There is the inevitable go at a crisis moment. At a time when the stories of all three addicts are coming to a head, the narrator says that 'emotions are building up to an explosive Synanon session'. The session turns out to be little more than a dull encounter group situation lasting for at least a fourth of the film. The experience is less than enlightening and not a satisfactory resolution to the manufactured crisis. The film ends as it begins, with shots of David swimming in the sea. This week (says the narrator) has been a victory for David.

David is not as bad as I may have made it sound. It is redeemed by an intangible degree of concern for David's fate, a feeling of cameraman's love for his subject. Where in *On the Pole* our interest in Eddie as a person is closely tied to the excitement of the race, in *David* we care more for the truth of his struggle than for dramatic titillation. There are a couple of beautiful scenes with David and

his wife and child, the tenderest moments in any of the Living Camera films. We also find a skillful use of David's music, a fittingly melancholic sound that is used for mood in several well-edited sequences that seek to do nothing more than convey the feeling of the place at that time. (Admittedly, some find this contrived. Henry Breitrose, for one, objects strenuously: 'It is as if the style screams to the audience "Isn't this poetic and moving!" It may very well have been, but the qualities of poesy and emotion are destroyed by its obviousness'.¹⁸ The moments when plot is not advanced an iota are invariably the best in *David*.)

The better qualities of *David* are due, I think, to D. A. Pennebaker, and assigning credit here is only done because *David* is indicative of a particular sensibility that is evident elsewhere in Pennebaker's films. In its own way, Pennebaker's work is equally as distinctive as Leacock's, and while his range of interests is more limited (on the basis of his work to date that I have seen), his style is no less identifiable. Louis Marcorelles even goes so far as to say that only Pennebaker, among all those who worked on these films, was able to assert a personal style, and that he accomplished this in *David* and *Jane*.¹⁹ I would disagree about the uniqueness of Pennebaker's accomplishment (because Leacock asserts a personal style as well), but anyone familiar with his later work would know who is responsible for *David*.

The Hemingway-like ending of *David* brings up a touchy point, the degree to which a film-maker should have control over the material he shoots. Marcorelles, in the same article, raves about the final moments:

The last scene attains an extraordinary plastic beauty; it gives us the nostalgia of a more refined classical cinema, of a Frank Borzage enriched by nuances of direct: David's success is in the balance, he is going bathing in the California waves, entering almost timidly into the water. And Pennebaker's camera follows him from a distance, trembling imperceptibly, as if at the mercy of the waves which carry him.²⁰

When I asked Pennebaker about the ending, he dismissed it completely, saying that it was forced on him despite his objections. He thinks it falsely suggests that David is better off at the end of the film than he was at the start and that this simply wasn't so.²¹ Whether or not Pennebaker is correct in his interpretation, this is a good place to assert what should have been assumed from the first: the edited film should not contradict the film-maker's view of the event. Marcorelles may be right about the beauty of the last scene in *David*, but if the person who shot it doesn't think it's a true representation of the event, then it shouldn't be there. This may sound like idealistic quibbling, but I hope the pragmatic considerations behind it will become more apparent when we consider further examples. Part of this, of course, is the possible

90 conflict between truth and drama, a matter which goes well beyond the more obvious questions of creative freedom.

Nehru

Nehru (1962) is almost an open admission of failure by the Drew team, a shift from the avowed intention to make a film about the Indian Prime Minister to an auto-critique of the problems encountered in following him and the difficulty they had in maintaining the relationship they wished to establish. The result is something of a disaster, but one that lays bare important unstated assumptions behind the Living Camera philosophy.

The original idea for Leacock and Gregory Shuker to film *Nehru* for fifteen days prior to an election, providing the dual opportunity to observe *Nehru* during a crisis period and get a first-hand look at India as he travelled. The idea is a familiar one for the Drew group. Besides *Primary*, *Kenya*, *Africa* tried the same approach. So, from the outset, they expected a familiar kind of conflict. To put it mildly, things didn't happen quite as they had envisioned. Leacock describes the problem: '... we had thought that because there was an election coming up there would be some kind of tension ... but the election of *Nehru* was such a foregone conclusion that you barely noticed it'.²² Lacking that conflict (we never even find out if he had any election opponents), another was found in the editing room – between *Nehru* and the film-makers.

The film begins with Leacock and Shuker introducing themselves on camera, and then explaining what their relationship was to be with *Nehru* and the manner in which they work. (This was shot afterwards in New York.) Leacock says that the arrangement would be that 'He, for his part, would ignore our presence' while the film-makers would promise not to interfere with his activities in any way. Shuker (who was to record sound) tells of the need for getting the microphone in close and demonstrates the method used to obtain synchronised sound, tapping the mike.

And so the action begins. Leacock and Shuker provide the narration. The first scene shows *Nehru* at some sort of reception. Shuker says: 'Nehru greets his guests but ignores our presence. The deal is on'. During a meal, Shuker reports what is said, explaining that he couldn't get close enough with his microphone. The scene continues with what almost looks like a parody of the pitfalls of direct cinema: a dog starts barking at Shuker and conversation at the table stops as they watch his loud canine encounter. Normally rejected gaffs like this one are a major component of the film.

One almost envisions editing room conferences about which of several scenes is most embarrassing, thus meriting inclusion in the finished film. Two more examples will suffice. In one scene, Leacock narrates: 'Nehru notices something. Now I pan over to see what

it is [the camera pans over to Shuker, then the shot of Shuker is frozen for several seconds]. . . . A slip on his part of the bargain', for not ignoring the film-makers. A scene that rivals the dog barking scene in terms of self-parody involves a struggle by Leacock and Shuker to hop on a jeep in the midst of a surging crowd. Leacock manages all right, but Shuker tells of first having to throw the tape recorder on and then getting his hand stuck under a bar on the jeep. Soon after, Leacock shows Shuker covered with flowers that have been tossed in the direction of the Prime Minister.

Things go on like this for most of the film. Shuker taps on the mike, Nehru notices the camera or makes an explicit reference to it, and so on. Then, a final crisis occurred (or was created). Says Leacock in the narration, 'We were moved with an overwhelming desire to talk to the man'. Shuker continues by saying that to interview Nehru would jeopardise the chance for further filming, but they will take that chance. In a strange way, the relationship of subject to film-maker is treated as a mystical spell that can be broken with a single word. An interview is set up, one that fully justifies the recalcitrance of those direct cinema film-makers who refuse to resort to interviews. The questions are ludicrously uninformed, the answers unrevealing, as in this tepid exchange:

Shuker: How do you feel about the kind of life you have to live?

Nehru: Generally it's a satisfying life.

The film ends with a final reminder of the film-making process, Shuker again tapping the mike.

Clearly, some drastic measures were taken in putting the film together. Drew made the decision to edit the film in this manner because, he says, they had 'run the risk of starting to tell a story about a person during a period that was not a key or important time in his life' and that it wasn't apparent from the footage that this was indeed such a crucial period for Nehru. He feels that the interaction between the film-makers and the subject was evident, and says:

At some point I crossed the Rubicon and decided that was more relevant and interesting, and a better frame of reference, at least for an American audience, than simply to see what Nehru was doing along with conventional narration.²³

Or, as Leacock briefly sums it up, the form is 'a gimmick Drew dreamed up to save a boring film.'²⁴

There has been a strong divergence of opinion as to the source of error, whether it was in the choice of subject or the manner in which it was edited. One French critic who has written astutely about American cinema-*verite* feels that the fault lies in the incompatibility of film-maker and subject, that Nehru lacks the 'champion' personality of a John Kennedy or an Eddie Sachs.

Nehru's Oriental sensibility, this argument goes, is not sufficiently akin to the kind of American character that is on the go all the time and able to tolerate more easily the presence of the camera. The error, then, was in believing that this method is 'absolutely and universally valid'.²⁵ (This view is perhaps supported by Leacock's observation in an interview that Nehru 'was just doing what he usually does day after day'. He excused the film as a result of inexperience, claiming that they were not yet at a point where they could make films in other than 'high pressure situations'.²⁶

Others saw the fault elsewhere. Colin Young calls the structure a 'hold over from conservative classical drama' that is totally unnecessary. His conclusion has far-reaching consequences: 'It ought to be enough to spend fifteen days with Nehru, so long as the film-maker is telling us something we did not know before, and probably could not know by any other means.'²⁷ This is perhaps the single most promising sentence in all cinema-verite criticism, one of the few statements which encourage cinema-verite film-makers to become more adventurous, rather than suggesting that their work is too 'emotional' (as Bluem and Shayon say) or their goals impossible to achieve.

It may not be clear that the two points of view represented by Bringuier and Young are here mutually exclusive. The former accepts the effectiveness of the Drew films where the subject is suited to the crisis structure, and claims that the successful films will be those that recognise the limitations in subject possibilities. In other words, structure dominates subject matter. The latter, on the other hand, implies that any subject which interests the film-maker is suitable material, and that direct cinema should reject traditional theatrical forms and search for new ways to structure the films. In this view, what was wrong with *Nehru* was not the Prime Minister himself (as Bringuier asserts), but in Drew's and Leacock's lack of faith in the possible interest of their subject for its own sake without a story to prop him up.

There is a bridge between the two poles, and that is where I will put myself, because I don't think either side quite explains the problem of *Nehru*. Each argument makes a valid general point, but neither is entirely applicable to this specific case. The fault, I feel, lies in the film-maker's interest in Nehru solely as a public figure, a man of action. They want him to conform to their own image of what he should be like. To this extent Bringuier is correct: Nehru is not John Kennedy. But the fault lies in their thinking he could be, not in any inherent unsuitability of the subject. Young is partially correct in this instance – it should have been possible to make a film about Nehru. This is not, however, a structural problem. It is a matter of the subject having sufficient confidence in the film-makers' acceptance of his normal activities. Leacock and Shuker were not ready to do that; they were expecting action. In a way then, *Nehru* is a very honest film, reflecting their

awareness of their inability to win the confidence of the subject. But admitting your mistake is not equivalent to transcending it, and *Nehru* remains an unsatisfactory work, albeit a very curious one.

We might do well to conclude discussion of this film by pointing out that economics required every film experiment, as all of these are, to look like a success. One does not send a film crew to India and then come back and abandon the project in the editing stage. Unlike a scripted film, which can be written and then abandoned if it looks unsatisfactory or unrealisable, a direct cinema film involves far bigger risks. With *Nehru*, they gambled and lost. But a failure costs as much money to make as a success, and has to fill the same amount of television time.

Jane

Perhaps the most common criticism of direct cinema is that a person constantly subjected to a camera can never truly forget its presence, that he is never 'natural'. As I have already suggested the situation is a good deal more complex, for it turns out that the tension between film-maker and subject depends upon several variables. The point I wish to stress now is that whatever the nature of this tension, to a large extent it is visible on the screen. In the Drew films there is scarcely a single moment when one is not able to hazard a reasonable guess as to how much 'acting' is going on, and in most cases guessing isn't necessary at all.

A degree of awareness of this problem is already apparent in these films. The very fact of their preference for people accustomed to the limelight (politicians, actors, musicians) suggests that they felt this sort of person would be less affected by the presence of a camera. (A more obvious consideration in their selection is, of course, audience interest in famous personalities.) These are the people who are 'on' all the time, whether playing to one person, a roomful, a large audience, or a camera. And because we see them as public figures, we can be aware of this facet of their personalities, their inclination to perform.

This notion leads to *Jane* (1962), for it follows the question of acting in front of a direct cinema camera in a natural direction. The film shows Jane Fonda in rehearsals for a Broadway play, 'The Fun Couple', through to its second night closing. The degree to which Jane is acting is always in the open; in fact, it is a primary interest in the film. Continually present is the obvious contrast between her on-stage acting style and her off-stage manner. That we would not, then, consider the possibility of an on-camera and off-camera difference is naive – the first comparison invites the second. And as soon as we recognise this, it ceases to be a problem. The role playing and deception become, instead, a key concern. When you know there is distortion in a measurement, you are able to compensate for it. (This is an analogy Leacock also likes

to make, no doubt a reflection of his early physics training.) The game of who is aware of what (the viewer aware that the subject is aware of the camera) sounds complicated, but in practice it is, I feel, readily comprehensible.

We mentioned before Louis Marcorelles' feeling about a discernible style being present in the two Pennebaker films, *David and Jane*. While he doesn't go on to explain what he means by this, I think we are now on the track of it. The two films both push their subjects' defences to the limit. As can also be seen in *Don't Look Back*, Pennebaker's film on Bob Dylan, he is particularly adept at filming people when they are doing very little, in direct opposition to the cinema-verite maxim about trying to film people when they are involved in other things so that they will forget the camera. Pennebaker's camera invites its subject to pretend they are ignoring its presence, for through that pretence we will learn something about them.

Jane Fonda was interviewed a year after the film was made, and there is a good indication she came to understand this. In part, this is what she said:

*Jane was a nightmare because I was filmed rehearsing and acting, and there were moments when I didn't know when I was acting and when I wasn't. There was the camera all the time, from start to finish; it was very strange. It was only when I saw the film, a good time after, that I understood what I hadn't realised during the experience. The film was truer than the experience itself. . . . My terms with the play were false and ambiguous. Thus on the whole, in a sense, this film was a false thing about a false thing, and it is that which was true. . . . I learned many things as an actress from this film. I saw that the best way to make something happen is to do nothing (my italics).*²⁸

This excerpt shows Miss Fonda's keen insight, after the fact, of the revelatory power of Pennebaker's camera, her realisation of the possible paradoxes in his way of filming that can still lead to truth. (There have also been reports that Miss Fonda was greatly upset when she saw the film for the first time.²⁹ Even if exaggerated, they lead to an interesting speculation on the power of direct cinema. Actresses should be accustomed to seeing themselves on the screen, but of course Miss Fonda had never really seen herself in this way.)

The film certainly does catch her during a hectic period. The play itself looks like an obvious disaster from the first moment we see a part of it. The fascination throughout is in the effect that the impending catastrophe is having on the company, and their blind faith that they may somehow have a hit on their hands. Jane is romantically involved with the play's director, and the strain on their relationship brought about by the play's difficulties

is convincingly captured. The travelling from city to city for tryouts, the endless rehearsing, the backstage tension before opening night: the theatrical clichés are subverted by the complete mess they are trying to perfect. Nominally another crisis-oriented structure, *Jane* has a full hour of the same feeling that the last moments of *On the Pole* had, the observation of someone caught with their defences down because they aren't able to maintain publicly their own self-image. The best moments are surely played for the camera: Jane in her dressing room mugging in front of a mirror, Jane and her director in a taxi cab (she whispers something to him when she doesn't want the camera to hear), and an excellent scene of Jane reading the reviews of her performance.

Louis Marcorelles raises a question that one hears frequently: couldn't this be done better in a fiction film? Isn't, in this case, Lumet's *Stage Struck* (1958) a more persuasive portrait of a young actress than *Jane*?³⁰ This is an interesting addition to the earlier question of book versus movie concerning *The Making of the President 1960* and *Primary*. On the one hand, cinema-verite is faulted for not being close enough to written journalism, on the other for possibly being less effective than drama. Marcorelles is only partially convinced of *Jane's* superiority: 'At the level of immediate perception, the physical sensation that something is really happening as it is being filmed, Jane holds all the cards'.³¹ Left unsaid, however, is the implication that beyond the 'level of immediate perception', fiction films are superior.

Once again, it ought to be pointed out that direct cinema does not seek to displace the fiction film any more than it would written journalism. But if the defenders of the older forms feel threatened, perhaps it is for good cause. A better comparison with *Jane* than *Stage Struck* is the scene in *Citizen Kane* of Susan Alexander Kane reading her bad reviews. (Lumet's film, a laboured and sentimental remake of *Morning Glory*, also has a review reading scene, but it, like the rest of the film, is too clumsily executed for worthwhile comparison. Hopefully, Marcorelles' mention of the film was no more than pedagogically motivated.) Welles' scene is a skillfully edited interplay between Susan's yelling and Kane's quiet reactions. Its effectiveness is heightened by lighting and camera position to enforce the relationship between the two people, especially in the last moments when Kane literally overshadows Susan. In *Jane*, the corresponding scene is phenomenal in its understated simplicity. Stripped of fictional invention, Jane's thinly masked restraint, her near-tears reading, is even more theatrically powerful. Not scripted or rehearsed, there is no need for the scene to justify itself dramatically, no use for camerawork to emphasise what is already abundantly evident. Though the camera may have affected her, it is still a version of reality of substantially greater credibility (as well as dramatic impact) than Welles' admittedly masterful scene. Superior to fiction film or not, a scene like this at least

96 deserves recognition of its legitimacy.

An annoying little 'sub-plot' is added to *Jane*, and it sticks out so obviously and artificially that it is worth mentioning. Near the beginning there is a brief shot of *New York Times* Drama Critic Walter Kerr, who isn't heard from again until close to the end of the film, just prior to the play's opening. We then follow his journey from the *Times* office to the play and then back again. The old technique of parallel editing is then trotted out, and from this point to the scene of Jane reading Kerr's review, the story lurches back and forth between Kerr and Jane (him typing in his office, her partying at Sardi's, etc). This comes as an unnecessary intrusion at a time when Jane's story alone has more than enough momentum of its own. The Kerr material is a hedged bet, reflecting uncertainty as to whether the rest of the story could stand alone. *Jane*, like *On the Pole*, is able to sustain interest without shallow editing devices.

A scene of Jane alone in her dressing room is quite unlike any other in the Drew films, very close to a sort of actor's improvisation in front of the camera. Jane, sitting before a mirror, is not content to remain still, and instead launches into a series of grimaces, looks, bits of impersonations, and the like. According to Pennebaker, there was a dispute between him and Drew while editing this scene as to whether the sound of the camera should be filtered out as much as possible. Pennebaker felt that the noise should remain, making it clear that the audience was not seeing Jane alone in her dressing room, but Jane alone in her dressing room with a camera observing her.³² Drew apparently won out, as the sound of the camera is scarcely evident in this scene. Pennebaker was right, of course, but I think his intent still remains clear. No pretence is being made of 'invisible recording', a notion brought up more frequently by cinema-verite's detractors than its practitioners or defenders.

Jane, then, is not typical of the Drew films, for the nature of its probing stems from a different notion of the possibilities for direct cinema. It is the product of a camera style that does not wish to minimise its presence, instead of serving almost as an instigator of the action. I think it is safe to assume that such fine distinctions were lost on the majority of *Jane's* audience, but the difference between, say, *Blackie* and *Jane* is unmistakable in retrospect. They are characteristic of two wholly separate approaches to this kind of filming, beginning with different assumptions about their subjects that result in entirely separate relations between the cameraman and what he is filming. The former (like *Blackie*) is closer to journalism, a kind of surface reporting that is often all that is necessary for a very likable, effective film when the subject is cooperative; the latter tracks the elusive, openly questioning both the subject and the recording method.

The Chair

The Chair (1962) is a hybrid of the two main tendencies in the Drew films, between the multiple camera coverage approach to an event of short duration and the method of closely following a single person for a long period of time, ultimately capturing particularly intimate moments. It is clear from the final film that an enormous amount of material was shot (reports vary between 60,000-70,000 feet of 16mm film, roughly 30-35 hours when projected, compared to 18,000 feet for *Primary*) for there are a number of extraordinarily personal moments that I would think had to be culled from many hours of filming. The blending of these two approaches might, on first thought, suggest an ideal synthesis. To my mind, however, it indicates the incompatibility of mixed viewpoints. This may seem inconsequential, but it is an issue that was to have an important part in what eventually led to the end of the Drew-Leacock association, a fundamental breach between their conceptions of the possibilities for direct cinema.

Once more, at the risk of sounding repetitious, the film revolves around a highly tensed situation.³³ In this case it is literally a life-and-death matter: Will Paul Crump, a black man sentenced to death nine years previous but now substantially rehabilitated (according to many who know him including the prison warden), be executed, or will his lawyers be able to have his sentence commuted to life imprisonment? This is surely powerful material, with strong emotional content, opportunity for discussion of basic social issues, and all tied together by a certain conclusion (and possibly a very upsetting one). What, then, goes wrong? I think it is not so much that what is there is so bad, but that it conforms too well to dramatic expectations. Despite the power of some individual scenes (among the best the Drew group ever shot), the raw material seems seriously diminished.

The story begins five days before the scheduled date of execution, and the principals are introduced quickly. Don Moore, a Chicago lawyer, along with Louis Nizer, brought in from New York to assist, are to prepare a last ditch effort for a hearing that will decide whether to recommend a commutation sentence to the Governor. The warden, who we learn later will pull the switch if execution is to be carried out (by Crump's request because the warden has become his friend), tests the electric chair. (This is another of the famous tracking shots, down one hall, into an elevator, down another hall, and into the room with the chair.) The prosecuting attorney, his case all prepared, practices his golf swing at a driving range. And of course there is Crump himself, visiting with the editor of a novel he has been preparing. (Another fine scene. Crump is asked to do some rewriting. The look on his face as he asks 'Do you want me to do that now' is incredible.)

Topping even these fine scenes, the first part of the film has one of Leacock's great pieces of work. It is a very long take in

98 Moore's office. He receives a phone call telling him that the Church will issue a strong statement of support for clemency. It is apparently something Moore has been trying to get for some time. After hanging up, he begins to cry but then holds back, pauses, puts out a cigarette, and then really cries. The camera moves away, as if in deference to the power of the emotion, and then the shot ends.

I would think that a shot like this could only come about after, first, a strong degree of trust between film-makers and subject, and, second, as the climax to a long period of shooting. Leacock (with Drew taking sound in this case) seems able to film intimate situations without provoking them, minimising the importance of the camera's presence in a self-effacing manner that is communicated to an audience through the restrained but purposeful selection of camera movements. It is a style as personal as Pennebaker's, but more in keeping with the flow of events. Leacock's skill is evident in the more open actions of his subjects, Pennebaker's through the tension between camera and subject. (This is a rough generalisation rather than a strict differentiation. It is more correct in characterising the best moments of each than as a description of their total work.)

The parole hearing defence is handled by Nizer, who earlier delivers a to-the-camera explanation of the rehabilitation issue. Nizer is a skillful speaker, and he comes off well. The original prosecutor of the Crump case, now a judge, takes the stand and questions Crump's attitude toward contrition. Nizer reads a letter written by Crump to the Governor, and during the reading of the letter the camera pans over to Crump's mother in the audience (identified shortly before by the narrator), down to her hands, and then back to Nizer. Substantial portions of the prosecution and defence summations end the hearing.

On the day of the decision, the suspense is played up for all it's worth. Sample narration: 'At the County Jail, Paul Crump waits twenty feet from the chair'. The warden conducts practice drills with the chair while waiting for word. There is a shot of the Governor reading through some papers, others of Moore waiting in his office. Near the warden's office, cameramen set up for a possible news conference. Moore receives a call that commutation is to be recommended. Elated, he talks about going to the races and sends his secretary to get a racing form. At a press conference, the warden announces that the sentence has been commuted to 199 years. Crump appears before the press: 'What have you got to say Paul?' 'I thank God'. 'A little louder'. Over the noise of clicking cameras, someone asks Paul to smile, but he is visibly shaken by the experience and not able to respond to the clamour of the scene. The film ends with shots of Moore at the races, and then of Crump being transferred to the prison where he will begin his life sentence.

The Chair certainly has no shortage of fine moments. The initial

problem, though, is that it exploits traditional courtroom and death row clichés to the hilt: the young lawyer serving for no pay because his cause is just, the star defence attorney, the spectre of death, the warden with a job to do. It may well be true that real life is full of high drama, but *The Chair* deals in too many clichés when the film's evidence indicates a tension of an even higher order. An event may be too dramatic, as well as not dramatic enough, to adapt to conventional forms.

There have been several explanations posited as to what goes wrong, each close to the heart of the problem. Louis Marcorelles speaks of the shift in interest from Crump to Moore (partly necessitated by the shooting conditions), resulting in the sacrifice of 'simpler human truths' for suspense-through-editing.³⁴ It would be more correct to say, I think, that given the shift from the Crump to Moore, it was not a sufficiently committed shift. Had it been more completely Moore's story (or Crump's, as Marcorelles would have preferred), simpler human truths might still have been evident. The difficulty arises out of the balancing act between separate stories. In another article, Marcorelles admits that the suspense may be strong and well-intentioned, but that nevertheless it is arbitrarily introduced and receivingly toys with a man's life.³⁵ Robert Vas implies that *The Chair* is either edited too much or not enough, saying that it 'is no longer the raw material nor is it the final, shaped product'. His metaphor is crude, but the point is well-taken: 'Somewhere between the two extremes of raw material and final product lies the banana-skin of which this technically so progressive way of looking slips artistically'.³⁶

Godard, in his previously mentioned blast on American cinemaverite, is particularly vituperative in his use of a familiar argument:

After having seen *The Chair*, we know less about the electric chair than in a mediocre film starring Susan Hayward that follows melodramatic techniques [referring to Robert Wise's *I Want to Live* (1959), which, though it is a negligible error, was about the gas chamber] (Godard).³⁷

This is part of the same editing argument, I think, since *The Chair* apes the fictional courtroom and prison stereotypes in a format all too recognisable from film and television dramas. But Godard is wrong, for the problem with *The Chair* is not that we 'know less' about the people and institutions here than in comparable fiction films, but that we know them equally poorly. His argument suggests the superiority of fiction films in dealing with social issues, where actually it is the dependence on fictional conventions and imitation of fictional editing techniques that is *The Chair's* crippling error.

When a film is finished, the question of the particular source of a general problem, whether it results from shooting or editing or any other point of control, seems too open to unfounded specula-

tion. In the case of *The Chair*, one could believe that the suspense orientation and stereotyped characters are an outcome of the choice of subject and/or the resulting footage. This argument would continue by saying that the editing possibilities were then rather limited, that they were dictated by the material then at their disposal. This is an inviting interpretation, but in this case at least, it is a false one. I think we can pinpoint specifically the evidence against this, in support of my feeling that reality was too powerful, and in a way they were not accustomed to dealing with. (I do not, however, wish to suggest that the film is a fiasco. In fact, it is out of respect for the passion still evident in the film that this examination is worthwhile.)

The prime responsibility for *The Chair* belongs to Gregory Shuker, who had the original idea for it and maintained his supervisory role through to the editing. Pennebaker and Shuker (on sound) covered Crump and also Nizer. Leacock and Drew (sound) were on Moore, and together they all covered the parole board hearing.³⁸ This split means that neither group knows what the other is getting. Especially in a situation of brief duration (here it was a couple of days), structure comes after the fact. The relationship between the parts, the points of transition between them, the overall thrust of the narrative: these are editing, not shooting, decisions. *The Chair* is not a unique case in this respect. Nearly all the Drew films were shot with at least two camera crews, often many more. What is unique is the incompatibility of the separately shot material and the preference for maintaining independent narratives and not supplying much of any one.

The Chair should have been either the story of one person or else eight hours long. Pennebaker's two good scenes of Crump (with his editor, at the press conference) and Leacock's two with Moore (two phone scenes, one when the Church supports them and the other when commutation is recommended) are highlights for which one craves details. It is a cheat to show displays of emotion without sufficiently preparing for them. Deciding to juxtapose such moments (not even considering problems of different shooting styles) means simplification of ideas; one conflict after another is a device of melodrama.

In the midst of this falseness, anything is possible. It comes as no surprise in this context to learn that the great shot following the warden on his inspection of the electric chair was actually done a month later.³⁹ When direct cinema comes from bits and pieces, this opportunity for deliberate falsity can be an overpowering temptation. And to make matters worse, part of the shot is used a second time. When a structure leaves room for such manipulation, we must categorically reject its use. Without credibility at the base of our response to a cinema-verite film its prime source of strength is cut off. The unquestioned power of individual scenes in *The Chair* makes the falseness of the overall structure that much

more apparent. It's simply too exciting to be true.

Even more tantalising are the suggestions that some of the events in the film might not have been as stereotyped as they appear. Leacock says in an interview:

... many things were omitted because they did not fit the conception required of the film: 'Will he or won't he?' Will Paul Crump be saved from execution? For instance, the young lawyer was terribly pissed off when Louis Nizer came in on the case. And said so. 'Who's this s.o.b. coming out from New York?' And he was terribly concerned with the race-track all the way through it. And sometimes you wondered, 'How the hell is this guy ever going to get out?' He was never going to get the bloody brief written.⁴⁰

Even discounting possible exaggerations here (although Pennebaker also expressed similar feelings to me), it still indicates an inflexibility in the editing that is an anathema in direct cinema. Editing can conform to a film-maker's personal vision, but that vision becomes highly suspect when it coincides so closely with traditional drama. Further, when someone edits material they didn't shoot, the chance for falsity is clearly greater. At this stage, obligation to reality is more likely to take back seat to efficacy as entertainment.

A good place to end our discussion of *The Chair* is to bring up an accusation that has been levelled many times since the Drew-Leacock films. It is surprising, in fact, that it had not come up earlier and more often. The issue is privacy. A BBC-TV executive in discussing American direct cinema said that *The Chair* 'illustrates more clearly than any other film the danger of this kind of filming – that it may degenerate into a sort of voyeurism, a hunt for any situation where people are stripping themselves emotionally'.⁴¹ Except in rare cases (so far, at least), this seems like a manufactured problem. Provided that those being filmed give their consent, where is the immorality? The most private moment in *The Chair*, I feel, is the look on Crump's face while he is being callously treated by reporters at the press conference. It is hardly an incident of voyeurism. The issue of privacy become a matter of viewers being sensitive to situations they would prefer not to watch or acknowledge.

to be continued

Notes

1. Roy Huss and Norman Silverstein, *The Film Experience* (New York; Delta, 1968), p 114.
2. See, for example: Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Le detour par le direct', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No 209 (February 1969), pp 48-53, and No 211 (April 1969), pp 40-45.
3. See, for example: Louis Marcorelles, 'Le cinéma direct nord américain', *Image et Son*, No 183 (April 1965), p 47.

4. Andrew Sarris, 'The Independent Cinema', *Motive*, XVII (November 1966), p 30.
5. Ian Cameron and Mark Shivas, 'Interview with Richard Leacock', *Movie*, No 8 (April 1963), p 16.
6. Author's interview with Robert Drew.
7. Louis Marcorelles and Andre S. Labarthe, 'Entretien avec Robert Drew et Richard Leacock', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXIV (February 1963), pp 20-21.
8. Sarah Jennings, 'An Interview with Terence Macartney-Filgate', *Terence Macartney-Filgate: The Candid Eye*, ed Charlotte Gobeil, Canadian Filmography Series, No 4 (Ottawa, 1966), p 6.
9. Ulrich Gregor, 'Leacock Oder Das Kino Der Physiker', *Film* (Munich) IV (January 1966), p 16; interview with Richard Leacock.
10. George Bluestone, 'The Intimate Documentary', *Television Quarterly*, IV (Spring 1965), p 52.
11. Marcorelles and Labarthe, *op cit*, p 21.
12. Author's interview with Richard Leacock.
13. Author's interview with Albert Maysles.
14. Author's Interview with Richard Leacock.
15. Claude Julien, 'Un homme dans la foule', *Artsept*, No 2 (April/June 1963), p 46.
16. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Richard Leacock' in 'Dictionnaire de 121 Metteurs en Scene', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXV (December 1963-January 1964), p 40.

On the other side of the Atlantic *Cinema Verité* is translated as - 'candid camera'. And candid Leacock certainly is in more than one sense, pursuing truth with such fervour that he doesn't even ask himself which side of the Pyrenees he has the lens, this side or over there? Nor therefore, what truth is in question. By not separating cause from effect, mixing the exception with the rule, Leacock's crew fail to take into account (and what is cinema but the rendering of accounts) that the eye composing the shot in the viewer is both more and less than the recording instrument it uses. Yes, more and less (more in Welles, less in Hawkes) but never just that recording instrument, which remains a recorder, or becomes a pan and brush, as the case may be. Deprived of judgement, Leacock's camera, despite its honesty, loses two of the camera's basic qualities - intelligence and sensibility. A sharp image is no use if the intentions are fluffy. What's more Leacock's lack of subjectivity in the end becomes lack of objectivity. We know less about the layer after seeing *The Chair* than we do from seeing *Dial M for Murder*, and less about the electric chair than we do from any film following the lines of melodrama and starring Susan Hayward.

In the same way we know less about the Democrat Kennedy after seeing *Primary* than we do from reading Ted White's book, All this is easily explained by the fact that the *mise en scene* in Leacock's group is on a par with a Gordon Douglas - not even a Hathaway or a Stuart Heisler. With the additional fault that they aren't even aware that what they're engaged in is *mis en scene*, and that there is no such thing as pure reportage. Hence their childish mania for filming in close up events which demand a long shot, accompanying people instead of following them, and sticking so close to actuality they kill it. To sum up, all the faults that a cameraman on Walt Disney's documentary series wouldn't commit, since Leacock also seems not to know how to use a magic

'Marker' to annotate his 'Rouches' (rushes). Briefly, it takes more than honesty to fight in the *avant garde*, especially when you don't know that while reality surpasses fiction the latter gives as good as it gets.—J-L G.

17. 'Television's School of Storm and Stress', *Broadcasting*, LX (March 6, 1961), p 83.
18. Henry Breitrose, 'On the Search for the Real Nitty-Gritty: Problems and Possibilities in *Cinema-Verite*', *Film Quarterly*, XVII (Summer 1964), p 38.
19. Louis Marcorelles, 'Le cinéma direct nord américain', *Image et Son*, No 183 (April 1965), p 52.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Author's interview with D. A. Pennebaker.
22. Cameron and Shivas, *op cit*, p 17.
23. Author's interview with Robert Drew.
24. Author's interview with Richard Leacock.
25. Jean-Claude Bringuier, 'Libres propos sur le cinéma-vérité', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXV (July 1963), pp 16-17.
26. Cameron and Shivas, *op cit*, p 18.
27. Colin Young, 'Cinema of Common Sense', *Film Quarterly*, XVII (Summer 1964), p 28
28. Jane Fonda, 'Jane (an interview)', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, XXV (December 1963 - January 1964), 6 187.
29. Hal Seldes, 'D. A. Pennebaker: The Truth at 24 Frames per Second' *Avant-Garde* No 7 (March 1969), p 48.
30. Louis Marcorelles, 'Nothing But the Truth', *Sight and Sound*, XXXII (Summer 1963), p 116.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Author's interview with D. A. Pennebaker.
33. A well organised summary in words and pictures is available. It is recommended for an idea of the film which my brief summary will not express. 'The Chair', *Show* (April 1964), pp 51-55.
34. Louis Marcorelles, 'Nothing But the Truth', *Sight and Sound*, XXXII (Summer 1963), p 115.
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In the absence of a completely accurate filmographical information, below is a list of the films involving two or more of the following: 'Living Camera' series/Robert Drew Associates Production/Time Inc. Sponsorship/Leacock, Pennebaker, and other film-makers.

- 1960 *Primary*
On the Pole
Yanki No!
Balloon
- 1961 *Petey and Johnny*
The Children were Watching
David
Adventures on the New Frontier
Football
Blackie
- 1962 *The Chair*
Kenya, South Africa

- Susan Starr*
Jane
 1963 *Eddie (Eddie Sachs at Indianapolis)*
Nehru (also known as Portrait of Nehru, Nehru Story)
Aga Khan
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