



NEITHER / NOR

CHIMERIC CINEMA, NEW YORK CITY, 1967-1968
ESSAYS AND INTERVIEWS BY ERIC HYNES

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Neither/Nor is an annual screening series and publication that provides an historical overview of films that explore and/or break free of the dubious dichotomy of fact and fiction. To describe these forward-thinking works, we've adopted the word chimera.

Chimera is a mythological Greek figure composed of body parts from a lion, a goat, and a serpent. In the *Iliad*, Homer describes Chimera as a "great, swift-footed and strong" creature that breathes bright fire. In the years since Homer penned his epic, writers have used the word to define any creature formed from the distinct body parts of various animals.

Chimera perfectly suits the magical, unwieldy films Neither/Nor seeks to probe. This evocative word gets at the multifaceted nature of these alluring whatsits.

Beyond examining the films that laid the groundwork

for this era of inbetweenness, Neither/Nor also celebrates the art of film scholarship. For our inaugural edition, we asked Eric Hynes, a gifted film critic whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, and *Film Comment*, to offer his insights on work produced in New York City during the late 1960s.

Over the course of several months, Eric took a comprehensive look at the masterpieces and curios produced during this wonderfully inventive era and then selected four chimeric films to represent the time period. With his essays and interviews, he's given us a wealth of astute observations to consider.

It's been a pleasure working with Eric, who has set a high bar for future editions of Neither/Nor. We look forward to building on his scholarship and, in the coming years, bringing you a wide range of inquiries into the history of chimeric cinema. ■

introduction by eric hynes

Chimeras have existed since the advent of film, a form that has always simultaneously offered to record and represent, to capture and simulate life. But as filmmaker Jim McBride says, "Something was in the air" in the mid-to-late 1960s, particularly in New York City, where the likes of McBride, William Greaves, and D.A. Pennebaker, as well as transients Peter Whitehead

and Jean-Luc Godard, were making gloriously uncatagorizable works of cinematic art. It was a moment when everything and everyone seemed to be riding, or even embracing, the edge of things, when films and politics and morality suddenly seemed undefined, up for grabs, subject to reinvention. With the Civil Rights era giving way to Black Power, Kennedy

idealism ceding to Johnson's military morass, Beat Dadaism transforming into hippie agitation, and mod Godard morphing into Mao Godard, it was as if utopia and dystopia were both within reach—if not one and the same.

For these four filmmakers, as well as other fellow travelers in New York and beyond, it was a moment when politics, formal curiosity, and the sudden mobility of both the camera and sound recording invited an approach to cinema in which every shot, every gesture, every decision seemed less a statement than a question. Reality and fiction were constantly being blurred—for serious and for play, and ever sincerely. The four films in this series were all recorded during 1967–1968 in New York City, and all are both invaluable time capsules of that moment and impossible to box or bottle up. There are resonances and ricochets among these four films—having all drunk from the same wild New York well, with its fly-on-the-wall documentarians and Warholian flair, its Actor's Studio interiority and Living Theatre political absurdity, there would have to be. Viewed together they represent less of a cinematic leap forward than a scatter-shot concentric expansion into the beyond—beyond genre, beyond the limits of film itself.

Filmed over the summer of 1967, *David Holzman's Diary* marked the advent of cinéma vérité by slavishly albeit fictionally aping it, while 16 months later the

vanguards of that movement subtly aped themselves in *1 P.M.*; in between, *The Fall* would both deconstruct and co-opt the movement's objective approach, while *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* cajoled its flies on the wall to swarm to the center of the room. Method actor Rip Torn bustles through *1 P.M.* (as he would in several chimeric films of the era), Dadaist destructivists make mischief in *The Fall*, a salty nude model steals the show in *Holzman's*, and *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* closes the circle with a former Method man making an entire film crew into an extension of his own directorial performance. News and politics of the day buzz between background and foreground of all four films, from Vietnam and the Newark riots to ubiquitous activist Tom Hayden. And in the most startling overlap, an elevator rising up a half-formed skyscraper in *The Fall* is almost exactly matched in *1 P.M.*; while the former metaphorically implies a toppling in its very title, the latter ends with a literal, time-lapse dismantling of a city tower.

Rising and falling, accumulating and dispersing, evoking and projecting, destroying and creating, these are films whose true common thread is instability. And it's instability that makes them, still, vital. Their very form—their deliberate unwieldiness—makes them perennially modern. Strictly speaking, they're neither documentary nor drama, scripted nor spontaneous, true nor false. They're neither/nor, and therefore pretty much anything they want to be. ■

Maddening Method

by Eric Hynes

Symbiopsychotaxiplasm

directed by William Greaves





I don't see where there's a beginning or a middle or an end. I don't mean in a conventional story fashion. But everything we shoot is the same. I don't see where there's any build in the film at all.

—TERRENCE MCCARTNEY-FILGATE

Whether or not Bill is capable or cares to articulate it consciously, nobody would come up with such a crazy idea for a film.

—ROBERT ROSEN

No, don't take me seriously.

—WILLIAM GREAVES

Symbiopsychotaxiplasm is the cinematic equivalent of a ship listing, steadily and helplessly, over a waterfall. "The name right now is *Over the Cliff*," director William Greaves says to a Central Park policeman on the first day of shooting. "We're jumping over the cliff," he says. "What kind of film is it?," asks the cop. "It's a feature-length 'we-don't-know,'" Greaves replies, grinning. The policeman offers an awkwardly conspiratorial laugh, remounts his horse and briskly clears the hell out of the way. The crewmembers, shouldering heavy equipment in the summer sun and trying to make sense of what's being asked of them, have no such egress.

In the summer of 1968, venerated veteran filmmaker Greaves, then-executive producer of NET's *Black Journal*, documentarian and formerly of both the Actor's Studio and the American Negro Theatre, set out to shoot an independent film in Central Park. The idea was to shoot multiple sets of actors performing the same dialogue about a squabbling married couple. A rotation of performers, new set ups, new directives from Greaves, but the same unsavory dialogue in which

the woman accuses her husband of being a homosexual, and the man asserts that his wife has gone mad. Yet that's only one set of variables. The project also entailed three different cameras recording three tiers of action: one filming the fictional scene; another capturing the making of that scene, triangulating the actors and their assigned camera; and a final camera widened out to the whole community of machines, actors, crewmembers and bystanders. Both in terms of the camera set-ups and the rotation of performers, it's clear from the start that *process* is of more importance here than *product*. What's not immediately, but soon becomes, clear is that this process is just as fucked as the product. In footage captured by the three cameras—footage, it should be noted, that Greaves chose to include in the film—Greaves seems unprepared, out of it, unhelpful when asked questions, and insensitive to the inconveniences he's subjecting others to; as a crewmember later observes, "He doesn't know how to direct."

As cinematic train-wreckers go, it's not that Greaves is hell-bent on torturing anyone, Lars von Trier-style,

or behaving like a combustible megalomaniac ignorant of the disaster he's fostering. It's more that he conducts himself with such benign ineptitude that everyone begrudgingly goes along with the inanity—for a while. It's only when the crew starts asking questions, and steals away to record a secret bull session in which they question the wisdom of everything they've been asked to do, that they entertain the possibility—like prisoners realizing they've been caught in a maze—that Bill Greaves has been neither benign nor inept. And that's when the film transforms from a curious shambles to the closest a meta-textual making-of what's it gets to a thrill ride.

To say that the film is a social experiment would be both accurate and inadequate. Whatever Greaves's precise intentions, there's no doubt that the true subject of *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* is its own production. He established a very loose framework for a film, intentionally left its subject and purpose vague, and then minimally intervened when his cast and crew grew impatient, confused, and mutinous. He anticipated strong reactions from his seemingly soft-headed actions, and got them; and in rushed voices of dissent, sarcasm and unrest, he created a vacuum where his own authority ought to have been. And thanks to the three-camera set-up, in which two-thirds of the film was always going to be a documentary, there's plenty of spontaneously recorded material of that unrest. The mutiny and the record of the mutiny don't seem to have been planned, but considering how much equipment was lying around, how many reels were being burned through, and how intelligent and free-thinking the collaborators Greaves handpicked

for this project were, such an outcome could be fairly called reasonable, scientifically speaking.

Such organic caucusing also satisfies Greaves's evident hope that *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* would speak to the moment at which it was made, a moment when America was ramping up its presence in Vietnam, a moment when leftists were collectivizing against corporatism and corruption. When the crewmembers, led by the wise and wonderfully articulate soundman Jonathan Gordon, finally confront Greaves on camera—foremost about the very badly written dialogue the actors are forced to perform, and the crew to endure—the filmmaker, for once dropping his deft dumb guy act, basically says as much. "This sort of palace revolt which is taking place is not dissimilar to the revolution that's taking place, let's say, in America today," he says, a touch too hubristically. "I represent the establishment, and I've been trying to get you to do certain things which you've become disenchanted with. Now, your problem is if you come up with creative suggestions which will make this into a better production than we now have."

But alchemical interpersonal-relations and political-metaphoric explanations don't account for how well the project functions as entertainment. Forget documentary versus fiction—*Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* is a hybrid of dramedic, slapstick experimental proportions, with its jaunty Miles Davis score, split- and triple-screen action, off-the-cuff humor, inherent mystery, and the giddy-making dialogues of the mutiny sequences. Greaves may have hid his directorial capabilities from the camera, but his editing acumen is plain as day. An especially exquisite sequence cuts from crewmembers

complaining about the film's lack of direction to the director himself wandering aimlessly in Central Park, a caricature of cluelessness. Then after the onscreen confrontation, after Greaves inspirationally explains to production manager Robert Rosen how "the important thing is that we surface from this production experience with something that is entirely exciting and creative as a result of our collective efforts," he cuts to two actors absurdly, unmotivatedly singing their lines. Greaves looks on, attentive and intent, puppetmaster and poker-faced master thespian to the end. "As soon as you turn the camera on he turns on," observes cameraman Terrence McCartney-Filgate earlier in the film. "He's like a bad actor. And he doesn't turn off into his natural self until the camera stops."

Ultimately, despite the fascinatingly diverse reactions of the crew, despite the subtle dismantling of acting

methodology—useless, it would seem, in the face of horrid writing—despite the priceless documentary footage of city life gathered at the margins, Greaves's biggest get, his biggest gotcha, is himself. In seventy-five swift minutes, the director fully deconstructs the role of the director, demystifying the notion that he has all the (or any) answers, any business communicating with actors, any knowledge of the technical aspects of film, any right to whatever reputation or respect that preceded him. I don't know that a filmmaker has ever allowed his own abilities, his very qualifications, to be so interrogated in his own film. The endgame may have been to prove that great things could be achieved without such a godhead, but the great paradox of *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*—and of most grand theories of collectivity, for that matter—is that the proof comes thanks to the genius of a man with a plan. ■

interview with jonathan gordon

ERIC HYNES: Where were you coming from before Symbiopsychotaxiplasm?

JONATHAN GORDON, sound recordist and on-screen participant, *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*: I was working at the time for an outfit that made its living mostly by doing public service announcements. I think it was on West 54th St., which was the center of film rental and developing houses and stuff like that. It was a fairly small community, so a lot of people knew a lot of people. Someone would need a camera and

they would call someone up. Bill [Greaves, the director] was kind of a popular guy. He had been running something called *Black Journal* [a news program for public television]. When he decided to do this film, he just called up the people he knew. Everyone said yes because Bill was a well-liked man. So he got us there in the park, and the film unfolded.

EH: At several points in the film someone asks you if you've read the concept, and you reply no. I'm curious as to why you didn't.

JG: I didn't read the concept because, as far as I knew, there was no concept. The hard thing to understand about this is that from my point of view—this is the way I thought then and the way I see it now—this was not a game. This was not what you'd call a *Paranormal Activity 2*. This was not a faux deal. The irritation that I and some of these other people like [Robert] Rosen felt was absolutely genuine. I was a radical person in those days. I was very anti-authority. Even when it came to my friend Bill, I was a very provocative person. Not everybody is that way, and some people would not challenge the authority of a director. Those people claimed, "Well, there's a concept here, you just didn't read it." Well, they're totally genuine, and so am I. Most of the time you go on a shoot with somebody, you know what they're doing, and you help them do it. But it's not like Bill sat everybody down and said, "Look, here is my concept. I'm going to have this sort of fractal or multi-time parallel universe, da da da," or however he wanted to explain this thing. He did not explain it. The thing just went on and on. And then cut, and then start again. And then the next day we've got to be there to do the same bullshit again. Well, it got to the point that you see very clearly in the film where some of us just grabbed a couple of rolls of film and shot [the mutiny]. Bill didn't know we had done it—the first time he was aware of it was when he found it in the dailies. Now I don't know if there's a myth that Bill has created, and I don't want to get ahead of that or interfere with that—he's the director, and it's his baby, and he can build the myth of his creation the way he wants. Let's just say that when Bill says, "Well, I knew this all along. I was provoking these guys deliberately, and I knew there were these loose cannon types like

Jonathan. And I just pushed it and pushed it until I knew that these guys were going to do something," that the whole thing was an artifice that came out of Bill's amazingly multidimensional mind—well, that isn't how I saw it. That may in fact be true. Bill might be so ahead of me—I was about 26, Bill was about 36, and he had a lot of authority. He had a tremendous amount of gravitas for a young man. Yet he also was playing, or was in fact—again, I don't know—the bumbling person who didn't know what he was doing. I respected Bill enormously. He had a very calm disposition. He never got angry or insulting or pulled this diva behavior that some directors would do. It's a tribute to Bill's friendliness that even though there were sparks and flashes and irritation, the affection for Bill was very great.

EH: In terms of whether or not Bill had invited, if not a mutiny then at least a level of critique and deeper participation, I wonder if that was fostered by the fact that there was already a "making of" aspect to the film, with two additional cameras shooting what everybody was doing. Did that foster a sense that you were actually a player in this drama, as well as somebody on crew?

JG: At the time—this was 1968—was this an absolutely unprecedented, brilliant, you've-never-seen-anything-like-this-before? Not really. I mean, these were the times when you would do stuff like that. We were film guys, and there was a spirit of great play. These were the days of the Living Theatre. One wasn't reluctant in those days.

EH: I'm fascinated by that sense of play. You're right, it wasn't like nobody else was doing it—in fact it seems like

a moment when these things were happening way more than ever before.

JG: It was a case where technology changed an art form. Suddenly it was possible to have a camera on your shoulder. Three or four years earlier it wouldn't have been possible—except in the most studio set-up kind of ways—to point a camera at a camera. And to have all that shaky stuff, and this was not fake shaky. All this stuff has since been co-opted—you can't tell anymore if that's real shaky camera or if they're making it look like a shaky camera. But everything here—if you hear a sound pop, that's a real sound pop. If the sound suddenly drops, it's because that shotgun mic wasn't pointed in the right place. Everything is real. Anyway, I was such a young man, so many things have happened since. Of all the things that have happened to me in life, this event here with Bill is one of the absolute high points of my life.

EH: To see you on camera, the way you responded to it, even with your frustration, you're clearly so deeply engaged with what's happening. Obviously that's who you were at the time, but how amazing to have had an opportunity to be engaged that way.

JG: There was a seriousness there. An artistic seriousness. This engagement that you notice, this is not just some wise guy undermining authority for the purpose of undermining authority. There's an actual artistic earnestness here. We actually care about what we're doing. In our own rebellious way, we're loyal to the film.

EH: It's amazing how with all these conflicting personalities and opinions, the metaphorical ambitions and

political and theoretical intentions, the film comes across as so alive. It becomes this active moment, perpetually. And that's very rare. You can try to manufacture it, but it's very rare to have a film where, even if improvisation plays a part in it, it's not like everybody is working towards an improvisation. It's all just happening.

JG: In fact, the word improvisation almost is not appropriate because of the vastness of the improvisatory character of what we were doing—from the moment we arrived at the park to the moment we went home. It was so improvisatory that to call it that almost diminishes it.

EH: Did it feel that deeply spontaneous throughout?

JG: The improvisatory character was so huge that it's almost like it went too far. It was like, "Let's improvise. And we're improvising and all of a sudden it was like, Oh my God. This is just, like, ridiculous." And that's when the mutiny happened. You might say too much improvisation. I thought I was so cool, being so loose. Just rolling down the ocean with no rudder and no compass. And then, finally, Hey, can we please have a rudder and compass? Like, where are we going? It finally hits you.

EH: Of all the things that Bill may have intended, that to me is most valuable. That sense of, "Okay: ultimate openness, total collaboration sounds great. Not having one all-knowing leader sounds good." But the reality of that is really maddening.

JG: No matter what his motive, his strengths or weaknesses, he allowed this mutiny. And it created an altogether different kind of outcome. ■

The Liminal States of America

by Eric Hynes

1 P.M.

directed by D.A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, Jean-Luc Godard





"I think that the future for a revolutionary cinema is an amateur cinema."

—JEAN-LUC GODARD, 1968

"I seem to remember JLG getting frustrated that he couldn't tell whether Leacock or Pennebaker were filming their own film about the film he was making or shooting for him."

—TOM LUDDY, *1 P.M.* COLLABORATOR, IN 2007

It was like a Sixties-era cineaste supergroup. And like all such assemblages, it was destined to disassemble, to be a dream team deferred, to elicit a mess of metaphors pitting sums versus parts. Over here you had the inexhaustible trailblazers of Direct Cinema, the most celebrated and pejoratively pegged flies on the wall, Richard Leacock and D.A. Pennebaker. Over there you had the notorious JLG, Jean-Luc Godard, the international arthouse superstar turned ardent political provocateur. Throw in Method acting madman Rip Torn, rock 'n' drug culture messengers Jefferson Airplane, cult heroic polemicists Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panther Party, national leader for Students for a Democratic Society Tom Hayden, and black nationalist poet LeRoi Jones (the soon-to-be Amiri Baraka), and you pretty much had boho-'60s-rabbleroising incarnate.

The story is that it didn't really come together. The story is of bafflements, bruised egos, and abandonment—a film left unfinished, and participants free to foster their legends elsewhere. Yet that story is

ultimately irrelevant to the cinematic record, to what you can actually see with your eyes.

1 P.M. isn't just undefined. The overwhelming liminality of the project far exceeds any single dearth of definition. Mounted by three filmmakers of differing styles and intentions, at an historical moment full of confusion, conflict and (real and illusory) potential, composed of footage both captured and planned, with a tone that's arch and sincere, grave and giddy, a document disowned by Godard and reclaimed by Pennebaker, a film that went through as many working titles as directors, *1 P.M.* is undefined defined. It's also peerless.

That it's recalled as more of a curiosity rather than as a major work actually reflects, if not honors, its inbetweenness. It doesn't really serve as a representative work of Jean-Luc Godard's political period, or as an exemplar of the D.A. Pennebaker-Richard Leacock Direct Cinema model. Despite Godard's ambitions, it doesn't well serve either the American

counterculture or the revolutionary radicalism of the '60s. It's too contrived to fit snugly into documentary, too shambling to succeed as a stunt, too conflicted and complex to make a statement. Revisiting it, and the moment it captures, is to have preconceptions frustrated, historical and formal narratives derailed. In exchange, it remains, 44 years on, momentous, alive, thrillingly uncertain. For all of its recited philosophies and symbolic gestures, *1 P.M.* isn't an idea—it's thinking.

The lead-up to that thinking, as told by the filmmakers, their collaborators, and assorted historians and biographers, goes something like this: Fresh from the revolutionary events of May '68 in Paris, Godard was convinced that the agitating wave was about to crest in America. He'd spent the early part of '68 on a tour of American college campuses to support his film *La Chinoise*—a tour organized by the film's distributor, which was none other than Leacock-Pennebaker—and apparently felt the tide rise. With financing in place, courtesy of New York public television, Godard conspired to shoot Hayden, Jones and Jefferson Airplane in New York, and then Cleaver in California.

Considering some of Godard's statements from earlier in the decade, the pairing with Leacock and Pennebaker was a curious one. Via his platform at *Cahiers du Cinéma*, he voiced distrust in Leacock's work, particularly for its evident pretensions to clear-eyed objectivity. In 1963, Godard accused Leacock and company of "not knowing what they are shooting, nor knowing that pure reportage does not exist."

He continued: "Leacock's lack of subjectivity leads him in the end to lack objectivity. Honesty, in other words, is not enough for a fighter in the avant-garde, particularly when he does not know that if reality is stranger than fiction, the latter returns the compliment."

Yet Godard had long been preoccupied with the documentary potential of film, and that only intensified as he became more interested in recording and understanding the unfolding events of the late 1960s. By 1968, and particularly in *1 P.M.*, Godard saw increased value in a more reactive and improvisatory camera—not necessarily as an overriding machine of objectivity, but as a useful aspect in often materially contradictory constructions, whether documenting fictions (Rip Torn's Brechtian hijinks) or fabricating seemingly straightforward recordings (a Jefferson Airplane rooftop concert, which predates similar, more celebrated sequences in both *Let It Be* and *Rattle & Hum*). Everything in *1 P.M.* is shot with the same busy curiosity, simultaneously offering an astonishingly rich record of its time and place, and, by dint of the filmmakers' many fabrications, offering an auto-critique of cinéma vérité itself.

For as much as Godard wanted to capture America in this moment of presumed transformation, and honor the leading architects of that transformation, he couldn't help but monkey with the process, to pervert dry rhetoric and mystify what the camera threatened to make plain. Before we even meet Hayden, he's heard in cacophonous piecemeal via Torn's tape player, his words doled out in abstracted, stop-start bursts that the actor slavishly (mockingly?) parrots

while dressed as an Indian chief in Central Park. Then the act moves to an in-progress skyscraper, with Torn riding the construction elevator, tape player tucked under his arm, chewing over every scrap of Hayden's Marxist rhetorical playback while actual workers look on, unengaged. So when the activist finally appears on-camera, delivering the disquisition that has been the source of the audio we've been enduring, we can't help but find him tedious and, like Pennebaker's camera, avert our attention to the groovily attired backyard assembly, as well as to the apparently rapt Godard, who nonchalantly puffs on his cigar before slipping out of view.

Later in the film, the evidently entirely humorless Hayden expresses frustration with the circling cameras and intrusive equipment, particularly since "the method is to make it appear natural." Godard seems almost delighted to set him straight. "No, I don't mean to. It's the reverse of natural," he says. "It's totally not. Because it's completely abstract. To seem natural is to do something else. Art is not natural." Even among fellow political travelers in this moment of presumed revolution, Godard is still making, talking, and privileging the stubborn, impractical beast that is art.

Yet so are Leacock and Pennebaker. Never merely the straight men monitoring the carnival, as JLG may have envisioned them, they're active participants in stomping over the line between documentary and fiction, seriousness and absurdity. When Godard abandoned the project before completing the ambitious construction he'd planned for the footage, it fell to Pennebaker to assemble the film we have today

(completed and finally released in 1971), which asserts a point of view removed from Godard's poker-faced ringleader, and employs footage largely captured by Pennebaker himself (prompting JLG to dub the film, with perhaps begrudging respect, "One Pennebaker Movie"). When Torn engages the school kids from Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn, reciting the words of a well-meaning but condescending white "oppressor" while wearing both Confederate and U.S. Military garb ("I want to develop you!" he barks), Pennebaker's camera is just as interested in Godard's orchestration of the scene—scooting from the back to the front of the classroom to whisper into Torn's ear—and in the crew's intrusion into the space. We're never certain what the game is here, or what we (or the students) are supposed to gain from Torn's antics, but we can see Leacock laughing heartily, evidently charmed by the kids and the general sense of play. He's too engaged, and buzzing too excitedly, to be a mere fly on the wall.

For standard-bearers of clear-the-way filmmaking, Leacock and Pennebaker seemingly exult in this chance to get in the way—of the subjects, of New York bystanders, of Godard. When Godard interviews a young banker on a crowded city street by radio mic, Pennebaker's camera confirms that the crew is a walking spectacle of equipment, conspicuously lumbering through the streets before being accosted by corporate security. They're mobile, as filmmakers suddenly were thanks to sync sound advances in the '60s (thanks, as it were, to Pennebaker himself), but far from discreet. Even in what appears to be the most *vérité* sequence, a fluidly shot poetic/musical

street performance by LeRoi Jones and associates (a sequence that Godard never intended for the film), Pennebaker doesn't allow us to think we've just happened upon a Harlem happening. After seemingly ignoring the camera for a long stretch, Jones leans into the visible boom microphone for emphasis. Meanwhile neighbors peer down from windows, a young boy snoops from around the corner, and Godard and then-romantic-partner Anne Wiazemsky, perched at a distance, watch from behind a parked car. Who's in charge in this scene? Is it Godard, pulling some long-distance strings? Is it Pennebaker, inches away from the subjects? Is it Jones, who's orchestrating and orienting the spectacle?

For all of the overt gamesmanship of *1 P.M.*, it's in scenes like this one that the genius of its haphazard collaboration is most apparent. So distinct and independent of one another are the participants that everything always seems both objective and

subjective, plotted out and captured on the sly, invested and distanced, sincere and full of shit. And every shot seems less a demonstration of this than an active, laborious contemplation of it. If Godard had once doubted the efficacy of the Leacock-Pennebaker approach, assuming their recessive shooting strategy was a sign of a self-denying point of view, this collaboration not only explodes that notion but does so, at least to some degree, at Godard's own expense. *1 P.M.* pulls back every curtain, baring everything from the flaws of Cleaver's thinking (what political activist would today relegate public relations to a future, rather than first, consideration?) to Godard's amateurishness with the camera (his footage from the concert is all zooms and inelegant pans). But it somehow does so without ever demystifying what brings it all together, which is cinema. Forty-four years later, it's what makes this snapshot of its moment into something timeless, unclassifiable and unanswerable. ■

interview with d.a. pennebaker

ERIC HYNES: Reading through the literature from the '60s, I found it fascinating that this project even happened, considering some of the things Godard had said about your work and Richard Leacock's work.

D.A. PENNEBAKER, co-director of *1 P.M.*: Yeah. He had written something in which he used Ricky's name, but he called him Pat Leacock, Patricia Leacock. It was peculiar, but certainly Ricky never took much notice

of it. I think the problem in France was, in order for Jean-Luc or any of the French directors to make a film, it had to come through the government. So there was a kind of ongoing series of essays that appeared in the movie magazine there about the difference between *cinéma vérité*, as Jean-Luc imagined it, and whatever it was we were practicing in America that was being called that. I'm not sure that anybody took [the criticisms] seriously.

EH: And then you and Leacock distributed Godard's La Chinoise. Was that how you became associated with him?

D.A. P: I'd met him before that but didn't know him very well at all. He was just somebody I met at the Cinematheque. For [1 P.M.] he had gotten some arrangement with a thing called PBL, which was kind of the beginnings of PBS. He had the idea that the revolutionary activities that were starting to take place in Europe were going to happen here, too, and he was going to film this. *1 A.M.* is what the film was called. Ricky and I were going to be the filmmakers, and he was the director.

EH: Did you also think the revolution was going to continue in America?

D.A. P: Well, he kept saying we've got to hurry. It was because there had been several outbreaks, I think at UCLA or Stanford, which were basically anti-Vietnam. He wanted to get to California—that was his aim. In fact we had arranged something with [Eldridge Cleaver], so that was hanging over us, and he kept saying, everyday, we've got to hurry out there. He expected to see what you saw in Paris, where the students gathered in the streets. I knew there was some anti-Vietnam feeling out there, but I'd never seen anything like what he was talking about. So I didn't really take it seriously.

EH: You definitely get a sense of different personalities and different points of view marshaled into the film all at once. When he's talking to Eldridge Cleaver, he's clearly

trying to convince Cleaver that they're on the same level, yet Cleaver's not really buying it. And from where you were standing with the camera, you sense a skepticism about the whole thing.

D.A. P: Well, it was true. With the money we gave to Cleaver, he went to Mexico. That's how he got out of the States. Actually, he ended up in North Africa. And years later, not too many years later, I went down with somebody from the Cinematheque who was going down to a screening in North Africa. And I met Cleaver down there. He was designing clothes.

EH: He was designing clothes?

D.A. P: And very happy. He kind of liked North Africa. But when I first heard him talking about Mao Tse-tung, I didn't know who Mao Tse-tung was. So the whole thing politically was kind of interesting for me. I thought there was much more here going on than I have any idea about, and if I'm making a film about it, I better find out. So I was finding out as I cut, reading and becoming aware of the political tracts being written. And I could see that they were quite real, that the whole black community perceived itself as a colonial entity, and until that got fixed, they weren't going to be able to survive individually. I was intrigued by how to put what I was learning into a film that didn't really have anything to do with that. So my mind muddles had an effect on that film.

EH: Looking back, that's the most accurate way of approaching it all, it would seem. There wasn't a clear sense of how to proceed.

D.A. P: It was such a funny crossworld, this world we were inhabiting. We were like refugees from the movie world, from a Hollywood fiction film. There were some filmmakers in New York who practiced filmmaking with the hope of eventually becoming part of the fiction film world, but there were a lot of us who didn't know what we were doing. We had no audience. We couldn't sell the films to anyone. So we were just doing it to amuse ourselves in a way. We were kind of refugees from what we wanted to escape without being quite sure how to get where we wanted to go. After [*Don't Look Back*] and *Monterey Pop* and a couple of other films, when we came to *1 P.M.*, I thought this is where we come up against the iron cross as it were. The European films were like legends. I just adored Godard's films. But they were hardly what we were going for. So it was a very disorganized time.

EH: There's a quote that I read from Tom Luddy about how frustrated Godard became, not knowing if you were shooting his film or making a film about him shooting his film. Is that your recollection?

D.A. P: We were doing whatever he told us to do. But he kind of lost interest. He could see that we just weren't politically smart enough to even have discussions with him about it all, and whatever we did was going to come out kind of soft focus. He was, at that point, ready to go out and give cameras to revolutionaries. He wanted to ferment a whole revolutionary brigade, making films that would bring down governments. We had no such ideas. But along with Rip Torn and some others, we were seeing what

would happen if we all shared the same party—if we all hung out together. But I certainly never saw it as being a revolutionary film. Not the way we were filming it, which was ridiculous. Rip with the Indian feathers on his head? These things may have had huge importance for Jean-Luc, but we didn't have any idea about them. But he represented something that I really liked, and since I didn't know how to get it into my own films particularly, this was as close as I was ever going to get.

EH: There's this sense of your work as being something of a brand, having a certain style, but I think 1 P.M. shows how formally adventurous you could be.

D.A. P: Oh, that's true. I could be because who cares? The only reason I finished the film was because we had a contract with PBL, and they were going to sue us if we didn't deliver a film. Well, I delivered it. They looked at it and said, "Well, this isn't quite what we had in mind." I don't think it was ever shown on television here. Nobody cared what I did, so I might as well have fun with it. The whole thing with the Jefferson Airplane—they were all pals. And they wanted to go to Moscow and do the same thing, do a big deal in the middle of Red Square. And I said, "You know, they won't take as nice a view of it as the New York Police do. They'll send you right out to a place where it's very cold." [Laughs] And they said, "We don't care." They were ready to go. They had a truck ready in Germany. This is what's so interesting about that time. We thought that you could do that. We couldn't make a mistake. But we couldn't make any money either.

EH: Even though there were other cameras running, I heard you mostly used your own footage for 1 P.M. Though I hear there's a story about shooting the Jefferson Airplane rooftop concert.

D.A.P: Ricky and I interchanged sometimes—I would do sound for Ricky and he would do sound for me. We never thought of either of us as the prime cameramen. [For the concert], I set up a camera for Godard because he'd never shot a camera. I was amazed. He kept saying, "Now, don't zoom too much." And I thought, okay, that's a good idea—Maysles also used to tell me not to zoom so much. So we set up a camera on a tripod in my

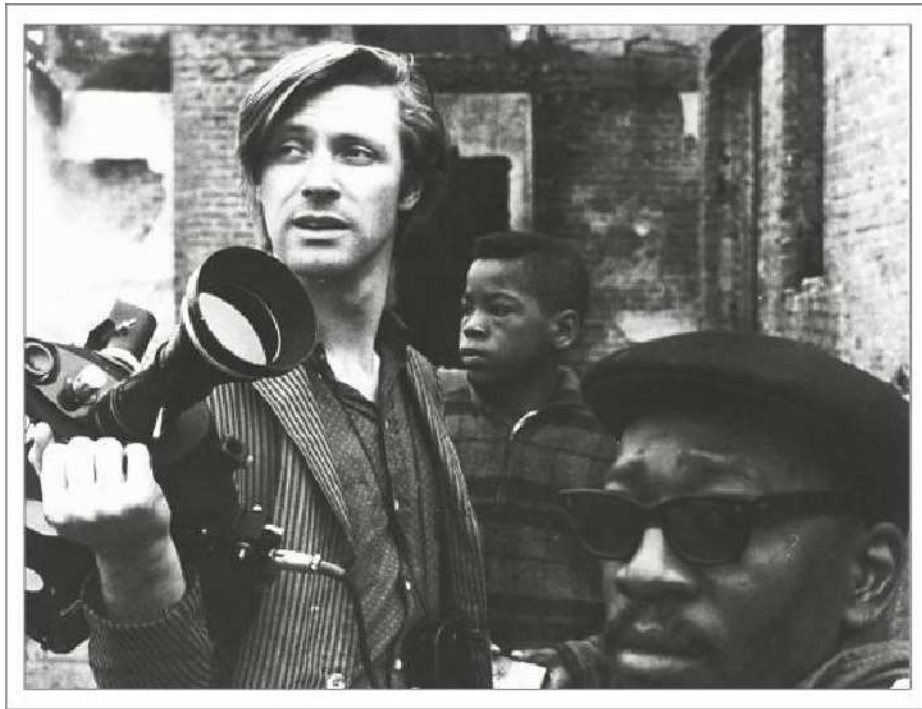
office window looking out on the top of the hotel roof. There was a whole shot of his that I never cut a frame out of because it was so good—he was zooming like a crazy kid first encountering the zoom. But it was still interesting because you could see he was looking for something. At one point, he zooms and pans up along the RCA building and comes to the top where it says RCA, looks for a minute and goes down again. And I thought if he knew that the Airplane belonged to RCA, and that it was a requirement for us to [incorporate the sign] in order to get them, he would have died. It would have outraged him. [Laughs] But he just filmed it. It's kind of wonderful. ■

The Apocalyptic Tourist

by Eric Hynes

The Fall

directed by Peter Whitehead





*I have to tell the truth, I have to be objective.
My subjects have to be objects. But sooner or
later you have to take sides.*

—PETER WHITEHEAD, *THE FALL*

To watch *The Fall* is to be embattled by *The Fall*. An essay, a dialectical exercise, a visual and sonic experimentation, a documentary, a stunt, a record, a statement, an idea, a harangue, a grenade, an opus, *The Fall* presses hard against its time and place until it pulses outward to the past and future, then back in on itself, as exhausting as it is exhaustive, as totalizing as it is total. *The Fall* is a bow shot and parting shot for Peter Whitehead, a 30-year-old filmmaker who dropped the mic and scarcely returned to the stage after all was edited and done, literally wandering the desert to teach falconry in Saudi Arabia in the decades that followed. This would be tragic if the film didn't entail a career's worth of ideas and developments deployed at once, if it weren't a whole hog, endgame, *Don Quixote* of meta-filmic kaleidoscopic disquisitions. Falconry seems like a *logical* next chapter after *The Fall*.

Even the title is manifold, describing a societal descent, a specifically New York/American civilization plummet, a personal breakdown, a filmic materialist

disintegration, and simply the time of year when Whitehead set out to make *The Fall*. In town for the 1967 New York Film Festival, where his films *Benefit of the Doubt* and *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London* were screening, the Englishman was cajoled into training his lens on Gotham, the de facto capital of a civilization he found both kinetically alluring and politically deplorable. From that autumn through May of 1968, he would shoot a daunting spectrum of activity: a pro-military rally in Washington Square Park, an anti-war march on Washington D.C., lefty traveling theater troupes in Union Square and Central Park, art openings, art happenings, poetry readings, football games, dance parties, photo shoots, Newark in smoldering ruins, and the tide-turning sit-ins at Columbia University.

One of the more important things to realize about *The Fall*, which is apparent throughout the film, is that not only didn't Whitehead arrive in NYC without preconceptions, those preconceptions are the basis for the film's very conception. Whitehead's damning

view of the city, and of the country, culture, and politics he asserts the city stands for, accounts for the most infuriatingly intractable aspect of the film. But it also stands as a built-in proof of the film's subjectivity—and thus only affirms Whitehead's prevailing purpose, which is to obliterate any notion of objectivity. There's no pretending that the filmmaker is a mere vessel for footage, that he's ever just pointing and shooting whatever passes before him, and the film *starts* from that place. Whitehead has his beliefs, his theories and notions about the city, and he's making a film motivated by them. In a sense, *The Fall* is the ultimate tourist film. The tourist can observe, but can never cease being a tourist; he can't ever look but from the eyes he's imported, for good and for ill. Rather than shrink from this reality, Whitehead cops to and embraces it. He samples street scenes and protest rallies like a diner at a buffet, and sizes up the culture by flipping through the TV dial. "Sometimes outsiders see us with a much clearer light than we see ourselves," he says, with a heavy dose of entitlement that's cannily deconstructed moments later via footage of the director touring the city next to a rent-a-model from the plush back seat of a Cadillac, the landscape speeding past and comfortably framed by the car window. It's preening, but also an admission of preening. For starters, these sequences were staged—the gal isn't an actual paramour but model Alberta Tiburzi ("No she doesn't have to be able to act," he tells her casting agent), and the man behind the wheel gets one of the grooviest screen credits in history, "Angelo Mannsraven—Driving the Cadillac." But also Whitehead's epileptic, cubistic, MTV-15-years-before-MTV editing style turns every

second of the film into a construct. Whether any particular sequence is acquired on the fly or concocted for the camera, it all ultimately functions as matter for the director's infinitely malleable cinematic collage. Supplementing, and at times overwhelming the visuals, is a soundscape riddled with haunting, often atonal Hammond organ riffs on Bernstein-Sondheim's "America," contrapuntal atmospheric, and the warping hum of a TV tuner. It may contain invaluable documentation, and it may come on as an audio-visual essay, but *The Fall* is never other than a work of art.

Though quite opposite to Direct Cinema in its interventionist, fiddly, textural, editorializing execution, *The Fall* is startlingly direct in intent. Unlike his kindred spirit and semi-hero Godard, Whitehead doesn't mince his words or riddle his meanings. This can make him, and his film, rather didactic, too transparently condemnatory and condescendingly English in its anti-Americanism. "A city gone mad," he drones as Tiburzi cavorts in his rented flat, "condemned to an addiction to the present, the now, the news," his words pegging that New York minute yet echoing with centuries of Euro disgust with upstart, culturally greener America. "The real world must be somewhere else." But that overflowing revulsion also makes him impossible to laugh off or relegate, and makes even his broadsides double as confessions, his naïveté seem calculated, the thinness of his diatribes feel subjectively weighted. Rather than slink about, Godard-like, in sunglasses, the raffishly, practically self-mockingly handsome Whitehead spends ample screen time looking

straight into the camera lens, his gaze as frankly direct as cinema gets.

After fairly attacking the notion of objectivity, and asserting the work's multilayered subjectivity, Whitehead takes the film to a genuinely surprising place for its third act. From swirling psychedelic notions of the apocalypse, replete with fantasies of assassinations (the Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy murders bring out the macabre thought experimentalist in Whitehead), the film left-turns to something like a Whiteheadian utopia. We move behind the barricades of the Columbia University sit-ins, where students seized control of Hamilton Hall and the Low Library in protest of the University's affiliation with the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), a weapons think tank, and the construction of a school gymnasium in Harlem's Morningside Park. These sequences are notably free of both Whitehead's violent, slice-and-dice editing style and contrapuntal sound, and are the closest *The Fall* gets to the brand of Direct Cinema that he otherwise aims to denude. Yet since these events most closely illustrate the director's own outlook and ambitions—the collectivism, the activism, the

youth and vibrancy—they also represent him at his most subjective. His footage is warm and playful, and shows students effectively forming an ad-hoc society within the barricaded halls of the library; what it doesn't show are the conflicts between protesting factions, the rancorous split along racial lines, the complications of paradise. Though the protests would last for eight days, and, it should be noted, proved effective at both dissolving the University's association with IDA and halting construction of the gym, Whitehead's parting impressions are of the swift and violent denouement witnessed by his camera. Always, ever, a fall. From nocturnal shots of students nursing bloody foreheads and being yanked to the ground by cops, he cuts to his own image on a flickered TV set, the modern carnival mirror revealing a face befogged by static, as electric and flatly mediated as everything else we've just seen. This final fall from grace is apparently more than he can bear, hastening a film-ending crash into silence and darkness. For its time, and also for the psyche of its maker, *The Fall* is both a record and a projection. Subjective and objective. Documentary and fiction. Its great feat, thrilling and devastating to this day, is managing to make those phenomena one and the same. ■

interview with peter whitehead

ERIC HYNES: *In looking through all of these films from the 1960s I realized that the most fascinating ones were made basically from around mid '67 through late '68.*

PETER WHITEHEAD, writer/director of *The Fall*: Yeah, that was the high point I would think. After that people became a little more self-conscious. When I made *The Fall*, I was not quite sure about anything,

you know? That period was when we still had a certain kind of curiosity and naïveté about everything. Then everyone got a bit disillusioned, which is perhaps why all the work that came after that particular period wasn't quite so intense. I hate to say this, but after I made *The Fall*, I looked away from filmmaking. I walked away and never really took anything seriously ever again about watching or making movies until, in fact, a couple of years ago when I made another film called *Terrorism Considered as One of the Fine Arts* (2009).

EH: What brought you to New York to make The Fall?

PW: All the films I'd made in England I considered, on reflection, to be about America. I mean, at the time I made *Wholly Communion* I was working for news as a cameraman, but I was also working secretly for the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. I was in fact editing films from North Vietnam. Then, from *Wholly Communion*, I jumped into *Benefit of the Doubt*, which is all about Peter Brook's production of *US*, the theater play. *Tonite, Let's All Make Love in London*, which was my spoof film about Swinging London, was really about how we'd been hyped up by America. For me, the '60s was America—the cultural imperialism of America, which I resented bitterly, and foresaw as being a total disaster for everyone concerned forever. And I would still say exactly that. So *Benefit of the Doubt* and *Tonite, Let's All Make Love in London* were invited to the New York Film Festival as a double bill, called "The London Scene." It was there that I was approached by two young women, who asked, "Would you like to make a film in New York?" I said

I'd be very interested. So they said, "Okay, we'll raise some money." I wanted to try to expose how I felt that American culture was absolutely saturated with violence in one form or another. So I started doing a lot of filming—documentary, pure documentary—of everything I could scavenge on the streets of America, and following this particular thesis that this zeitgeist of violence, of imperialism, was a violation of the people. Part One was going to be the camera—what I could see outside. Part Two was where it went into the artist, the person who is sensitive to these particular issues and contradictions. And then finally, of course, [the] Columbia [University sit-ins] happened, and I thought to myself, Well, bloody hell. Finally all these young people have suddenly occupied one of these big institutions in New York. But in the meantime, you see, the whole process had changed. I discovered that I wanted to make it much more of a film about perception and participation and representation of myself. I wanted to challenge the idea of making objective documentaries, which at that point I decided you could not make. That it was a myth. I felt like I can't just disappear. This film has got to be about me. And I have the right as an outsider to say here I am, an Englishman experiencing America and American culture in New York.

EH: Then with the Columbia sit-ins, you really became part of it.

PW: In the middle of filming I discovered that Columbia had been occupied. So I went with my camera and knocked on one of the windows. I said "I'm Peter Whitehead. I'd love to come in and film. How

wonderful it is you've occupied the University." And they said, "Fuck off." [Laughs] "We're not having any fucking media coming in." And I said, "Hey, I just made a film about Vietnam. I just made a film with [Allen] Ginsberg. It was shown at the New York Film Festival in September." And suddenly I heard a voice from behind one of the other blokes. He had seen my films. He disappeared for two minutes and came back and said, "I've had a word with Tom Hayden—Peter Whitehead, come on in and join us," which was the most wonderful moment of my life. I was inside. I was one of them. I ceased to be an observing voyeur. I had become a participant. And that was the significance of Columbia for me, that I was merely one out of a bunch of people who were standing up and saying, "This is wrong. We don't like it, and we don't want it to happen."

EH: The film is so intricately constructed, so rhythmically put together. How difficult was it to edit?

PW: I had to cut every single shot with a razor blade and glue it together. It's the most edited film in history. Well, it certainly was at the time. I had a complete nervous breakdown in the middle of it. Nearly ended up drowning in the sea in bloody Sardinia. I had such a total collapse that I had to put myself together, and I discovered the only way to do that was to put the film together. Then I spent 30 years in the desert trapping falcons and everything. I'm sure you know all that. But then all these years later, when it was playing at the Edinburgh Film Festival, I was so amazed. I guess you do forget things, because I felt like it had been made by somebody else. There wasn't a single edit or word

or image that was out of place. I was under some kind of trance, you know?

EH: Do you think you were accurately seeing what was in front of you in New York? Were you even going for accuracy?

PW: The first film I ever made was called *The Perception of Life*. I had to shoot the whole thing through microscopes because it was a history of the theories made by scientists as to what was living material. Since their theories were based on what they saw through microscopes, I went back to the museums and started filming through those microscopes to show what they saw, to show how they were forced to come to their conclusions because they were limited by the technology. I was aware that the microscope stood between the mind and the decisions made. By the time I made *The Fall*, I was aware that my camera was standing between me and authentic experience. I could never believe again in making a film without questioning everything about subjectivity and objectivity, what was true and what wasn't true. Being aware that every edit was a lie. If you cut something, it is a lie. Godard had this problem, too, and so did the Russians for God's sake. But back to your question, I never questioned whether it was true what I was filming. You're trying to say to me, "Well, can I look at *The Fall* as an objective truth?" And I'm saying, Well fuck me, no. The whole film is about the fact that you can't do that.

EH: What I'm trying to get at is that your film seems to fight against the whole notion that documentary can be a truth.

PW: I think my film is in fact a double documentary. It's a documentary about what I film, and it's a documentary about myself filming it. It's a two-way mirror. A hologram. A holographic image is where you take two images, and you make them interfere, and you get three-dimensional time and space. The point is that you can't separate the two sides out. I didn't go up to anyone and say, "Oh, no. Can you move over please?" You know, I wasn't a fascist. I just went, sat in the corner and filmed. As you do in a

newsreel, as you do in a microscope. I was making a documentary film on what was going on in New York. But why have I got myself in the bloody film? Because I wasn't prepared to show all the rest and claim it was true without saying, "Hold on there. Look, I'm in this up to my teeth. Here's me holding the camera. Here's me on the editing machine." And I'm chopping it up smaller and smaller and smaller until bang. It's gone. The film has been destroyed. And I have been destroyed. ■

Reflections in a Cinematographic Mirror

by Eric Hynes

David Holzman's Diary

directed by Jim McBride





I'll be your mirror
Reflect what you are, in case you don't know
— "I'LL BE YOUR MIRROR," THE VELVET
UNDERGROUND & NICO (1966)

A man makes a picture
A moving picture
Through the light projected
He can see himself up close
— U2, "LEMON" (1994)

Objects. People. Events. Seem to speak to me. They seem to carry some meaning that I can't quite get. My life, though, ordinary enough, seems to haunt me in uncommon ways. It seems to come to me from somewhere else. I've been trying to understand it but it seems I can't get it. So the noted French wit Jean-Luc Godard said what is film? Film is truth 24 times a second. So I thought that if I put it all down on film, and I run it back and forth, and I put my thumb on it, and I stop it when I want to, then I got everything. I got it all. I should get it all. I should get the meaning. I should understand it. So this is what this is going to be. I'm going to make a diary. My diary.
—L.M. Kit Carson as David, *David Holzman's Diary*

In a sense, *David Holzman's Diary* marks the beginning of the modern media era. Fundamental changes in the production, consumption, and physical engagement with film were afoot in the mid-1960s,

particularly the increasing portability and affordability of film cameras and sound recorders, a tandem development that allowed for on-the-fly sync sound and, most seismically, solo filmmaking. Suddenly it was possible for a filmmaker to approximate the self-sufficiency of a writer, painter or singer-songwriter, and have autonomy over his or her art. And what was the lonely probing artist to do with such self-sufficiency, but make a subject of the self—to scrutinize his reflection, heroicize his reflection, and posit that reflection as evidence of a larger human condition. But with *David Holzman's Diary* Jim McBride went one further—he identified that even a form with the veracious promise of film ("cinema is objectivity in time," wrote André Bazin) could also be a looking glass, a distorter as well as a recorder, a bald-faced liar employing the vocabulary of truth.

The film comes on as a first person, documentary-style, chronological diary of a young man, recently unemployed and potentially going off to war. David

rambles for the camera about his ambitions and ideas, shoots his home and surroundings, and generally tries to give a wholistic sense of his life (including his TV watching and masturbation habits). The footage is so raw that it seems to be edited in camera, with David visibly switching the machine on and off, and including interstitial sequences of placement, light flares, and distorted sound. Yet it's all a fiction.

McBride's movie not only pegged the emerging self-sufficiently self-obsessive moment but also anticipated (and pre-satirized) the next half-century of first-person cinema—of videocam monologues, of YouTube exhibitionism, of faux confessionals, of media's psychic irresolution; it jump-started the genres of pseudo-documentary, mockumentary, and "documentary-style" fictions. It's partly why the film doesn't feel dated, despite the now antiquated technology and deep-dyed specificity of its time and place (NYC, summer of '67). It's not a record of a world since passed, but rather the groundbreaking for a terrain we're still tramping over.

Yet despite the clichés that its style would become, and despite being largely a fiction, the film rings bracingly true, like a phlegmatic Dostoevskian moan that never fails to stir the bones. A bewildered son to *A Man With a Movie Camera*, which had exploded with revolutionary, re-inventive potential 40 years prior, *David Holzman's Diary* witnesses a modern man elevated by technology yet dogged by mortality, manipulating a machine of mass communication to express private distress. For what gives McBride's film enduring, gut-punching power is not its fact/fiction

sleight of hand, but its lock-eyed existential lament, with David pursuing both voyeurism and exhibitionism to a queasy ground zero.

It starts with a whisper to break silence. "Test, test, test," David says, looking for audio confirmation that all is functional, and also that he's actually there. "Please pay attention." As with all diaries, it's never clear if he's speaking solely to himself or to a potential audience, if he's keeping himself company or if we—the idea of a 'we'—are. He's acting as his own witness, as well as recording for posterity, with his buzzing radio offering a wallpapered time capsule (the Vietnam War, a state of emergency in Newark) of the larger moment. With Carson superbly fabricating direct-address candor before that was even a thing, David itemizes his equipment and refers to his camera as "friend"; he plays unseen tour guide to his neighborhood, the Upper West Side of Manhattan; he films his girlfriend Penny (Eileen Dietz), a nude fashion model who wants no part of David's intrusive camera—a seeming contradiction that David can neither fathom nor honor; he creepily shoots into a stranger's apartment, *Rear Window* style, and fabricates a life for her; he interviews strangers on the street, most notably a husky-voiced Amazonian who propositions him for sex (one of the few straight documentary sequences in the film); and he gets reprimanded from a friend, Pepe (Lorenzo Mans), who deconstructs the fallacies of the whole enterprise in a monologue of dizzying meta-ness.

"As soon as you start filming something, whatever happens in front of the camera is not reality anymore.

It becomes part of something else. It becomes a movie," Pepe says to said camera—lines written, and to some degree sincerely felt, by McBride. "Your decisions stop being moral decisions and they become aesthetical decisions. And your whole life stops being your life and becomes a work of art. And a very bad work of art." Of course this awareness, both within a fictional and documentary context, is what makes it a very great work of art. (Fascinatingly, McBride would go on to actively take on these problems and paradoxes in a first-person documentary context, making a film of his own life in *My Girlfriend's Wedding*, before veering off to Hollywood and feature filmmaking.)

Yet the most important thing that David shoots is himself, seated at his desk or perched in the corner of his studio, a lavalier microphone around his neck attesting to the sync-sound nowness, surrounded by reels and canisters, movie posters and magazine clippings. It makes for a man-among-his-tools self-portrait worthy of Hockney. But instead of a mirror in the corner offering a glimpse of the artist at work, here the mirror reflects the camera through which we're watching—the artist as separately propelled machine, as disembodied other. "You haven't told me anything. You have. I have. This is ridiculous. Why am I sitting here talking to you, to two machines?" he says amid a mother-of-all meltdowns, losing all sense of where he begins and ends, what he's made

happen versus what's happened to him, what differentiates "you" from "I," animate from inanimate. "What the fuck do you want? Why doesn't this help me? Why doesn't this help me?"

McBride's film is a fiction, but his script anticipated the dialogue of our contemporary lives. Do film and other media bring us closer to, or further from, ourselves? Are we ever alone? Are we ever in control of the devices we're meant to control? Are reflections of self ever anything but fictions? Are fictions ever anything but reflections of self? *David Holzman's Diary* captures a moment when modern man was able to see better than he ever had before, yet his sense of self only got murkier. David lost the plot of his own diary, and 46 years later none of us are any closer to finding it. But unlike the simplistic satires and finger-wagging media critiques that would follow, McBride's film doesn't put the onus on media, but rather on the inherent sorrow and corruptions of existence, our human tendency to pervert everything we touch into monstrous projections of ourselves. David is David's problem, not society's, not media's, not the camera's; but simultaneously, despite his frustrations over what he's wrought, his creation is also a solution—to loneliness, to inaction, to powerlessness. Personal cameras giveth and taketh away thusly to this day. In both form and content, *David Holzman's Diary* is a bent reflection of our mediated gaze, and it's utterly uncanny. ■

ERIC HYNES: From direct quotations to mementos in the apartment, your character David surrounds himself in cinephilia—Godard, Truffaut, Hitchcock, Minnelli. Was that the case for you as well?

JIM McBRIDE, writer/director of *David Holzman's Diary*: They are certainly touchstones for me in my life. These films were in the air, in the world that I inhabited in those days. It was an exciting time in New York. It felt like a movement of these fans who love movies, who were thinking about all these ideas and different kinds of experimentations. One of the things that was particularly interesting to me was the whole idea of *cinéma vérité*. L.M. Kit Carson, who is the actor in the film, and I shared that. We had some gig to write a monograph about *cinéma vérité*, which we never published, but did spend a lot of time interviewing everyone who was trying to deal with this idea of reality and truth. A lot of these people, particularly the documentary filmmakers, were involved with the invention of the technology that made it possible to go into people's lives and record what was going on without altering things too much. They felt as if they were really onto something, that they were approaching a kind of idea of proof. That was a stimulating concept but it was also something that was slightly missing the point. Over time I actually came up with this idea that if a filmmaker thinks that he can figure out proof about something, then the actual filming of it undermines the idea. It proves him wrong.

EH: But was there proof in your film? Was any aspect of what you were filming documentary?

JM: Oh yeah, a lot of it was just, you know, we would go out on the streets and film. There was a lot of stuff that just happened. Then there's the other stuff that you create.

EH: What's fascinating is that even in those documented sequences, there's a voiceover that fictionalizes things to some degree.

JM: I don't know quite how to put this, but when you're making a movie you're constantly, whether it's fictional or factual, you're constantly sort of looking at what you're doing as you're doing it. You're realizing what you have, how to incorporate that into a master plan, if there is a master plan. In my case there wasn't—or not much of one. But there was an idea.

EH: Even films that purport to be direct cinema documentaries have master plans. They just don't want you to know about it.

JM: After the fact.

EH: So you had an idea that took shape as things went along?

JM: We never really had a script or anything. But I did have this idea about a guy trying to make a film about himself, and through that to better understand his life and what the point of it was. Kit Carson and I basically sat in a room with a tape recorder, and I would give him a certain broad outline of what I wanted to happen or

to see. He would then put it into his own words, and we would listen to it and he would say, "Oh that was pretty good," or "That's bad," and we would end up with something that we thought we wanted. Then we would move onto the next thing. So over the course of, I don't know, two or three days, we essentially had "written the script" without writing much down. When we shot it all, we tried to know pretty much what was going to happen in each moment because we didn't have very much film. We had enough to do one or two takes for each scene. Even after we finished the main body of shooting, there were things that we went back and shot to make the whole thing work. So that's just basically how it happened. It wasn't about having a master plan. It was more just executing.

EH: It's interesting that you were working with so little film, because you get the sense that the camera's just rolling.

JM: We had talked to [Richard] Leacock and those guys, and actually worked in the vérité world, so we knew how liberal you have to be with film, how prepared you have to be for anything to happen. It's not that I imitated that approach, but I was informed by that approach, and was able to create a film that looked like it was shot that way but wasn't really.

EH: This was one of the first films to take on, as its subject, the new mobility of filmmaking. Was there a general sense at that moment that this was a turning point in terms of what was possible?

JM: I think that was at the heart of a lot of what was going on in moviemaking at that time. This was the

early to mid '60s, the time of the French New Wave, when those guys, particularly Godard, were getting at some sense of what real life is like on film, rather than the sort of confectionary way that traditional Hollywood movies would portray life. There was also what we called at the time the American Underground, which had all of these interesting filmmakers working with the most primitive kind of equipment—like Stan Brakhage was shooting Super 8. So people were coming at it from different ends, from different angles. There was a whole world to explore. Some of them did it in a very journalistic way, others in a more poetic way.

EH: I love how David refers to the equipment as his friends. And obviously by the end of the film, he's talking to the camera as if it's a different person.

JM: Not only is it a person, it's a person who's controlling him.

EH: And then he attacks the film, too, the actual celluloid. I love how everything is visible—all of the material that goes into this film is in front of you. In a sense you're demystifying the process even while you're mystifying everything.

JM: We loved all that stuff. This generation of filmmakers were all interested in the process. We were all really just learning about it. Loving the feel of the film and how to make a splice, how to run a projector and how to keep something in focus. All these basic things, the physical, practical aspects of filmmaking, were part of the aesthetic.

EH: One thing that interests me about the time period, which your film really captures, is this sense of almost limitless possibility in terms of both film and personal lives—drug and sexual experimentation—but also a sense of impending doom. The Newark riots, Vietnam, society falling apart. Did it feel like dystopia and utopia were going on at the same time?

JM: I'd never heard it explained that way, but it's not a bad way of looking at it. It was all kind of boiling under the surface. There were all these awful things happening in the world—as there are now, as there always are, I guess. It all eventually sort of exploded into the youth moment, the anti-war movement, the civil rights movement. It did feel like there was something happening, and I was in the mix of it.

EH: Your film was also basically predictive of where our society was going in terms of people making spectacles of themselves. You look at the Internet, YouTube, even way before that with videocam culture in the '70s and '80s. Are you surprised at all by how prescient you were?

JM: Well, I don't really know about it really. I lived through that experience, I made that movie, then made another couple of movies that turned the camera back on myself. Then I lost interest in it. All that stuff [that you're talking about] happened later on. I didn't follow it very much. I mean, it's a legitimate enterprise to explore your own reality. Certainly in terms of the diary, the journal. And there's been a long tradition of self-portraiture in painting. But it was never really possible in movies because everything

was so expensive. So as things got cheaper and easier to use, it just seemed inevitable that that would be a result of it.

EH: I love the speech that David's friend Pepe gives, saying: "Go write a script. Make a good movie. Your own life is a bad movie." I don't mean to relate this to you directly, but I was wondering if that was at all a projection of things you were trying to work through yourself. Because soon thereafter you made a first-person documentary—a really lovely one—called My Girlfriend's Wedding.

JM: It was kind of stupid, wasn't it, not to have learned a lesson. [Laughs] I look at those films now and I cringe with embarrassment. But there was something in the air about... You set aside the issue of reality and truth, and there's another word, which is honesty. One of the things that motivated a lot of the cultural revolution going on in those days was this feeling that what came from the establishment, what came from television, was a manufactured idea, was bourgeois middle class values or something like that. There was something to trying to find a different way of approaching one's life. Finding a personal sense of honesty and truth was a goal. That's probably what motivated me.

EH: The notion of honesty is almost a separate conversation to truth. Because you can be honest while making a fiction, and you can be dishonest while working in non-fiction.

JM: That's very true. ■



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