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 *reflective* 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 reflexiveness. 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 reflexiveness 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 illusionary 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 *Eat 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 alienated from the suspension of disbelief and to become self-conscious about 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. Vertov 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 Vertov'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. Vertov 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 Vertov film collective), Vertov 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] Vertov 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 Vertov's concern with the process.

Both films were ahead of their time. Vertov'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 Vertov. As we know, Morin described *Chronicle of a Summer* as being *cinéma vérité* in emulation of Vertov'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 Plaint 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 jiggle, 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" reflexiveness 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 reflexiveness 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 reflexiveness 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 filmmaker 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-involvedness 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 Stent, "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 Armes thinks that it was Buñuel (see Armes, *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 idiocy 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," *Ciné-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 adventurer/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 reflexiveness 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 adventurer-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 Scholte, "Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology," in Dell Hymes, ed., *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 430–58.

24. Quoted in Simeon W. Chilungi, "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.