

4. "ACTING TO PLAY ONESELF": Notes on Performance in Documentary

Thomas Waugh

IN 1940, JORIS IVENS, IN THE MIDST of finishing *Power and the Land* for Pare Lorentz's U.S. Film Service, wrote an essay on "Collaboration in Documentary." It was time to summarize much of what he had learned in the first fifteen years of his career. Much of the resulting manual of the classical documentary concerns the challenge of working with nonprofessional subjects in "re-enactment," one of documentary's "wide variety of styles." As a lead-in to my reflection on the presence of performance within the documentary film tradition, it is worth excerpting this text at length:

... We come to the problem that has attracted and sometimes baffled us for many years: the handling of non-actors. In re-enacting a situation with a group of extremely pleasant persons, who for your purposes have become actors, the danger of letting them do what they like, of falling back on pleasant, easy naturalism, is even greater. And as your location work progresses, the non-actors become the central figures in your group, creating problems that temporarily force all the other problems out of your consciousness....

Our farm film presented material that seemed to demand re-enactments.... In choosing the people who were to play the roles (of themselves—the farmer as the farmer, his sons as the farmer's sons, etc.), the first visual impression is very important. Casting has its own difficulties too. A father and a son may work well separately, but not at all well when they're together in a scene. To get close enough to these people, to work with them, the director must be sensitive to these relationships. In general, I feel a knowledge of psychology is demanded of every member of the group, for all must watch and sense delicate situations.

The writer must employ his imagination to manipulate the real personal characteristics of the new actors—searching them with seemingly careless observations. He must learn thereby, for exam-

Thomas Waugh

65

ple that the farmer takes a special pride in the sharpness of his tool blades, and therefore suggest a toolshed scene which will make use of that fact. The key to this approach, I think, is that a real person, acting to play himself, will be more expressive if his actions are based on his real characteristics.

My experience has been that directives to non-actors who are playing together would usually be given them separately, so that a certain amount of unrehearsed reaction can be counted upon. To get natural reactions we played tricks similar to those Pudovkin has recorded, and some of them worked. For example: the father was filmed receiving a notification from the dairy that his milk is sour; he expected to unfold and pretend to read a blank piece of paper. But he read instead a startling message from me, complaining about his sour milk in no uncertain terms.

In general my method was to give precise directions to these non-actors but not to do it for them—simply to tell them what has to be done.... The farmer will have his special way of doing it, whether it is entering a room or moving a chair, and it is usually a very good way.

I have come to believe it is best to have as few retakes as possible. Repetition seems to have a deadening effect on the non-actor. If rehearsals are necessary, allow some time to elapse between rehearsals, and shooting. Use yourself or anybody as stand-ins—to keep the non-actor from exhaustion or self-consciousness. On the other hand, if the period of filming a re-enactment is short or very rushed, there can be less care in humoring him, depending more on the camera's ability to break up the action into useful close-ups.

The cameraman has to understand the special difficulties in working with non-actors ("What good is all this fooling with lights?") to render the length of time during light and camera adjustments tolerable to the non-actor. I don't believe in having long conferences before takes, while the non-actor waits. Keep discussions away from him. He begins to feel that these long, visible, but inaudible conversations are about himself and his acting—and he is usually right. We learned to use a code. Whenever a cameraman said, after a shot, "Very good" I knew he meant, "It's not so hot, try some other way"....

The surest way to avoid loss of time with re-takes is to know and anticipate the real movements of the man, to catch the regular rhythm of his normal action (which is far from re-enactment). The whole action should be watched (away from the camera) before breaking it up for filming. And the breaking up, and covering shots, should absolutely include beginnings of an action, endings of an

action, and the places where the worker rests—not just other angles of the most exciting sections of his movement. Thus you get material for good human editing....

Overcoming self-consciousness is of course the greatest problem with the non-actor, no matter what his background. If you work for months with the same group of persons, you can gradually expect to find more consciousness of themselves as actors. They become more flexible and adaptable and greater demands can be made of them. They can even be taught something of the film's technique. When the father in the farm film couldn't understand why he had to repeat an action more than once while the camera was shifted about, I took him to see a Cagney movie at the local theatre and pointed out how an action in a finished film was made out of long shots, medium shots and close-ups. From then on he understood our continuity problems and gave very useful assistance in this way. But I don't think it wise to show them their own rushes. I waited until the last few days before showing our farm family themselves on the screen.

I advise not to fool with a man's professional pride. Don't ask a farmer to milk an empty cow, even though it's just for a close-up of the farmer's face. He fights such an idea because to him it is false—until he has been with the film group for a long time.

Even as simple a rule as "Don't look at the camera" is bound up with the man himself. But this is such a basic necessity for the quality of your film that you must enforce the rule even though it hurts you to!

Ivens goes on to illustrate this last point with an anecdote from his Chinese shoot a few years earlier (*The Four Hundred Million*) where he had had to force himself to impose the rule of not looking at the camera on traumatized stretcher-bearers in a battle scene.

ACTING NATURALLY IN THE CLASSICAL DOCUMENTARY

Documentary film, in everyday commonsense parlance, implies the absence of elements of performance, acting, staging, directing, etc., criteria which presumably distinguish the documentary form from the narrative fiction film. Ivens' text helps focus a discussion of performance in documentary because it

challenges the common understanding. It reveals how basic the ingredients of performance and direction are within the documentary tradition—certainly within the classical documentary as reflected in this 1940 document, but also, as I will argue, in the modern *vérité* and post-*vérité* documentary as well.

For Ivens and his generation, the notion of performance as an element of documentary filmmaking was something to be taken for granted. Towards the end of the thirties, as documentarists yearned to get out of the basements and into the theaters, semi-fictional characterization, or "personalization," as Ivens called it, seemed to be the means for the documentary to attain artistic maturity and mass audiences. Social actors,² real people, became documentary film performers, playing themselves and their social roles before the camera.

The decade's prevailing notion of documentary performance is reflected most in Ivens' terminology with its echoes of narrative studio-based filmmaking: "roles," "re-take," "continuity," "covering shots," "rehearsals," "casting," etc. His directing techniques, significantly, are borrowed from Pudovkin, a director notable for his work with professional dramatic actors. Documentary performers "act" in much the same way as their dramatic counterparts except that they are cast for their social representativity as well as for their cinematic qualities, and their roles are composites of their own social roles and the dramatic requirements of the film.

Ivens' term "natural" indicates a problematical concept and practice for the classical (pre-*vérité*) documentarist. By "naturalism" Ivens means a cinematography characterized not by "content value" (a concept he uses elsewhere in the article) but by a spontaneous textural or behavioral quality, a quality which the later *vérité* generation would transform into an aesthetic gospel. But he also refers to "acting naturally," in reference to not looking at the camera, the code of illusion by which both extras, such as the Chinese stretcher bearers, and principal (non-) actors should "perform" unawareness of the camera. This clearly artificial code of acting naturally is so rooted in our cinematic culture, then as now, that Ivens posits it unquestioningly as a basic axiom of "quality"

cinema. The vérité school, in its American observational incarnation (Leacock, Wiseman), would share this axiom with Ivens and his generation however much they would repudiate the didacticism of the principle of "content value."

But the concept and the practice of acting naturally are far more complex than either generation realized, and the familiar concepts of "presentational" and "presentational" discourse are of some help. Let us use "representational" to refer to Ivens' "acting naturally," the documentary code of narrative illusion borrowed from the dominant fiction cinema. When subjects perform "not looking at the camera," when they represent their lives or roles, the image looks natural, as if the camera were invisible, as if the subject were unaware of being filmed. This performance convention is by no means inherent in the documentary mode. Certainly, in documentary still photography it is considerably less unanimous, for from August Sander to the Farm Security Administration to Diane Arbus, from Wilhelm von Gloeden to Robert Mapplethorpe, the convention of posing is much more the dominant tradition. In contrast, the convention of representation as found in, say, Henri Cartier-Bresson, (whose influence on the cinema-vérité is of course not without interest), informs a vigorous but secondary counter-current. The convention of performing an awareness of the camera rather than a nonawareness, of presenting oneself explicitly for the camera—the convention the documentary cinema absorbed from its elder sibling photography—we shall call "presentational" performance.

Although posing, the presentational convention of acknowledging the camera, never became the standard convention in classical documentary cinema, it did become an important secondary variant of documentary cinematic practice, particularly in the sound era. Whereas Flaherty's silent *Nanook* was depicted performing presentationally a few times—posing for the camera with a grin or a look—he for the most part performed naturalistically, "acting" or representing his daily life for the camera without explicitly acknowledging its presence. *Moana* similarly displayed some engaging moments of presentation—a subject displaying a captured tortoise to the camera, for

example—but by and large Flaherty succeeded in getting his Samoan social actors to perform according to the codes of representation. By the time of his later features, *Man of Aran* and *Louisiana Story*, Flaherty was following the codes of representation obsessively—to the extent that they become abstract mytho-narrative meditations on exotic landscapes rather than social narratives rooted in the daily cultural contexts of those landscapes' inhabitants. These latter films are no longer able to bear, for contemporary eyes at least, the slightest pretension to ethnographic veracity, nor even, my students would say, the least claim to the documentary mantle at all—a point whose significance I will take up later.

Not all sound documentarists followed Flaherty's lead. During the sound era, the counter-current of presentational performance in fact became quite visible—or rather audible. Inspired in part by radio, aural presentational conventions like the interview, the monologue, even choral speech, were experimented with in the thirties by Vertov, by Grierson's British school, by Frontier Films, and even by Flaherty himself in his project for the U.S. Film Service (slightly later than Ivens'), *The Land*. Traumatized by the devastation he "discovered" in his own backyard on this latter project, Flaherty somehow let go of the representational style he'd perfected on *Aran*. Prominent in the film are curious silent/non-sync variations of aural presentational performances as well as several moments of silent presentational posing clearly inspired by Flaherty's fellow Federal employees in the still photography business. For his part, Ivens was accustomed of course to "representing" far more traumatic devastation than nonelectrified farming in Ohio, as his Chinese anecdote reminds us. In *Power and the Land*, then, his representational skills were thus honed to their finest point, and the performances that spurred the writings excerpted at the outset of this article became milestones in documentary representation.

It is interesting that the two traditions intersect in the career of a single editor, Helen van Dongen. Ivens' long-time collaborator and a principal pioneer in the perfection of representational documentary editing, Van Dongen edited both *The Land* and *Power*

and the Land. I have always found odd her complaint about the staged quality of Flaherty's most intricate representational scene, in which a black farmhand moves about a deserted plantation and rings the plantation bell. In practice, Van Dongen sculpted this scene with all the representational precision and smoothness which she had just brought to *Power and the Land* and would later bring to *Louisiana Story*.³ Flaherty's uncharacteristic posing shots, however, were never brought up in her published notes about the editing, though they clearly disturbed the seamless continuum that was Van Dongen's professional pride. The FSA-style posing shots she treated with an anomalous awkwardness, cutting them off with abrupt, haunting fadeouts before the intrinsic rhythm of the shot and the dynamic of the spectator's encounter with the performers are fulfilled.

As for Flaherty's and Ivens' British contemporaries (and admirers), they pushed the cumbersome sound technology of the day much further than the Americans in the direction of both presentational and representational performances, achieving unintentional self-parody with the latter in *Night Mail* and groundbreaking revelation with the former in the legendary interviews and monologues of *Housing Problems*. In the Soviet context, such experimentation appeared even earlier. As early as 1931, the only Soviet documentarist of the sound period whose work is available in the West, Dziga Vertov, incorporated short production pledges delivered as monologues by shock workers in *Enthusiasm*, the film that must be considered his manifesto of the possibilities of documentary sound, despite the stilled and self-conscious effect of these first attempts. Three years later, *Three Songs of Lenin* offered vivid and personalized portraits of Soviet citizens by virtue of a more developed use of monologue performances: two of the portraits feature a woman shock worker who shyly describes how she averted an accident with some concrete tubs in a construction project, and a woman Kolkhoz worker who chats with amazing informality and dramatic gestures about the role of women on her farm. The possibility of Vertov's influence on his Western European counterparts is a strong one since the Grierson group knew his work.

Yet, despite the inspiration occasioned by Grierson's rat-plagued housewife holding forth to the camera, and by Vertov's vivid portraits, the presentational style predominated only in the documentary vernacular of the commercial newsreel (as later in its descendent, television journalism), or in specialized forms like the still rare campaign film (such as Renoir's *La Vie est à Nous*, which incorporates Party oratory along with a range of representational sketches). Ivens' representational style of naturalistic acting and *mise-en-scène* was never edged from its hegemony within the hybrid repertory of the so-called artistic documentary of the period.

In summary, now that we have returned to Ivens, performance—the self-expression of documentary subjects for the camera in collaboration with filmmaker/director—was the basic ingredient of the classical documentary. Most directors relied principally on naturalistic, representational performance style borrowed from fiction, which some varied from time to time with presentational elements akin to the conventions of still photography and radio. The difference between representation and presentation is not that one uses performance and the other doesn't, but that the former disavows and hides its performance components through such conventions as not looking at the camera, whereas the latter openly acknowledges and exploits its performance components. This difference must be explored.

PRESENTING VERSUS REPRESENTING

The distinction between representational and presentational performance is a very useful one for looking diachronically at documentary history. The pendulum of fashion and usage has swung back and forth between the two conventions, from one period to another, from one culture to another, and from the margin to the mainstream within one particular period and culture. I have already mentioned, for example, that presentational performance became visible, though not predominant, during the latter half of the thirties, during the first maturity of the sound documentary. At the same time proponents of the predominant representational

element of the period's hybrid form often went even further than Ivens in availing themselves of the resources of fictional cinema: the use of studio sets (*Night Mail*) and professional actors (*Native Land*) during the thirties as a means of both overcoming technological difficulties and deepening social perspective did not attract any notice at the time, but would become anathema thirty years later during the heyday of vérité. During the Second World War (*Fires Were Started*), and especially during the postwar decade, the representational convention evolved so much that the resulting "docudrama" format (*Quiet One*, *Strange Victory*, *Mental Mechanisms Series*) seemed the unanimous style on the eve of the vérité breakthrough, although voiceover narrations by subjects sometimes superimposed a presentational patina (*Paul Tomkowicz Street-Railway Switchman*, *All My Babies*) on representational films from those years.

The first wave of vérité or direct technology, cresting in the early sixties, continued the representational mode of performance. At the same time, vérité radically revised its execution. The new technology was often able to dispense with *mise-en-scène*, though not with performance, to follow an event or performance without "setting it up." While much of the studio paraphernalia of rehearsals and retakes, etc. was no longer necessary, the code of not looking at the camera, whether implicit or explicit, was still in force—at least in the United States. The classical American vérité filmmakers systematically snipped out all looks at the camera in order to preserve the representational illusion. It didn't matter that even the most noninterventionist camera instigated palpable performance on the part of subjects, tacitly understood and enacted as part of the representational code: has anyone seen hospital workers or high school teachers as conscientious, flamboyant, and downright cinematic as those who performed their daily jobs for Wiseman? The subject in a Wiseman film, consenting to continue daily activity, to act naturally, and to perform the pretense that there is no camera or crew, consenting to show the putative audience his or her life, is performing at a most basic level. The pretense, the disavowal of performance on the part of filmmakers, editors, and subjects is at the heart of the basic contradiction of cinéma-

vérité—the contradiction between the aspiration to observational objectivity and its actual subjectively representational artifice. Small wonder that the best moments in Wiseman often involve highly histrionic individuals such as *Hospital's* black "schizophrenic" hustler, fighting the system for his self-reliance while flirting with the camera operator, or the bad-tripping art student who waxes melodramatic indeed ("I don't want to die") amid the floods of vomit and the most attentive audience he has ever had. These social actors become such memorable film actors because their clearly inscribed awareness of the camera amplifies their performance and transcends the representational pretense of vérité observation.

Small wonder also that two important genres of vérité have outshone Wiseman's cold observational eye in the marketplace to this day, genres that by their subject matter bypass and compensate for vérité's disavowal of performance:

(1) films whose crews have or establish intimate relationships with subjects, such as *Warrendale*, *Grey Gardens*, *Harlan County U.S.A.*, *Best Boy*, *Soldier Girls*, *Seventeen*, leading to on-camera performances that are clearly enabled by, addressed to, and improvised enactments of that relationship, despite token adherence to the "don't look at the camera" code; and

(2) films about subjects whose extra-filmic social role consists of public performance, including entertainers (*Jane*, *Burroughs*, *Comedian*, *Eye of the Mask*), musicians (from *Lonely Boy* to *Woodstock* and *Stop Making Sense* via *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman*), prostitutes (*Chicken Ranch*, *Hookers on Davie*), politicians (*Primary*, *Milhouse*, *The Right Candidate for Rose-dale*), transsexual people (*The Queens*, *What Sex Am I?*, *Hookers on Davie*), sexual performers (*Not a Love Story*, *Striptease*), guerrillas (*Underground*, *When the Mountains Tremble*), bodybuilders (*Pumping Iron I and II*), artists (*Painters Painting*, *Portrait of the Artist—As an Old Lady*), teachers (*High School*), street kids (*Streetwise*), salespeople (*Salesman*, *The Store*), crusaders (*If You Love This Planet*), and clergy (*Marjoe*). In this group of films, special scrutiny is usually given to the dialectic of public and private, the subject's identity expressed by

means of an onstage-offstage intercutting. The genre offers as one of the pleasures of the text the deciphering of borders between social performance, film performance, and so-called private behavior, and the discovery that the borders are both culturally encoded and imaginary.

INTERVIEWS AND BEYOND

Now, of course, within North American documentary, we have been back in a phase since the early seventies where presentational forms of performance are very much in vogue. The seventies revived the interview in the documentary, thanks largely to the feminists, the New Left, and such individual pioneers as Emilie de Antonio. The eighties have witnessed a flourishing wave of hybrid experimentation with these presentational modes as well as with stylizations of representational modes, including dramatization, a wave that has been termed, not surprisingly, "post-documentary."⁴ The current repertory includes a whole spectrum of performance elements, usually incorporated within hybrid works, as often as not alongside vestiges of earlier styles, from voice-of-God direct address narration, to observational vérité, to interview/compilation conventions of the seventies. The following is a brief tabulation, offered simply as a suggestion of the richness and range of the evolving performance vocabulary since the sixties.

TABLE

I. Presentational

Social actor performs formal oral narrative, fiction (*Soyelling*), and nonfiction (*When the Mountains Tremble*)

Social actors perform daily life presentationally (*Rate It X, 24 Heures ou Plus*)

Social actors explore geographical setting of their past at instigation of filmmaker (*Burroughs, The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*)

Social actors present musical performances (*La Turlute Des Années Dures, Before Stonewall, Silent Pioneers, Bombay, Our City*)

Interviews: social actors analyzing present (*Not a Love Story, Dark Circle*); remembering past in archival/historical format (*Union Maids, The Times of Harvey Milk*); marathon autobiographical format (*WordIs Out, Portrait of Jason*)

Social actors present monologues (*The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter, Rate It X*)

II. Representational

Social actors role-play or dramatize improvisationally real-life situation (*A Bigger Splash, Michael a Gay Son*)

Social actors perform/improvise fictive or "mise-en-scene" situation created by filmmaker (*Waiting for Fidel*)

Social actors perform daily lives, representationally (*Seventeen, Streetwise, Québec-Haiti, Mother Tongue*)

Representational group discussions by social actors (*Rape, Pink Triangles*)

Indecipherable mixture of real and professional actors in scripted improvisational situation (*Prostitute*)

Professional actors in real life situation (*Dernier Glacier*)

Professional actors reconstruct event (*In the King of Prussia*) with help of social actors and transcript

Professional actors in scripted historical reconstruction employing simulated documentary codes (*Edward Munch*)

Representational autobiographical personae in investigative documentary format (*Not a Love Story, Dark Lullabies, Rate It X*)

III. Hybrids

Social actors dramatize representationally their own social conditions, contextualized presentationally (*Quel Numéro, What Number?, Not Crazy Like You Think*)

Social actors dramatize representationally their collective history, contextualized presentationally (*Two Laws*)

Composite documentary characterizations performed presentationally by actors (*What You Take For Granted*)

Pseudo-vérité docudrama plus autobiographical voice of filmmaker (*Daughter Rite*)

Professional and nonprofessional performers construct intertextual essay on socio-political situation, including elements as diverse as transcript-based dramatization and semifictional autobiographical improvisation (*Far From Poland*).

A timely intervention by Bill Nichols has pointed out a central problem of authority and voice arising from the seventies current of interview films, namely those mostly historiographical projects reacting against vérité discourses, building on the de Antonio model, and addressing Feminist or New Left constituencies.⁵ The model is very familiar: representative subjects offer interview performances of personal reminiscences or present experiences that figure large in a documentary investigation of a politically apt topic. Nichols' criticism is directed at those documentaries in which the

authority of the filmmaker is diffused through, or uncritically hidden behind, the voices of the subjects. The best known example of this risk is New Day Films' *Union Maids*, in which the evasions and nostalgias of the subjects' oral histories become the liabilities of the film as a whole. "Interviews diffuse authority." Nichols argues,

A gap remains between the voice of a social actor recruited to the film and the voice of the film The greatest problem has been to retain that sense of a gap between the voice of interviewees and the voice of the text as a whole ... [In *The Day After Trinity*,] the text not only appears to lack a voice or perspective of its own, the perspective of its character-witnesses is patently inadequate ... the voice of the text disappears behind characters who speak to us ... we no longer sense that a governing voice actively provides or withholds the imprimatur of veracity according to its own purposes and assumptions, its own canons of validation ... the film becomes a rubber stamp. ... The sense of hierarchy of voices becomes lost.

The problem of the disappearing voice, however, is not intrinsic to the interview performance mode—it may just as well be a condition of state funding for most of the films in question. In any case, it would be extremely foolish to disparage the tremendous advances in popular social history and the political enfranchisement enabled by the interview genre, nor to disallow filmmakers' choices to mute their individual voices in favor of providing a forum for voices that have been suppressed, forgotten, or denied media access. Nichols points to several films—such as *Rosie the Riveter* and de Antonio's works—in which the self-reflexive contextualization of interviews allows the filmmaker's analytic perspective to complement and coexist with, without drowning out, the voices of subjects. The disappearance of the voice derives less from the interview format than from a lack of focus in conceptualization, research, and goals, or from a self-censorship triggered by Public Broadcasting or NFB or NEH funding. It has also derived from a fuzzy and sentimental populism leading to what Jeffrey Youndelman has described as an abdication of political leadership on the part of media intellectuals, and to the absence of historical contextualization with which both

Youdelman and Chuck Kleinmans have taxed *The War at Home*.⁶ Ethics also enters into the picture, whether it is a question of responsibility to the subject or to the spectator. The latter is certainly not served by the camouflage of the terms of the construction of the discourse: does the spectator not have the right to know who is speaking, what the author's political relationship to the speaker is, and how, to whom, and to what end the film is addressed?

Nichols diagnoses this latter problem by focusing on corrective self-reflexive tendencies in some of the best recent films. However, it is more pertinent to this article to focus on evolving performance styles in the same work, particularly on the very promising excursions into the presentational mode (which in any case have much in common with Nichols' prescription of self-reflexivity). For the most visible and innovative pattern in the current decade is in fact the expansion of performance input by social actors which goes beyond the oral history format of the seventies to experiment with dramatic performance modes, both presentational and representational. The new visibility of dramatized and semi-fictional performance components constitutes a reaction against the "string-of-interview" orthodoxy. Dramatization is clearly a useful means of fleshing out the gaps left by the interview format, gaps of a technical or ideological nature, or gaps due simply to uncontrollable factors (as in *Michael a Gay Son*, in which a very tense "coming out" encounter with the protagonist's hostile family is conveyed through fictionalized role-playing). It is not surprising that the new "dramatized" documentaries, (or "docudramas," as they are called in some quarters, misleadingly I think, since the term is used most commonly and aptly for fictionalized reconstructions like the United States television films *The Missiles of October* or *The Atlanta Child Murders*)⁷ may be divided like all their forebears into: (a) those whose emphasis or context is presentational (*In the King of Prussia*, *Far from Poland*, *The Kid Who Couldn't Miss*, *Two Laws*, *Not Crazy Like You Think*, *Quel Numéro What Number*—in fact films Nichols would call self-reflexive) and (b) those whose primary address is representational (*Michael a Gay Son*, *What You Take for Granted*, *Journal Inachevé*, *Democracy on Trial*, the

historical episodes of *When the Mountains Tremble*, *Le Dernier Glacier*, *Caffè Italia*, *The Masculine Mystique*). Needless to say, the new expansion of the repertory into the terrain of dramatization has greatly multiplied the importance of performance in documentary as a whole and greatly expanded the opportunities for social actors to "perform" their lives in every format from semi-fictional improvisation to didactic sketches.

The eclecticism of the expanded hybrid repertory sharpens our sense of our bearings in relation to our documentary past. One useful observation is that the more presentational of these new formats is most in keeping with the traditional documentary genius for incorporating the presence and performance of social actors into the cinematic text. The more representational films seem inclined more towards a long tradition of "docu-flavoured" fiction (de Sica/Rossellini, Cassavetes, McBride, Loach/Garnett). From another point of view, the new repertory removes us yet another step away from the sixties: the small amount of work still appearing in an unadulterated vérité style (*Middletown*, *The Store*) seems purist indeed, even classical, and reminds us that the sixties are no longer the definitive crucible for today's documentarists, but more and more just another period style available for postmodern recycling. On the other hand, the new work looks back in a very vivid way to the years of the Popular Front, in particular to the "wide variety of styles" that characterized such late-thirties hybrid films as *Spanish Earth* and *Native Land*.

It is not surprising that the thirties are evoked more than any other period by the present work. For Ivens and his contemporaries were no strangers to several contextual conditions that have influenced today's alignment of a hybrid performance-based documentary style with an atmosphere of increasing political polarization and crisis, and of cultural attrition:

(1) Economic factors may have been predominant: after the late twenties and the arts funding crisis of the Reagan-Thatcher-Mulroney era, very few independents other than Wiseman, the National Film Board, and a handful of TV-funded artists have been able to afford the high-ratio budget of representational vérité (except perhaps in video). Sustaining

representational illusion is too expensive for the austerity of the eighties, and presentational elements offer filmmakers and subjects alike more control over the pro-filmic event and the budget. In the pre-war period, for similar reasons, it was no accident that it was with the (relatively) luxurious state-supplied budget of *Power and the Land* that Ivens left behind the off-the-cuff hybridity of his earlier films for the graceful representational coherence of that film.

(2) The fact that the new presentational performance modes were pioneered by political filmmakers, whether feminists or other progressives, is highly pertinent. In this regard, we've arrived once more back at Ivens, the Old Left grandfather of New Left political documentarists and their contemporaries. For Ivens, the proto-vérité style that he called "easy naturalism" precluded the organized communication of "content value," that is, the psychological dynamic or atmospheric texturing obscured the social text. Social documentarists generations later came independently to the same conclusion: pure representational vérité was often a medium of aestheticist psychologism that by itself often precluded the political explorations that such filmmakers sought to produce.

(3) Other factors in the post-vérité configuration must not be discounted, though they are decidedly minor. First, the critical acceptance of the presentational performance style was encouraged by the currency of Brechtian theory in film culture persisting since 1968. There may also have occurred a certain cross-fertilization with a presentational counter-tradition outside of Anglo-Saxon culture that predates the current phenomenon by a whole generation. This tradition, originating in France (Rouch and Marker) and in Quebec (Pierre Perrault and a national documentary tradition known as "le direct"), has never had any commitment to representational illusion. Since the late fifties, this tradition has accumulated a rich repertory of presentational elements, elevating verbal and interactional performances to a degree of exceptional expressiveness. Although Rouch is a household word among documentarists (and Perrault would be were he from Paris rather than Montreal), this possible cross-fertilization remains a subject for future research since the cross-linguistic circulation of this

cinema has been greatly hampered by its privileging of speech and oral culture. Finally, the post-modernist absorption and recycling of the presentational television vernacular is surely as important as it is hard to quantify as an element of the new post-documentary performance style.

PERFORMANCE AND COLLABORATION

"Collaboration in Documentary": Ivens' title is more than just a literal description of the relationship engendered by the *mise-en-scène* of subject performance by filmmaker. "Collaboration" also embodies a perennial ideal of the documentary tradition, the goal of a changed, democratized relationship between artist and subject. The subject's performance for the camera becomes a collaboration, a stake in and a contribution to the authorship of the work of art. Performance becomes a gauge of the ethical and political accountability of the filmmaker's relationship with subject.

Although Ivens' respect for the integrity of his cast is obvious, his distance from the democratic ideal of collaborative performance is problematical. He admits quite openly to manipulating and tricking his "performers" into performing, and of keeping them in the dark as to film techniques and as to the results of their own performance. These less-than-egalitarian terms of the collaboration were necessary, he claims (not unlike some Method director who has terrorized his leading lady) to preserve elements of freshness in the performance. Unwittingly, Ivens points to an ethical liability of the representational mode during its classical phase, a problem which surfaces perhaps even more acutely in the work of Ivens' contemporary, Flaherty.

I mentioned earlier the dichotomy in Flaherty's work between his two silent ethnographic features with their presentational elements and his later mytho-narrative features based exclusively on representational performances. The issue of collaboration seems to be the crux of this dichotomy. The absence of presentational elements in *Man of Aran* and *Louisiana Story* is

surely an index of the films' minimization of the input of the subjects and of their virtual embargo on the cultural textures and social realities of the Aran (West Irish) and Cajun communities respectively. It is true that in both films rudimentary voice-tracks gently ruffle the surface of the seamless representational unity: in the former, the performers improvise semi-synchronized dialogue-commentary over the edited film, and in the latter, Flaherty's voice-over commentary is interpolated by a few awkward and static direct sound sequences of an expository nature. But the verbal performances of the actors in either case do not constitute a qualitative heightening of their collaborative input—especially in *Louisiana*, with the heavily scripted and heavily rehearsed feel of the dialogue. The representational web is ultimately as intact as the hegemony of authorial vision and control over ethnographic mission and subject input. The legendary contribution of "Nanook" to the film that bears his name is by now a distant memory and inoperative ideal.

A decade after *Louisiana*, the introduction of direct sound technology into the documentary arena transformed the potential for subject collaboration as surely as it transformed the nature of subject performance. *Vérité*, as I have stated, failed to push this potential as far as it would go by retaining the representational mode of documentary performance. By the time the *vérité* movement had consolidated direct sound as the everyday vocabulary of the documentary, grassroots political movements were beginning to arise to profit from the hitherto untapped political potential of the new apparatus. The New Left of the late sixties, and especially the women's movement a few years later, embraced speech and intercommunication as a political process, favored participatory and collaborative cultural forms, and privileged oral history as an essential means of political and cultural empowerment. It is not surprising then that their documentary cinema featured presentational performance elements ranging from the simple interview and group discussion formats⁸ of the early years to the more complex formats I have listed. Incorporating vocal performances into a film was a crucial strategy for an artist who wished to share creative and political control with subjects/social

actors. Whereas *vérité* had by and large retained the Flahertian mystique of authorial control, the presentational modes of the New Left and the women's movement dissipated that mystique and permitted varying degrees of subject input into the finished documentary, of subject responsibility for his or her image and speech. The ideal to which such filmmakers subscribed, to greater or lesser degree, was of the documentarist as resource person, technician or facilitator, and of the subject-performer as real steward of creative responsibility.

Such a prescriptive distinction between the political and ethical advantages of a specific formal strategy of course runs the risk of aesthetic idealism and political naivete, not to mention a technological fallacy: the power of the filmmaker is such that ultimately no strategy is the automatic guarantee of collaborative process. Even the most presentational, collaborative performance is subject to ethical abuse in the editing room or exhibition context. Ultimately, the creative and political accountability of the artist is clearly the final guarantor against political and ethical abuses. However, this caveat having been registered, a concluding glimpse at two recent Canadian documentaries that focus on a similar subject clarifies the political dimension of the distinction between presentational and representational modes that I would like to insist on as a general guideline to the artist's accountability to subject performance and collaboration.

Bonnie Klein's National Film Board of Canada feature, *Not a Love Story*, *A Film about Pornography*, and *Kay Armatage's* independent short, *Striptease*, consider aspects of the sex industry through predominantly representational and presentational approaches respectively. With *Not a Love Story*, the relationship between the on-screen filmmaker persona, embarked on her voyage of discovery of the pornographic night, and her guide, ex-stripper Linda Lee Tracy, is conveyed representationally through traditional *vérité*. Much of the criticism of the film centered on the manipulative appearance of this relationship between artist and collaborator. The narrative thread of the relationship includes two sex performance interludes set in representational frames (Tracy as stripper on location in a Montreal club, Tracy as centerfold model