



C·H·A·P·T·E·R 8

AUTHORSHIP

Some readers may be looking in perplexity for information on how to write a script. Because a modern documentary is an improvisation made out of real-life materials, a script would undermine the spontaneity of the result by forcing participants into the role of actors. The nearest we get to scripting is in making lists of sequences, and deciding in advance what kind of contribution to the whole we want each sequence to make. The director has overall intentions for everything he or she shoots, but each situation and each new participant must be individually approached in order to respect his or her autonomy to the maximum. Approaching actuality is like entering a love affair: One needs high hopes and qualitative expectations, but if one plans it in detail, there can be nothing new or spontaneous.



FULFILLING ONE'S INTENTIONS

The toughest demand upon the director during shooting is to know if one is fulfilling one's intentions, and to determine "whether one has a film." Earlier I talked about forming a working hypothesis during research to define your film's basic statement. I want to stress again that without such a commitment guiding your choice of material, without this definition influencing all aspects of your direction, you will surely be rudderless during the shoot. Some people approach shooting a first film in the same spirit as naive students tackle exams: make good resolutions, study all night as an act of consecration, and then on the day employ Positive Mental Attitude to encourage miracles. This is magic

thinking—and magic thinking creates neither rain nor documentary films. That carefully wrought definition of intent is *vital!*

Here is a sample of intention for an imaginary film about a likable, impulsive engineer I knew who lost the battle against cancer. An overall statement would say, "These scenes must establish this German immigrant engineer's decision to sell all he has worked for and jettison his whole life in order to try to buy back his health and future."

The engineer's name was Hans and he lived above his electric-motor shop. In the back was a workshop of staggering size and untidiness, containing many large metalworking and electrical machines. From visiting with him a documentary director would make up a shopping list of shots and sequences annotated with their intended meaning to the audience, thus:

Scene	Intended Meaning
Hans at shop counter, afternoon.	Last normal day of business.
Hans descending stairs from apartment, morning.	Morning, a new day.
Hans in greasy spoon restaurant eating breakfast.	Listless, sad, unresponsive to friends.
He arrives at shop, walks through.	Change of routine, ominous.
Stands high above his silent workshop; begins to tour the metal shop, picks up one or two items.	Making his last rites.
Drawer with photographs emptied.	Collecting, sifting his past.
Other clearing out, ending shots.	" " " "
Shock cut to auction: Hans stands impassively as machine after machine is auctioned.	Hans stoic, numb, betrays no feeling.
Check being signed.	The price of his life's work.
Torn papers in waste bin.	Break with the past.
Subjective shot, walking into building with "Mayo Clinic" sign.	Feeling what it is like to enter as a frightened, sick person.
Voice-over: Receptionist greeting him, telling him his room is ready, etc.	

These are typical notes a director makes based on what he knows Hans intends to do. The list shows not just shots he expects to shoot, but also of the feeling and information desired from each, and the impact the various brief scenes should have upon the audience, both factually and emotionally, as the story is built up.



MEASURING PROGRESS

Keep your intentions clear and keep them handy in list form so you can make running checks. Keep nothing in your head that can be dumped on to a piece of paper. When you have defined what story points must be made and have