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A black and white photograph of a hand holding a glass sphere. Inside the sphere, a film strip is visible, showing a scene with a person's face. The background is dark and textured.

FILM ART

AN INTRODUCTION ■ FIFTH EDITION

In these ways Ozu draws our attention away from the strictly causal functions of space and makes space important in its own right. He does the same with the flat space of the screen as well. Figures 8.99 to 8.102 and Color Plates 62 and 63 show examples of graphic matches from Ozu films. The stylistic device is characteristic of Ozu, who seldom uses the graphic match for any narrative purpose. In *Tokyo Story* a conversation situation leads to a shot/reverse-shot pattern but again with cuts 180° across the axis of action. The two men speaking are framed so that each looks off right. (In Hollywood, upholders of the continuity system would claim that this implies that both are looking off toward the same thing.) Because they are positioned similarly in the frame, the result is a strong graphic match from one shot to another (Figs. 11.60, 11.61). In this respect, Ozu's style owes something to abstract form (see Chapter 5, pp. 146–154 and Chapter 10, pp. 373–376). It is as if he sought to make a narrative film which would still make graphic similarities as evident as they are in an abstract film like *Ballet mécanique*.

The use of space and time in *Tokyo Story* is not willfully obscure, nor does it have a symbolic function in the narrative. Rather, it suggests a different relationship among space, time, and narrative logic than exists in the classical film. Space and time no longer simply function unobtrusively to create a clear narrative line. Ozu brings them forward and makes them into prominent aesthetic elements in their own right. A large part of the film's appeal lies in its strict but playful treatment of figures, settings, and movement. Ozu does not eliminate narrative, but he opens it out. *Tokyo Story* and his other films allow other stylistic devices to exist independently alongside narrative. The result is that the viewer is invited to look at his films in a new way, to participate in a play of space and time.



Fig. 11.60

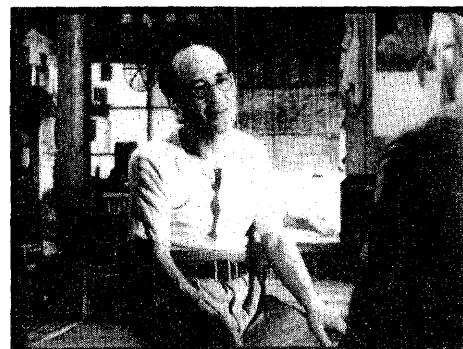


Fig. 11.61

DOCUMENTARY FORM AND STYLE

■ HIGH SCHOOL

1968. Produced and directed by Frederick Wiseman. Photographed by Richard Leiterman. Editor: Frederick Wiseman. Associate editor: Carter Howard. Assistant cameraman: David Eames.

Before the 1950s, most documentary filmmakers shot footage silent and added a voice-over commentary and postsynchronized music at the assembly stage. Lorentz's *The River* and Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, Part 2, analyzed in Chapters 5 and 10, are instances of this trend. After World War II, however, magnetic tape recording made it possible to record sound on location. At the same period the demands of military and television users encouraged manufacturers to develop lightweight but sophisticated 16mm cameras. These technological changes fostered a new approach to documentary filmmaking: *cinéma vérité* ("cinema truth"). In the 1950s and 1960s, many filmmakers began to use portable cameras and synchronized-sound recording equipment to capture spontaneous activity in a wide variety of situations: a political campaign (*Primary*, 1960), a legal case (*The Chair*, 1963), a folk singer's life (*Don't Look Back*, 1967), the tribulations of a Bible salesman (*Salesman*, 1969).

Some filmmakers claimed that *cinéma vérité* was more objective than traditional documentary. The older trend had relied heavily on staging, as well as on editing, music, and commentary to guide the viewer to certain conclusions. The *cinéma-vérité* film instead minimized voice-over commentary and put the filmmaker on the scene as the situation unfolded. It could, its defenders asserted, neutrally record the facts and let the audience draw its own conclusions.

Frederick Wiseman's *High School* is a good example of the *cinéma-vérité* approach. Wiseman received permission to film at Philadelphia's North-east High School, and he acted as sound recordist while his cameraman shot footage in the hallways, classrooms, cafeteria, and auditorium of the institution. The film that resulted uses no voice-over narration and almost no nondiegetic music. Wiseman uses none of the facing-the-reporter interviews that television news coverage employs. In these ways, *High School* might seem to approach the *cinéma-vérité* ideal of simply presenting a slice of life. Yet if we analyze the film's form and style, we find that it still aims to achieve particular effects on the spectator, and it still suggests a specific range of meaning. Far from being a neutral transmission of reality, *High School* shows how film form and style, even in *cinéma vérité*, shape the event we see on film.

The *cinéma-vérité* film records reality in some sense, but like any film, it demands that the filmmaker select and arrange material. The filmmaker chooses not only the film's subject matter but also the events to be photographed. The *cinéma-vérité* filmmaker also makes decisions on the spur of the moment, choosing when to start filming during a scene, what to keep in frame, and what sounds to record. There is selection in the editing phase as well; the 80 minutes of *High School* are culled from over 40 hours of raw footage.

The filmmaker also arranges the material, presenting it in a specific way that affects our experience. Although the *cinéma-vérité* filmmaker has surrendered control over what happens in front of the camera, she or he retains control over the film's structure, choosing what segment will follow another. The filmmaker can pick a camera position that will juxtapose various elements in the frame. (Consider Fig. 11.62, which frames the dean of discipline against the American flag; another angle, such as that of Fig. 11.67, does not make the flag visible.) The filmmaker also arranges shots through editing, by putting images and sounds into specific relations. Through selection and arrangement, the *cinéma-vérité* filmmaker utilizes film form and style no less than does a filmmaker who employs *mise-en-scène* and stages the action for the camera.

High School contains 37 distinct segments, each one showing an episode of high-school life. Some segments, such as chorus rehearsal, are quite brief; others involve extensive dialogue. Formally, the film presents an interesting combination of structural types. On the whole, the form is categorical. The main category is high-school life, and the subcategories consist of typical activities: classes, student/teacher confrontations, sports activities, a pep rally, and so on.

Within the activities we see, the action depends on narrative principles. Many of the segments constitute small scenes fraught with conflict. The dean



Fig. 11.62

of discipline insists that a boy take an unjustified detention, an administrator argues with complaining parents, and so on. Nonetheless, the overall form of the film is not narrative. The film lacks continuing characters, causality (one action does not trigger the next), and temporality (we do not know the "real" order and duration of events shown in the film). Wiseman has realized that our prior knowledge and experience will help us fill in gaps. When one segment begins with the disciplinary dean saying, "What do you mean, you can't take gym?" we will draw on our own high-school memories to create a typical context around this scene. Finally, as we shall see, the film is somewhat associational in the way it arranges and links its parts. Thus *High School*, like many documentaries, combines various principles of formal organization. The film presents typical categories of high-school life by means of small-scale narrative episodes and links them by associational factors.

The way in which categorical, narrative, and associational strategies combine becomes clearer if we look at how Wiseman has selected and arranged his material. The film is not a full cross-section of high-school life. It omits many important aspects. We never see the home life of students and faculty, and, strikingly, we never witness any conversations between students, either in class or outside it. Wiseman has concentrated on one aspect of high-school life: how the power of the authorities demands obedience from pupils and parents.

The most common strategy we see is simple drilling. The classes consist of teachers lecturing, reading aloud, or leading the students in some regimented activity, such as calisthenics, cooking, musical performance, or language drill. The filmmaker's selectivity is especially evident in one segment, in which an English teacher uses a popular song to teach poetry. Wiseman shows her reading the text aloud and then playing the song on tape, but he omits the class discussion that came in between. At other times, the authorities are shown exacting obedience through cajolery and flattery. An administrator tells one girl that she could be a leader; the disciplinary dean coaxes the boy to take his punishment like a man. If conflict breaks out, a teacher or administrator is shown taking a hard line in order to exercise discipline or win a point. In this film, no one in charge loses an argument. The narrative interest of each scene depends on our recognizing it as repeating the same pattern of the victory of authority. We come to expect that the disciplinary dean will argue down a fractious boy or that an administrator will force students to wear formal dress to the prom.

Wiseman's selectivity also gives the neutral category of high-school life some of the expressive overtones we expect of associational form. One scene may depict a drum major's march while another portrays a history class, but the important thing is that we notice the regimented quality of each one.

The arrangement of parts in the overall film betrays the mixture of formal types as well. The film's first segment evokes sketchy narrative expectations. The opening shows views of streets, highways, and eventually the school, all filmed from a car or bus. It suggests that the day begins with someone (teacher? student?) coming to school. The next sequence, apparently during homeroom period, tends to confirm the hypothesis that the school day is starting. But as the film develops, there are no cues to demarcate phases of the day. Moreover, we see another homeroom period later, as well as several



Fig. 11.63

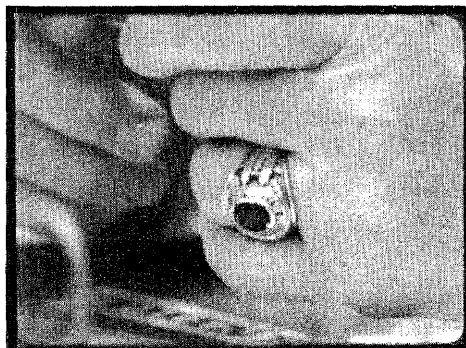


Fig. 11.64



Fig. 11.65



Fig. 11.66

school assemblies, a simulated space flight, and other activities that would not all plausibly take place on a single day. By the last sequence, a teachers' meeting, we can't know when this event occurs—at the end of the day, the end of the semester, or at some other point. After the first two scenes, the sequences are not linked by any indications of chronology. What we see are simply categories of high-school life, restricted to the sorts of face-to-face exercises of power that we have already mentioned.

In general, *High School* lays out its categories and then links them associatively, grouping several sequences around themes. For example, several scenes concentrate on how the school teaches about sexuality and gender roles. Sequence 15 shows a boys' health class being lectured on families; this is followed by a sequence showing an assembly of girls being lectured about sexual conduct. In Sequence 17, an administrator and a teacher explain why all female students must wear formal gowns to the senior prom. In Sequence 18, as a girls' gym class practices hanging from parallel rings, the teacher calls out, "We're feminine, let's go." Later in the film, three more sex-education classes are clustered together, reinforcing the idea that the school creates models of behavior that define masculinity and femininity.

Late in the film a string of sequences associates high-school education with the military. Here we can clearly see how powerfully the order of the sequences can shape our participation in the film. A soldier home on leave talks with a coach about a wounded friend who will never play soccer again. The next sequence, which simply shows a boys' gym class bouncing an enormous ball, encourages us to imagine these boys as future soldiers, some of whom may be killed or crippled. There follows a scene of a drum corps in the auditorium, again evoking military comparisons. This is followed by the film's last scene, in which a female principal reads to the assembled teachers a letter from an ex-student about to go to Vietnam. The ordering of scenes thus encourages us to pick out emotional or conceptual qualities that a string of scenes shares—a basic convention of associational form. A film using this structure does not advance a specific *argument* about its subject (the form is not rhetorical), but the film may imply a broad *attitude* to its topic, as Conner's *A Movie* does (p. 163).

Associational linkages are strengthened by other means. For one thing, motifs reappear. Wiseman uses shots of the school hallway to demarcate the scenes. Details of student anatomy—hips and legs especially—reinforce the notion of docile bodies waiting, lining up, bent to assigned tasks. By contrast, the authorities are associated with hands. While talking to parents, one administrator makes a fist, and the framing emphasizes this with a close-up (Fig. 11.63). In the next sequence, the disciplinary dean's hand is treated in a similar framing (Fig. 11.64).

Most strikingly, the transitions between scenes depend on associations. Some are simple repetitions, as when one teacher asks, "Are there any questions?" and we cut to another teacher asking, "Any questions?" Other transitions are more figurative. A teacher concludes "Casey at the Bat" with the line "Mighty Casey has struck out." Cut to a girl in a gym class batting a ball. A Spanish teacher waves her arms, drilling the class in a pronunciation exercise (Fig. 11.65); cut to a percussion ensemble practicing, led by a teacher conducting them (Fig. 11.66). This effectively suggests the regi-



Fig. 11.67

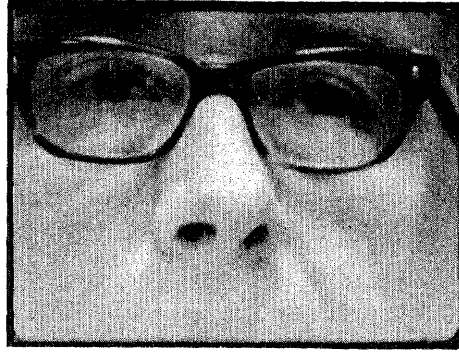


Fig. 11.68

mented nature of learning. Although the film does not supply cues for temporal order, it unifies itself through recurring motifs and transitions that reveal unexpected repetitions and similarities.

On the whole, the filmmaker's stylistic choices reinforce the overall structural features we have already mentioned. The segmentation into categories of school life is accomplished through editing and sound. Each sequence begins with an abrupt cut to a situation already in progress. Often the first shots are close-ups, so that the situation is revealed only gradually. The associative aspects of the film's form also depend upon techniques that create the sort of surprising transitions we have already considered.

Within segments, the use of cinematography, editing, and sound supports the narrative dynamic of the individual scenes. Even though Wiseman is filming unstaged situations, he adheres to principles of classical narrative style. The zoom lens permits the camera operator to situate someone in space and then isolate details (Figs. 11.67, 11.68). More strikingly, *High School's* scenes rely heavily on continuity editing which creates an axis of action and shot/reverse shot. In Figure 11.69, the blonde student is shown from the rear, at the far left edge of the frame. The next shot, Figure 11.70, cuts to a reverse angle on her that maintains the 180° line between her and the teacher. (Compare this cutting pattern with that in *The Maltese Falcon*, Figures 8.61–8.63, p. 291.) When filming under confined conditions, however, a *cinéma-vérité* filmmaker cannot always obtain an establishing shot. In *High School*, this makes eyelines and screen direction crucial cues for spatial continuity. For example, when the English teacher reads “Casey at the Bat,” she is consistently intercut with shots of students looking to the left, even though no long shot shows both teacher and pupils in the same space.

The use of continuity editing does more than give the scenes a narrative unity we can recognize from classical Hollywood conventions. Cutting from speaker to listener also lets Wiseman skip over action and conceal the breaks through offscreen sound. If he cuts away from the teacher to a reaction shot of the pupil listening but keeps the teacher's voice on the sound track, he can omit whole sentences before cutting back to the speaker. In the scene showing the English teacher studying the Simon and Garfunkel song, the cutaways and offscreen sound allow Wiseman to omit the class discussion of the poem. The “invisible” ellipses that cutaways and offscreen sound can yield are constantly used in television news coverage, in which a cut to a nodding reporter typically conceals omissions in the speaker's talk. This is,

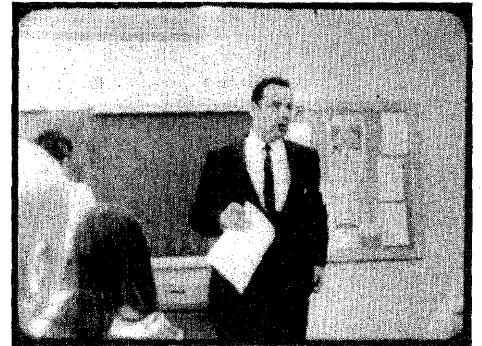


Fig. 11.69



Fig. 11.70

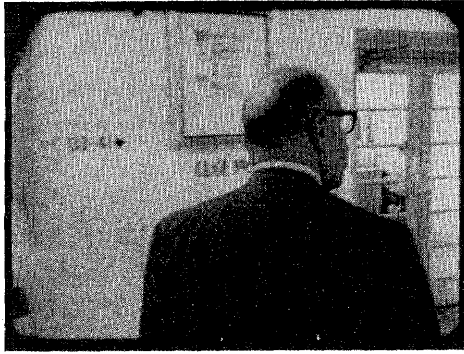


Fig. 11.71



Fig. 11.72



Fig. 11.73



Fig. 11.74

in essence, a documentary application of the principle of dialogue overlap considered in Chapter 9, p. 322.

The absence of establishing shots and the reliance on eyelines can even create the sort of “imaginary geography” that Kuleshov discussed (see p. 281). We follow a teacher as he stalks the halls demanding passes. He turns (Fig. 11.71). There is a cut to a long shot of a girl walking down the corridor (Fig. 11.72). After the monitor has ordered some students to leave, he goes up to a door and peers in (Fig. 11.73). The offscreen music gradually grows louder, and we cut to a phonograph and a girls’ gym class exercising, filmed to emphasize legs and torsos (Fig. 11.74).

These cuts might go unnoticed, but analysis reveals that the sequence depends upon artifice. A close study of the shot showing the girl in the corridor (Fig. 11.72) reveals that she is not in the hall that the teacher is patrolling. As for the gym class, there is no establishing shot showing both teacher and students, so we cannot know with certainty that it was really this gym class which the teacher watched through the window. In fact, if we recall the conditions of *cinéma-vérité* production, we realize that the music must have been added after the shot of the teacher was made. (If the music really was coming from the gym, there would have been a gap on the sound track when the filmmakers had to switch the camera off and go into the gym to film the students.) Thus both editing and sound create the Kuleshov effect, prompting us to connect two things that are not really adjacent. The stylistic function would seem to be to characterize the teacher as lecherous, ogling girls in the hallway and spying on them in gym class.

After analyzing how *High School* uses overall form and specific film techniques to guide our response, it may seem odd to suggest that the film is somewhat ambiguous. Yet reactions to the film varied. When *High School* was first shown to the Philadelphia Board of Education, many officials praised it. But critics from around the country have tended to see the film as criticizing the school and secondary education in general. Does this controversy mean that *cinéma vérité* has achieved its goal of a neutral capturing of reality, leaving meanings to the eye of each beholder?

We think that the varying reactions to the film illustrate how viewers can emphasize one sort of meaning over another. It is likely that school officials concentrated upon the film’s *referential* and *explicit* meanings, treating it as a record of a single school (a sort of institutional home movie) and as a statement about the success of education. They may have weighted most strongly a sentiment made very explicit at the film’s close, when the female principal reads a letter from the student about to go to Vietnam. Critics, however, offered an interpretation of the film that stressed an *implicit* meaning at odds with the explicit one. In this view, the school is shown as an oppressive bureaucracy. These critics could use our analysis to claim that the film’s form and style, and its tactics of selection and arrangement, portray this institution as more concerned with inculcating obedience and conformity than with teaching critical thinking, independent action, and a sense of self-worth.

This interpretation could gather further evidence from the use of rock-and-roll tunes to comment on the bleakness of high-school life as well as from the final scene, in which the soldier’s letter is read. Here the film’s development from educational discipline to military regimentation is capped

by an overt link between school and army. The boy's letter urges people not to worry, and the motif of students as docile bodies returns: "I am not worth it. I am only a body doing a job." The scene also repeats the motif of the hand of authority when the camera racks focus during the administrator's reading (Figs. 11.75, 11.76). From this interpretive stance, the film's final line—"When you get a letter like this, to me it means that we are very successful at Northeast High School. I think you will agree with me"—becomes ironic. Irony, indeed, is often defined as exactly this sort of conflict between explicit and implicit meaning.

We could even suggest that the film's *symptomatic* meaning reinforces this interpretation. Depicting a school as a training ground for conformity is symptomatic of the period in which the film was made. In 1968, many filmmakers were questioning both specific governmental policies, such as American involvement in Vietnam, and broader values of Western society.

Frederick Wiseman's *High School* can be considered ambiguous in that its referential and explicit meanings run counter to its implicit and symptomatic ones. Nonetheless, the fact that the film can generate not vagueness but such a precise dispute about its range of meanings suggests that *cinéma vérité* is not a neutral record of the world in front of a camera and a microphone. Like other types of documentary, *cinéma vérité* is an active cinematic intervention *in* the world, another way of handling the filmmaker's inevitable choices about form, style, and effect.



Fig. 11.75



Fig. 11.76

■ MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (CHELOVEK S KINOAPPARATOM)

Made 1928, released 1929. VUFKU, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Directed by Dziga Vertov. Photographed by Mikhail Kaufman. Edited by Elizaveta Svilova.

In some ways, *Man with a Movie Camera* might seem to resemble *High School*. As a silent film, it necessarily avoids the use of music to guide our expectations (music, that is, controlled by the filmmaker, since in the theaters a piano or orchestra would have accompanied screenings). Moreover, the film does not employ intertitles to provide a commentary on the action, though most silent documentaries did use such titles. Yet, unlike *High School*, *Man with a Movie Camera* does not try to give the impression that the reality it documents is unaffected by the medium of film. Instead, Dziga Vertov proclaims the manipulative power of editing and cinematography to shape a multitude of tiny scenes from everyday reality into a highly idiosyncratic, even somewhat experimental documentary.

Vertov's name is usually linked to the technique of editing; in Chapter 8 (p. 280), we quoted a passage in which he equated the filmmaker with an eye, gathering shots from many places and linking them creatively for the spectator. Vertov's theoretical writings also compare the eye to the lens of the camera, in a concept he termed the "kino eye." (*Kino* is the Russian word for "cinema," and one of his earlier films is called *Kino-Glaz*, or "Cinema-Eye.")

Man with a Movie Camera takes this idea—the equation of the film-