

The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film

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Anyone who recognizes that self-reflection, as mediated linguistically, is integral to the characterization of human social conduct, must acknowledge that such holds also for his own activities as a social "analyst," "researcher," etc.

Anthony Giddens,
New Rules of Sociological Method

My topic is the concept of reflexivity as it applies to the documentary film. Before I can approach this subject, I must first briefly examine the parameters of reflexivity, situate it in a historical-cultural context, and discuss my own relationship to the concept.

To be ideologically consistent, I should and will now situate my thoughts within my own history, in other words, be reflexive about my ideas of reflexivity. In the process of organizing the 1974 Conference on Visual Anthropology, I organized a series of screenings and discussions entitled "Exposing Yourself." The panelists—Sol Worth, Gerry O'Grady, Bob Scholte, Richard Chalfen, and myself—discussed a group of autobiographical, self-referential, and self-consciously made films in terms of a variety of concerns within visual communication and anthropology. Some of those films and ideas have formed the basis for my discussion here.

While I do not intend to proselytize, I should point out that I am partisan. I am convinced that filmmakers along with anthropologists have the ethical, political, aesthetic, and scientific obligations to be reflexive and self-critical about their work. Indeed, I would expand that mandate to include everyone who manipulates a symbolic system for any reason. You will find little direct

empirical support for such sweeping statements in this paper. Instead, my focus is more modest. I intend to concentrate on a discussion of the manifestations of reflexivity in documentary films.

As a means of delineating the concept, let us examine the following diagram borrowed from Johannes Fabian's article, "Language, History, and Anthropology":¹ PRODUCER-PROCESS-PRODUCT. I am deliberately using general terms because they serve to remind us that the issues raised are not confined to the cinema even though this paper is.

While one can find exceptions, I think that it is reasonable to say that most filmmakers present us with the product and exclude the other two components. According to popular rhetoric as used in our culture by some people to explain the documentary, these films are produced by people striving to be unbiased, neutral, and objective. They employ fair and accurate means to obtain the true facts about reality. Given that point of view, and I realize that I am oversimplifying, not only is it unnecessary to reveal the producer and the process, such revelation is counterproductive. To reveal the producer is thought to be narcissistic, overly personal, and subjective. The revelation of process is deemed to be untidy, ugly, and confusing to the audience. To borrow a concept from the sociologist Erving Goffman,² audiences are not supposed to see backstage. It destroys illusions and causes them to break their suspension of disbelief.

On the other hand, assuming a reflexive stance would be to reveal all three components—to see things this way: PRODUCER-PROCESS-PRODUCT and to suggest that unless audiences have knowledge of all three, a sophisticated and critical understanding of the product is virtually impossible.

To be reflexive is to structure a product in such a way that the audience assumes that the producer, the process of making, and the product are a coherent whole. Not only is an audience made aware of these relationships, but it is made to realize the necessity of that knowledge. To be more formal about it, I would argue that being reflexive means that the producer deliberately and intentionally reveals to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions that caused him to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally to present his findings in a particular way.

There may be some confusion between *reflexivity* and terms which are sometimes used as synonyms: *autobiography*, *self-reference*, and *self-consciousness*. In an *autobiographical* work, while the producer—the self—is the center of the work, he can be unself-conscious in his presentation. The author clearly has had to be self-aware in the process of making the product (i.e., the autobiography), but it is possible for him to keep that knowledge private and simply follow the established conventions of that genre. To be *reflexive* is not only to be self-aware, but to be sufficiently self-aware to know what aspects of self are necessary to reveal so that an audience is able to understand both the process employed and the resultant product and to know

that the revelation itself is purposive, intentional, and not merely narcissistic or accidentally revealing.³

Self-reference, on the other hand, is not autobiographical or reflexive. It is the allegorical or metaphorical use of self—for example, Truffaut's films *400 Blows* and *Day for Night*. The maker's life in this work becomes symbolic of some sort of collective—all filmmakers, and perhaps *everyman*. It is popularly assumed that *self-reference* occurs in all art forms: as the cliché goes, an artist uses his personal experience as the basis of his art. The devotees of an art form try to ferret out biographical tidbits so that they can discover the "hidden meaning" behind the artist's work. Again, there is the cultural fact that we believe it is quite common for producers to be self-referential. What I wish to stress is that this self-reference is distinct from reflexivity—one does not necessarily lead to the other.

To be *self-conscious* in the turgid pseudo-Freudian sense of a Fellini, for example, has become a full-time preoccupation particularly among the upper-middle class. However, it is possible and indeed common for this kind of awareness to remain private knowledge for the producer, or at least to be so detached from the product that all but the most devoted are discouraged from exploring the relationship between the maker and his work; and furthermore, the producer does nothing to encourage that exploration. In other words, one can be *reflexive* without being *reflexive*. That is, one can become self-conscious without being conscious of that self-consciousness.⁴ Only if a producer decides to make his awareness of self a public matter and conveys that knowledge to his audience is it possible to regard the product as reflexive.

I have just suggested that it is possible to produce autobiographical, self-referential, or self-conscious works without being reflexive. Let me clarify. I am simply saying that if the work does not contain sufficient indications that the producer intends his product to be regarded as reflexive, the audience will be uncertain as to whether they are reading into the product more or other than what was meant.⁵

While I am primarily concerned with reflexivity in the documentary film, it is necessary to mention at least some of the general cultural manifestations of reflexivity. I believe they are to be found in the growing popular realization that the world, and in particular the symbolic world—things, events, and people, as well as news, television, books, and stories—are not what they appear to be. People want to know exactly what the ingredients are before they buy anything—aspirin, cars, television news, or education. We no longer trust the producers. Ralph Nader, the consumer protection movement, truth in lending and advertising laws are the results of this felt need.

On a more profound level, we are moving away from the positivist notion that meaning resides in the world and human beings should strive to discover the inherent, objectively true reality of things.⁶ This philosophy of positivism has caused many social scientists as well as documentary filmmakers and

journalists to hide themselves and their methods under the guise of objectivity. This point of view is challenged by both Marxists and structuralists.

We are beginning to recognize that human beings construct and impose meaning on the world. We create order. We don't discover it. We organize a reality that is meaningful for us. It is around these organizations of reality that filmmakers construct films. Some filmmakers, like other symbol producers in our culture, are beginning to feel the need to inform their audiences about who they are and how their identities may affect their films. They also wish to instruct their audiences about the process of articulation from the economic, political, and cultural structures and ideologies surrounding the documentary to the mechanics of production.

Reflexive elements in documentaries are undoubtedly a reflection of a general cultural concern with self-awareness. They are also the continuation of a tradition in visual forms of communication. It has been suggested that reflexivity in the visual arts begins with the cave paintings where people drew the outline of their hands on the wall. It is the first sign of authorship. It reminds us of the process and even tells us something about the maker—most of the hands reveal missing finger joints.

In painting we have early examples of reflexivity in Jan van Eyck's *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride* (1434), where we find a mirror in the center of what appears to be merely a portrait. In the mirror are the reflections of two people, one of them assumed to be van Eyck. So that the viewer will know for certain, the painter has written around the top of the mirror, "van Eyck was here." I could trace the development of such genres as the self-portrait and other evidences of this kind of sensibility, but it would take us too far astray. It is sufficient to say that by the time movies were invented there was already established a minor tradition of reflexivity within most pictorial communicative forms.

Turning to the cinema, we discover that reflexivity is to be found more frequently in fiction film than in the documentary. From their beginnings films have been an imperfect illusion. That is, the suspension of disbelief has been broken through either accident or design. Audiences have been reminded that they are spectators having technologically generated vicarious and illusory experiences. In one sense, every time the camera moves one is reminded of its presence and the construct of the image. Also, there is an early tradition in film of actors making direct contact with the audience. These "theatrical asides" (undoubtedly having a theatrical origin) of Groucho Marx and other comedians, like Woody Allen in *Annie Hall*, momentarily alienate the audience.⁷ However, the overall effect of both camera movements and asides is probably not significant and is hardly constructed in a manner that could be called reflexive.

There are three places where one finds sustained reflexive elements in fiction films: (1) comedies in the form of satires and parodies about movies

and moviemakers; (2) dramatic films in which the subject matter is movies and moviemakers; and (3) some modernist films which are concerned with exploring the parameters of form, and in that exploration disturb conventions such as the distinction between fiction and nonfiction.⁸

From Edison to Mel Brooks, fiction-filmmakers have been able to mock themselves and their work more easily than have documentarians. Documentary parodies are uncommon and recent in origin. For example, Jim McBride's *David Holzman's Diary*, Mitchell Block's *No Lies*, and Jim Cox's *Ear the Sun*.

In fact, documentary parody is so rare and out of keeping with the sensibilities of people who make these films that when a parody may exist it is regarded as confusing. In Basil Wright's review of Buñuel's *Land Without Bread*, Wright assumed that the narration and music score were errors and not a deliberate attempt on Buñuel's part to be ironic. "Unfortunately, someone (presumably not Buñuel) has added to the film a wearisome American commentary, plus the better part of a Brahms symphony. As a result, picture and sound never coalesce, and it is only the starkness of the presented facts which counts."⁹

Whether Buñuel is, in fact, responsible for the text of the narration and the music score is unclear.¹⁰ It is sufficient for our purposes to realize that it apparently never occurred to Wright that some audiences might regard the juxtaposition of music, narration, and images as ironic, perhaps even as a parody of travelogues and information films.

It is not difficult to see why the possibility of parody did not occur to Wright. Because parody mocks or ridicules communicative forms, conventions, and codes, it can be said that parody has reflexive qualities. Both reflexivity and parody draw attention to the formal qualities of film as film. Most documentarians wish to make their films transparent, that is, to appear to be merely records. Calling attention to the film as film frustrates that purpose.¹¹

It is interesting to note that the tradition of parody in fiction films commences at the beginning of cinema and continues to the present. The ironic messages in Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* and in *Uncle Josh Jumps*, a silent one-reeler produced in Edison's studio, are amazingly similar. In *Uncle Josh Jumps* we see a man sitting in a theater balcony watching a movie. He ducks and cringes when a train appears on the screen. As each new scene appears he behaves as if the action were live and not on the screen. When a fight appears he jumps onstage and punches the screen fighters, thereby knocking down the screen, exposing the projector and projectionist. The film ends with the moviegoer and projectionist fighting.

Both *Blazing Saddles* and *Uncle Josh Jumps* are comedies. Because they are parodies they serve an additional function. They cause audiences to become

their assumptions concerning film conventions. As stated earlier, parody can have a reflexive function.

Hollywood has produced many films that deal with movies and the lives of the moviemakers: *A Star Is Born* and *Sunset Boulevard* are two examples. However, these films serve not to reveal but to perpetuate popular cultural myths about the glamor of the stars and the industry. As William Siska suggests, "Traditional cinema does not expose the process of production to alienate us from the story that's being told; rather, the camera, lights, and technicians are used as icons to authenticate the notion that we are enjoying a behind the scenes look at how the industry 'really works.'"¹²

Some modernist films, such as Godard's *La Chinoise*, Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool*, and Agnes Varda's *Lion's Love*, tend to blur conventional distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. For example, in *La Chinoise*, Godard (from behind the camera) interrupts Jean Léaud's monologue on the role of the theater in the revolution and asks him if he is an actor. Léaud responds, "Yes, but I believe this anyway," and returns to his speech. The audience is unable to decide whether they are hearing the sentiments of the director spoken by a character, or the actor spontaneously expressing his personal feelings, or an actor who shares certain ideas with the director and is speaking written lines.

Documentary parodies that purport to be actual footage but are staged, scripted, and acted are similar to those films that mix fictional and nonfictional elements. Both cause audiences to question or at least become confused about their assumptions concerning fiction and documentary and ultimately, I suppose, their assumptions about reality. In that sense, they produce audience self-consciousness and have reflexive qualities. Examining the history of the documentary, we discover that it is to the Russians in the twenties and thirties and the French in the fifties and sixties that we must look for the true origins of documentary reflexivity.¹³ Taken together, Jean Rouch's film *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un été*) and Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* raise most of the significant issues.

In the 1920s Vertov, an artist and founder of the Russian documentary, developed a theory of film in opposition to that of Eisenstein. Vertov argued that the role of film in a revolutionary society should be to raise the consciousness of the audience by creating a film form which caused them to see the world in terms of a dialectical materialism. The Kino Eye (the camera eye) would produce Kino Pravda—Cine Truth.

For Vertov the artifices of fiction produced entertainment—escape and fantasies. Revolutionary filmmakers should take pictures of actuality—the everyday events of ordinary people. This raw stuff of life could then be transformed into meaningful statements. In his film *The Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov attempted to explicate his theory.¹⁴

He was more concerned with revealing process than with revealing self. Vetrov wished the audience to understand how film works, in mechanical, technical, and methodological as well as conceptual ways, thereby demystifying the creative process. He also wanted audiences to know that filmmaking is work and the filmmaker a worker, a very important justification for art in Leninist Russia. We see the filmmaker, but he is more a part of the process than anything else. One of Vetrov's major goals was to aid the audience in their understanding of the process of construction in film so that they could develop a sophisticated and critical attitude. Vetrov saw this raising of the visual consciousness of audiences as the way to bring Marxist truth to the masses. Like Godard (who at one point founded a Dziga Vetrov film collective), Vetrov wished to make revolutionary films which intentionally taught audiences how to see the world in a different way. To locate it in modern terminology,¹⁵ Vetrov is suggesting that in order to be able to make the assumption of intention and then to make inferences, viewers must have structural competence; that is, they must have knowledge of the sociocultural conventions related to making inferences of meaning in filmic sign-events.

Rouch, a French anthropologist engaged in field work in West Africa since World War II, is one of the few anthropologists concerned with creating a cinematic form which is peculiarly appropriate for anthropological expression.¹⁶ His film *Chronicle of a Summer* represents an experiment to find that form. Rouch is primarily concerned with the personal: the philosophical problems of doing research and the possible effects of filming research. He is also interested in form. But questions about the formal aspects of structure come from his concern with the self more than from Vetrov's concern with the process.

Both films were ahead of their time. Vetrov's pioneering work had to wait almost a quarter of a century for Rouch to come along before someone would pursue the questions raised with *A Man with a Movie Camera*. Rouch has said that he sees his own films as being an attempt to combine the personal and participatory concerns of Robert Flaherty with an interest in process derived from Vetrov. As we know, Morin described *Chronicle of a Summer* as being *cinéma vérité* in emulation of Vetrov's Kino Pravda. Rouch's influence in France has been extensive. In the United States, however, his films are seldom seen, and his work is confused with that of such American direct-cinema people as Leacock, Pennebaker, and the Maysles brothers.

Rouch's films signaled the beginning of a technological revolution that caused some documentarians to face several fundamental issues. Prior to the mid-1960s, film technology was obtrusive, and it limited the type of filming possible. The advent of lightweight, portable sync sound equipment made it feasible for filmmakers to follow people around and film virtually anywhere, to intrude on people's lives—observe them and participate in their activities. Documentarians found themselves confronted with problems similar to those

of ethnographers and other fieldworkers.¹⁷ For some it became necessary to rethink the epistemological, moral, and political structures that made the documentary possible. They began to grapple with such questions as:

1. If documentarians claimed that they were trying to film people as they would have behaved if they were not being filmed, how could they account for the presence of the camera and crew and the modifications it caused?
2. On what basis can filmmakers justify their intrusion into the lives of the people they film?
3. Given the mandate of objectivity, how could the filmmaker convey his feelings as well as his understanding of the people he filmed and about the subject of the film?
4. What are the ideological implications of documentary film?
5. What obligations does the filmmaker have to his audience?¹⁸

While these questions are obviously not new—the social documentarians of the 1930s grappled with many of them—they have been raised again in the last ten years with a new urgency because of several factors: (1) the potential created by the new technology; (2) a general shift in our society toward self-awareness; (3) the influence of university education on young filmmakers (i.e., more documentarians received social science training); and (4) the effect of television news and documentary.

The desire to explore the capacities of this equipment and the self-awareness it produced created a need for new methods and forms of expression. Feeling equally uncomfortable with self-referentiality (where the self becomes submerged into metaphor) and with the apparent impersonality of traditional documentary (where the expression of self is deemed improper), some filmmakers found new ways to explore themselves, their world, and in a very real sense, cinema itself. They have confronted these questions by exposing themselves in the same way they expose others. One particular manifestation—the development of nonfiction films dealing with the filmmaker's own family and their immediate world—seems to represent a nonfiction genre which fits neither the traditional definition of the documentary nor the personal art film. In fact, these films violate canons of both genres.

The documentary film was founded on the Western middle-class need to explore, document, explain, understand, and hence symbolically control the world. It has been what "we" do to "them." "They" in this case are usually the poor, the powerless, the disadvantaged, and the politically suppressed and oppressed. Documentary films dealing with the rich and powerful or even the middle class are as sparse as are social science studies of these people. The

documentary film has not been a place where people explored themselves or their own culture.

To find this subject matter one must look at the experimental, avant-garde filmmakers or at the home movie. In fact, film artists like Jonas Mekas in the treatment of his life entitled *Notes, Diaries, and Sketches* and Stan Brakhage in *Window Water Baby Moving* have developed a deliberate aesthetic from the conventions of the home movie in much the same way as Lee Friedlander and Diane Arbus created a snapshot aesthetic in art photography.

Until recently the division was relatively clear. If you wanted to make films about people exotic to your own experience you made documentaries, and if you wished to explore yourself, your feelings, and the known world around you, you made personal art films. Recently a number of films have appeared which confuse this taxonomy. They are films that deal with the filmmaker's family and culture. In subject matter they violate the norms of traditional documentary in that they overtly deal in an involved way with a personal interest of the filmmaker. Because many of these filmmakers come from a documentary tradition, they do not employ the conventions of the personal art film; rather, they use a documentary style. In other words, they have the look of a documentary even though the subject matter is exotic to the genre. Examples of these films would include Jerome Hill's autobiography *Portrait*, Miriam Weinstein's *Living with Peter*, Amalie Rothschild's *Nana, Mom, and Me*, and Jeff Kreines's *The Plaine of Steve Kreines as Told by His Younger Brother Jeff*.

These filmmakers have created an autobiographical and family genre which cannot be comfortably fit into either the art film or the documentary. This creation, which employs elements from both genres, has the effect of making us self-conscious about our expectations. In addition, these films are clearly self-consciously produced and often quite overtly reflexive.

While it is obviously impossible to reveal the producer and not the process, it is possible to concentrate on one and only incidentally deal with the other. Most of these filmmakers share with Rouch a primary concern with self as maker and person and make that quest dominate their films.

It is in other types of films that we see a concern with the revelation of process emerge. This interest seems to come from two main sources: (1) politically committed filmmakers who, like Vertov and Godard, are interested in the ideological implications of film form—for example, David Rothberg's *My Friend Vince*; and (2) filmmakers who seek validation for their work within social science and who, consequently, feel the need to articulate and justify their methodologies—for example, Tim Asch's *Ax Fight*.

Finally, there are a number of documentaries which contain reflexive elements which appear to be present through accident rather than design. Direct-cinema films, such as Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* and the Canadian Film Board's *Lonely Boy*, are filled with what were considered at the time to be "accidents"—

that is, shots which were out of focus, shots where the mike and/or sound person appeared in the frame, etc. Very soon these "accidents" became signs of direct-cinema style, an indication that the director did not control the event he was recording. Audiences appeared to believe in them so much as a validating device that fiction-filmmakers who wished to increase verisimilitude in their films began to employ such direct-cinema signs as camera juggle, graininess, and bad focus—for example, John Cassavetes's *Faces* or the battle scenes in Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*. In addition to verifying the "uncontrolled" aesthetic of direct cinema as a recorder of actuality these elements served to remind audiences of the process of filmmaking and, of course, the presence of the film crew.¹⁹

Other films such as Mike Rubbo's *Sad Song of Yellow Skin* and *Waiting for Fidel* and the Maysles brothers' *Grey Gardens* contain interactions between the subject and crew and other "backstage" behaviors which provide audiences with information about the producers and process.

It would appear that these apparently reflexive elements are again an accident of the moment: an unexpected turn of events during the shooting rather than the result of deliberate pre-production planning. What is interesting and does represent a departure from documentary conventions is that these "accidents" are allowed to remain in the final version of the film. It seems that these filmmakers acquired footage which had a particular "look" and which could not be cut in traditional ways. I would argue that it was primarily a professional need for a finished product rather than an interest in the question of reflexivity that motivated them to include those elements which cause these films to appear reflexive. For example, "big" Edie and "little" Edie Beale would not ignore the presence of the camera and crew, that is, learn to behave as "proper" subjects of a documentary film. In spite of this situation (or possibly because of it), the Maysles brothers decided to continue and make *Grey Gardens* even though it has a "look" which is different from their other films. In one sense, the filmmakers were allowing the circumstances of the shooting to dictate the form of the film, which consequently revealed the process and producer.

In contrast to these films of "accidental" reflexivity, there does exist a project which was designed at the outset to explore the consequences of documentary and ethnographic reflexivity. To my knowledge it is the first American film to continue the explorations of Rouch and Vertov. Hubert Smith, a filmmaker, and Malcolm Shuman, an anthropologist, are presently in the field filming an ethnography of some Mexican Indians. According to their proposal, "The principal strategy to be undertaken by this project is to invest ethnographic material in film with additional self-conscious components—the field investigators, their actions, personalities, methods, and their dealings with an advisory panel of colleagues."²⁰ They intend to accomplish this task by: (1) filming the Indians in a context that includes the observers; (2) filming the field team and

the Indians in mutual socialization; and (3) filming the field team as they interact with each other and with the advisory panel.²¹

In addition to the films they produce, they will provide "a written body of field-related methods for investing nonfiction films with internal self-conscious statements of procedure."²² I mention Smith's project now, even though it is incomplete and its significance is difficult to assess, because it represents a step toward a truly reflexive documentary cinema. Whatever else these films may be, they will have been intentionally reflexive from their inception. They will provide us with a chance to compare "accidental" and "deliberate" documentary reflexivity.

One could argue that the idea of "accidental" reflexivity is a contradiction in terms and that reflexivity depends on intentionality and deliberateness. In fact, a number of the arguments presented here appear contradictory.

On the one hand, I have generated a definition of reflexivity which situates some recent documentary films within a tradition in the visual arts, a tradition in which the producer is publicly concerned with the relationship among self, process, and product. In addition, I have tried to show how these concerns have been transformed by a general increase in public self-awareness and by the technological changes that occurred in filmmaking in the 1960s.

At the same time I have said that most documentary reflexivity has been more accidental than deliberate. In effect, I have been arguing that some documentary filmmakers have used reflexive elements in their films (or at least have been regarded by some audiences as being reflexive) without really intending to do so, or at least without examining the implications. Further, I would argue that based on my examination of these films, on published interviews with the filmmakers, and on personal conversations and correspondence, these filmmakers appear to lack a sufficiently sophisticated philosophical, moral, aesthetic, or scientific motivation for a rigorous exploration of the consequences of reflexivity for documentary cinema. They seem oblivious to the fact that reflexivity has been explored by social scientists and other scholars for some time and that there is an extensive literature.²³ As a consequence, some of the films mentioned above which contain these "accidentally" reflexive elements are regarded as narcissistic, superficial, self-indulgent, or appealing to an elite in-group.

The contradiction can be phrased in the form of a question: Why haven't more documentary filmmakers explored the implications of reflexivity, when reflexive elements crop up in their films? To adequately explore this question would require a lengthy discussion of complicated issues such as the cultural role of the documentary or the adequacy of the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity for the documentary, and so forth. However, I would like to present what I believe to be the kernel of the issue.

To be reflexive is to reveal that films—all films, whether they are labeled fiction, documentary, or art—are created, structured articulations of the film-

maker and not authentic, truthful, objective records. Sooner or later the documentarian is going to have to face the possibility of assuming the socially diminished role of interpreter of the world, of no longer being regarded as an objective recorder of reality. If this is the case, then it is not too difficult to see why these filmmakers are reluctant to explore the idea.

My intention here was to restrain my obvious partisanship. Clearly, I have failed to do so. I should now like to conclude by suggesting that documentary filmmakers have a social obligation to *not* be objective. The concept of objectivity, inappropriately borrowed from the natural sciences, has little support from the social sciences: both social scientists and documentary filmmakers are interpreters of the world. As Sue Ellen Jacobs has put it, "Perhaps the best thing we can learn from anthropological writings [and I would add films and photographs] is how people who call themselves 'anthropologists' see the world of others."²⁴ To present ourselves and our products as anything else is to foster a dangerous false consciousness on the part of our audiences.

Reflexivity offers us a means whereby we can instruct our audiences to understand the process of producing statements about the world. "We study man, that is, we reflect on ourselves studying others, because we must, because man in civilization is the problem."²⁵

NOTES

1. Johannes Fabian, "Language, History, and Anthropology," *Journal of the Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 1 (1971): 1947.
2. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959).
3. In commenting on the manuscript of this paper, Gaye Tuchman made the following observation, which I believe to be both relevant and important to the distinction that I am trying to make between autobiography and reflexivity: "Autobiography may also be naively self-conscious. That is, autobiography is one's purposive ordering of one's life to create coherence. It assumes coherence and so necessarily eliminates that which cannot be ordered and of which the autobiographer might not even be aware. For, perhaps, we can only perceive those amorphous phenomena which we are ultimately capable of classifying and ordering. Perhaps, then, reflexive self-consciousness is not merely autobiography, but the ability to see ourselves as others see us—as co-present subject and object, as perceiving subject and the simultaneous object of others' perceptions. Such self-consciousness necessarily entails a simultaneous self-involvement and self-estrangement; a standing outside of oneself in a way that is foreign to the non-reflexive everyday self."
4. See Barbara Babcock, "Reflexivity: Definitions and Discriminations," unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C., 1977.
5. Sol Worth and Larry Gross, "Symbolic Strategies," *Journal of Communication* 24 (Winter 1974): 27-39.
6. Gunther Stern, "Limits to the Scientific Understanding of Man," *Science* 187 (1975): 1052-57.
7. I am using the term *alienate* here in the sense that Brecht used it—that is, as the breaking of the suspension of disbelief during a performance. See *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willet (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

8. It is curious that the concern with form and structure which has dominated the works of some modernist writers, painters, musicians, and filmmakers, and of scientists from physicists to anthropologists, has not interested many documentarians. For example, I know of no documentary filmmakers who deliberately choose uninteresting and trivial subject matter in order to be able to concentrate on the significance of formal and structural elements in the documentary.

9. Basil Wright, "Land Without Bread and Spanish Earth," in *The Documentary Tradition*, ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971), p. 146.

10. Roy Arnes thinks that it was Buñuel (see Arnes, *Film and Reality* [New York: Pelican, 1974], p. 189): "*Land Without Bread* is also remarkable in the way it anticipates later modernist cinema by its triple impact. It combines devastating images of poverty, starvation and idiosyncrasy with a dry matter of fact commentary and a musical score filled with romantic idealism." Barsam, however, seems to disagree (see his *Non-Fiction Film* [New York: Dutton, 1973], p. 83): "As an information film, even a travel film (but hardly one designed to promote tourism), *Las Hurdes* is an effective and disturbing record of poverty and neglect; but as a social document it is awkward and as mute as a faded poster despite its tragic theme."

11. Jeanne Allen, "Self-Reflexivity and the Documentary Film," *Cine-Tracts* 1 (Summer 1977): 37-43.

12. William Siska, "Metacinema: A Modern Necessity," unpublished paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Society for Cinema Studies, Evanston, Illinois, 1977. The quote is from p. 3.

13. I am excluding from consideration illustrated lecture and adventure/travelogue films. These cinematic forms predate the documentary. In fact, the illustrated lecture film finds its origins in the lantern-slide lecture of the early nineteenth century. They constitute an unstudied form of the cinema and have been overlooked by most historians of documentary film. However, they do contain the earliest evidence of reflexive elements in nonfiction film. The makers frequently employ first-person narration to describe themselves as authors and the process they used to make the film. In many cases, these films are primarily about the making of the film and thereby cause the films themselves to become the object of the audience's attention. However, like the traditional fiction films about movies and moviemakers, the apparent reflexivity of these films is partially based on the assumed difficulties of production and the heroic acts performed by the makers in the process of getting the footage. These films do not lead viewers to a sophisticated understanding of film as communication; rather, they cause them to continue to marvel at the mysterious wonders of the intrepid adventure-filmmakers.

14. See "The Vertov Papers," *Film Comment* 8 (Spring 1972): 46-51.

15. See Worth and Gross, "Symbolic Strategies."

16. See Jean Rouch, "The Camera and the Man," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 1 (1974): 37-44.

17. "With the development of lightweight equipment and the growth of an aesthetic of direct cinema, the ethical problem of the relationship of filmmakers to the people in their films became more amorphous. . . . Regardless of whether consent is flawed on such grounds as intimidation or deceit, a fundamental ethical difficulty in direct cinema is that when we use people in a sequence we put them at risk without sufficiently informing them of potential hazards" (Calvin Pryluck, "Ultimately We Are All Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filming," *Journal of the University Film Association* 28 [Winter 1976]: 21-29; the quotations are from pp. 21 and 29).

18. James M. Linton, "The Moral Dimension in Documentary," *Journal of the University Film Association* 28 (Spring 1976): 17-22.

19. See Stephen Mamber, *Cinéma Vérité in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974).

20. Hubert Smith, "Contemporary Yucatec Maya Allegory Through a Self-conscious Approach to Ethnography and Ethnographic Film," a proposal submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities.

21. The advising panel consists of four specialists in Indian anthropology (one member is Indian by birth and an anthropologist by profession), three visual anthropologists, and a philosopher of social science.

22. Smith proposal, cited n. 20.

23. For example, see Bob Schole, "Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology," in Dell Hymes, ed., *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 430-58.

24. Quoted in Simon W. Chikungu, "Issues in the Ethics of Research Method: An Interpretation of the Anglo-American Perspective," *Current Anthropology* 17 (1976): 469.

25. Stanley Diamond, "Anthropology in Question," in Hymes, ed., *Reinventing Anthropology*, pp. 401-29; the quotation is from p. 408.

The Ethics of Imagemaking; or, "They're Going to Put Me in the Movies. They're Going to Make a Big Star Out of Me . . ."

Jay Ruby

In this paper I will discuss the moral questions that arise when one person produces and uses a recognizable image of another. I am interested in an exploration of the ethical problems that stem from the justification of the use of human beings in the pursuit of art, science, news, or entertainment when those uses involve the production of realistic and recognizable images of people. The questions that can be raised are seemingly infinite, and many important issues will merely be touched on here. Let me cite a few of the more obvious. What does "informed consent" mean when a family is asked by a television crew to have their lives recorded and packaged into a series for national television? How does one balance the public's right to be informed with the individual's right to privacy? Are objectivity and "balance" the primary obligations of the photojournalist? Do visual artists have a moral license to use people in ways different from the ways scientists or reporters use them? I am not a lawyer, philosopher, or theologian. I will not attempt to deal with the legal controversies or with the larger moral issues these questions imply. I am an anthropologist involved in the study of visual communication as a cultural system. For the past twenty years I have been a participant/observer in the production and consumption of documentary and ethnographic photographs and films. I speak as both native and researcher.

I am concerned about society's shifting moral expectations of the image maker and the consequent ambivalence some professionals feel about their own ethical base. This uneasiness bespeaks a deep-seated and widespread concern with the nature of images. At times we seem to be more confused than informed by them. The traditional arguments used to justify the behavior of artists, journalists, and scientists who make images are becoming increasingly

inadequate, convincing neither the professionals involved nor the public as thoroughly as they once did.

As we enter an era of telecommunications where image-producing, -distributing, and -consuming technologies are becoming ever more decentralized and Andy Warhol's idea that eventually everyone will be a star for fifteen minutes is no longer futurist thinking, the urgency of these questions increases. The moral base on which image producers have relied is shaky, if not crumbling. Before every city block has its own news service and resident visual artist, we should have a better understanding of how one reaches the decision to use someone else's image and where our responsibilities lie.

Ethnic minorities, women, gays, third- and fourth-world peoples, the very rich and the very poor are telling us—the middle-class, middle-aged white males who dominate the industry—that our pictures of them are false. Some wish to produce their own representation of themselves and control or at least monitor the ways we now image them. The New World Information Order cannot be ignored any more than can the organized protests against the Metropolitan Museum's photographic exhibition *Harlem on My Mind* or the gays' rage against the film *Cruising* or, most recently, the Puerto Rican community's displeasure over *Fort Apache, The Bronx*. The list is long and grows daily.

The time when an artist could take photographs of strangers, usually poor or in some other way removed from the mainstream of America, and justify the action as the inherent right of the artist is, I believe, ending.

The time when one could reconstruct a historical event by creating composite, and therefore fictional, characters for the sake of plot and not be held legally and ethically responsible ended with the popularity of the television docudrama.

The time when a reporter could rely on the principle that the public's right to know is more important than the individual's right to privacy, when people believed that a journalist's primary ethical responsibility was to be objective, fair, and honest, is over.

The time when a scientist could depend on the public's belief in the material benefits of scientific knowledge to justify the use of double blind studies, often employing hidden cameras, ceased with Stanley Milgram's frightening explorations of people's willingness to obey authority.

Examples are endless, and they signal the demise of our naive trust that since the camera never lies, a photographer has no option but to tell the truth. We are beginning to understand the technologically produced image as a construction—as the interpretive act of someone who has a culture, an ideology, and often a conscious point of view, all of which cause the image to convey a certain kind of knowledge in a particular way. Image makers show us their view of the world whether they mean to or not. No matter how much we may feel the need for an objective witness of reality, our image-producing technologies will not provide it for us.

I believe that the maker of images has the moral obligation to reveal the covert—to never appear to produce an objective mirror by which the world can see its "true" image. For in doing so we strengthen the status quo, support the repressive forces of this world, and continue to alienate those people we claim to be concerned about. So long as our images of the world continue to be sold to others as *the* image of the world, we are being unethical.

To pursue this argument efficiently I must be specific, and so I confine myself to one variety of imaging. I will not try to separate assertion from supportable theses; I will simply state that the argument presented here is based on a combination of personal experience, research, and passionately held belief. I make no claim that all aspects of the argument are verifiable, only that all other points of view are much less convincing to me.

I use case studies from the documentary tradition—still and motion pictures—simply because I know the tradition well. A similar case could, of course, be made using fiction films or paintings, but since the documentary is such a marvelously confused genre of motion pictures, it allows me to deal with art, science, reportage, etc., in a rather inclusive way. In addition, the production of documentary images and the production of anthropological knowledge are in fundamental ways parallel pursuits. The moral and ethical concerns of one can be applied to the other. Most documentarians would agree that the following quotation from Dell Hymes could just as well apply to the documentary tradition:

The fundamental fact that shapes the future of anthropology is that it deals in knowledge of others. Such knowledge has always implied ethical and political responsibilities, and today the "others" whom anthropologists have studied make those responsibilities explicit and unavoidable. One must consider the consequences of those among whom one works of simply being there, of learning about them, and what becomes of what is learned.¹

For a variety of reasons, anthropologists have been conducting public discussions about their ethical responsibilities longer than documentarians have. I believe that the experience social scientists have had in grappling with these questions provides documentarians with usable insights into their own problems. I have consequently incorporated some of those findings into this paper.

The production and use of images involves three separable yet related moral issues which when combined into a professional activity becomes an ethical position. These three issues are: (1) the image maker's personal moral contract to produce an image that is somehow a true reflection of the intention in making the image in the first place—to use the cliché, it is being true to one's self; (2) the moral obligation of the producer to his or her subjects; and (3) the moral obligation of the producer to the potential audience. The solution to these questions will vary with the producer's intention, his or her sociocultural role and that of the image's subjects, and the contexts in which the image appears.

I have argued elsewhere that images are polysemic, that is, a photograph or film has a variety of potential socially generated meanings.² The cultural expectations producers, subjects, and audiences have about the various communication events that transpire in the production and consumption of images predispose people to employ different interpretive strategies to derive signification and meaning from images.³ These interpretive strategies are embedded within a larger body of cultural knowledge and competencies which encompass or are supported by a moral system. That is, systems of knowledge and epistemologies are attached to moral systems. As an anthropologist I would argue that morals and ethics are only comprehensible in relation to other facets of a culture.

The particular signification or meaning that is appended to an image emerges as a consequence of a variety of factors: (1) the label attached to the image—for example, photographs that are considered to be news photos are regarded differently from art photos; (2) the context in which the image appears—for example, news photos which are made into high-quality enlargements and placed in an art museum tend to be regarded primarily as art; and (3) the socially acquired expectations of the audience toward certain types of images produced by certain types of image makers which tend to appear in certain types of settings.

An illustration will help make these abstractions less abstruse. At the beginning of the century, Lewis Hine, a sociologist turned social reformer, took a series of photographs, commissioned by the National Committee to Reform Child Labor Laws, of children working in factories. The archetypical Hine image is that of a prepubescent child, quite small, often frail, and always dirty, standing in front of an enormous piece of machinery. The child is staring into the lens of the camera, and consequently into the eyes of the viewer. The machines are black and dirty, and the factory so dark that the edges of the machine disappear into nothingness. These images were designed to appear in tracts that detailed the social and psychological abuses of child labor. They were often printed on inexpensive, porous newsprint with a cheap half-tone process. All of the subtlety of tone and detail present in the negatives disappears. These tracts were sent to legislators, the clergy, and prominent citizens and handed out at meetings. The intended message of these images in this context is a pragmatic one—they are a call to arms. One is to feel pity for the child and anger at the exploitation by the factory owner implied in the large and ominous machine. If the photographer is thought of at all, he is assumed to be on the side of truth and justice, providing irrefutable evidence of wrongdoing.

If we were to prepare a set of Hine's photographs for exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, enlargements of fine quality would be matted, framed, and hung with a brief but articulate and insightful explanatory text in a stark white room with subdued lighting. The audience in this context becomes people whose primary interest lies in art and photography, not in

reforming labor laws. The photographs are now regarded chiefly for their syntactic elements, that is, formal and aesthetic qualities. The waits are no longer pitiable examples of capitalistic exploitation, but aesthetic objects with interesting, if not haunting, faces. The machines are now examined for their texture and lines—as industrial art objects, not as symbols of oppression. A little girl's stare is now simply a sign of her willingness to be photographed, not an indictment of our economic system. It is unlikely that anyone seeing the exhibit would be motivated to do anything except admire and applaud the artistic accomplishments of Lewis Hine. I am virtually certain that no one would rush to West Virginia to see whether similar conditions might still exist.

The photographs in these two scenarios are the same, but the cultural expectations created by the two contexts cause us to regard the photographer and his works in different ways. I am not suggesting that Hine was never regarded as a photographic artist when his images were used in political tracts or that no one would ponder the political or economic implications of the photographs in the museum. I am suggesting that one interpretive strategy seems more appropriate to most people given a particular setting. It's hard to imagine people concerned with the plight of children in factories arguing about Hine's compositional style, or tuxedoed gentlemen and bejeweled ladies rushing out into the streets to picket a corporation thought to be exploiting children.

In fact, our readings of most images vacillate between these two extremes.⁴ It is a case of the confusion I alluded to earlier with regard to documentary images. We are often uncertain whether the image maker is an artist who is to be critiqued for his mastery of the form or a technician who holds the mirror to the world.

This lack of clarity confronts producers with a moral dilemma that can be traced back to the beginnings of the tradition. Robert Flaherty, the American father figure of documentary film, was immediately accused by his critics of "faking" *Nanook of the North*. The film confused many film commentators—some failed to see any coherent story, since the narrative line was not obvious; others accused him of using actors and staging the entire movie. Criticism of the documentary form has not progressed far since the 1923 reviews of *Nanook*, and as a consequence, theory, criticism, and even review flounder on the question: Is the documentary art or reportage?

This cultural confusion has so limited the semantic and syntactic possibilities that some leave the documentary tradition for the apparent freedom of fiction. The moral obligations of the producers of fiction—written and visual—are certainly not clear, and some recent court decisions (particularly the 1978 decision against Gwen Davis Mitchell for apparently basing one of the characters in her novel *Touching* on a California psychologist, Paul Bindrim) appear to greatly limit the artistic license of even fiction makers—but seldom do its producers get accused of faking or criticized for staging or for misrepresenting their subject.

If documentarians choose to regard themselves as artists and are so received by the public, conventional wisdom argues that their primary ethical obligation is to be true to their personal visions of the world—to make artistically competent statements. In this way artists are thought to fulfill their moral responsibilities to the subjects of their work and to their audiences.

The artist is often regarded as being somewhat outside the moral constraints that confine other people—as having license to transform people into aesthetic objects without their knowledge and sometimes against their will. Until recently, few critics except Marxists argued that art contains and espouses the ideology of the artist, that even photography is in no way a universal language transcending cultural boundaries. Now, even Susan Sontag acknowledges that a Nazi film like *Triumph of the Will* was produced by a fascist filmmaker who must bear the moral responsibility of her art no matter how competent it might be. Some people argue that ethics should have priority over aesthetics, or perhaps more correctly, that a morally acceptable ethical position produces the foundation for a good aesthetic.

If one takes the everyday lives of people—a favorite subject matter of the documentary—and transforms them into an artistic statement, where does one draw the line between the actuality of their lives and the aesthetic needs of the artist? How much fiction or interpretation is possible before the subjects not only disagree but begin to be offended, or even fail to recognize themselves at all? These questions have recently been raised with great passion with reference to videotapes produced by video artists, people not from the documentary tradition but in the field of nonrepresentational video art. When a Juan Downey or an Edin Velez produces tapes that include images of native people such as the Yanomano Indians of Venezuela, some audiences become quite upset about the "exploitation" of the subjects for the sake of art. It would appear that documentarians who employ more subtle and less obvious techniques of construction are less likely to be criticized for being exploitive than are the video artists who employ overt techniques of aesthetic manipulation. Where does the documentary artist seek verification and justification for his or her work? Must the subject agree with the artist's interpretation? Or is it sufficient that the artist remains true to a personal vision regardless of how offensive it might be to others? I believe that we are now less certain of an easy answer to this question than we once were.

Where does the documentary artist's responsibility to the audience lie? Most audiences believe documentary images to be accurate representations of reality, unless they are overtly altered as in the case of the videotapes just mentioned. Given our belief in the image, should the documentary artist remind the audience of the interpretive and constructed nature of the documentary form—that is, demystify the construction? For example, is it important for people to know that Flaherty cast his films by looking for ideal types? "Family members" in *Nanook of the North*, *Man of Aran*, and *Louisiana Story* are not related to

each other, they were selected because they suited Flaherty's conception of what makes a good Eskimo, Irish, or Cajun family. Is the documentary artist being more ethical if methods and techniques are revealed? Does that knowledge cause us, the audience, to regard the film differently?

Traditionally, documentarians have not revealed these things within their films, and some have never discussed the mechanics of their construction anywhere. (Obviously Flaherty has, or we would not be able to contemplate the consequences of his revelation and actions.) To remind an audience of the constructive and interpretive nature of images is regarded by some as counterproductive, if not actually destructive, to the nature of the film experience, that is, to the creation of an illusion of reality. Moreover, some people regard such revelation as self-indulgent, in that it turns the audience's attention away from the film and toward the filmmaker. For many, effective art requires a suspension of disbelief; being reminded that the images have an author disrupts the fantasy.

It is commonly assumed that art should be a little mysterious to be successful. A reflexive art has never been very popular and, at least in film, has become confused with a kind of self-indulgent autobiographical film that has recently become popular, in which young filmmakers expose themselves, exploit their families, and use the camera as therapist. Reflexivity has gotten a bad name because of its mistaken association with narcissism, self-consciousness, and other forms of self-contemplation.⁵ I believe, however, that an intelligently used reflexivity is an essential part of all ethically produced documentaries. I will return to this idea later.

The confusion about which moral guidelines should be used to judge a documentary is compounded by the fact that some documentarians respond to aesthetic and moral criticism of their art by suggesting that their works are mere reflections of the reality observed and that their role as producer was to faithfully record and transmit what they experienced. They are not really the "authors" of their works, nor are they responsible for any conclusions audiences might draw. If one sees someone in a documentary image who appears stupid or disgusting, the implication is that the person so imaged is in reality stupid or disgusting, since the camera merely recorded what was in front of it without any modification. This aesthetic and moral "neutrality" is to be found in films like Frederick Wiseman's *High School*.

When the American direct-cinema movement, founded by people like Robert Drew and Richard Leacock, used television as their primary outlet, they associated the documentary with the ethical canons of broadcast journalism. Fairness, balance, and objectivity became paramount. In doing so they brought the tradition full circle. As Dan Schiller has argued, objectivity became an ideal for journalism partly as a consequence of the photograph's being introduced into newspapers.⁶ As newspapers capitalized on the public's belief in the objectivity of the photograph, print journalists sought to emulate this objectivity

in their writing. Fifty years later, documentary film became concerned with being objective because of its association with broadcast journalism.

Documentarians as journalists logically assume the ethical codes of the latter profession. In doing so they become virtually unassailable, for, unlike their printed-word brethren, photo and film journalists are thought to be employing a medium that when used properly is inherently objective. Thus, apart from the occasional accusation of the outright faking of a picture or the staging of a scene in a television program, documentary broadcast-journalism has not been subjected to much critical examination.

The recent arguments raised by Marxists, structuralists, and others about the relation between ideology on the one hand and the producer of images on the other have, however, caused some people to begin to critique broadcast journalism in a fashion similar to that discussed earlier for art. Stuart Hall and other British scholars of mass communication are among these analysts. Criticism of objectivity as the primary ethical responsibility of journalists is on the increase. As James Carey pointed out:

What are lamely called the conventions of objective reporting were developed to report another century and another society. They were designed to report a secure world . . . about which there was a rather broad consensus, . . . a settled mode of life: . . . which could be rendered in the straightforward "who says what to whom" manner. . . . Today no accepted system of interpretation exists and political values and purposes are very much in contention . . . and cannot be encased within traditional forms of understanding. Consequently, "objective reporting" does little more than convey this disorder in isolated, fragmented news stories.⁷

Print journalists have responded to this criticism by acknowledging the active role of the reporter in creating, not finding, news. The so-called new journalism of Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson is written in the first person and employs narrative techniques of fiction. With Truman Capote and Norman Mailer writing fiction in the same style, it is often impossible to know from the text whether you are reading fiction or not, and often even then there is no easy answer. Is *The Right Stuff* by Wolfe or *The Executioner's Song* by Mailer fiction or not? Does it really matter? It is a fascinating legal and ethical question but too great a detour for now. However, I would like to point out that there has yet to be invented a visual equivalent to new journalism. When Truman Capote's nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood* was made into a movie it became straightforward fiction.

Most documentarians who consider themselves more journalist than artist are people interested in investigating rather than merely reporting. They are committed people motivated to make images of social or political concerns. Since Jacob Riis and John Grierson, many documentarians have been social reformers, and some, even radical revolutionaries who shared Lenin's belief

in the power of the cinema. They produce images to inform audiences of injustices, corruption, and other societal ills, often to persuade people to act against these evils.

The ethical considerations of these image makers differ somewhat from those of the documentary artist. Since politically committed image makers have definite points of view, often prior to the production of any images, they approach the content of the images, the people imaged, and their audiences with a fairly clear agenda. Unlike the documentary as art, here the pragmatic features of the image must dominate—they must have their desired effect to be successful, and that effect is known in advance. People in these images are no longer aesthetic objects, but rather symbols of some collective force. A poor person is often used to stand for poverty, or a factory owner for all of capitalism. The question has to arise: Is it acceptable to use someone's life to illustrate a thesis? Are the considerations different when you are seeking to aid someone you regard as a victim by using that person in your film, as opposed to using a subject in order to expose him as a villain?

Let me use an example from one of the favorite themes of documentary images—housing conditions for the poor. Let us say you are making a documentary on slums for local television and you select a family who appears to have suffered directly because of an irresponsible landlord. How do you weigh the possible harm that might come to the family as a consequence of their public exposure in the film versus the possibility that the film may cause city officials to crack down on slum owners and consequently improve the living conditions for a large number of people?

Is it justifiable to try to avoid explaining your motivation and point of view to the landlord in order to be able to interview him on film? To be blunt about it, is it ethical to lie to an assumed evil person in order to perform what you regard as a positive act? For example, a film like Roger Mugee's *Saturday Night in City Hall*, an exposé of then mayor of Philadelphia, Frank Rizzo, could not have been made if many of the people in it had known the maker's intention.

Because of the economic realities of distribution, documentary images with a political intent are usually viewed by the already committed, people who immediately comprehend the film's thesis. However, some find their way into theatrical release or public television and hence to a more diverse audience. Should the makers reveal themselves, their methods, and their goals to their audiences, or are they justified in employing the techniques of advertising and other forms of propaganda and persuasion? A recent example is to be found in Julia Reichert and Jim Klein's film *Union Maids*, a skillfully edited set of interviews of three women active in union organizing in the thirties. The makers failed to mention that the women were members of the Communist party, because they felt that some audiences would be alienated from the primary message of the film—the unsung role of women as union organizers.

Does this sort of selection taint a film to such an extent that all of it becomes suspect? Are political-documentary makers caught in the dilemma of having a responsibility to reveal methods and motives, which might lessen the impact of their message? Can political-image makers justify their sins of omission on the basis of the service they provide in helping to bring public attention to our social problems? I think not. I am skeptical of the motives and sophistication of many political-image makers. Even though thousands of films and millions of photographs have been employed in political causes in the past fifty years, there is little or no empirical evidence to suggest that they are a significant means of influencing people.

If all the money expended on all the images of the plight of migrant laborers since Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly's *Harvest of Shame* program had been used for day-care centers and the improvement of these workers' living conditions, their plight would be significantly improved. I doubt that the "professional sympathizers" who produced all these images can defend their work with much tangible evidence. Power comes more directly from the end of a gun than it does from the lens of a camera. Few revolutions were won in a movie house or on the six o'clock news.

I have barely touched on a large number of important questions concerning the ethical obligations of the professional image maker. Whether artist, journalist, or social documentarian, image makers need to confront their responsibilities in a more reflective and reflexive way than they have so far. I have argued elsewhere for the necessity of a reflexive documentary and anthropological cinema.⁸ I would extend the argument to all image makers.

I believe that the filmic illusion of reality is an extremely dangerous one, for it gives the people who control the image industry too much power. The majority of Americans, and soon the majority of the world's population, receive information about the outside world from the images produced by film, television, and photography. If we perpetuate the lie that pictures always tell the truth, that they are objective witnesses to reality, we are supporting an industry that has the potential to symbolically recreate the world in its own image. Technology grows out of a particular ideology. The Western world created image-producing technologies out of a profound need to have an irrefutable witness—to control reality by capturing it on film.

We stand on the threshold of the telecommunications revolution—a revolution potentially as profound and far-reaching as the agricultural and industrial revolutions. The one significant difference between the present changes and past changes is that the telecommunications revolution is happening so fast, we can actually be aware of it. It took five thousand years of gradual change from the first experiments in plant domestication until people were fully sedentary farmers. Today, there are people still active in television who contributed their talents at the very beginnings of the industry. We have the opportunity to make the revolution anything we want it to be. As privileged members of that

segment of the world who manage, if not control, the image empires, we have an obligation to pause and reflect on the past and to contemplate the future. We should not let the rush of the marketplace destroy our responsibility to act intelligently. We need to demystify these technologies so that we can cultivate a more critical and sophisticated audience. We need to make it possible to include a greater variety of human experience via these media—to give the many voices available access to this revolution. The human condition is too complex to be filtered through the eyes of a small group of people. We need to see the world from as many perspectives as possible. We have the means to do so now.

Notes

1. Dell Hymes, ed., *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 48.
2. Jay Ruby, "In a Pic's Eye: Interpretive Strategies for Deriving Significance and Meaning from Photographs," *Afterimage* 3, no. 9 (1976): 5-7.
3. Sol Worth and Larry Gross, "Symbolic Strategies," *Journal of Communication* 24, no. 4 (1974): 27-39.
4. Alan Sekula, "On the Invention of Meaning in Photographs," *Artforum* 13, no. 5 (1975): 36-45.
5. Barbara Myerhoff and Jay Ruby, Introduction to *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. Jay Ruby, pp. 1-38 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).
6. Dan Schiller, "Realism, Photography, and Journalistic Objectivity in Nineteenth-Century America," *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 4, no. 2 (1977): 86-98.
7. James Carey, "The Communications Revolution and the Professional Communicator," *Sociological Review Monographs* (Jan. 1969): 35.
8. Jay Ruby, "Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology, and Film," *Semiotica* 3, no. 1-2 (1980): 153-590.

The Prosecutor

Michael J. Arlen

It's hard not to like "60 Minutes," at least much of the time. The general reporting is brisk and capable, neither too trivial nor too densely detailed, as in the better tradition of the general-magazine feature. And the investigative stories, for which the program has become well honored and remarkably popular, are often hard-hitting and dramatic. The show's four correspondents, Mike Wallace, Mortley Safer, Dan Rather, and Harry Reasoner, are all good interviewers, and Wallace and Rather are also uncommonly tough interviewers: combative, probing, a far remove from the once typical TV newsmen whose interrogatory technique consisted mainly of proffering his microphone, like an ice cream cone, to a public figure who would then, as often as not, make an election speech with it.

It's been good, at last, to see tough interviewing on the air—especially in an era when important persons so often try to hide behind imperturbable, on-camera pronouncements or else behind shields of lawyers and accountants so thick that most politely mellifluous TV reporters can scarcely make a dent in them. The pugnacious "60 Minutes" musketeers unfailingly dent such shields, and sometimes penetrate them, while awards are won and ratings climb. But there's also a danger in this approach, for clearly much of what sustains the popularity of the program is the thrill of the chase: the excitement that comes from watching a quarry being pursued and brought down by aggressive questioning on the air. As a result, the program (with its large staff of producers and researchers) is bound to be on the lookout not just for newsworthy stories but for situations that will specifically provide this drama of pursuit, and for interview subjects that can be made to serve, willingly or unwillingly, as the quarry. Thus, with the "60 Minutes" newsmen being more frequently drawn