‘JUST ACT NATURALLY’:
A POETICS OF DOCUMENTARY PERFORMANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation formulates a poetics of performance in nonfiction film and television. Building on a large body of converging research that calls for an acknowledgment of: the constructedness of documentary texts; the performative nature of identity; and the significance of screen performance, I illustrate the way in which documentary subjects must finally be seen as creative agents who (consciously or not) play a significant role in determining the meanings, functions, and effects of the films in which they appear.

A first chapter lays the groundwork for this discussion, setting out a means of understanding and investigating the documentary performer’s work. It is argued that nonfiction performance is a three-tiered process, wherein everyday performative activity (tier #1) is shaped by and often tailored to the camera (tier #2) within specific nonfiction film frameworks (tier #3). In addition to providing a flexible and generally applicable model of what the nonfiction subject’s work entails, this conceptualization suggests an appropriate means of analysing individual documentary performances, indicating the necessity of attending to the way in which twice modified everyday self-presentational tools serve as signifiers in any given nonfiction text.

Subsequent chapters turn from the issue of what nonfiction performance involves to a consideration of what it accomplishes. Drawing from scholarship devoted to each of the three levels of the documentary ‘social actor’s’ work, I posit three major functions for nonfiction
performance. Chapter 2 demonstrates the way in which the individuals who appear in documentaries play a significant role in the construction of ‘characters’, which, in turn, exert an indelible influence on the meaning(s) of the texts in which they figure. Chapter 3 argues that nonfiction performance helps to bolster and/or to destabilize normative understandings of identity categories such as gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, race, class and dis/ability. Finally, the concluding chapter discusses the way in which documentary performers help to invite affective reactions from spectators, and – in so doing – contribute significantly to nonfiction texts’ ability to effectuate social change. Detailed analyses of a wide range of documentaries provide support for these contentions.
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All figures are frame enlargements taken, with permission, from a DVD of the film in question.

Images from Operation Filmmaker by permission of Nina Davenport.

Images from Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience by permission of ‘The Documentary Group.’ 125 West End Ave. New York, NY 10023.
**Introduction: Documentary Performance?**

“Everybody in the world is an actor. Conversation is acting. Man as a social animal is an actor; everything we do is some sort of a performance”

– Orson Welles (in Welles and Bogdanovich 262)

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman advances a definition of performance that echoes Welles’ comment quite closely. A ‘performance,’ Goffman argues, consists of “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his [or her] continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (22). From Goffman’s (and Welles’) perspective(s), that is, *all* communicative social activity is, in fact, performance, and can be studied fruitfully as such.¹

This dissertation applies this insight to the documentary context, formulating a poetics of performance in nonfiction film and television. Rather than situating documentary subjects as part of the profilmic ‘reality’ *represented by* a given film or television broadcast, I attend to the numerous means by which such individuals exert “some influence on the observers” who view their onscreen activities (Goffman ibid). In so doing, I demonstrate that documentary subjects must finally be seen as creative agents who (consciously or not) play a significant role in determining the meanings, functions, and effects of the texts in which they appear.

In spite of its potential significance, nonfiction performance has not received much scholarly attention. In fact, but for a few exceptions (which I will discuss shortly), theorists and researchers have passed rapidly over the documentary subject’s work, if/when they have discussed it at all. In *Acting in the Cinema*, for instance, James Naremore raises the issue only to drop it without further comment. He makes the useful observation that the term performance applies even to the activities of non-actors who are unaware of being filmed (15), but then focuses strictly on acting within fictional, narrative texts. That said,
Naremore’s study is nonetheless exceptional in its acknowledgment – however cursory – of the very existence of performance in documentary film. As Vinicius do Valle Navarro points out, film studies and documentary scholarship have by and large been marked by a sense that nonfiction performance is “a sort of taboo better left untouched” (6).

Even amongst the few critics who have devoted some attention to the documentary subject’s work, many are loath to admit performance into the nonfiction realm without qualification. Despite recognizing that documentary thrives on a kind of “virtual performance” (Representing Reality 122), and labeling the individuals who populate nonfiction texts “social actors” (ibid 42), for instance, Bill Nichols ultimately equates performance with excess (ibid 141). In this respect, he implicitly positions it as something that stands \textit{outside} the ambit of documentary discourse, something that – in Navarro’s words – “exposes the limits of non-fictional representation and must thereby be circumvented, omitted, or avoided” (12). Likewise, while John Corner notes that “the necessarily creative and transformative business of documentary-making … may encourage varieties of ‘performance’ even where there is no intent to dramatise” (32), he also casts performance as “a problem” that often compromises the evidentiary status of documentary films (51-52).

Perhaps most tellingly in this regard, in an entry ostensibly devoted to nonfiction acting in the \textit{Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film}, Paul Miller spends the majority of his time discussing the use of non-actors in \textit{fictional} works. He attends happily to performance in films by Pudovkin and the neorealists, and in recent drama-doc hybrids such as \textit{American Splendor} (Shari Springer Berman/Robert Pulcini, USA, 2003), while passing over texts more commonly referred to as documentaries without comment (with the single exception of \textit{Man With a Movie Camera} [Dziga Vertov, Russia, 1929]).\footnote{By largely excluding nonfiction films}
from the discussion in this way, Miller too manifests a palpable discomfort with the notion that documentary subjects perform. Like Nichols and Corner, he evokes a sense of the incompatibility of documentary and performance even as he speaks of the potential confluence between the two.

In large part, this neglect of and hesitation about nonfiction performance seems to be attributable to a general tendency to conflate ‘performance’ and ‘acting.’ While these two terms are often used interchangeably in everyday parlance, scholars such as Richard Schechner have argued that the latter is in fact a “sub-category” of the former (174). In particular, acting is commonly understood as that portion of performance that involves pretense. Michael Kirby, for example, writes, “To act means to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate. … [N]ot all performing is acting” (40).³ Insofar as the individuals who appear in documentary texts are rarely asked to enact roles outside of their own identities, acting (in this sense) does indeed seem to be only an infrequent feature of nonfiction discourse. Furthermore, the connection between acting and artifice makes the former seem not only uncommon but also inappropriate within a mode of representation predicated (at least in the popular consciousness) on the imaging of ‘truth.’ From one commonly held perspective, that is, nonfiction subjects must not act when they appear before the camera (unless their impersonation has been lucidly justified and explained); those that do must be seen as mendacious con artists attempting to abuse viewers’ faith in the documentary project. Given that few people would want to label all documentary subjects duplicitous in this way, it’s not surprising that acting hasn’t been an issue of high priority for nonfiction scholars. Performance, it would appear, has also been avoided by extension.
Exacerbating this problem, some of the topics that have been most pressing for individuals thinking about documentary also happen to have the side effect of deflecting attention away from the work of the nonfiction ‘social actor’. For example, several scholars – such as Jay Ruby and Bill Nichols – have expressed a particular interest in documentary ethics. Most commonly, these writers argue for the need to attend to what Ruby calls “the moral questions that arise when *one person produces and uses a recognizable image of another*” (209, emphasis added). This is certainly a laudable approach, and it has generated many significant observations that are beyond the scope of this introduction. Without detracting from these insights, I only want to underline here that this method doesn’t leave much room for a consideration of the documentary subject as a creative contributor to the film/program at hand. Essentially, such writers place their emphasis firmly on the things done to documentary subjects, rather than the things done by them, implicitly foreclosing the possibility of attending to the nonfiction performer as an active agent in the process.

Finally, this tendency to pass over nonfiction performance may have also been fed by what Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Frank Tomasulo call “the long-standing perception that film technology and cinematic technique produce screen performances” (“Introduction” 11). Ever since Lev Kuleshov first proclaimed that montage could shape and alter the actor’s work (55), film performers have been widely understood to exert an exceedingly limited influence on the texts in which they figure. At an extreme, they have been described as mere props to be manipulated by directors and editors. Though few writers go this far in their denigration of the film actor, it is nonetheless true that many understand screen performances to be constructed largely through the work of people and processes beyond the performer him/herself. And as Paul Miller points out, “to the extent that that assertion is true, it holds
regardless of whether the acting performance occurs in a fiction film or in a documentary” (4). Like his/her fictional counterpart, the documentary performer is thus understood to occupy a rather circumscribed position within the text in which s/he appears. This position again prevents those endorsing it from engaging in nonfiction performance analysis, suggesting that effects ostensibly engendered by the documentary performer are merely derivative by-products of other formal choices.

Running alongside all of these factors that militate against the study of documentary performance, however, are an equal or greater number of considerations that suggest the validity and import of such a pursuit. Given my focus on nonfiction performance in this project, I’d like to devote some time to examining these issues that underline the necessity of considering the documentary agent’s creative work.

**Why Study Documentary Performance?**

Perhaps the most compelling reason to initiate an examination of nonfiction performance is the fact that the large body of contemporary documentary theory seems to call precisely for this kind of investigation. In particular, a central trend in recent nonfiction scholarship has involved critiquing the commonsense notion that documentary films constitute a simple, straightforward recording of some pre-existing reality. Against the everyday equation of nonfiction and ‘truth,’ several writers assert (with a variety of emphases) that documentaries are in fact constructed texts that shape, alter and constitute the ‘realities’ that they purport to document. Often, this has involved deconstructing the boundary between fiction and nonfiction in order to underline that documentary ‘fact’ is inevitably a product of discourse and mediation.
Trinh T. Minh-ha, for example, argues, “there is no such thing as documentary – whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques” (90). For Trinh, the texts that we call documentaries are simply those that make use of specific, ideologically determined markers of authenticity and non-intervention. “Although the whole of filmmaking is a question of manipulation,” she writes, “those endorsing the law unhesitantly decree which technique is manipulative and which, supposedly, is not” (98). By making use of the sanctioned techniques of naturalism (synchronous sound, long takes, hand held cameras, etc.), Trinh suggests, most documentaries downplay or disavow their constructed, rather fictional nature, and advance as truth what is actually only “a meaning” (92).

Trinh is certainly not alone in pointing out the way in which the notion of documentary ‘truth’ obscures the inherently manipulative and fabricated nature of the filming process. In a related vein, Michael Renov argues that:

Every documentary representation depends upon its own detour from the real through the defiles of the audio-visual signifier (via choices of language, lens, proximity, and sound environment). The itinerary of a truth’s passage (with ‘truth’ understood as propositional and provisional) for the documentary is, thus, qualitatively akin to that of fiction. This is only another way of saying that there is nothing inherently less creative about nonfictional representations, both may create a ‘truth’ of the text (“Intro” 7).

As Renov (like Trinh) points out, the very fact of filming exerts a kind of fictionalizing influence on the materials presented. Inasmuch as documentaries are the result of unavoidable choices in terms of composition, sound design, editing, etc. (even the mere selection of what to shoot), they necessarily provide us not with the world, but rather with a created image of the world that is “qualitatively akin” (ibid) to the representations of fiction. As Jean-Louis Comolli puts it: a “consequence of all the manipulations which mold the film-
document is a co-efficient of ‘nonreality’: a kind of fictional aura attaches itself to all the
filmed events and facts” (qtd. in Carroll [“From Real”] 237).

Though Trinh, Renov and Comolli don’t explicitly say so, this sense of the
manufactured and/or manipulative nature of nonfiction filmmaking also lays the groundwork
for a consideration of documentary performance. After all, as I mentioned previously, the
widespread tendency to equate acting (and, by extension, performance) with fiction has been
one of the major roadblocks standing in the way of documentary performance study. In
breaking down the fiction/nonfiction divide then, authors such as Renov and Trinh implicitly
create a place for performance within documentary discourse. At the same time, the fact that
these writers underline the constructed, created nature of texts that might, at first glance,
appear ‘natural’ also forces one to reconsider the commonsense proposition that individuals
appearing in documentary texts are simply ‘being themselves.’ Given these insights, a
consideration of nonfiction performance starts to seem appropriate and necessary.

In fact, the need for such analysis becomes especially clear once we acknowledge that
it is not only isolated theorists, such as those mentioned above, who position documentaries
as mediated representations (rather than recordings) of real world situations and events.
Truth be told, this understanding of documentary has become almost axiomatic within
contemporary theory, marking a point of contact between a range of authors whose opinions
differ widely on several other counts. Whereas Trinh and Comolli suggest that the very term
nonfiction is a misnomer, for example, a variety of other theorists resist this contention that
documentary and mainstream narrative cinema are equivalent phenomena. That said, these
other authors nevertheless continue to underline the manufactured, ‘non-natural’ status of
documentary films, even as they argue for the necessity of retaining nonfiction as a discrete and unique category.

Bill Nichols, for instance, has dubbed documentary “A Fiction (Un)Like Any Other” (*Representing Reality* 105), pointing out that the films that fall under this label “do not differ from fictions in their constructedness as texts, but in the representations they make” (ibid 111). Documentaries, Nichols claims, “direct us toward the world” (ibid 110) rather than toward an imaginatively constructed universe, but they nonetheless do so “by means of form, rhetoric and ideology” (ibid), just like their fictional counterparts. Likewise, Carl Plantinga suggests that authors such as Comolli are correct in pointing toward the constructed, manipulated nature of nonfiction films and programs, but wrong in implying that such manipulation necessarily renders the fiction/nonfiction distinction impracticable. Instead, Plantinga argues that “nonfiction makes no claim to reproduce the real, but rather makes claims about the ‘real’” through its own processes of rhetoric and representation (*Rhetoric* 38). In this respect, Plantinga casts creative intervention as a defining aspect of the nonfiction form, rather than positioning it as the element that inevitably transforms documentary into fiction. Finally, John Corner makes a related point by calling a book about nonfiction *The Art of Record* (1996). This title, Corner says, is meant to reflect “a widely recognized and problematic duality in documentary work – its character as both artifice and as evidence” (2). In this characterization, Corner echoes and extends the sense of nonfiction as both document and invention evoked by Frederick Wiseman and Allan King, documentary filmmakers who refer to their work as “Reality Fiction” (qtd. in B. Grant 240) and “Actuality Drama” (4), respectively. At the same time, he also joins Nichols and Plantinga in asserting that, while
documentary is not equivalent to fiction, it nonetheless cannot be seen as some kind of pure, untouched record.

By maintaining this sense that documentaries are necessarily constructed representations, these authors again intimate the feasibility of documentary performance study. If nonfiction films are understood as creative representations rather than neutral recordings (as all of the writers heretofore mentioned agree), then it is not outside the realm of possibility that documentary subjects contribute to this creative process. In the face of all of these arguments about nonfiction constructedness, one is pressed to consider how individuals appearing before the documentary camera/microphone might also make choices (in terms of language, gesture, positioning, and the like) that frame and form the represented ‘real.’ (While filmmakers select what to shoot or mic and how to frame and edit this material, documentary subjects must likewise make choices – often under the explicit guidance of the filmmaker – about what to do or say in front of the camera/microphone and how to do or say it.) Moreover, given Nichols’ and Plantinga’s argument that documentary constitutes a unique form of creative practice, it also seems important to consider how performance might play out specifically as an element of nonfiction discourse. By attempting to conceptualize the ways in which formal elements such as narrative structure, cinematography, and editing are mobilized in documentary texts, Nichols and Plantinga also begin to point to the practicability and significance of thinking through the unique details and functions of nonfiction ‘social acting’ (which is, after all, just another formal element). To this end, such authors again issue an implicit call for documentary performance study – a call that has thus far gone largely unanswered.
The notion of nonfiction performance appears more pressing still when one considers a related strand of writing that focuses more explicitly on the documentary subject. Alongside the tendency to note the subjective, selective, and—therefore—creative aspects of the filmmaking process, several scholars discussing documentary have also commented on the way in which the presence of the camera influences and alters the behaviour of those it records. Countering the ideal that filmmakers can become quasi-invisible, easily forgotten ‘flies on the wall’ (promulgated most emphatically by American practitioners of direct cinema in the 1960s), authors such as David MacDougall⁹ point out that documentary filmmakers are “forever interfering with what it is they seek” (48). This is true not only insofar as representation is a necessarily creative process, but also because “as in particle physics, the process of filming transforms its object” (ibid). Put simply, for MacDougall (and for several others¹⁰) documentary filmmakers not only create specific versions of the world through their formal and technical choices; they also alter and influence the world itself through their mere presence as observers. Most importantly for the present discussion, this line of reasoning underscores that, when confronted by a filmmaker and his/her camera, the vast majority of people will behave differently than they otherwise might.¹¹

Of course, in underlining the inescapability of camera influence in this way, scholars such as MacDougall might also be seen to point rather directly towards the phenomenon of documentary performance, or even documentary acting. Jean-Louis Comolli in fact makes the connection between the camera’s modification of behaviour and performance explicit when he writes, “the nonprofessional actor who places a bet and takes the risk of playing his or her own role in one of my films … is obviously conscious of acting, aware that what is happening is not typical of the nonfilmed life, but of the filmed life” (46).¹² If, as Comolli
and MacDougall suggest, people appearing before a documentary camera do not simply behave ‘naturally,’ then they must be seen as individuals who contribute creatively to the text under construction. In this respect, nonfiction subjects are, most certainly, performers, and their work merits examination in its own right.

In several respects then, recent nonfiction theory seems to demand (or at least to suggest the feasibility of) a consideration of documentary performance. Simultaneously, this notion is rendered even more plausible by the wide range of scholarship that seeks to underline the connections between performance and everyday existence. In fact, while the nonfiction literature prompts one to consider documentary subjects’ creative contributions to the text at hand, this complementary body of research and writing positions such individuals as performers much more specifically. In particular, by suggesting at least four broad parallels between mundane social reality and the work of professional actors in formal contexts, scholars from a range of fields emphasize that even ‘being oneself’ is largely a matter of performance. As a corollary, they also bolster the argument in favour of nonfiction performance study.

To begin with, many of these authors argue that all people are performers insofar as we habitually take part in the kind of communicative activity defined as performance at the outset of this study. Goffman, for instance, contends that quotidian social interactions are determined largely by information that their participants “give” and “give off” (2). When in the presence of others, he writes, “the individual will have to act so that he [sic] intentionally or unintentionally expresses himself, and the others will in turn have to be impressed in some way by him” (ibid, emphasis in original). In a similar fashion, Randall Collins and Michael Makowsky assert, “situations do not simply define themselves. They must be constructed by
symbolic communication and hence social life must be expressive, whatever else it might be” (qtd. in Brissett and Edgley 3). Given the communicative imperative of collective existence, such authors argue, people are near-continually engaged (consciously or not) in the task of conveying information about themselves and the circumstances in which they figure. In this respect, all of us – nonfiction subjects included – are performers of a certain sort.

In addition to pointing out the extent to which mundane interactions conform to the basic definition of performance advanced by Goffman, however, scholars have also noted that these expressive, everyday performances frequently also share a number of other characteristics with their more formalized counterparts. William James, for example, contends that all human beings are rather ‘actorly’ insofar as we take on a variety of pre-existing roles that fluctuate in relation to the contexts and audiences with which we are confronted. “We do not show ourselves to our children as to our Club companions,” he writes, nor “to our customers as to the labourers we employ, to our own masters and employers as to our intimate friends” (qtd. in Burns 129). Rather, we learn what Richard Schechner calls the “appropriate culturally specific bits of behavior” that define each of these relationships within our society (28), and modify our conduct accordingly. In different situations, people assume the pre-determined characteristics of ‘parents,’ ‘children,’ ‘employers,’ ‘employees,’ or ‘friends,’ for example, just as professional actors perform the attributes of countless fictional characters over the course their careers. From this perspective, all human beings (including those who populate nonfiction texts) can be understood as virtual actors, and, in consequence, an analysis of their performance work should be seen as both apposite and potentially fruitful.
Many social psychologists also point out that human beings are motivated strongly to control the way in which we appear to others. Since many of our opportunities and outcomes are dependent on the way that we are seen by those around us, we “typically prefer”, as Mark Leary puts it, “that other people perceive [us] in certain desired ways and not perceive [us] in other, undesired ways” (xiii). Furthermore, this pervasive concern with public opinion has been shown to exert a considerable impact on social behaviour. In Barry Schlenker’s words, people constantly “attempt to influence how other people – real or imagined – perceive our personality traits, abilities, intentions, behaviors, attitudes, values, physical characteristics, social characteristics, family, friends, job, and possessions” (6). Likewise, Goffman writes: we “mobilize [our] activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in [our] interests to convey” (4). Effectively, what all of these writers underscore is that, when confronted by an audience of any sort, people generally mold and present themselves just as stage actors craft their roles for spectators. To this end, all public, social activities can be understood as performances that, as Schlenker says, are “more or less revealing, more or less truthful, more or less deliberate – but performances nonetheless” (35).

Finally, a variety of authors also contend that everyday social subjects are performers inasmuch as they, like their stage counterparts, actively construct identities through doing. For instance, several sociologists of the dramaturgical school have argued that the ‘self’ is in fact an outcome of various performances of selfhood; it is, as Dennis Brissett and Charles Edgely put it, “a meaning” that emerges out of action rather than a pre-existing “entity” that shapes and guides behaviour (18). Perhaps Erving Goffman makes this point most clearly when he writes that the self:

…does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his [or her] action … A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to
impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented (252-253).

Here, Goffman succinctly lays the groundwork for much subsequent theory, pointing out that our identities, much like dramatic characters given life in performance, actually exist in our actions alone. However much we may feel that our conduct is a reflection or byproduct of who we are, the opposite is finally closer to the truth. As Brissett and Edgely maintain, “in the interactive world of human beings, we are simply, only, and completely what we do” (114).

This is precisely the notion that postmodern theorists such as Judith Butler have taken up and extended in recent years. In fact, while Goffman’s sense that the self is merely a “dramatic effect” (253) only appears as a brief postscript to his lengthy treatise on self-presentation, the performative construction of identity is the defining element of much of Butler’s work. Drawing from J.L. Austin’s theory of performative language and Michel Foucault’s understanding of the body (in Stuart Hall’s terms) as “a surface on which different regimes of power/knowledge write their meanings and effects” (51), Butler argues that ostensibly ‘natural’ identity categories are actually created through the repeated enactment of discursively-determined behavioural norms. Speaking of gender, for instance, she says:

Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. … [The] implicit and popular theory of acts and gestures as expressive of gender suggests that gender itself is something prior to the various acts, postures, and gestures by which it is dramatized and known. … If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performativeness is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts … are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation
of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. ("Performative Acts” 162)

As this quotation suggests, Butler – and the countless cultural and literary theorists who have embraced her theoretical formulations – share Goffman’s sense that selfhood is constituted in performance, despite distinguishing their work from Goffman’s in a range of other respects. These authors place new emphasis on the juridical, rule-bound nature of social actions, for instance, but nonetheless continue to stress that identities are constructed through acts, which, as Butler says, “bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts” ("Performative Acts” 155).

In several ways then, theorists and scholars from a range of fields have pointed out that everyday social existence demands decidedly performance-like activity. As a matter of course, human beings help to fix meaning through conscious or unconscious communicative action, train for and take on roles, shape the impression(s) we make on others, and ultimately construct our very identities through social action. With this in mind, the ‘non-actors’ who appear in documentary films and television programs can certainly be seen – and discussed usefully – as performers, in spite of the fact that they (generally) don’t make their livings as professional actors and (usually) play only ‘themselves’ in front of the camera.

Furthermore, an awareness of the centrality of self-presentation within all of our lives helps to dispel the connotations of falsity and dishonesty that attach to performance (via its connection to acting) and that have thus dissuaded several nonfiction theorists from discussing the documentary subject’s creative work. Once one acknowledges that performance constitutes a fundamental aspect of human existence, for example, one is also compelled to admit that individuals are not necessarily being insincere or fraudulent when they present themselves for and in relation to the camera. Indeed, from this perspective, the
behavioural change engendered by the camera and noted by theorists such as MacDougall and Comolli can be understood as an extension of performative processes that are already operative in life, rather than as a qualitative shift in conduct with the concomitant potential to compromise documentary ‘authenticity.’ Likewise, if, as Goffman and Butler suggest, the self is finally just an outcome of one’s performative acts, then there is no singular, ‘true’ version of any individual’s identity that might be captured in a documentary text in any case. Performance, including that which takes place before the camera, necessarily comprises the very identities in which the documentarist is interested. In bringing such considerations to light, the wide range of scholarly material that draws parallels between performance and social reality works alongside contemporary nonfiction theory to suggest the import of documentary performance study. It positions performance as a basic condition of existence, and thus as a legitimate aspect of nonfiction discourse rather than an embarrassing dilemma to be overlooked, guarded against or discounted.

Finally, further support for an investigation of nonfiction performance can be derived from the growing body of scholarship devoted to screen acting in general. As several authors have pointed out, the historical neglect of film performance has recently been alleviated somewhat by an upsurge of academic interest in the topic. Much of this writing bears usefully on the documentary subject’s work despite being focused on professional performances in narrative films. Most importantly in this regard, several contemporary analysts of screen acting contest persuasively the Kuleshovian notion that film and TV performances are constructed solely through the work of editing and other technological devices.
Stephen Prince and Wayne E. Hensley, for instance, enumerate several methodological flaws that may have marred the (in)famous Kuleshov ‘Mozhukin Experiment’ upon which the myth of the inconsequential actor was originally based. Whereas Kuleshov claimed emphatically that his research provided incontrovertible evidence of montage’s power (in the case of the Mozhukin test, different editing patterns ostensibly caused audiences to ‘see’ corresponding emotional expressions on the actor’s unchanging, blank face), Prince and Hensley argue that Kuleshov’s theoretical dedication to both Taylorism and Formalism may have skewed his results. At the same time, these critics also note that the extant accounts of the Mozhukin study are so imprecise and unclear that “it remains difficult to evaluate the empirical status of Kuleshov’s experiment and the experiential validity of his claims about montage” (65). Most damningly, when Prince and Hensley attempted to recreate the legendary experiment using rigorous, scientific methodology, no Kuleshov effect was found. The majority of their subjects reported that an actor with a neutral expression on his face conveyed no emotion, regardless of the sequence into which the shot of his impassive visage was edited.

With this result, Prince and Hensley effectively open up a place of some importance for the screen actor. They undercut the historical basis on which the case for ignoring film performance rests, and point out that individuals appearing before the camera can also contribute to the way(s) in which audiences understand and respond to cinematic and televisual texts, even if only by maintaining an expressionless stare.

Several analyses of specific performances within individual films and television programs have offered compelling support for this idea as well. Despite predating most of the screen acting texts discussed in this section, Richard Dyer’s Stars, for instance, contains a
brief examination of John Wayne’s work in *Fort Apache* (John Ford, USA, 1948) that
demonstrates how even an actor whose abilities have been especially doubted can make
performance choices that affect the films in which he figures. While Dyer acknowledges that
elements beyond acting (such as mise-en-scène, editing, Wayne’s star text, the characteristics
of the Western genre, etc.) help to shape viewers’ sense of character and action in this film,
he also notes several moments at which Wayne’s movements and expressions participate in
the construction of meaning rather directly. For example, Dyer suggests that, at the end of the
sequence in which the cavalry meets up with the Apache leader Cochise, Wayne’s upward
glance, slight smile, and relaxed posture combine to create a sense of his character’s
comfortable amusement without the help of editing or mise-en-scène. He also points out that
Wayne’s confident physicality and fluid movement throughout this sequence help to
construct the thematic contrast between Wayne’s Captain York and the more rigid, bookish
Captain Thursday (played by Henry Fonda). Such examples, Dyer argues, clearly attest that –
like other, more frequently discussed formal elements – “performance also signifies” (*Stars*
146).

More recently, both Roberta Pearson and Paul McDonald have corroborated Dyer’s
position by looking to performance in cinematic remakes. Pearson demonstrates the
formative role that acting plays in filmic character construction by comparing the 1937 and
1954 renditions of *A Star is Born* (William Wellman, USA, 1937; George Cukor, USA,
1954). In particular, she notes countless ways in which the specific performances given by
Fredric March and James Mason (in the 1937 and 1954 versions, respectively) work in
combination with other formal choices and with extra-textual elements to create two widely
divergent instantiations of the character Norman Maine. For example, of the sequence (in both films) in which the studio head visits Norman in a psychiatric institution, she writes:

While both Normans deliver the same desperately upbeat dialogue, the costumes, staging, and other cinematic signifying practices combine to create different moods, reinforced by nuances of the performances. Throughout the scene, the March/Maine maintains a false, hearty bravado, while the Mason/Maine seems much more tired and defeated, less able to pretend a confidence he does not feel. March relies primarily on speech patterns and gestures to convey Norman’s manful attempt to suppress his emotions. Mason augments speech patterns and gestures with subtle shifts in facial expression and body posture, changes in the direction of his glance, and the use of props – all these signifiers combining to create the impression of a Norman who lacks the fortitude to resist an inevitable decline (“A Star” 66).

In this, Pearson substantiates Dyer’s contention that “performance also signifies” (Stars 146) by pointing out how specific acting choices can help to create unique inflections of the same textual material. In fact, based on her analysis of March’s and Mason’s contributions to the shifting characterization of Norman Maine, Pearson ultimately contends that “while performance cannot be analysed in isolation from [editing, mise-en-scène and extratextual factors], one might conclude that it is the actor’s delivery of his [or her] dialogue, together with his [or her] facial expressions, gestures, and posture that most vividly endow a cinematic character with life” (ibid 72-73).

For his part, McDonald makes the case for film acting even more forcefully by demonstrating performer-related distinctions between the original Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1960) and Gus Van Sant’s recreation of the film in 1998. Given that Van Sant attempted to mimic his predecessor’s staging, cinematography and editing as closely as possible, McDonald points out, much of the variation between this remake and its progenitor can be attributed to “differences produced entirely at the level of the actor’s voice and body” (26). For instance, McDonald remarks that Anne Heche’s “loose swinging body” and “rather
wicked smile” (30) in the 1998 film produce a Marion Crane who differs considerably from the more restrained, anxious woman created by Janet Leigh almost forty years prior. Furthermore, he asserts, this characterological change engenders a corresponding shift in the remake’s thematic and ideological stance. “Leigh/Crane is the transgressive woman who questions her actions in a patriarchal society,” McDonald writes, “while Heche/Crane appears to embrace and take pleasure in her wrongdoing. With the former, the woman appears conscious of her fate at the hands of male authority, while the latter is either unaware of that authority or excited by disrupting its power” (32). Given that such significant changes in meaning can be seen to take place in the virtual absence of narrative or stylistic alterations outside of the actor’s work, the signifying capacity of performance becomes especially apparent. In this respect, McDonald (like Dyer and Pearson before him) provides compelling evidence of the film actor’s ability to influence the text in which s/he figures.

After decades of being ignored or underestimated then, screen acting is gradually gaining recognition as a significant element of cinematic and televisual discourse. Scholars such as Dyer, Pearson and McDonald have made a convincing case for the actor’s role in constructing character and promoting particular interpretations of the text at hand. This notion has also been echoed by Sarah Kozloff, who discusses the way in which actors influence and inflect cinematic dialogue, and by Lloyd Michaels, who lists performance style as one of five “strategies for presenting character” onscreen (9). Furthermore, other writers have enumerated a variety of additional screen performance functions that reach beyond this ability to shape narrative, thematic, and/or characterological meaning. Film and television actors have been understood to articulate “pockets of resistance” within ideologically regressive texts (Knobloch 123); to “model cultural norms and practices for a society that is
largely bereft of more traditional modes of transmitting values” (Wexman, Creating ix); to shape audience engagement with and emotional response to characters (McDonald 34-39); and to provide a site at which to “reflect upon the pervasive theatricality of society itself” (Naremore 6). I’ll have occasion to return to several of these issues later on, but for now suffice it to say that, together, they provide a strong indication of the breadth of screen acting’s potential uses and capacities. As a corollary, they also issue a compelling call for film performance study.

In fact, many of these issues that have been raised in relation to acting in fictional films and programs might be seen to point in the direction of documentary performance analysis as well. To begin with, rebuttals to the Kuleshovian notion that editing constructs screen performance begin to point toward the potential signifying capacity of the documentary subject’s work. That is, if the fictional film actor can contribute to the construction of his/her performance before the camera (in spite of or in combination with the external factors that also shape his/her work), then it is not outside the realm of possibility that an individual appearing in a documentary can do likewise. At the same time, the range of significant functions that have been attributed to screen acting might also prompt one to consider the myriad possible uses and effects of nonfictional film and television performance. Do documentary subjects contribute to the construction of their own images on screen and to the larger implications of the texts that purport to record them? Do they encourage or discourage spectator response, and, if so, what bearing does this have on a text’s real-world efficacy? Do their performances reflect, inflect, or resist cultural norms and daily habits of self-presentation? Indeed, these are precisely the sorts of questions that inform and propel my own consideration of the documentary performer in this study.
**The Current State of Affairs**

Given that documentary theorists, sociologists, social psychologists, and film acting analysts have all generated compelling material that promotes the study of documentary performance, the general neglect of this subject seems shortsighted and problematic. A few scholars, however, have taken note of this situation and conducted sustained examinations of the nonfiction performer’s work. It is upon their groundbreaking (though not much heeded) efforts that the present study endeavours to build. In a landmark essay, for example, Thomas Waugh argues that performance has always been a central element of documentary filmmaking, and that it thus warrants careful consideration. Perhaps most significantly from my perspective, Waugh calls attention to the fact that the conventions and practices employed by the documentary filmmaker dictate the manner in which individuals are expected to relate to the camera as they are filmed. Directors can ask nonfiction subjects to perform in a presentational mode (acknowledging their awareness of the camera) or in a representational mode (denying that awareness), but in either case, Waugh says, the subjects are asked to perform (71). In this manner, Waugh is able to underline that a basic level of performance underlies *every* nonfiction text, including highly representational direct cinema films that often claim to abjure performance of any sort.

Waugh also goes on to suggest that the performance mode employed by a given documentary can bear significantly on that text’s ethical status. Specifically, he asserts that presentational performance is better equipped to foster collaboration between filmmaker and subject (though it too can be exploited), and that it thus affords performers more control over their self-presentations. “Subject performance,” Waugh writes, “affirmed and enriched as a presentational element of documentary film, remains a means by which the most committed
documentary filmmakers can aspire to the realization of their democratic ideals” (86). With this claim, Waugh points out that a consideration of performance may speak to the ethical issues that have long occupied a dominant place in documentary theory, rather than deny those issues, as Nichols and Ruby seem to imply. He thus situates the documentary subject’s work as an issue of central importance for nonfiction filmmakers and scholars alike.

Stella Bruzzi also argues that “performance has always been at the heart of documentary filmmaking” (*New Documentary* 125), though she comes to this conclusion by a rather different route than Waugh. In particular, Bruzzi is concerned to point out the problematic and counterproductive way in which nonfiction filmmaking has been theorized over the years, and to suggest a new, more viable manner of understanding documentary that includes an awareness of performance as one of the form’s defining aspects. Most importantly in this respect, she refuses to endorse the traditional – and impossible – theoretical ideal that documentaries are predicated on the desire to capture reality in a pure, unmediated form. Instead, she suggests:

> it is perhaps more generous and worth while to simply accept that a documentary can never be the real world, that the camera can never capture life as it would have unraveled had it not interfered, and the results of this collision between apparatus and subject are what constitutes a documentary – not the utopian vision of what might have transpired if only the camera had not been there. If one is always going to regret the need for cameras and crews and bemoan the inauthenticity of what they bring back from a situation, then why write about or make documentaries? Instead, documentaries are performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming (ibid 7).

In this, Bruzzi effectively re-frames documentary as a form founded on the creative interaction between a filmmaker and the reality on which s/he encroaches. As a corollary, she also re-positions performance as a fundamental component of the form. For, if we accept that documentary films produce the ‘truths’ that they document, then the way in which
individuals present themselves for and in relation to the camera (as MacDougall noted and the American direct cinema practitioners denied) can be seen as a viable part of this creative process. Like Waugh, then, Bruzzi finally indicates that documentary performances demand far more attention and analysis than they have heretofore received.

Finally, Vinicius do Valle Navarro elaborates and augments many of Waugh’s and Bruzzi’s points in his recent dissertation on performance in American nonfiction of the 1960s. He shares Bruzzi’s sense that ‘social actors’ help to produce documentary ‘realities,’ for instance, and combines this perspective with a Waugh-like understanding of performance’s political and ethical import. Specifically, he looks to the 1960s as an historical moment at which American life became increasingly saturated with media images, and illustrates how nonfiction performance provided an especially useful means of constituting one’s identity and existing socially within this hypermediated world. He says:

Non-fictional performers turn the process of representation into a dialogue between the filmmaker and the world, one in which the intervention of the camera in any given situation is complemented by the performer’s participation in the filmmaking process. From this perspective, the subject in front of the camera is key to the representational process not only because she connects the filmmaking effort to the referential world but also because she helps shape the reality made available for us. I have suggested that this discursive position is also the site of a struggle – a struggle for visibility – and that this struggle has both symbolic and concrete political consequences. When images function as an integral part of everyday life, and when that very distinction becomes precarious, being able to shape and reshape one’s own image is indeed a way of asserting one’s presence in the world. Although nothing in this effort is certain – neither the image itself nor its effects on the world – the possibility of participating in this process … is key to a forward-looking politics of representation (284).

With this kind of argument, Navarro builds effectively upon Bruzzi’s and Waugh’s insights and demonstrates their especial significance within one particular context. Moreover, he also corroborates this position with an unprecedented amount of close study of specific nonfiction
performances, including those featured in *Meet Marlon Brando* (Albert and David Maysles, USA, 1966), *Portrait of Jason* (Shirley Clarke, USA, 1967) and *Screen Test #2* (Andy Warhol, USA, 1965). As a result, he provides the most thorough and persuasive demonstration yet of the centrality of performance to nonfiction discourse.

That said however, like Bruzzi and Waugh, Navarro still leaves plenty of room for further work in this area. As he notes, his discussion is restricted not only to performances in American films from the 1960s, but also to a specific subset of individual-centred films from this period that best reflect his thematic concerns (34). Likewise, Bruzzi’s discussion of performance focuses almost entirely on demonstrating how particular performances support her thesis about the performative nature of documentary film, while Waugh’s attention remains fixed throughout his essay on the representational/presentational divide and its ethical ramifications. While each of these authors offer a range of insights then, they only begin to scratch the surface of what might be said about the centrally important role of performance in documentary film as a whole.

To that end, this study picks up where Bruzzi, Waugh, and Navarro left off. Drawing from, combining, and expanding upon their pioneering work, I offer a novel conceptualization of documentary performance that attempts to move beyond each of their individual concerns. Most importantly, I seek to address what I see as the most glaring omission from the current nonfiction performance literature: the lack of sustained discussion about how documentary subjects perform. If we are to move towards a more thorough understanding of the nonfiction subject’s performance work, we need to trace out and analyze the various strategies available to her/him within a variety of documentary contexts. It is necessary to show not simply that s/he performs for the camera, but also to elaborate the
arsenal of techniques at his/her disposal and to consider how these might play out across different kinds of documentary practice. While Waugh begins this essential process by noting that documentary subjects must routinely decide – in collaboration with or contravention of the filmmaker – whether or not to acknowledge the camera, this singular decision hardly constitutes the entirety of such individuals’ labour. Similarly, though Bruzzi and Navarro observe individual performance techniques at work within isolated filmic examples, they make no attempt to enumerate the constituent elements of nonfiction performance in more general terms. Until this has been done, we will continue to lack the tools and vocabulary to analyze documentary performances in all their complexity. I advance a first attempt at this process in the pages that follow.

Furthermore, I also endeavour to build upon existing scholarship in this study by multiplying the number of functions that documentary ‘social actors’ have been seen to fulfill. Without taking away from the outcomes that Bruzzi, Navarro and Waugh have attributed to nonfiction performance, I will illustrate that each of their useful observations constitutes only one of a multitude that might be made about the functionality of the documentary agent’s work. In this manner, I hope to further corroborate the arguments for attending to documentary performance that I have summarized in this introduction. In addition, I hope to prompt other scholars to think about the complex efficacy of nonfiction ‘social acting,’ and to thus generate discussion of roles played by the documentary performer that I myself have overlooked.

In line with these goals, the remainder of this dissertation will elaborate a ‘Poetics of Documentary Performance’ akin to Michael Renov’s general documentary poetics, illustrating “those principles of construction, function, and effect” specific – in this case – to
the nonfiction subject’s work (“Toward a Poetics” 21). A first chapter initiates this process by setting out a means of understanding and conceptualizing what nonfiction performance entails. It is argued that documentary performance is a three-tiered phenomenon, wherein everyday performative activity (tier #1) is shaped by and often tailored to the camera (tier #2) within specific nonfiction film frameworks (tier #3). This model is used as a means of determining the specific tools and techniques that the ‘social actor’ has at her/his disposal when appearing in a documentary text, and examples from The Up Series (Michael Apted, UK, 1964-2005) are provided to demonstrate the way in which these tactics figure within the repertoire of actual nonfiction performers. In addition to providing a flexible and generally applicable model of the documentary subject’s labour, then, this chapter finally suggests an appropriate means of analysing individual documentary performances, indicating the necessity of attending to the way in which twice modified everyday self-presentational tools serve as signifiers in any given nonfiction text. This methodology is deployed in case studies of documentary performance throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

Subsequent chapters turn from the issue of what nonfiction performance involves to a consideration of what it accomplishes. Drawing from scholarship devoted to each of the three levels of the documentary subject’s work, I posit three major functions for nonfiction performance. Chapter 2 demonstrates the way in which the individuals who appear in documentaries play a significant role in the construction of ‘characters,’ which, in turn, exert an indelible influence on the meaning(s) of the texts in which they figure. Evidence from Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen (Donald Brittain/Don Owen, Canada, 1965), Leonard Cohen, I'm Your Man (Lian Lunson, USA, 2006), and Pour la suite du monde (Pierre Perrault/Michel Brault, Canada, 1963) provides support for these claims. Chapter 3
advances a discussion of masculinities in “The Case of Milo Radulovich” (Edward R. Murrow/Fred Friendly, USA, 1953) and Point of Order! (Emile de Antonio, USA, 1963) in order to establish that nonfiction performances can also help to bolster and/or to destabilize normative understandings of identity categories such as gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, race, class and dis/ability. Finally, the concluding chapter draws upon analyses of two recent documentaries about the current Iraq War – The Ground Truth (Patricia Foulkrod, USA, 2006) and Operation Filmmaker (Nina Davenport, USA, 2007) – as a means of illustrating that documentary performers invite affective reactions from spectators, and – in so doing – contribute significantly to nonfiction texts’ ability to effectuate social change. Each of these three functions has been attributed to performance within both everyday self-presentation and screen acting contexts, and many of them are discussed briefly within the fragmentary documentary performance literature as well. This convergence suggests that they might be amongst the most common and significant tasks that nonfiction performance carries out, and hence especially appropriate targets for study.

As this synopsis suggests, detailed analyses of individual documentary exemplars will provide support for my contentions throughout this study. The texts listed above have been selected not only for the way in which they corroborate the ideas under consideration, but also because they provide a means of demonstrating the general applicability of my conceptualization of documentary performance. They represent a wide variety of nonfiction types, from television news exposé and concert film to compilation documentary and a modified version of cinema vérité. Furthermore, this selection of material also provides the opportunity to discuss older, ‘canonical’ texts alongside recent films that have not yet received much attention, and to thereby illustrate how performance analysis can both enrich
understanding of the most widely discussed documentaries and initiate dialogue about current nonfiction production.19

My close focus – throughout these chapters – on the characteristics and functions of the documentary performance text, however, should not be taken as an indication of a reductively formalist approach. Rather, I aim to cultivate a methodology that could be described by Renov’s estimation of recent attempts to craft poetics of various aesthetic media. He writes of these efforts: “Whereas the attention to rhetorical device or formal strategy is pronounced, no intrinsic disregard for historical or ideological determinants (including those intrinsic to the critic’s own enterprise) can be assumed” (“Toward a Poetics” 19). Along these lines, I, too, acknowledge that performance signs are culturally and historically determined, and – in Chapter 3 – I take this process as my central focus. I further recognize the polysemic nature of the performance text; while an implicit awareness that the meanings I attribute to performance are a product of my own critical methodology and historically demarcated interpretation processes runs throughout the dissertation, the potential multiplicity of spectator response becomes an issue of central concern in Chapter 4. In this respect, my method here attempts to be sensitive to criticisms of formalist approaches offered by poststructuralist writers and reception theorists,20 and to respect the complexity and cultural bounded-ness of communication described by many sociological, social psychological and performance scholars.21

My analyses throughout the text are also conceived so as to respond to critiques of the inexact and often oversimplified nature of semiotic performance analysis. As several authors have pointed out, the complex, analog stream of overlapping gestures and actions that constitute performance make it impossible for the analyst to separate out and attend to
discrete signifiers with any degree of precision. Like Paul McDonald, however, I believe that this inescapable elusiveness does not require one to abandon the close study of performance signs *tout court* (39). Rather, it underlines the necessity of acknowledging the way in which multiple gestural, verbal and paralinguistic cues function simultaneously (or in rapid succession) in order to constitute a multifaceted, indefinite macrosign. This will be my practice throughout the analyses in this study. As Patrice Pavis puts it, “Instead of separating gesture from text, or gesture from voice, I will endeavor to identify macrosequences (within which diverse elements come together, reinforcing or distancing each other), by forming a coherent and pertinent whole” (64). These complex performance signifiers will also be considered in relation to the filmic techniques that frame and interact with them, as scholars such as Virginia Wright Wexman have deemed necessary (*Creating* x). By such means, I will attempt to illustrate the utility of semiotic performance analysis without downplaying its complexity or its interdependence with other signifying systems. In the process, I will corroborate McDonald’s argument that the “the imprecision [of performance analysis] should not be mistaken for lack of detail, nor should impressionism be regarded as preventing insightful analysis and criticism” (39).

I don’t expect that this approach exhausts the options for studying documentary performance, but I do believe that it provides a useful, broadly applicable method of analysis and a means of stimulating discussion of this widely overlooked field. A poetics of nonfiction performance seems a timely, productive response to the converging lines of research that underline the necessity of considering the documentary subject’s work.

1 Goffman’s definition, of course, is by no means the only understanding of performance that exists in the literature (see Carlson “What Is Performance?” and Schechner for some alternate characterizations of the term.) In fact, Marvin Carlson (quoting Mary Strine, Beverly Long, and Mary Hopkins) argues that performance is “an essentially contested concept” (ibid 68), “developed in an
atmosphere of ‘sophisticated disagreement’ by participants who ‘do not expect to defeat or silence opposing positions, but rather through continuing dialogue to attain a sharper articulation of all positions and therefore a fuller understanding of the conceptual richness of performance’” (ibid). In line with this description, I conceive of my endorsement of Goffman’s definition, and my application of it to a novel context, as a means of further exploring the conceptual utility of one particular version of performance, a version that may differ substantially from other definitions of the term but is no less valid for that fact.

2 For instance, Miller’s central (and only) example of cinema vérité filmmaking is the work of Jean-Luc Godard.

3 See: Harding (qtd. in Schechner 176); Lampe; Naremore; Navarro, etc. for similar uses of the word ‘acting’. Schechner proposes a slightly broader definition. Acting, he suggests, is that brand of performance that is consciously expressive and emphatically ostended; it “consists of focused, clearly marked and framed behaviors specifically designed for showing” (174). According to this more comprehensive characterization, many documentary texts could involve acting, since the process of filming and projecting behaviour necessarily marks it off from everyday performance, while nonfiction subjects might also consciously plan their appearances and/or be coached in how to comport themselves by the filmmaker. Even Schechner, however, acknowledges the dominant understanding of acting as feigning by labeling the end of his acting spectrum at which there is “no portrayal of another or of a character”: “minimal acting or even not acting” (ibid). I, too, will respect this widespread terminological usage by utilizing ‘acting’ only to refer to those instances of performance that involve impersonation.

4 This point is well made by Vinicius do Valle Navarro at several points throughout his dissertation on performance in American nonfiction of the 1960s.

5 See, for example, von Sternberg’s claim that actors are “materials” with which to work (97), Arnheim’s contention that the film actor is “a stage prop chosen for its characteristics” (qtd. In Benjamin 232) and Hitchcock’s famous assertion that “actors are cattle” (qtd. In Kramer and Lovell 2). Hitchcock, however, claimed that he had been misquoted, and that he had in fact stated that actors should be treated like cattle.” While this version of his statement is slightly less extreme, it nonetheless maintains a sense of the director’s supremacy in the film acting process.

6 Robin Wood, for instance, argues: “the effect of screen acting is inextricable from mise-enscène [sic], editing and the films’ general thematic” (22). Likewise, Barry King writes: “while film increases the centrality of the actor in the process of signification, the formative capacity of the medium can equally confine the actor more and more to being a bearer of effects that he or she does not or cannot originate” (145). Cavell; Jackson; Pudovkin; and Thomson (qtd. in Klevan) have also advanced similar ideas – with a variety of emphases – about the screen actor’s limited status and/or restricted control.

7 There may be issues in addition to those listed here that also contribute to the relative lack of attention paid to documentary performance. For example, the fact that much film acting scholarship focuses on actor training or on the employment of codified acting styles (e.g. Baron “Crafting”, J. Butler “Introduction”; Hollinger; Larue and Zucker; Riis (“Naturalist”); Wexman “Masculinity”, etc.) might be said to contribute to a (mistaken, from my perspective) sense that performers are only those individuals who have received some formal education in the field. The considerations listed above thus constitute only one, particularly compelling set of performance analysis-discouraging factors.
The work of many authors espousing this view is discussed in the ensuing paragraph (pp. 7-8).

This assertion is only true of MacDougall later in his career. In the 1970s, MacDougall was not unlike direct cinema filmmakers in suggesting that subjects eventually lose interest in the camera and behave “naturally”. (“Beyond Observational Cinema” 128-129)

Jean Rouch makes a very similar point in an interview entitled “The Politics of Visual Anthropology”, suggesting that any observation disturbs its subject, and that the presence of a camera magnifies this disturbance assuredly. Further comments about camera influence in relation to direct cinema specifically can be found in Bill Nichols (Introduction 114) and Erik Barnouw (Documentary 253). Finally, Roland Barthes makes a similar point in his discussion of photography in Camera Lucida. “[O]nce I feel myself observed by the lens,” he writes, “everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing,’ I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image.” (10)

Individuals who are unaware of the camera are obviously immune to this process, and those who don’t fully understand the implications of its presence (as might be the case, for example, with very young subjects) may be less likely to alter their behaviour as well. These examples, however, constitute the exceptions that prove the rule.

While it may simply constitute an artifact of translation, the use of the word ‘acting’ here again seems indicative of the general mistrust of documentary performance even in texts that acknowledge its inescapability. In fact, however, - as I discuss on pp. 15-16 - the modification of behaviour engendered by the documentary camera needn’t necessarily involve falsification or pretense as Comolli seems to suggest. Given that individuals always already perform their identities and modify their actions in relation to various quotidian audiences, camera influence simply constitutes a more extreme version of processes that are already operative in everyday life.

The self-presentation literature is voluminous and ever expanding. Amongst other things, self-presentational concerns have been shown to be relevant to: health damaging behavior (Martin Ginis and Leary; K. Roth) – including eating disorders (Strong), treatment avoidance (Pollock), and smoking (O’Callaghan and Doyle); interpersonal relationships (Cupach and Metts; Nezlek, Schutz and Sellen; Tice et al) gun violence (Stretesky and Pogrebin); dissembling (Tyler and Feldman), work behaviour and institutional structure (Dror and Zaidman; Fuller et al.; Giacalone and Rosenfeld), modesty (Gibbins and Walker; Gibson and Sachau), cooperation and prosocial behavior (Danheiser and Graziano; Tedeschi and Riordan), depression (Weary), self-esteem (Baumeister, Tice and Hutton; Leary [“Self we know”]), behaviour in recreational contexts (Pin and Turndorf), politics (Benoit; Gillespie; Hall), emotional expression (Fridlund; Graham, Gentry and Green), prison behavior (Watson), shyness (Leary and Schlenker), aggression (Felson), and bargaining (Pruitt and Smith). In fact, given the wide range of areas in which self-presentation has been seen to function, Barry Schlenker and Michael Weigold contend: “to ask when people will engage in self-presentation during social interaction is like asking when people will engage in cognition during social interaction. The process is always going on, but its character may change depending on the actor’s goal and the circumstances” (137). Useful summaries of much of the early research in the field can be found in Baumeister; Leary and Kowalski; and Schlenker and Wiegold. Select additional references can also be found in the Works Cited.
Amongst others, Hollinger; and Kramer and Lovell (“Introduction”); and Robertson Wojcik have made claims of this sort.

Of course, the different directors overseeing the two films may have contributed to these variations in characterization. Hitchcock may well have encouraged Leigh’s restraint, just as Van Sant could have coached Heche in her relaxed physicality. The fact remains, however, that these significant differences in character and meaning are ultimately registered “at the level of the actor’s voice and body” (McDonald 26). While directors may guide and shape actors’ kinesic and vocalic choices, the performers themselves must finally produce the gestures, actions and intonations in question.

Michaels’ other strategies include: dialogue, the star system, typology and mise-en-scène (9).

In addition to the three broad studies of nonfiction performance discussed here, several other texts make note (often briefly or implicitly) of the way the documentary subject’s work functions in individual texts or documentary subgenres. See, for example: Butler (Bodies); Chasnoff; Fuchs; Goldsby; Grindon; Hladki; Johnson; Lawrence; Nichols; Siegel; Straayer; and Waugh (“Walking”). Audrey Levasseur also discusses performance in film and video autobiography in some detail.

My focus on these three major functions, however, should not be taken as an indication that documentary performance does not also perform other, equally significant tasks. Indeed, authors such as Waugh (“Acting”) and Bruzzi (New Documentary) have already elucidated some alternate effects of documentary performance, and I feel certain that other, additional functions could be enumerated as well. Likewise, it should also be noted that I have chosen to discuss these three functions in separate chapters for purposes of clarity alone; they are certainly not mutually exclusive, and likely overlap in many cases.

It should also be noted that these texts – while varied – are somewhat limited in terms of their geographic origin. This choice is based on a practical consideration. Given the importance of engaging with detailed features of speech and prosody as a part of performance analysis, I felt it necessary to select texts in languages with which I am fluent (i.e. English and French). (While Operation Filmmaker contains some brief sequences in Arabic, English is still the most common language spoken throughout the film.)

See Renov (“Toward a Poetics” 16-20) for a summary of much of this criticism.

Birdwhistel; Burgoon; Elam; Hertenstein et al.; and Shaffer, amongst others, point to the polysemic and contextually determined nature of performance signs.

This point has been made variously by Pearson (Eloquent); Schechner and Mintz; and Wexman (Creating).
Chapter 1: The Documentary Performer

At the broadest level of conceptual abstraction, documentary performances are similar to their counterparts in other contexts. Like everyday interactions, theatrical productions, religious rituals, sporting events, and the like, the onscreen appearances of nonfiction subjects consist of semiotically-rich behaviours unfolding before an audience. This, of course, is the very definition of performance first advanced by Erving Goffman (22) and endorsed throughout this study. As Richard Schechner reminds us, however, “each and every performance is specific and different from every other” in spite of the underlying affinity that conjoins such events (36-37). While Schechner here alludes to the various factors that distinguish between individual performance texts, I would like to explore this insight at a slightly broader level in this chapter, considering the unique characteristics of documentary performances that distinguish them from their correlatives in other circumstances. This seems a necessary first step in initiating a discussion of the nonfiction subject’s work, insofar as it will provide a basic framework within which the performance characteristics of specific texts can be better elucidated, and also suggest a means of analysing ‘social acting’ across the broad spectrum of documentary production.

In spite of the common contention that they are simply ‘being themselves,’ the individuals who participate in nonfiction films and television programs in fact carry out a complex, rather difficult brand of performance. On the one hand, they undertake the kinds of performative behaviour common to their daily lives; at the same time, however, these quotidian actions are mediated by the filmmaking apparatus and impinged upon by the specific nonfiction conventions chosen for the text at hand. As a result, a three-tiered model is necessary to describe the nonfiction subject’s work effectively. I propose that at least the
vast majority of documentary performances consist of everyday communicative activity (tier #1) which has been framed, influenced by and/or tailored to the camera (tier #2), and which is carried out within specific nonfiction film frameworks (tier #3). This distinctive set of characteristics distinguishes nonfiction performances from their counterparts in all other forums.

This is not to suggest, of course, that all documentary texts necessarily involve the same ‘level’ of performance activity. Nonfiction performances in fact exist along a spectrum. At one end are the apparently spontaneous actions of individuals captured in private by a hidden camera, which only become communicative performances by virtue of being framed and displayed for a film audience. At the other extreme are cases of documentary acting, wherein individuals consciously enact and present roles outside of their own identities to the camera. Each of these limit cases, however, ultimately involves meaning-charged everyday actions (either simply ‘behaved’ or consciously selected and/or abstracted as part of constructing a non-fictional character) that convey information to an audience only after being filtered through the filmic medium and through specific documentary conventions. A three-tiered model thus provides a broad, conceptual link amongst all the activities that might be understood as documentary performance without denying the variety of those activities.

Importantly, this multifaceted understanding of nonfiction performance also suggests the necessity of a complex, interdisciplinary method of analysis. If one is to consider adequately the nature and implications of the documentary subject’s work, one must draw from and combine the insights of fields that investigate each of the three levels involved in nonfiction performance. This chapter constitutes a preliminary attempt at laying out such an approach. By amalgamating the relevant work of sociologists and social psychologists, film
performance scholars, and documentary theorists, I will enumerate many of the performance strategies and techniques available to nonfiction subjects. Throughout, evidence from one representative documentary example – Michael Apted’s *Up Series* (UK, 1964-2005) – will demonstrate the way in which these techniques figure within the arsenal of actual nonfiction subjects.¹ By these means, the pages that follow will flesh out just what it is that documentary performers *do*, and thereby begin to lay bare the ostensibly hidden communicative actions to which analysts must attend.

**Tier #1: Everyday Performance**

Given that routine ‘social acting’ constitutes the first level of my working documentary performance model, it is also the first component of that model that must be broken down and considered in more detail. What does it mean – in terms of concrete, practical action carried out by actual human bodies – to suggest that the individuals who populate nonfiction texts engage in the kinds of communicative activities characteristic of daily interaction? Put simply, just what are the materials and practices of everyday performance that documentary participants bring with them into the filming situation? In order to begin to answer these questions, it is necessary to turn to the existing scholarship concerning the performative nature of mundane social existence.

That said, however, not all of the work in this field is equally useful in terms of the task at hand. Authors endorsing the model of performativity first espoused by Judith Butler, for instance, frequently pass over the individual techniques involved in performing oneself in favour of broader issues such as the theoretics of identity formation, the ultimate impossibility of personal agency, and the determining power of discourse. In fact, several critics have faulted Butler and similarly minded poststructuralist writers for reducing the
human subject to a theoretical abstraction, and for failing to anchor their speculative claims in the actual and concrete. Lise Nelson, for instance, takes issue with Butler’s tendency to divorce the subject “from personal, lived history as well as from its historical and geographical embeddedness” (332), and calls instead for the acknowledgement of “a situated subject, one constituted by discursive processes yet not reducible to them” (ibid). Paul Smith, too, argues against the abstracted subject common to poststructuralist writing, directing his criticisms at Jacques Derrida rather than at Butler per se. Finally, Justine Coupland and Richard Gwyn also note the prominence of speculative discussion in writings devoted to the body and identity, and ultimately underline “the need for analysis of empirical data to illustrate the utility of theoretical approaches” (7). In light of such criticisms, the ‘Butlerian’ performativity literature is clearly not the most useful place to begin looking for insights into the specific, concrete elements of quotidian social performance.

At the other end of the spectrum, the extensive body of sociological and social psychological research devoted to self-presentation and interpersonal communication illuminates many of the minute details involved in the everyday ‘doing’ of identity. By focusing on tangibly occurring instances of behaviour (whether apparently spontaneous or experimentally engineered), researchers in these fields have itemized and analysed countless strategies that actual individuals call upon in the course of real-world interaction. In so doing, they have also inadvertently constructed a list of common performance tools that documentary subjects already have at their disposal when confronted by the filmmaker and his/her camera. Though these everyday strategies will undoubtedly be affected by the unique experience of appearing in a nonfiction film, they nonetheless remain deeply engrained,
well-rehearsed processes of self-presentation from which documentary subjects are likely to draw wherever possible.

In fact, in certain respects, the tactics discussed by self-presentation researchers might be especially relevant to the work of nonfiction performers. This seems true to the extent that the process of being filmed for a documentary is in some ways roughly analogous to the experience of being observed during the course of experimental or field research. This is obviously the case for the individuals appearing in ethnographic films, for instance, who are effectively participants in a documentary and subjects in a sociological study simultaneously; however, the relationship holds more generally as well. For example, during both documentary filming and empirical research, subjects are typically asked to behave as they might on a day-to-day basis, despite being exposed to rather atypical states of affairs (such as being observed/interviewed by outsiders, or being asked to (re)create certain scenes or to respond to certain stimuli). Furthermore, as documentary critics and social psychologists have noted, these situations are also each likely to place subjects in a state of heightened “dramaturgical awareness” (Leary, Self-Presentation 16), making them especially conscious of the impressions they are creating and particularly likely to actively shape those impressions.³ Inasmuch the documentary framework has close ties to the kinds of environments in which sociological research is carried out, the self-presentation strategies observed within such research may be used by documentary subjects especially frequently or in particularly ‘pure’ form.

Nevertheless, my explicit focus – in this section – on social-psychological findings should not be taken to suggest that the insights of performativity scholars are irrelevant to my understanding of the ‘everyday’ component of the documentary subject’s work; nor is this
focus meant to imply that the performativity and self-presentation literatures are mutually exclusive. In fact, despite several significant differences between these bodies of work (most notably, their often drastically dissimilar views on the possibility of personal agency), I believe that they are ultimately complementary, and that they need to be synthesized for an analysis of nonfiction performance to be wholly persuasive. In particular, while scholars such as Butler force one to bear in mind that the individual choices made by documentary subjects are finally molded by governing power structures and existing discursive formations, self-presentation research provides a means of examining the way(s) in which these larger motivating principles are activated and carried out at the more proximate level of lived experience. Though my attention in this chapter will be directed to the specific techniques of self-performance that have been noted by social psychological study, then, I nonetheless understand these strategies as shot through by discourse, and as participating in the constitution – rather than the expression – of identity. In this respect, many of Butler’s ideas will remain in the background of the ensuing discussion despite their surface absence. They will also return emphatically to the forefront of my analysis in Chapter 3, when I consider the interactions between documentary performance choices and social-institutional norms.

The immediate task, however, is to establish the concrete tools of self-presentation that Butler herself doesn’t set out in sufficient detail. These, as I have indicated, constitute the foundational elements of documentary performance and therefore represent the most basic means by which nonfiction subjects carry out any number of significant activities. They thus merit a far more thorough and systematic consideration than they have received from documentary scholars (including those who attend to the documentary subject as performer) to date.
In the spirit of addressing this oversight, the present section describes several of the constitutive elements of everyday performative interaction. In so doing, it again takes Goffman’s definition of performance as its guide. Since – according to this perspective – all communicative social activity before observers constitutes performance, all of the component parts of everyday social interaction can also be understood as elements of what Goffman calls the performance “front” (22) and I have been referring to as a set of everyday self-presentation tools. The implication of this point of view, then, is that the term ‘performance technique’ needn’t only be used to refer to consciously considered, strategically deployed manipulations of one’s personal ‘expressive’ equipment. Rather, it should be understood to include any and all usages of that equipment – conscious or otherwise – that communicate to an audience.5

Given this broad definition, a vast number of activities and attributes can be understood as techniques figuring in the everyday presentation of self. Manipulations and manifestations of language, voice, body, behaviour, environment, etc. all serve as communicative cues from which observers read meaning(s); thus, each of these types of activity constitutes a performance tool used intentionally or unwittingly by everyday ‘social actors.’ In fact, any given self-presentation event amounts to what Perinbanayagam might call an “assemblage of signs” or a “maxisign” (qtd. in Babe 9), wherein performers activate several ‘expressive’ signals simultaneously or in succession. For the purposes of clarity, however, I will describe a range of these techniques in isolation here.6

To begin with, it should be noted that language itself constitutes an important self-presentational tool. Much of our everyday performance time is spent in conversation of one sort or another, and, as a result, the ‘scripts’ we write for our interactions figure importantly
in the selves we produce (and in the effects those selves engender). As Martin J. Malone puts it, “Selves live in the worlds that talk creates. Talk is the principal way for others to know ‘who’ we are” (1). In line with this observation, conversation analysts, linguists, and self-presentation researchers have elaborated a variety of ways in which ‘social actors’ deploy the resources of spoken language in a communicative fashion.

It is a commonplace within psychological self-presentation writing, for example, to note that self-descriptions are social performers’ most basic and central means of impression management. Mark Leary, for one, argues, “The most straightforward way for people to convey information about themselves involves verbal descriptions. By telling others about their personalities, likes and dislikes, previous experiences, accomplishments, families, occupations, emotional reactions, fears, and so on, people can create particular impressions in others’ eyes” (Self-Presentation 17). This kind of verbal delineation of one’s own personality therefore serves as a fundamental performance technique.

More than simply observing the commonality of self-descriptive practice, though, social psychologists have also outlined some of the ways in which such self-description frequently unfolds. For example, several researchers have remarked that statements about the self are often articulated in an “indirect or tacit” manner (Leary, Self-Presentation 18), in order that the speaker might avoid appearing overly self-absorbed or braggart. The Up Series provides several illustrative examples of this process. In 49 Up, for instance, Nick – a Yorkshire farm boy turned American physics professor – offhandedly mentions that he met his second wife at a convocation ceremony he attended at the request of one of his graduating students. In this manner, Nick not only conveys explicit information about the events leading up to his re-marriage, but also implies that his students respect and value him enough to
demand his presence at a major life event. Similarly, in the series’ third installment, a wealthy Oxford student named John takes time to list some of his Ivy League school’s positive attributes. In so doing, however, he tacitly asks spectators to attribute these characteristics to him, too, as a member of the Oxford community. By making statements that ask audiences to infer things about them in this way, everyday performers such as Nick and John construct and communicate certain identities while still maintaining conventional norms of modesty. At the same time, this tendency to abide by standards of social propriety itself serves to indicate that they are specific kinds of people (reasonable, socially-skilled, etc.). Indirect self-descriptions can therefore be doubly communicative – and, as such, especially potent – ‘expressive’ cues.

Another useful means of implicit self-construction that is frequently addressed by social psychology scholars is the verbal articulation of attitudes. Although – in the popular imagination – attitudes and beliefs are often understood as internalized, individual opinions about particular objects, events or ideas, they also serve several interpersonal functions (Schlenker, Impression Management 202-3; Baumeister 11-14). Most importantly for the purposes of the present discussion, public attitude expressions help to promote a specific image of the attitude-holder’s personality and identity. As Mark Leary writes, “By expressing certain attitudes, people convey particular impressions of themselves. For example, if a woman says she supports capital punishment, you probably form an impression of her that goes far beyond simply her attitudes toward the death penalty” (Self-Presentation 19).

Likewise, when Charles (another of 21 Up’s affluent London subjects) declares his distaste for the “Marlborough-Oxbridge conveyor belt” and the way in which it prevents students from meeting new kinds of people, viewers might be prompted to conclude that he is a
laidback, libertarian individual who has little in common with many of his ‘upper class’ peers. Audiences habitually interpret stated beliefs as markers of personal temperament in this manner, and thus the act of articulating of one’s attitudes becomes an important self-presentational strategy.

Explicit self-descriptions, along with indirect techniques such as attitude expressions, therefore constitute important self-presentational tools upon which everyday performers call in the course of social interaction. That said, however, a variety of scholars specializing in linguistics and conversation analysis have pointed to the way in which much smaller variations in language usage are also communicatively significant. In addition to the broad tactics discussed thus far then, these micro-features of language usage must also be understood as crucial ‘expressive’ strategies.

The way in which speakers make use of pronouns provides a useful case in point, as several researchers have discussed the signifying role(s) that these small parts of speech play within everyday social situations. Martin J. Malone, for instance, argues that – in many cases – “pronouns signal how to hear what is said by demonstrating the attitude of the speaker to the utterance” (46). In 28 Up, for example, Tony (an East Ender who’d previously dreamed of becoming a jockey) refers to the famous English rider Lester Piggott as “the man himself.” Here, the appositive inclusion of an intensive pronoun demonstrates clearly this performer’s high opinion of the British horseman, speaking to his values and interests in the process.10

Pronominal choice also constitutes a communicative self-presentation technique inasmuch as it can associate speakers with, or disassociate them from, particular entities under discussion. Barry Schlenker notes, for instance, that “[a] proud parent might remark ‘That’s my boy,’ when the child receives a good report card, but, should the poor child
misbehave, each parent might turn to the other and say ‘What’s the matter with your son?’” (Impression Management 107). Lynn, a woman from London’s East End, chooses pronouns in this kind of evocative manner in 21 Up. When asked by the director-interviewer if she finds money troubles depressing, she retorts, “Why should you?” By using the second person pronoun in place of the first in this way, Lynn creates symbolic distance between herself and the pecuniary issue that Apted raises. In fact, because she deploys the second person ‘you’ as one might use the impersonal pronoun ‘one,’ Lynn effectively re-casts the issue under discussion as a widespread, general phenomenon, rather than letting it stand as a problem besetting her specifically. In addition to exerting a variety of communicative effects of their own then, pronouns also offer a useful means of carrying out indirect strategies of association and disassociation that figure importantly in everyday self-presentation.11

Of course, however, pronouns are not the only aspects of language that serve to convey self-relevant information in this way; the communicative function(s) of several other linguistic variables have also been studied and discussed extensively. Researchers have pointed toward the ‘expressive’ implications of word selection and combination, verb tenses, and the use of the active or the passive voice, amongst other things.12 For example, George F. Mahl and Gene Schulze note that linguistic factors such as high verb to adjective ratios, repetitious vocabulary, and grammatical errors have all been found to contribute to listeners’ sense that a speaker is anxious or uneasy. Within the first film of the Up Series, many of these features characterize the speech of Paul (one of two series subjects who grew up in a London children’s home). When asked why he wouldn’t like to get married, for example, Paul replies:

I don’t like, um… S-say you had a w-wife… they, they, say, you had to eat what they cooked you … and say, say, I don’t like greens, well I don’t, um,
and say she says ‘you have to eat what, what you get give’. So I… I don’t like greens, so she gives me greens, and that … that’s it.

In line with the research findings noted above, the absence of adjectives, recurring words, and grammatical blunders that characterize this response do much to suggest the considerable anxiety and discomfort of the boy uttering it. Given this kind of signifying ability, the selection and arrangement of words must be understood as another significant technique upon which everyday performers can call.\(^\text{13}\)

In spite of the central role that language plays in day-to-day self-presentation, words are certainly not the only performance implements that ‘social actors’ have at their disposal. As a matter of course, individuals inflect, add to, emphasize and/or undercut their verbal communications through gesture, intonation and a variety of other extra-linguistic behaviours. These nonverbal activities thus themselves constitute what Susan Lovell calls a “semiotic system” that “carries meaning about mental, emotional and characteristic aspects of an individual” (14). In fact, research has indicated that – in many situations – “adults place more reliance on nonverbal than verbal cues in determining social meaning” (Burgoon 347). In view of these observations, any description of the basic tools of everyday performance must take stock of nonverbal communicative measures. As David J. Schneider puts it, “Limiting discussions of self-presentation to verbal utterances does as much violence to the genre as discussing film acting only in terms of the lines spoken by the actors” (26).

In line with this contention, scholars studying nonverbal communication have identified several different classes of non-lexical behaviour that are commonly read for meaning(s) during social interaction. These include: **kinesic cues** (movements of the head, face and body, including facial expressions, gaze, gesture and posture); **vocalic** or **paralinguistic cues** (extra-linguistic usages of the voice, including pauses, insertions of non-
lexical sounds, and modulations of intonation, inflection, pitch or tempo); **haptic cues** (communicative uses of touch); **proxemic cues** (meaningful handleings of space, including manipulations of interpersonal distance); and **artifactual cues** (‘expressive’ usages of and/or interactions with aspects of the environment, such as clothing, décor, personal ornaments, etc.). Given their signifying potential, actions within each of these nonverbal domains must be seen as central performance techniques.

For example, several kinds of extra-linguistic behaviour can be utilized to construct an impression of one’s current affective state. As Bella M. DePaulo notes, empirical studies repeatedly demonstrate that “people can successfully make clear to others, using only nonverbal cues, the internal state that they actually are experiencing and that they can also convey to others the impression that they are experiencing a particular internal state when in fact they are not” (219). Facial expressions, vocalic cues, gestures, and posture, she suggests, can all figure importantly in this process. Likewise, Matthew J. Hertenstein and his colleagues suggest that ‘social actors’ also use touch to evoke and convey particular emotional states. Reviewing the results of a 2006 study, they note that – for American subjects – “sympathy was associated with stroking and patting, anger with hitting and squeezing, disgust with a pushing motion, gratitude with shaking of the hand, fear with trembling and love with stroking” (37). Finally, gaze seems to be used habitually in order to make a given emotional expression seem particularly intense; studies suggest that individuals attempting to transmit strong feelings spend more time looking at others than do those trying to convey weak feelings (reviewed in Kleinke 81).

A clear example of the way in which these kinds of extra-linguistic behaviours can be used to communicate emotion can be found in *21 Up*. In this film, Jackie (another of the
participants hailing from London’s East End) becomes incensed by Apted’s repeated questions about her background and the opportunities it may have denied her. She conveys this anger (consciously or not) through a constellation of nonverbal cues. Perhaps most obviously, Jackie frequently assumes the facial expression commonly associated with anger in this sequence, her eyebrows flattened and pulled downwards, her eyelids tense and eyes bulging, and her mouth opened in a taut squarish configuration (Ekman and Friesen 96-7). Concurrently, she also demonstrates some of the postural/gestural characteristics that have been found to convey this emotion in a range of studies. She leans forward on her stool, for instance (Coulson 132), and her shoulders frequently appear tensed and slightly raised (Wallbott 893). Furthermore, her numerous hand gestures and head movements also demonstrate many attributes of the kinesic pattern that Joann Montepare and her associates describe as characteristic of hot anger. Her motions are “very jerky, stiff, fast, hard … and also full of action” (143). Finally, as predicted by existing research on gaze patterns, Jackie conveys the considerable extent of her emotion by fixing her eyes on Apted in an unyielding stare for several stretches of the interview in question.

In addition to activating all of these kinesic signals, however, Jackie also sets in motion a variety of paralinguistic cues that help to express the annoyance she feels toward Apted at this moment. In line with frequently replicated findings about the vocal transmission of anger, for instance, her voice increases in pitch and intensity, and her rate of speech becomes rather quick. At the same time, she speaks at an increased volume and in a strident tone that has been impressionistically referred to as ‘blaring’ (Davitz, qtd. in Murray and Arnott 1104). Finally, Jackie’s intonation patterns in this sequence also sporadically resemble the “irregular up and down inflection” that Davitz suggests is common to anger displays (qtd.
in Nwe et al.). Each of these vocalic modulations helps to create a compelling image of this everyday performer’s fury.

In several respects, then, nonverbal cues constitute important performance strategies allowing Jackie to craft an impression of anger towards the director-interviewer with whom she interacts. In fact, however, the kinesic and paralinguistic behaviors outlined briefly here don’t even begin to exhaust the possibilities for the extra-linguistic communication of this particular emotional state; other variables, such as the haptic anger cues mentioned previously, may also be instrumental in this process. Furthermore, any number of these extra-linguistic activities might be combined with cues for different emotional states, and/or with verbal utterances to produce a variety of complex, nuanced emotional messages. Jackie’s performances in the *Up Series* again provide a useful example of this process. In *49 Up*, for instance, she conveys a range of anger-related emotions nonverbally after Apted asks impertinently if she worries that one of her sons shares her personality traits. She briefly flashes the square mouth and bulging eyes characteristic of anger, and then follows this display with an expression that combines the raised brows and wide eyes of surprise (Ekman and Friesen 37-40) with the pressed, slightly upturned lips characteristic of contempt (ibid 71). Through this constellation of facial cues, Jackie thus indicates both irritation with and disdain for Apted, while simultaneously suggesting her shock at his offensive interview tactics.

Extra-linguistic cues also participate in a variety of communicative practices outside of the performance of affect. As Bella M. DePaulo notes, “nonverbal behaviors can convey many other kinds of information, too, such as information relevant to opinions, moods, values, personality dispositions, psychopathologies, physical states such as fatigue, and
cognitive states such as comprehension or befuddlement” (205). For example, research studying the nonverbal conveyance of personality attributes has noted that extra-linguistic cues play a significant role in determining a performer’s perceived intelligence, empathy, trait anxiety, self-confidence, extraversion, competence, firmness, credibility, and benevolence, amongst other characteristics. Inasmuch as this is the case, nonverbal behaviours can be seen as particularly crucial techniques for the everyday performance of self. If observers reliably use variations across extra-linguistic dimensions to infer performer personality, these channels of communication must be seen as especially potent self-presentational tools.

As evidence of this assertion, consider the large body of work that has detailed the various extra-linguistic markers that North American audiences commonly associate with social dominance. Judee K. Burgoon summarizes much of this research as follows:

Cues proposed or confirmed as indicators of higher status and power include use or possession of larger, more private, and more luxuriously appointed spaces; greater access to other people’s space, time, and possessions; initiation of conversational distance and touch patterns; asymmetrical use of touch and spatial intrusion (giving more, receiving less); less frequent but more direct eye gaze; less smiling and facial pleasantness; greater postural relaxation and asymmetry; lower and more varied pitch; use of vocal interruptions; more rapid speaking pace; and control of silences (373). Andrew, another of the Up Series’ wealthy London subjects, manifests several of these extra-linguistic markers of social status in his performances at 42 and at 49. In both of these installments of the series, he is generally filmed in or around one of his two large and stately homes, demonstrating his considerable financial means in the process. His deportment tends to remain relaxed (he often rests comfortably on a couch, for instance), and a relatively guarded, neutral facial expression is fixed to his face throughout much of his interview time. Vocally, Andrew continuously exhibits the low pitch and frequently-modulated intonation
patterns referred to above, and also gains a sense of confidence and eloquence by pausing when he sees fit during interview responses, before proceeding to issue articulate comments at a fairly rapid clip. Insofar as this performer manifests these kinesic, vocalic, and artifactual cues, research suggests that an above-chance number of North American viewers will perceive him as socially powerful.

A third performative function commonly associated with nonverbal behaviour is the communication of relational meanings. Several empirical investigations have demonstrated that extra-linguistic factors such as touching and proximity behaviours create a clear image not only of the individual performers within a social interaction, but also of the relationship(s) between them. To return to the *Up Series*, for instance, the degree to which several of the subjects feel comfortable with their interaction partners can be inferred from a variety of extra-linguistic signals. In *42 Up*, Simon (the second of the series’ subjects who grew up in a London children’s home) and his wife, Viennetta, display their intimacy and fondness for each other by standing in close proximity, wearing similar clothes, gazing at each other extensively, and maintaining a similar, relaxed stance as they watch their son on an amusement park ride. Later, they further cement this impression of closeness by holding hands and using soft, affectionate voices as they are interviewed. Conversely, when Neil (the participant from Liverpool, who eventually turned to politics after a tumultuous life of depression and homelessness) is seen canvassing for the Liberal Democrat party in *49 Up*, his lack of familiarity with the voters to whom he speaks is conveyed by his tense, erect posture, by the rather nervous way in which he grasps a stack of flyers and by the relatively great distance he maintains between himself and his constituents. In each case, the nature of the interpersonal relationship between social performers is suggested through particular
nonverbal behaviours. These behaviours thus again prove significant as everyday performance tools.

One final group of self-presentational devices must be mentioned briefly before this breakdown of quotidian social performance is complete. In addition to broadcasting self-relevant information through verbal utterances, linguistic style and extra-linguistic cues, individuals regularly forge particular images of themselves by way of the larger social activities in which they engage. Several authors have pointed out that audiences often attribute given personality traits and attitudes to performers based on factors such as the performer’s occupation and leisure pursuits; the selection of a career and of how to spend one’s spare time therefore constitute communicatively rich performance choices (even though communication may not have been the primary principle motivating such decisions).

For instance, prosocial behavior is conventionally associated with personality characteristics such as benevolence and kindness. As such, when Bruce (a math instructor from a wealthy family) is seen teaching impoverished children in London (28 Up) and in Sylhet (35 Up), providing Neil with a place to stay (42 Up), and/or donating his spare time to coach his school’s cricket team (49 Up), he conveys successfully what David J. Schneider calls an impression of being “a compliant, trustworthy, or nice person” (28). Likewise, Mark Leary notes, “People hold stereotypes about people who enjoy different sports: people have different impressions of those who enjoy tennis versus bowling versus motocross racing, for example” (Self-Presentation 35).22 Thus, when Suzy (another of the series’ affluent subjects) states that her leisure activities include “play[ing] tennis” (7 Plus 7), and when she’s later shown enjoying a match on her family’s private court (35 Up), she implicitly suggests that she possesses the attributes stereotypically associated with players of this sport. Likewise,
she later nuances this picture of herself when she is shown engaging in a game of bowling with her family in *42 Up*. In this respect, individuals such as Bruce and Suzy underline Schneider’s contention that the social endeavours in which people engage “are always potential sources of information about the actor” (28). Since they communicate in this way, these endeavours also represent part of the everyday performer’s ‘expressive’ repertoire.

Activity choice, explicit and implicit verbal descriptions, language style and nonverbal cues thus all constitute vital means by which everyday performers communicate to their audiences. By extension, these are also the basic tools of self-presentation that documentary performers bring with them into the filming situation. In performing themselves for the nonfiction camera, documentary subjects will likely call upon these devices with which they are already comfortable and proficient wherever possible. As such, analysts of documentary performance should look for and consider the ‘expressive’ implications of these foundational elements of self-presentation as a primary means of approaching and discussing the documentary subject’s communicative work.

**Tier #2: Filmic Performance**

The centrality of this everyday component of documentary performance notwithstanding, one also needs to consider the way in which the process of being filmed interacts with and affects nonfiction subjects’ self-presentation methods. After all, the moment an individual steps before the camera (and/or microphone) and becomes a documentary subject, s/he also becomes a film performer. This is true to the extent that screen performance, like its everyday counterpart, can be defined as a process wherein an individual conveys information to an audience through action. As s/he is filmed, the nonfiction performer engages in ‘expressive’ activities that will communicate not only to
his/her immediately present interaction partners, but also to an extended group of spectators who will later view the performance as part of the finished documentary text.

In fact, several scholars have pointed out that behaviours become especially communicative when filmed, even when they are completely spontaneous or accidental. Because recorded actions are finally held up and displayed for an audience, such writers argue, they acquire a particular semiotic intensity. This process, first discussed by the Prague Structuralists in relation to the theatre, has been described by Keir Elam as the ‘semiotization of the object’. Elam writes: “The stage radically transforms all objects and bodies defined within it, bestowing upon them an overriding signifying power which they lack – or which at least is less evident – in their normal social function” (6). The same can be said of the motion picture screen. As James Naremore has argued, it too “separates audience from performer, holding other gestures and signs up for show” (23). The already-‘expressive’ actions of documentary subjects thus become particularly compelling signs when framed and ostended by the film (or television) screen. As such, these actions must certainly be understood as a particular brand of filmic performance.

The question remains, however, as to whether or not the techniques involved in film performance are the same as their less potent counterparts in everyday contexts. Is the documentary performer required to abandon or to modify extensively her/his everyday performance tactics when appearing before the camera? Are there new performance tools that concurrently present themselves for consideration during the filmmaking process? The existing literature on screen acting provides several useful insights into these issues. Despite the fact that most of this work was written with professional actors and fictional films in mind, many of its observations about screen performance are applicable to the nonfiction
case as well. This is perhaps not surprising given that documentary performers and their fictional film counterparts are ultimately engaged in the same pursuit: namely, communication to an extended film audience who will only view their work as it is captured and mediated by the filmmaking apparatus. While certain aspects of the literature (such as its discussions of actor training and of the approaches to characterization associated with particular acting ‘schools’) admittedly don’t pertain to the documentary context then, others (including its enumerations of the basic means by which film actors convey information and of the ways in which the camera exerts an impact on the ‘expressive’ process) are most surely germane.

Examinations of the tools that screen actors deploy in the process of filmed communication, for instance, indicate that – in one respect – documentary performers needn’t acquire new performance techniques when making the transition to film. Time and again, the literature underlines that the implements of screen performance are essentially the same as those that everyday individuals employ in the course of mundane self-presentation.26 James Naremore perhaps makes this point most clearly when he writes, “in its simplest form, … acting is nothing more than the transposition of everyday behavior into a theatrical realm” (21). Several other scholars have also attested to this similarity in more specific terms, however, providing lists of screen acting devices that dovetail closely with those compiled by scholars of social self-presentation.

Richard Dyer, for example, states, “The signs of performance are: facial expression; voice; gestures (principally of the hands and arms, but also of any limb, e.g. neck, leg); body posture (how someone is standing or sitting); body movement (movement of the whole body, including how someone stands up or sits down, how they walk, run, etc.)” (134). Likewise,
Andrew Higson (building on comments made by Barry King) boils the film actor’s work down to communicative activity on four levels: “the facial, the gestural, the corporeal (or postural) and the vocal” (112). For his part, Leo Braudy calls “face and voice” the “two continuities of character” onscreen (189), while David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson list vocal delivery, facial expression, gaze, posture and gesture as the basic items in “The Film Actor’s Toolkit” (201-2). Of course, what all of these claims emphasize is that the ‘signs’ of filmic performance (to use Dyer’s phrase) are also examples of the kinesic and paralinguistic cues that I discussed when outlining everyday self-presentational processes. In fact, this emphasis on vocalic and kinesic modulations as defining elements in the screen actor’s repertoire has been so emphatic that Paul McDonald defines the very study of film acting as a consideration of “how the signification of the actor’s voice and body contribute to a film’s meaning” (25).

Indeed, even film performance scholars who don’t explicitly focus on enumerating the communicative signs at screen actors’ disposal seem to focus on these physical and vocal dimensions as the performer’s primary tools. Examples of this emphasis within film performance analysis are many, running from Gianluca Sergi’s comments about the way in which vocal stress, tempo, and pitch help to construct a sense of Morgan Freeman’s characters in *Driving Miss Daisy* (Bruce Beresford, USA, 1989) and *Se7en* (David Fincher, USA, 1995) (127-30), to Maria Viera’s observation that “much of the multiplicity or ambiguity of motivation [that characterizes John Cassavetes’ *Opening Night* (USA, 1977)] is conveyed through the actors’ gestures and physicality” (165).27 Given this recurring emphasis on their onscreen semiotic potential, gestural and paralinguistic cues would seem to
be essential performance tools for film actors, much as they are for the everyday performers discussed in sociological study.

In addition to this focus on the way in which screen actors use physical and vocal cues in the service of communication, some film performance scholars have also attended to the way in which artifactual manipulations can figure within screen acting. Echoing self-presentation researchers who comment on the ‘expressive’ possibilities of personal adornment, for instance, Naremore comments on the signifying work done by costumes and props onscreen, and suggests that the way in which actors interact with these “expressive objects” conveys a range of information about the characters they play. He writes:

Every form of theatricality, on or off the stage, tends to use objects in this [communicative] way: cavalry officers brandish swords, orchestra conductors flourish batons, and striptease dancers toy with bits of clothing. In each case, the object transmits both a symbolic and a ‘personal’ message; hence the crown and the scepter stand in metonymic relation to kingship, but when a specific king in a particular dramatic setting wields the scepter, we induce something about his strength and capacity to play his role (86).

As this suggests, the manipulation of props, costumes and other aspects of the performance environment also constitutes a significant means by which both film actors and performers engaged in other “form[s] of theatricality” – including day-to-day performance – convey information. This additional convergence between the techniques of everyday self-presentation and filmic acting again suggests that documentary subjects do not need to alter their ‘expressive’ machinery drastically when appearing in a nonfiction text. In fact, inasmuch as they are sometimes able to choose their own costumes and performance settings, documentary performers may even be able to control and capitalize upon everyday artifactual cues in a manner that actors in narrative fictions typically cannot.
Interestingly, texts analyzing the stage performer’s work also point toward this congruence between the tools of everyday performance and those of formalized acting. In writing about performance both on stage and onscreen, for instance, Patrice Pavis points to the importance of “gestural, facial, or vocal signs” (60), and lists “all the components of acting” as follows: “the physical and gestural, the voice, the rhythm of diction, movements” (63). Pavis also claims that many of the kinesic techniques employed in formalized acting can be taken directly from life; the more mimetic the production, he says, the less the techniques must be altered from their real world use (84). This contention, of course, again underlines that documentary subjects need not acquire new performance techniques in the course of filming, given that many kinds of nonfiction film are particularly mimetic forms of representation. Focusing on the stage more specifically, Tadeusz Kowzan has proposed that there are thirteen theatrical sign systems, many of which (e.g. words; voice inflection; facial mimicry; gesture; body movement; makeup; headdress; costume; accessory) overlap directly with the everyday dimensions of performance I’ve been outlining (cited in Eco 108). Finally, Keir Elam points explicitly to the correspondence between everyday performance and theatrical acting, arguing that proxemics, kinesics and paralinguistics serve as communicative systems on stage, and that – in doing so – they draw from and are influenced by proxemic, kinesic and paralinguistic codes that operate in the culture at large (49-75).

This repeated focus on gestural, vocalic, artifactual, and proxemic signs within examinations of performance suggests that choices along these dimensions may in fact be the defining elements of the performer’s repertoire across media. Whether on stage, on screen, or amidst an everyday audience, performers appear to draw from the same basic, underlying set of communicative devices (though they may, of course, make use of these tools in different
ways depending on the nature of the performance event in which they figure). In this sense, the transformation from everyday performer to film performer doesn’t require the documentary subject to acquire a novel set of self-presentational techniques (nor the analyst to alter her approach in a fundamental way). Indeed, the examples I’ve provided from *The Up Series* throughout this chapter demonstrate clearly the way in which actions along everyday performance dimensions both figure in screen performances and convey significant information to filmic audiences in the process.

While the screen actor and the social agent may share the same essential tools, however, film performance nonetheless differs appreciably from quotidian self-presentation in several other respects. Foremost amongst the unique factors associated with screen acting is the mediating presence of the filmmaking apparatus itself. Unlike everyday self-presentation, the film performer’s work will only reach the majority of its audience after it has been filtered through the camera and all of its associated technologies. Not surprisingly, this intervening technological presence impinges on screen performance in a variety of ways.

For instance, as theorists from V.I. Pudovkin to Giovanna Jackson have noted, the process of appearing on camera drastically alters the traditional performer-spectator relationship. Since the vast majority of the film audience is not immediately present to the screen performer during filming, s/he cannot reliably use spectator feedback as a means of monitoring and adjusting his/her signifying work (as is possible on stage or during everyday encounters.) As a result, film actors can be less sure than other performers of the impression they are making on spectators, and unexpected and/or undesired evaluations of their performances may result. In *35 Up*, for instance, Neil recounts the shock and dismay he experienced upon receiving letters from viewers who found his performances in earlier
instantiations of the series inspirational. “It seemed that I was representing some kind of successful escapism,” he says. “What really bothered me was that people seemed to see something in me that I hadn’t been aware of myself. … I didn’t think my life was a success, but suddenly everybody seemed to think so.” This kind of unforeseen interpretation is always a potential byproduct of the separation between the screen performer and his/her viewers.\(^{30}\)

At the same time, the prospect of having one’s actions fixed and made publicly available on film is likely to make many people more conscious of and careful with their performance choices than they are during many of their day-to-day dealings. Although this kind of increased ‘dramaturgical awareness’ is also characteristic of several ‘real life’ performance milieus (including the kinds of experimental contexts in which quotidian self-presentation techniques are studied), some research suggests that intentional attempts to manage the impressions one makes may be especially common in situations involving a recording device.\(^{31}\) In \textit{21 Up}, the quick, rather nervous glance that John makes toward the camera as he converses with Tony at a party implies this kind of concern with the impression he’s crafting onscreen; likewise, Sue (the last of the three East End girls who appear in the series) makes the notion of camera consciousness explicit when she admits, at 49, that she always worries about what to say when Apted arrives for filming.

Perhaps most significantly, the contingencies of filmmaking also divest performers of some of their centrality in the meaning-generation process. In many cases, for instance, \textit{mise-en-scène} items outside of the performers’ immediate control may also function as artifactual cues that speak compellingly to the identities of those onscreen. The comparison between the ‘upper’ and the ‘lower’ classes in \textit{7 Up}, for example, is articulated at least in part by the
settings in which the filmmakers choose to film. A lunchroom sequence featuring Bruce, Jackie and Sue provides a case in point.

As this sequence begins, Sue and Jackie are shown in a sparsely decorated school cafeteria crowded with utilitarian tables and metal folding chairs. They eat what appear to be beans from functional white plates and drink from plastic cups. Bruce, on the other hand, is subsequently shown lunching at an expensive wooden table – set with formal dishes and glassware – within his private school’s dining quarters. The walls behind him are adorned with framed art and a large window to his left overlooks the school’s large and lushly wooded grounds. In and of themselves, these elements of the setting create a clear sense of the children’s differing lifestyles and widely discrepant financial means. The same could be said of the difference between the plush couch, ornate chessboard and fireplace that fill the room in which John, Andrew and Charles are interviewed, and the blank grey wall and cluttered metal shelf in front of which Jackie, Lynn and Sue speak. Of course, such externally-selected environmental cues might be taken as indicative of the children’s characters in the world outside of the film as well, but the process of semiotization renders such factors much more potent than they would be if they were not specifically framed and ostended by the film screen. Artifactual cues outside of performers’ control can thus compete with, supplement, or inflect performers’ own self-presentational activities much more compellingly in situations of filmed performance than they do in everyday contexts.

Concurrently, a range of cinematic factors outside of the *mise-en-scène* also influence the meaning(s) generated by any given self-presentational act on film. Editing, cinematography and sound choices – all of which are usually beyond the performers’ purview – themselves communicate in ways that may complement, complicate, or contradict
the screen performer’s work. The abovementioned comparison between Bruce’s dining quarters and the lunchroom in which Jackie and Sue eat in *7 Up* provides an especially useful example of this process. In this case, the image of financial disparity already indicated by the sequence’s settings is rendered especially salient through editing. By cutting immediately from the East End cafeteria to the dining room at Bruce’s exclusive school, the filmmakers make the differences between these two environments particularly apparent. In fact, this kind of comparative juxtaposition is used throughout the series both to point to contrasts between individuals from various backgrounds and to suggest ways in which the subjects’ personalities have either changed or remained stable over time. In this respect, editing plays a particularly salient role in crafting meanings about the *Up Series* performers.

At the same time, however, cinematographic choices also contribute significantly to the construction of meaning in the *Up Series*, and in the vast majority of filmic texts. In the *7 Up* lunchrooms sequence, for instance, a medium close up of a cat resting on the window overlooking Bruce’s opulent school grounds is followed by a rapid zoom out to a long shot of the students at the dining room table. Arguably, this pattern of cinematographic choices exerts a signifying effect all its own, visually connecting Bruce and his classmates to the initial image of majestic serenity implied by the shot of the animal surveying the scene. Furthermore, the cinematography throughout this sequence also contributes to the comparison between social ‘classes’ outlined above. Medium close ups continually draw attention to the dissimilar kinds of food and place settings to be found in these two discrepant dining areas. At one point, the camera focuses specifically on a plate of beef on Bruce’s table, and subsequently pans slightly to keep the succulent cuisine centered onscreen as it is passed between the diners. In this manner, framing and camera movement endow the food
with particular significance, and thereby further augment the class-based contrast drawn by the setting and editing at this moment. Because they are forced to co-exist with additional cinematic signifiers of this sort, the day-to-day performance techniques that figure within film appearances are deprived of some of their communicative primacy.

In addition to reducing the performer’s semiotic independence by multiplying the number of active signifying factors involved in a text, however, the process of filming also impinges on the autonomy of the communicative subject more directly. Directors select the elements of any given performance that will be filmed and finally included in an edited text, and further mediate the way in which chosen performance cues are rendered via framing and other filmic choices. In *42 Up*, for instance, Andrew may have picked out and helped to decorate the expensive home that indicates his considerable financial means, but this artifactual signal is finally only available to communicate to audiences by virtue of Apted’s decision to use the house as an interview setting. Likewise, the pauses Andrew takes – which point toward his easy self-confidence and his willingness to control others’ time – are only apparent because they have not been excised during the editing process, while his neutral facial expression and relaxed posture are isolated and emphasized by the focused medium close up used to film them.

Various other technological considerations involved in the process of filming impinge upon and alter performance choices in this manner as well. Silent filming, for example, renders everyday language and paralanguage useless as performance tools, just as the use of black and white stock makes communicating through colour impossible. While Tony is able to convey something of his vibrancy and confidence by donning a bright red and white golfing outfit in *28 Up*, for instance, such ‘expressive’ tools are unavailable to him in the first
series film, shot in black and white twenty-one years prior. By the same token, particular kinds of sonic manipulation also affect filmic performance, influencing the way in which viewers perceive the onscreen subject’s vocal work. Another example involving Tony provides a useful case in point. In 21 Up, a portable microphone allows him to be heard clearly from a great distance as he cheers on a dog at the racetrack, technologically elevating his shouts above the noise of the large crowd. By making Tony’s voice the loudest element in the final sound mix, the filmmakers both afford him an artificial position of primacy amongst the race spectators (a fact emphasized by the slow zoom in to a medium shot of him from an initial long shot of the crowd) and prompt greater attention to the vocal and verbal aspects of his performance. The mediating framework in which everyday self-presentational cues are activated during filming thus again alters the final image constructed by this film performer, manipulating it in ways outside of his immediate control.

This altered, less certain communicative context might also encourage film performers to modulate the way in which they deploy everyday performance tools in certain respects. Perhaps most importantly, such individuals might well attempt (perhaps at the director’s behest) to adjust their self-presentational activities in response to the perspective established by the filmmaker for the recording apparatus. This consideration is emphasized continually in popular manuals on screen performance. In Acting for the Camera, for instance, Tony Barr underlines the way in which cinema-specific techniques such as framing and camera position impinge upon the film actor’s work. He reminds would-be movie actors that in a close up “your face is all that is on the screen, and there are certain limits to how much you can move” (176), and later writes that, to be visible to the camera, “the actor sometimes has to assume a physical position that is not natural in real life” (180). Scholarly
publications also emphasize how medium-specific characteristics influence screen performance. Naremore, for example, argues that movie actors must “learn to control and modulate behavior to fit a variety of situations, suiting their actions to a medium that might view them at any distance, height, or angle, and that sometimes changes the vantage point within a single shot” (41). Like their professional counterparts, nonfiction performers too may be prompted in some cases to modify their performance choices such that they are responsive to the perspective from which they’re being recorded.

The *Up Series* provides several examples of performers tailoring their mundane ‘expressive’ techniques to the camera’s viewpoint in this way. Throughout the interview sequences, which tend to be rendered in static medium shots and close ups, the subjects remain relatively still, thereby keeping themselves visible within the boundaries of the rather tight frame. Likewise, during scenes that show them going about their typical, everyday activities, the performers often appear to adjust their actions in response to the variety of locations and perspectives from which Apted films them. When the forty-two year old Tony is seen re-visiting the dog tracks he frequented fourteen years prior, for instance, he continually turns and re-positions himself so that he is in profile to or directly facing the recording device which follows him, permitting it greater access to his expressions and gestures in the process. While not strictly necessary (a filmed individual could simply go about his/her actions without actively attempting to fit them to the shot set-up chosen by the director), such modifications are common. They thus constitute another means by which filmic self-presentation frequently differs from its everyday counterpart.

In addition to respecting and reacting to the perspective of the camera, screen performers might also be prompted to construct their performances in response to the editing
process. On one hand, short, rapid takes break up the performance moment, and can thereby encourage subjects to carry out communicative actions more rapidly than they otherwise might. Conversely, lengthier takes can serve to elongate performance duration, compelling performers to fill the time and space before a delayed cut. An example of this latter phenomenon can be seen in *49 Up*, after Apted asks Nick’s second wife, Chris, if she finds her husband sexy. She laughs and replies “absolutely,” nodding slightly as if to draw the line of conversation to a close. Apted does not cut at this point, however; nor does he ask the couple another question. Finally, after about four seconds pass, Chris puts an end to the awkward moment by looking to Apted and asking sarcastically, “Didn’t you have fun with that one?” The protracted period of time during which the filmmaker refuses to cut or otherwise intervene effectively prompts this performer to take up the slack, extending her performance on this subject beyond the boundaries she initially set up for it.

Each of these considerations underlines that – in the course of appearing on camera – documentary subjects not only engage in everyday performance practices, but might also be prompted to modify and adjust these techniques in response to the practicalities of being filmed. In this respect, their work again differs from mundane self-presentation, while nonetheless making use of the self-same tools. In fact, in some cases, nonfiction performers might also be encouraged to adapt the use they make of quotidian performance techniques in a range of other ways as well. They might be required to perform awareness and/or ignorance of the camera, to maintain continuity over several takes, to take direction, to preserve a sense of spontaneity following rehearsal, to learn and deliver pre-scripted lines, etc. The extent to which any of these additional film performance tasks will be necessary, however, depends on
the nature of the documentary in which the performer participates. This, of course, will be the focus of this chapter’s final section.

**Tier #3: Documentary Performance**

The individuals who appear in nonfiction films are not only film performers making use of mediated and modified everyday self-presentational tools; they also carry out this complex communicative activity within the specific framework of the documentary text. Not surprisingly then, their work is also affected drastically by the nonfiction conventions structuring the film(s) in which they figure. These conventions fluctuate widely from text to text. Indeed, while documentary scholarship has by and large ignored the question of performance, it has demonstrated repeatedly the great breadth and diversity of the films that fall under the nonfiction mantle. The organization of this vast and varied documentary field has in fact become a major critical pursuit. Most famously, Bill Nichols argues that there are six major documentary ‘modes’: the poetic, the expository, the observational, the interactive/participatory, the reflexive, and the performative. Carl Plantinga (*Rhetoric*), on the other hand, claims that nonfiction texts should be divided according to the “voice” they employ (open, closed or poetic). David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson advocate still another system of classification, describing several nonfiction “genres” (e.g. the compilation film, the ‘talking heads’/interview film, the nature film, cinema vérité, etc.) and suggesting that individual texts within these genres may be structured according to narrative, categorical or rhetorical form (130-133). Despite their differentiating factors, all of these taxonomies indicate that nonfiction films are a complex and varied group. In doing so, they also intimate that there are several different conventions and principles that may influence and interact with performance in the documentary text.
None of these major classification systems, however, was devised with the documentary subject specifically in mind. As such, each of them offers a less-than-ideal tool for considering the impact of documentary convention on performance across the nonfiction spectrum. For instance, many of these organizational schemes overlook distinctions in performance context, grouping together films that deviate significantly in terms of the kind of activity expected from the onscreen participants. Nichols lists both *Far From Poland* (Jill Godmilow, USA, 1984) and *Man With a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, Russia, 1929) as examples of his reflexive mode, for instance. Surely, though, the theoretical, direct address monologues found in the former piece constitute performance moments of a different nature than the representational images of Elizaveta Svilova working at her editing machine in Vertov’s film. In this respect, Stella Bruzzi’s general criticism of Nichols’ model becomes particularly compelling when the issue of performance is considered. Within a classification system such as Nichols’, Bruzzi writes, “wildly heterogeneous documentaries are forced to co-exist, very uncomfortably at times, within one mode” (*New Documentary* 2).

Thomas Waugh begins to provide a solution to this problem in “Acting to Play Oneself.” Focusing on the work of the documentary performer, he divides the field of nonfiction production into three broad clusters: representational films, presentational films, and hybrids, which make use both of representational and presentational performance techniques. Furthermore, Waugh also underlines the numerous performance contexts that may figure within any one of these three groups. Within the presentational mode, for instance, he notes that documentary ‘social actors’ might perform “formal oral narrative,” “explore [the] geographical setting of their past at [the] instigation of [the] filmmaker,” perform “daily life presentationally,” “present musical performances,” participate in various
kinds of interviews, and/or “present monologues” (74-75). Even this range of possibilities, he says, is only “a suggestion of the richness and range of the evolving [nonfiction] performance vocabulary since the sixties” (74). In this manner, Waugh accounts for the variability of documentary production, which is also set out in other taxonomies, in a fashion that is more attuned to and cognizant of the performer’s work. In the process, he also provides a workable tool for considering the way in which documentary conventions influence and affect nonfiction subjects’ performative techniques.

Most obviously, Waugh’s organizational scheme underlines that the conventions put in place by the documentarist will encourage performers to cultivate a particular relationship to the camera recording them. In the *Up Series*, for instance, the individuals appearing onscreen are required to perform an awareness of the camera at some moments and to pretend ignorance of it at others, making the text an example of Waugh’s hybrid mode. The subjects generally acknowledge and present themselves to their extended audience during interviews, orienting themselves directly toward the recording apparatus and directing their attentions to an offscreen questioner ostensibly located just beside it; during the enacted sequences in which they carry out activities meant to be representative of their day-to-day lives, however, referring to the camera appears to be strictly taboo. Indeed, in *28 Up*, one of Simon’s young sons makes the representational convention at work in the enacted scenes particularly apparent. While his family is shown walking around a zoo, this young boy breaks the performance ‘rule’ that has been established for such moments, staring curiously at the camera in a manner that shatters the illusion of non-awareness that his parents and siblings nevertheless attempt to maintain.35
In a similar fashion, Jackie’s actions at one point in 21 Up emphasize the way in which a version of presentational performance is expected of subjects during the series’ interviews. In this case, Jackie refuses to look in the direction of the camera after Apted has asked a question about marriage that she finds offensive. She stares determinedly at her knees until the interview largely breaks down, illustrating her resistance to the filmmaker by refusing to conform to the performance conventions he has established. In addition to communicating information about the performers themselves (for example, Simon’s son’s inquisitiveness and Jackie’s fiery temper and refusal to be bullied), both of these exceptions underline the generally operative performance rules by which the Up Series participants are required to abide. In becoming documentary performers, they are expected to modify their everyday self-presentation according to the presentational and/or representational conventions of screen performance established by the nonfiction filmmaker.

Despite Waugh’s strict concentration on the impact of presentational/representational convention, his preliminary lists of some of the performance contexts that figure within the three kinds of documentary practice raise the notion that other aspects of the filmmaker’s method may exert an impact on subject performance as well. To be sure, while both talking heads interviews and dramatic recitations are performance types that Waugh lists as presentational, they are two distinct presentational formats; they may oblige performers to employ self-presentation techniques in different ways, and/or make use of filmic devices that influence and mediate performance in unique fashions. With this in mind, it is necessary to move beyond Waugh’s focus on acknowledging the camera or pretending ignorance of it and to consider in detail the implications of the more specific performance contexts he notes in passing. If we are to discuss adequately the way in which documentary conventions impinge
upon the nonfiction subject’s work, that is, we must consider not only the broad influence of presentational/representational codes, but also the impact of devices and procedures particular to the individual performance contexts in which documentary subjects habitually appear.

The individuals in the *Up Series*, for example, are placed within three of the most common nonfiction performance milieus: the interview, the enacted scene, and the voiceover. Each of these contexts delimits the number of day-to-day performance techniques from which they can draw effectively, while simultaneously introducing a range of performance-affecting factors uncommon to everyday interactions. The medium close to close camera distance that is common to many talking heads interviews, for instance, also works in this series’ interview sections to restrict subject movement and to remove the possibility of kinesic communication beyond the activities of the face, upper body, and hands. At the same time, the sporadic use of another cinematographic convention common to the talking heads documentary – the zoom in on the performer during moments of emotional intensity – further decreases the *Up Series* participants’ self-presentational control during their interviews. When – in *28 Up* – Apted asks Neil if he worries about his sanity, for instance, a zoom in to a tight close up magnifies the performer’s expression (which quickly shifts from cynical amusement to serious concern) and simultaneously prevents him from expressing himself via means outside the now-tighter frame. Given that zooms can be carried out without obvious camera movement, this performance-influencing modification likely also unfolds outside of Neil’s awareness.

Documentary interviews also decrease the amount of authority performers exercise over self-presentation by virtue of what Bill Nichols calls their “inherently hierarchical
structure” (Representing Reality 47). Unlike many kinds of everyday interaction (job interviews, therapy sessions, and police interrogations notwithstanding), the nonfiction interview prevents subjects from choosing freely the information they’d like to convey about themselves; instead, interviewees must attempt to craft a desired impression within the limited field established by the filmmaker’s questions. The extreme difficulty of this process is indicated at numerous turns throughout the Up Series.

On the one hand, the Up subjects’ responses to interview questions frequently underline that Apted is attempting to uncover or emphasize aspects of their lives and personalities that they would rather not discuss. Neil’s stuttering and nervous rocking as he is asked to explain why he doesn’t want to have children indicate this kind of discomfort in 28 Up, for example, as do Sue and Jackie’s fidgeting and embarrassed laughter when the director inquires about their love lives at fourteen. (Sue even turns to Jackie at this moment and remarks playfully “that’s personal, isn’t it? … We shan’t tell him, shall we?”) Likewise, when Nick is asked his opinion of women in 21 Up, he closes his eyes as if pained by the query and snickers disdainfully, simultaneously shaking his head in what appears to be bewildered amazement at this rather inane line of questioning. Having thus registered his disapproval visually, Nick echoes it vocally, his voice dripping with quiet condescension as he suggests that he already gave the most sensible response to this question when he refused to answer it at seven.

In addition to demonstrating their discomfort and/or dissatisfaction with Apted’s invasive questions in this manner, the individuals in the Up Series also reveal the way in which documentary interviewers often attempt to construct particular images of their subjects through the inquiries they make. Throughout their 21 Up interviews, for instance, several of
the performers explicitly contest the director-interviewer’s efforts to place them in line with class-based expectations, making the attempt itself rather apparent in the process. Jackie contests angrily the insinuation that her early marriage is predictably restraining, for instance, while Tony argues that his limited education has never prevented him from doing what he wants to do. Similarly, in separate interviews, both Charles and Lynn assert that – contrary to Apted’s implications – the film’s less affluent participants have in some ways had more options in life than have the individuals born wealthy. In thus refusing to endorse the class-based conclusions that Apted seems intent on drawing through his questions, the 21 Up subjects transform much of the film’s interview time into an obvious conflict between themselves and a director-interviewer with a clear agenda. Their continuous refusals and rejections make explicit what is true in every documentary interview – these individuals are not merely presenting themselves untouched and on their own terms, but rather must construct their performances in relation to the guiding, and often biased, questions of the interviewer.

Like interviews, enacted sequences also construct a framework which further influences the already mediated everyday performances involved in documentary texts. These sequences – in which nonfiction ‘social actors’ are required to perform scenes from their everyday lives – can play out in a variety of ways, of which one of the most common can be seen in the Up Series. In particular, like several documentaries, Apted’s films feature several enacted sequences in which performers are seen going about their daily business while a voiceover narrator provides accompanying commentary on the sound track. This familiar documentary convention exerts an unmistakable impact on the way in which viewers will read and respond to the activities of the onscreen performer, providing a verbal context
that indicates the ‘correct’ way in which to understand the actions seen on the image track. This process of sonically framing and pre-interpreting subject performance can be clearly seen in 7 Plus 7, when Apted’s voiceover claims that “one of the keys to the character of the seven-year-old was how they spent their free time.” An image of Bruce playing in his school band, which this statement accompanies, is thus positioned as a centrally relevant window into the boy’s personality, whether Bruce himself views his past musical endeavours as personally significant or not.36

Furthermore, not unlike the enacted sequences in many other documentaries, the scenes of ‘daily life’ found in the Up Series may have at times required the performers to carry out pre-determined or camera-conscious actions while nonetheless maintaining a sense of spontaneity. In contrast to the handheld, shaky images of many cinema vérité films, Apted’s cinematography in the series’ enacted scenes is always clear and carefully composed, suggesting that – in many cases – shots were at least partially arranged in advance rather than captured ‘on the fly.’ In several cases, the performers enter into complex, pre-existing shot set ups, thereby intimating that the time, location, and/or basic character of their actions had been previously discussed with the director. When Neil is shown returning to his house in 21 Up, for instance, the camera is already set and filming from a striking low height as the performer approaches his front walk; it likewise precedes him inside the house itself, tilting smoothly upward from an initial image of a cat to meet him from indoors as he subsequently crosses the threshold. Clearly, for shots of this nature to succeed, Neil must have (at least) been required to pause his ‘everyday’ activities until Apted had established the desired camera position. At the same time, the representational, naturalistic convention at work in these sequences also demands that this performer refrain from telegraphing the pre-
arranged or otherwise restricted nature of his actions. As this example suggests, then, the cinematographic methods employed for the *Up Series*’ enacted sequences impel performers to disguise a range of novel, practical considerations beneath their day-to-day self-presentational procedures, making their actions seem unprompted and ‘natural’ in the process.

Voiceover, too, exerts this kind of performance-modifying effect. The *Up Series*, in fact, features two different kinds of offscreen commentary, both of which operate according to conventions that have an indelible influence on the narrating performer’s work. The first of these two voiceover types – traditional ‘voice of God’ narration – requires the performing subject (who, in this case, is the director himself\textsuperscript{37}) to deliver lengthy, pre-scripted passages of prose, a task that figures only rarely in everyday performative practice. Perhaps more importantly, this widespread documentary technique also divests the *Up Series*’ director-narrator of his physical performance tools and forces him to signify through aural means alone.

On the one hand, this process of disembodiment invests Apted’s vocal performance with a peculiar sense of persuasive authority; as Nichols suggests, it forces the viewer to attend “less to the physical presence of the commentator as a social actor engaged with the world than [to] the movement of the argument or statement about the world which the commentator advances” (*Representing Reality* 37-38). With this in mind, when Apted claims – in *7 Plus 7* – that the children’s leisure pursuits are central to their developing personalities, the lack of personalizing visual cues accompanying his voice might be said to help make this statement seem particularly convincing. Indeed, as Mary Ann Doane says of this type of narration more generally, “[i]t is precisely because the voice is not localizable, because it
cannot be yoked to a body, that it is capable of interpreting the image, producing its truth” (369). Apted’s use of the serious, official tone common to expository documentaries surely contributes to this effect as well, inasmuch as it helps to create what Nichols has elsewhere described as “a sense of credibility from qualities such as distance, neutrality, disinterestedness, or omniscience” (Introduction 107). From this perspective, the unique characteristics of ‘voice-of-God’ commentary simultaneously limit the number of ‘expressive’ tools at the performer’s disposal, and augment the communicative potency of the restricted set of vocal devices that remain available to him/her.

At the same time, however, Stella Bruzzi points out that the tendency amongst nonfiction theorists to assert the communicative primacy of the incorporeal narrating voice is not unproblematic. She writes:

“The questionable belief behind the theorisation of the narration-led documentary is that the voice-over automatically becomes the dominant and therefore subjectifying force behind every film in which it is substantially used, that its didacticism stems from its inevitable pre-eminence in the hierarchy of documentary devices. Instead, it should be acknowledged that a strong voice-over rarely renders the truth contained within the image invisible …” (New Documentary 49).

Evidence for this claim can be found at the beginning of 7 Up. At this point, the narrator’s attempt to distinguish definitively between the series’ subjects on the basis of wealth (he notes that they come from “startlingly different backgrounds”) is undercut by images that show the children engaged in extremely similar activities at a zoo. Despite imbuing vocal devices with special communicative potential in some respects, then, ‘voice-of-God’ narration also tempts the ‘expressive’ capabilities of the narrator’s voice by forcing it to co-exist with meaning-rich images taken in a different time and/or place. This brand of offscreen narration thus not only reduces commentators to aural means of communication and invests
their voices with particular power; it also demands that vocal cues – however potent – be understood in relation to the images that they accompany.

The *Up Series*’ other major form of voiceover – displaced audio segments from the subjects’ interviews – also demonstrates the way in which nonfiction performance is influenced by the context in which it takes place. To begin with, like the director commentator, the performer whose interview responses are heard in voiceover is prevented from communicating by kinesic, haptic, proxemic and/or artifactual means as s/he speaks. Unlike the ‘voice-of-God’ narrator, however, her/his offscreen voice is not simultaneously invested with special weight through a process of disembodiment. Rather, this type of voiceover has much in common with the kind of offscreen voice Doane describes as figuring within the flashback sequences of fiction films: Although it “effects a temporal dislocation of the voice with respect to the body, the voice is frequently returned to the body” (369). In this respect, the offscreen vocal performances of the interview subjects in the *Up Series* remain continually situated and personalized; while they still exert a signifying effect, they are prevented from assuming a position of omniscient authority.

Concurrently, the offscreen interview voice also must contend with the communicative potential of co-present images referred to above. When Suzy is shown bowling with her family in the series’ fifth installment, for example, displaced sound from one of her interviews not only inflects her non-simultaneous actions on the image track, but is also affected by those co-present visuals. The happy expressions and physical relaxation of the family as they bowl lead viewers to believe that the unhappy times Suzy and Apted discuss on the soundtrack are a thing of the past, for instance, just as this relocated aural commentary encourages viewers to understand the images as a specific indicator of how
much this subject’s life has changed. In addition to severing the auditory components of subjects’ performances from their visual complements, then, this second voiceover context also reduces the amount of control subjects wield over the meaning of their vocal cues by placing those cues in relation to images selected by the filmmaker.

Voiceover, enacted sequences and interviews thus all make use of specific conventions that both influence what the *Up Series*’ subjects do and affect how those actions are finally perceived by spectators. By the same token, other, less common performance contexts in which these performers are also asked to self-present exert a similar effect. Sporadic prompted scenes – wherein the individuals are filmed reacting to an event instigated by the filmmaker – require the subjects to re-tool their everyday performance machinery in response to loaded situations which they would otherwise not encounter. In *21 Up*, for example, Apted brings Paul and Simon together for a recorded tour of the children’s home in which they both lived as seven-year-olds. In so doing, the director tacitly encourages these two men to reminisce about their days at the facility, and forces them to carry out their self-presentation in relation to each other and to this heavily coded setting.

In a similar fashion, the longitudinal nature of the series prompts the individuals participating in the *Up Series* to construct their later performances in relation to their work in previous installments of this ongoing documentary project. Given that (in every film from *7 Plus 7* onwards) the subjects’ current actions are intercut with archive footage from previous series chapters, they must self-present in awareness of the fact that their present activities will be placed in direct comparison with performances from other times in their lives. Indeed, Paul points explicitly to this unique consideration during one of his interviews in *21 Up*, referring to a comment he made – at fourteen – about wanting to be alone, and demonstrating
the amount that he’s changed in the intervening years by declaring his current love for people. As this suggests, longitudinal appearances – like prompted scenes, voiceover, enacted sequences and interviews – influence the performative work that unfolds within them.

And, of course, the *Up Series* does not exhaust the possibilities in terms of the way in which nonfiction conventions shape documentary performance. For one thing, other documentaries make use of interviews, enacted scenes and/or voiceovers of a different sort than those found in Apted’s films, shifting their performance-modifying effects accordingly. An animated interview, such as the one found in *Ryan* (Chris Landreth, Canada, 2004), for example, decreases the direct role that performers play in their visual self-presentation, while a Nick Broomfield- or Michael Moore-style ‘ambush interview’ forces subjects to respond to leading (and often incriminating) questions while they are unprepared for an encounter and/or otherwise occupied. Likewise, the enacted sequences common to American direct cinema and Canadian candid-eye films are frequently rendered using unplanned, handheld cinematography that might capture only a portion of a subject’s preferred self-presentational activities clearly. Alternative voiceover conventions also affect performance in unique ways. The professional actors who recite offscreen prose written from the perspective of historical personages in films such as *On Strike: The Winnipeg General Strike, 1919* (Clare Johnstone Gilsig/Joseph MacDonald, Canada, 1991), for example, are required to both learn and rehearse pre-scripted texts and also – like the actors in radio drama – to interpret and present others’ personalities through vocal means alone.

Furthermore, many nonfiction texts require individuals to appear within performance frameworks that do not feature within the *Up Series* at all. Documentary subjects may be
seen self-presenting within newsreel footage; diary or home video recordings; reenactments and dramatizations; and filmed versions of formalized performances such as musical numbers, lectures or poetry readings (either taking place within the world documented or constructed specifically for the documentary at hand), for instance. Each of these contexts (many of which will be returned to in subsequent chapters) also exerts a palpable impact on the documentary performer’s work. Just as the everyday self-presentation at the heart of nonfiction performance is modified by the general practicalities of the filming process, then, so too is it affected by the specific nonfiction conventions chosen for the film in which it features.

**Conclusion**

Documentary performance is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. At core, it consists of deploying communicative tools common to everyday interactions. In the course of filming, however, these quotidian techniques are influenced heavily by – and may be tuned in response to – both the practical considerations of the filmmaking process and the specific nonfiction conventions chosen for the film in question. With this in mind, documentary performance must be understood as a three-tiered process, in which day-to-day self-presentation (1) is shaped by the camera (2) within specific nonfiction film frameworks (3). Significantly, this model of what the documentary subject’s work entails also suggests a useful means of analysing individual nonfiction performances. It indicates the rectitude of focusing closely on quotidian self-presentational tools such as language, kinesics and paralinguistics, insofar as these constitute the foundational elements of the performer’s repertoire across media. At the same time however, this three-tiered model also underlines the necessity of considering the way in which such everyday ‘expressive’ choices are
influenced, complemented and/or constrained by filmic choices and specific documentary conventions. Documentary performances are not simply replicas of real world encounters – in spite of the extent to which they feature some of the same elements – and an acknowledgment of these documentary-specific mediating factors is a necessary part of discussing the particularity of the nonfiction subject’s work.

While I have attempted in this chapter to provide a flexible version of what nonfiction performance consists of, the question of what it does still remains. How does the complex work of the documentary performer contribute to the meaning(s), function(s) and/or effect(s) of the film in which it figures? Moreover, given Schechner’s emphatic reminder that all performance events are ultimately unique (36-37), how does the general model of nonfiction performance advanced here apply to and play out within specific documentary texts outside of the Up Series? In order to begin to address these questions, the remainder of this study will be devoted to analyzing the effects engendered by nonfiction performance within a range of documentary exemplars.

1 The Up Series has been selected as an illustrative example for a variety of reasons. To begin with, the project’s longitudinal nature makes it quite useful for this kind of study, insofar as it allows the series to present a wealth of performance material for analysis. Given the sheer amount of screen time that its subjects have been afforded, that is, this particular documentary example stands a greater chance than most of demonstrating the wide variety of performance techniques and considerations that can figure within nonfiction practice. At the same time, the particular structure that Apted has chosen for the series requires its performers to work within three of the most common documentary contexts: the interview, the enacted sequence and the voiceover. As such, this example will provide an especially useful means for considering the way in which common nonfiction frameworks affect the documentary performer’s work later in the chapter.

2 The way in which various nonfiction contexts interact with and impinge upon documentary performance will be discussed later in the chapter.

3 For discussions of this process in the nonfiction context, see: Barnouw (Documentary); Bruzzi (New Documentary); Comolli; MacDougall “The Fate”; etc. For similar arguments pertaining to experimental situations, see: Djikic et al.; Leary (Self-Presentation); M. Page; Rosenthal and Rosnow; etc.
Here (and throughout this section), the word expressive is meant simply as a synonym for communicative. I do not intend to imply, by this usage, that the various performance techniques I will discuss should be understood to convey some fixed, pre-existing identity. Rather, I mean only to underline that the techniques carry or express information; audiences (and perhaps by performers themselves in some instances) take these techniques as indicative of performers’ traits, emotions, relationships, etc. In order to respect this complexity, I have elected to place the term in inverted commas throughout.

In this, I differ from several psychology scholars, who understand self-presentation in purely conscious, strategic (or, at most, ‘once-conscious’) terms. (See, for instance, DePaulo). Thus, while I draw heavily from the social psychological literature at certain junctures, my understanding also departs from some of its tenets in important respects.

Having clearly introduced these techniques by artificially separating them in this chapter, I will later gesture toward their complex interactivity by attempting to reintegrate them in my extended case studies of individual documentary performance texts.

It should be acknowledged that these examples – and, indeed, all of the instances of day-to-day performance figuring within the Up Series – may have been augmented and/or otherwise influenced by signifying elements of the filmic medium that do not figure in ‘real life’ performances. In each case, however, everyday self-presentation techniques still figure importantly as part of the profilmic event, demonstrating both the commonality of mundane performance tools within nonfiction environments and the ability of such tools to convey information even within this altered, somewhat circumscribed context (which will itself be discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections of this chapter).

Of course, viewers might interpret this assertion and its implications in other ways as well. The point here (and with all of the examples provided throughout this section) is not to suggest that performance choices have singular and fixed social meanings. They certainly do not. By providing specific examples of this nature, I mean only to demonstrate the communicative potential of various self-presentational tools by pointing toward the way(s) in which some audiences might respond to these cues.

Psychologists refer to this technique as ‘basking in reflected glory’. (For further discussion of this common self-presentation strategy, see: Leary [Self-Presentation]; Richardson and Cialdini; Schlenker [Impression Management] etc.)

For other examples of this sort, see Mehrabian on the way in which less specific pronouns (such as ‘one’) are often used to indicate decreased liking (35).

In fact, the above examples don’t even begin to exhaust pronouns’ communicative possibilities. For example, in some cases, pronouns can be used to lay subtle claim to rather specific identity formations. In discussing this process, Martin J. Malone transcribes the following useful example from Harvey Sacks’ work: “A kid comes into the parents’ bedroom in the morning and says to his father, ‘Can we have breakfast?’ His father says, ‘Leave Daddy alone, he wants to sleep’” (44). In Malone’s reading, this parent’s choice to refer to himself in the third person (which strictly grammatical understandings of language wouldn’t anticipate) serves to obliquely assert that he (the speaker) occupies the specific, socially authenticated status position of ‘father’ (44-5). Furthermore,
Malone notes that pronouns can also be used to forge and/or to sever bonds between a speaker and his/her immediately present interaction partners. He writes: “Reference to ‘we’ in a clearly inclusive sense makes the speaker and addressee part of the same unit. By contrast, a speaker’s use of ‘you’ may separate the speaker from the addressee, or it may be heard as ‘we,’ given the right context. A speaker’s reference to a co-present person as ‘she’ or ‘he’ or ‘they’ removes them from participatory status in the exchange” (75). Clearly then, pronouns must be seen as communicatively rich verbal performance tools.

12 See Mahl and Schulze for a summary of much of the early work in this field.

13 Indeed, research in this field has not been limited to exploring the linguistic communication of anxiety. For instance, see also Mehrabian and Scherer, and London and Wolf on the verbal transmission of liking and confidence, respectively.

14 For further discussion of these, and other, categories of nonverbal communication, see Baesler and Burgoon; Burgoon; DePaolo; and Hoffner and Cantor.

15 DePaulo references a wide range of studies that support this contention. See also: Ekman and Friesen; Keltner et al.; Matsumoto et al.; and Russell, Bachorowski and Fernandez-Dols (on facial expression), Coulson; Mignault and Chaudhuri; Montepare et al; Wallbott (on gesture and/or facial expression), and Bachorowski and Owren; Banse and Scherer; House; Murray and Arnott; Nwe, Foo and DeSilva; Russell, Bachorowski and Fernandez-Dols; Scherer (“Expression”); Scherer, Johnstone and Klasmeyer; and Ward (on paralanguage).

16 Again, the following examples should be taken simply as illustrations of the way in which anger might be conveyed. While the techniques noted have frequently been associated with this emotion by an above-chance number of North American subjects, certain individuals on this continent may interpret these cues in different ways, and members of non-North American cultures may ascribe different meanings to them entirely. When considering the meanings associated with performance signs, we must always keep Judee K. Burgoon’s warning in mind: “Cultures vary on what is normative behavior,” she writes, “and there is also considerable within-culture variability as a function of subgroup and contextual norms” (360). Furthermore, the techniques described here in relation to anger may also feature in the communication of other emotions and states, while anger itself can be conveyed via other means. As Hertenstein et al. point out, nonverbal communication is subject to the principles of equipotentiality and equipotentiality. “The principle of equifinality refers to the idea that the same communicative outcome can be achieved via a number of different means (e.g., anger may be communicated via a slap or a push). The principle of equipotentiality refers to the idea that the same type of touch can be assigned very different meanings or consequences (e.g., an arm around one’s shoulders interpreted as loving or a display of dominance).” (9). Given these considerations, the examples offered above must be seen as only one possible set of usages and interpretations of these particular performance signs.

17 These vocalic anger cues are reported in Banse and Scherer; Juslin and Laukka; Murray and Arnott; Rochman, Diamond and Amir; Scherer (“Expression”); Scherer (“Vocal Affect”); Sobin and Alpert; Wallbott and Scherer; Williams and Stevens; etc.

18 See Behling and Williams; Borkenau and Liebler; Murphy et al.; and Reynolds and Gifford (on intelligence), Davis and Kraus (cited in Murphy et al.) (on empathy), Mahl and Schulze (on trait
anxiety), Aronovitch; Lovell; and Scherer, London and Wolf (on self-confidence), Addington; and Aronovitch, (on extraversion), Kleinke; and Ray; (on competence); Pruitt and Smith (on firmness), Burgoon; Burgoon et al.; and Zuckerman and Miyake (on credibility) and Ray (on benevolence).

19 See also: Carney et al.; Hertenstein et al.; Kleinke; Lovell; Mignault and Chaudhuri; and Schlenker, (Impression Management).

20 The behaviours discussed here in relation to Simon and Viennetta’s exchanges have been found to generate an impression of intimacy in several studies. See, for example, the research outcomes reported in Burgoon; Grahe and Bernieri; Hertenstein et al.; Heslin et al.; Kleinke; Mehrabian; and Schlenker (Impression Management).

21 According to Judee Burgoon, “vocalic and kinesic anxiety cues, especially nonfluencies, adaptors, and postural tension or erectness, plus greater distance” (375) are commonly recognized indicators of interpersonal uncertainty or discomfort.

22 The same could be said of the decision to join specific community groups, to listen to certain kinds of music, to frequent particular meeting places, etc. In fact, scholars have suggested the ‘expressive’ significance of a range of social pursuits, including: risk-taking and health-damaging behaviors (Martin Ginis and Leary; O’Callaghan and Doyle; Roth); and violent or aggressive activities (Baumeister [“A Self-Presentational View”]; Leary [Self-Presentation]; Stretesky and Pogrebin). Frey and Smith note that social behaviours may also be used to form impressions of other individuals in an interaction, and of relationships between interaction partners.

23 See also Eco.

24 A similar argument is made by Barry King in “Articulating Stardom”.

25 The process of semiotization also suggests that even the slightest of actions can carry ‘expressive’ weight on film. As a result, individuals whose communicative abilities are hampered to such an extent that we might be prompted to call them ‘unable’ to perform (as in the terminally ill patients in Allan King’s Dying at Grace [Canada, 2003], for instance) can nonetheless influence spectators’ perceptions through their drastically reduced self-presentation means. These unconscious, diminished onscreen actions thus also constitute performance, since the process of framing and ostending them encourages audiences to view them as meaning-rich. This is simply performance of a different degree.

26 See also: Hoffner and Cantor, who describe a range of research demonstrating parallels between the ways in which we respond to everyday performers and to screen characters. This work emphasizes that the things that screen characters do (behaviours, gestures, etc.) influence our perceptions of them just as do the similar activities of everyday performers.

27 Some of the numerous other analyses that demonstrate this focus on gesture, facial expression and/or vocal delivery as central film performance techniques include: the chapters by Carson, McDonald, Self, Tomasulo, Zucker and others within Baron, Carson and Tomasulo; the chapters by Knobloch, Pearson and others in Lovell and Kramer; Affron (Cinema and Sentiment); Affron (Star Acting); Baron (“Performances”); Chow; Larue and Zucker; Kozloff; Pearson; Riis (“Film Acting”); Scott; Wexman (Creating); Wexman (“Kinesics”); Zucker; etc.
Kowzan’s remaining theatrical sign systems are stage design, lighting, music, and noise.

See also Bernard (cited in Pavis), who includes postures; attitudes; movements; facial expressions; and vocality amongst the elements of an actor’s corporeal work (65). Martin Esslin, too, lists a similar group of tools in The Field of Drama (56-71).

Indeed, the documentary literature provides other examples of this sort as well. Brenda Longfellow, for instance, describes the surprise and disappointment experienced by Troy Hurtubise when he discovered that urban audiences found his performance in Project Grizzly (Peter Lynch, Canada, 1996) comical. She quotes him as saying: “I don’t know where the laughs come from … In certain parts of the film, it doesn’t make sense to me. I try to explain to people … while you’re laughing, you’re missing the narration.” (208)

See, for instance, Djikic et al. Jean Rouch (219-220) and Roland Barthes (10) also make similar claims about the special disturbance caused by the camera, though they don’t provide empirical data to back up their claims. As indicated in the introduction to this study, however, there are exceptions that prove this general rule. Individuals who are unaware of the camera’s presence or who do not understand the implications of it, for example, will not necessarily demonstrate the kind of camera consciousness under discussion.

In 7 Up, for instance, Apted cuts between interview sequences in which subjects from different backgrounds discuss money-related issues, forcing a comparison between these individuals in the process. Andrew’s comment that he owns shares in the Financial Times, for example, is immediately followed up by a sequence in which Sue asks Jackie what she would do with “a lot of money - say, two pounds”. The second process mentioned above (using editing to indicate similarities or differences in subjects’ personalities over time) can be seen in several of the later films in the series. In 42 Up, for example, Apted points to continuities in Nick’s character by cutting between images of him tromping around his childhood home at seven and again at 42.

Though some performers may double as filmmakers and thereby retain control over the way in which their performances are imaged, the vast majority do not have this luxury. Even in documentaries, wherein directors frequently also manifest a performance presence (either as an onscreen subject or as an offscreen voiceover narrator/interviewer), most subjects do not have directorial control. While Jonathan Caouette or Agnes Varda control the final representation of their own performances in Tarnation (USA, 2003) and The Gleaners and I (France, 2000), respectively, for instance, the numerous other individuals who appear in these films exert no such power.

Waugh defines these terms as follows: Representational performance, he says, abides by “the documentary code of narrative illusion borrowed from the dominant fiction cinema. When subjects perform ‘not looking at the camera,” when they represent their lives or roles, the image looks natural, as if the camera were invisible, as if the subject were unaware of being filmed” (68). Conversely, he continues, presentational performance can be defined as “[t]he convention of performing an awareness of the camera rather than a nonawareness, of presenting oneself explicitly for the camera” (ibid).

The aforementioned moment, in 21 Up, when John directs his attention briefly toward the camera during a party is another example of this process.
In this respect, Apted makes the process of attributing personality characteristics to individuals based on their leisure activities (see pp. 19-21) even more likely than it would be in absence of the voiceover.

As mentioned in note 32, directors often appear as performers within documentary films. Some filmmakers, such as Michael Moore, Nick Broomfield and Ross McElwee, in fact structure the bulk of their documentary output around their own onscreen appearances. While such director-performers undoubtedly retain more control over their self-presentational work than do the majority of documentary subjects, even they must contend with the ways in which the filmmaking apparatus and conventions of nonfiction filmmaking influence and alter performance. They can select the ways in which their performances will be constrained and mediated, that is, but cannot avoid the simple facts of constraint and mediation.

Newsreel performances can be seen in Fall of the Romanov Dynasty (Esfir Shub, Russia, 1927), Why We Fight (Frank Capra, USA, 1943-1945), and The Year of the Pig (Emile de Antonio, USA, 1968), for example, while diary or home video recordings figure in films such as Capturing the Friedmans (Andrew Jarecki, USA, 2003), Tarnation (Jonathan Caouette, USA, 2003), and Les glaneurs et la glaneuse (Agnès Varda, France, 2000). Reenactments and dramatizations constitute significant performance frameworks in a range of nonfiction texts, including The Thin Blue Line (Errol Morris, USA, 1988), The Body Beautiful (Ngozi Onwurah, UK, 1991), Little Dieter Needs to Fly (Werner Herzog, Germany, 1997) and Looking for Langston (Isaac Julien, UK, 1988). Finally, formalized performances likewise figure in a vast number of documentaries. Recorded diegetic performances can be found in films such as Titicut Follies (Frederick Wiseman, USA, 1967), Moon Over Broadway (Chris Hegedus/D.A. Pennebaker, USA, 1997), and An Inconvenient Truth (Davis Guggenheim, USA, 2006), for instance, while Harvest of Shame (Fred W. Friendly, USA, 1960), The American Ruling Class (John Kirby, USA, 2005), and Tongues Untied (Marlon Riggs, USA, 1990) make use of various kinds of formal performance conceived specifically for the film in question.
Chapter 2: The Architecture of Identity and Meaning

In *Reading People, Reading Plots*, James Phelan argues that one of the many tasks of characterization in the novel is to perform what might be called a “mimetic function” (11). As part of the process of writing, Phelan claims, a novelist usually invests a character with particular attributes and dimensions that work toward establishing an impression of that character as a discrete, ‘lifelike’ individual (ibid). This chapter proceeds from the assumption that a similar argument might be made about documentary texts. While some documentaries may avoid people altogether or feature only vague humanoid abstractions, the vast majority of nonfiction films trade in the mimetic creation of images of plausible human beings. In the documentary context, however (as opposed to that of the novel), any “portrait of a possible person” (J. Phelan 11) is constructed at least in part through performative action; the individuals representing and embodying particular ‘characters’ onscreen do things that help to define and construct what might be called their ‘documentary identities.’

That the activities of the nonfiction performer should exert this kind of identity-formulating effect is likely not surprising. After all, scholars discussing everyday self-presentation and screen acting – both of which are components of the documentary subject’s work – have emphasized repeatedly the way in which performance plays a significant role in determining and conveying character. Moreover, this sense that the nonfiction subject participates in the construction of his/her textual persona can also be found more directly within the small body of existing documentary performance scholarship. Writing of biographical films, for example, Audrey Levasseur contends that “the non-celebrity’s most potent tool for self-definition in cinematic biography is the construction and enactment of arresting performing identities” (63). Likewise, Vinecius do Valle Navarro argues that –
within person-centered American documentaries of the 1960s – performance equipped subjects with a means to “shape and reshape [their] own image[s]” (284). In the face of such converging evidence, any poetics of nonfiction performance must begin by acknowledging that the performer’s work is an element of the representational equipment by which documentary identities are formed.

While, at first blush, this might seem like an obvious conclusion, it is nonetheless an important point that has yet to be explored in the detail it merits. On the one hand, insights such as Levasseur’s and Navarro’s must be substantiated and extended by attention to nonfiction texts outside of the limited bodies of work they study. These scholars’ analyses also need to be supplemented by more detailed performance analysis (Levasseur’s study is often particularly underdeveloped in this regard). Perhaps more importantly, the argument that performance is one of the architects of documentary identity has a range of significant implications that scholars such as Levasseur and Navarro do not consider. For example, if we accept Michael Renov’s contention that one of the four functions of nonfiction production is “to record, reveal, or preserve” entities, including persons (“Poetics” 21), then the documentary subject’s work must be seen as a central aspect of this process; performance helps to construct and communicate the personalities being recorded, revealed or preserved in nonfiction films and television programs. Furthermore, the characters formed and offered up by performing individuals also affect audiences’ sense of the larger meaning(s) of any given documentary text. Again in this respect, an awareness of performance’s identity-formation function resituates the subject’s work as a central element of nonfiction discourse, one which contributes to the creation of characters that are not only of interest in and of themselves, but also help to determine the meanings and ‘truths’ of the text as a whole.
With all of these considerations in mind, this chapter positions the construction of character (or documentary identity) as the first major function within a poetics of documentary performance. By tracing some of the techniques outlined in Chapter One through a range of specific case studies, I provide a detailed demonstration of the performer’s role in crafting textual personae, and also illustrate the way in which these performer-crafted characters ultimately influence our interpretations of nonfiction texts. In so doing, I flesh out several points that have heretofore been made only elliptically, and simultaneously begin to establish the functional complexity of the documentary performer’s work.

**The Mimetic Function of Performance – Constructing Leonard Cohen**

Like many public figures, Canadian poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen has been the subject of multiple documentary films over the course of his extended career. The earliest of these texts – *Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen* (Donald Brittain and Don Owen, Canada, 1965) – and one of the most recent – *Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man* (Lian Lunson, USA, 2006) – together provide an especially useful means of examining some of the ways in which nonfiction performance participates in the mimetic creation and communication of documentary identities. Insofar as dissimilar self-presentation choices (framed by, filtered through and combined with other formal elements) build up a rather different image of the same individual in each of the two films, these documentaries illustrate the performer’s role in nonfiction characterization in an especially pronounced fashion. Furthermore, Cohen’s celebrity status makes these films useful sites at which to reconsider the relationship between performance and star persona, and – more specifically – to demonstrate the formative capacity of the former even within documentary texts wherein the latter is also operative. Finally, unlike several other films that meet all of the above criteria, these Cohen-centered
documentaries have not received much scholarly attention. As such, the ensuing discussion will initiate dialogue about two widely overlooked examples of nonfiction production, even as it illustrates the identity-shaping power of the documentary subject’s work.

Although Leonard Cohen’s star image is a complex and variegated one, it has in many ways remained remarkably stable over the course of his fifty-plus years in the public eye. Despite the fact that Cohen has defined himself (and has been defined) variously as a poet, a novelist, a singer-songwriter, and a Buddhist monk, several themes re-occur throughout his work in all its forms, and also throughout the publicity materials, reviews, and other cultural texts that take him as their subject. These defining elements of the Cohen persona include: a marked lugubriousness which has led to monikers such as “The Godfather of Gloom” (de Lisle 4) and “the arch bard of miserabilism” (Spencer 45); considerable wit and an ironic sense of humour; a paradoxical personality that combines a range of apparently discrepant traits (including the comicality and gloominess referred to above); a supposed capacity for visionary insight; a desire for and/or attainment of modern-day sainthood; a love for fine clothes and good grooming; an attachment to women and a Casanova reputation; and a relaxed, rather indulgent lifestyle marked especially by addictions to alcohol, cigarettes, and coffee.6

Of course, as countless scholars of stardom might suggest, these oft-discussed elements of Cohen’s celebrity persona exert a sizeable influence on our understanding of his documentary identity within Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen and Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man. We feel we know Cohen going into these films, and this foreknowledge frames and informs our understanding of the kind of ‘plausible person’ he embodies within the texts themselves. In fact, star discourse might be an especially
compelling factor in guiding our perception of character in these films (and, indeed, in all
documentaries involving famous personalities), insofar as it needn’t compete with or be fitted
to a secondary, fictional identity that the celebrity in question enacts. Unlike the vast majority
of stars who feature in fictional movies and television programs, that is, public figures
appearing in documentaries usually play only themselves (however constructed their
personae), a fact that likely renders the popular discourse about them especially salient to
spectators.

Nonetheless, these two Cohen-centered texts demonstrate that star image only goes so
far in the construction of character, even in this rather extreme case. Despite the relative
stability of Cohen’s extratextual persona, the films generate markedly dissimilar portraits of
him; each one activates, underlines, augments, and contributes to the perpetuation of
different elements of the poet-songwriter’s lore. In this respect, these documentaries provide
strong support for Richard Dyer’s claim that individual films necessarily emphasize and/or
downplay particular elements of a star’s image lexicon by means of a range of formal
devices. “[F]rom the structured polysemy of the star’s image,” Dyer claims, “certain
meanings are selected in accord with the overriding conception of the character in the film”
(Stars 127). My argument, of course, is that performance plays a central role in this process.8

In Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen, for example, Cohen’s documentary
identity is tightly connected to one specific element of his celebrity persona: the complex and
paradoxical personality that has led commentators to refer to him as “Part wolf, part angel”
(Huston 90), and as a “beautiful creep” (anonymous, qtd. in Goldstein 45). To be sure, the
fact that popular writings have positioned Cohen consistently as an individual who – in Todd
Gitlin’s terms – “caresses paradoxes” (par.9), “spin[s] reversals” (ibid), and delights in
making “the commonplace sound weird” (par.6) does much to influence one’s sense of him as a contradictory figure within this particular documentary.\textsuperscript{9} Performance, however, also contributes significantly to this characterization, helping – as Dyer puts it – “to foreground and minimize the image’s traits appropriately” (Stars 127).

Across the film, Cohen is required to enact his own identity within a range of nonfiction contexts, and – in each of these domains – he mobilizes several cues that help to emphasize and flesh out his status as an individual of apparently antipodal sensibilities. Like the individuals featured in the \textit{Up Series}, for instance, Cohen appears within both traditional ‘talking heads’ interviews and enacted sequences in which he’s seen ‘going about his business’ while a non-simultaneous voiceover plays on the soundtrack. Despite the fact that these conventional nonfiction situations constrain Cohen’s self-presentational choices considerably (forcing him to respond to the guiding questions of the director and to avoid gestures that would fall outside of the rather tight frame in the former case, and to signify through visible means alone in the latter), they also provide him with a restricted space in which to demonstrate some of the contradictions in his character.

In one interview sequence, for instance, Cohen evokes his paradoxical inclinations by way of three of the most common performance techniques: self-descriptive language, intonation and facial expression. Captured in a static medium close up as he discusses his trip to Cuba shortly before the Bay of Pigs Invasion, he claims, “the real truth is that I wanted to kill or be killed.” A quick cut, however, then immediately juxtaposes this emphatic self-description with a later moment from the interview, in which Cohen conveys an entirely different message. Here, he counters his own earlier comment unequivocally, stating, “no, no. I don’t want to give the idea, as I’ve been giving in the past ten or fifteen minutes, that
I’m completely obsessed with the idea of danger.” By placing these two logically opposed comments immediately next to each other, the editing of the sequence evokes a sense of this documentary subject’s paradoxical nature especially emphatically; Cohen himself, however, also contributes to this characterizing process by issuing the contradictory statements that the filmmakers appose. Finally, after a brief pause, he further augments this complex version of his personality without the aid of a cut, shifting gears once more by saying, “But I suppose I am. So it’s just as well that I gave the idea away.” By way of these multiple verbal reversals (enhanced in the first case by editing), Cohen helps to position himself as a figure of antonymous claims. He suggests that he is and that he is not obsessed with violence, and further intimates that he is both proud of and hesitant to admit to this uncertain fascination.

The nonverbal choices that Cohen makes in the course of articulating this continuously shifting description further emphasize one’s sense of its contradictoriness. As he issues his first claim about being captivated by the thought of physical harm, for instance, he constructs a sense of self-assured confidence by frequently directing his unashamed gaze toward the offscreen interviewer. Furthermore, he uses a variety of gestural and paralinguistic cues to invest this statement with maximum dramatic force, leading Ira Nadel, for one, to assert that Cohen proclaims his attraction to death “with bravado” (Life in Art 51). Most tellingly in this respect, Cohen pauses for emphasis after saying “the real truth is”, and then underscores the morbidity of his subsequent words by using two of the intensifying facial punctuators discussed by Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen (70) – an eyebrow raise on “kill” and a widening of the eyes on “be killed”. Finally, as he completes this rather ominous admission, Cohen leans forward slightly, and his eyes briefly take on the hard, penetrating quality commonly associated with anger (Ekman and Friesen 83). Combined with his falling
intonation, which itself indicates a sense of certainty and finality, these postural and facial modifications help to make the statement seem particularly dark, compelling and deeply felt.

The subsequent cut, however, constructs a striking contrast in Cohen’s nonverbal choices as surely as it underlines the discrepancies in his words. As he begins refuting his previous statement in the second shot of this segment, the poet-songwriter raises his voice to a much higher pitch, stutters slightly, and speaks more quickly than he had in advance of the edit. Moreover, he now spends much of his time looking downwards and away from the interviewer, as if slightly saddened, uncertain or ashamed. As a result of this dramatic change in his nonverbal choices, Cohen suddenly comes across as rather hesitant and unassuming, where he had previously appeared confident, irreverent and almost sadistic. As emphasized by the editing that places these two moments in immediate relation to each other, then, Cohen’s shifting extra-linguistic behaviours create a compelling sense of his multifaceted and often antonymous personality.

Finally, Cohen augments this growing picture of his unorthodox character by altering his nonverbal choices once more to emphasize his final verbal reversal. Following the slight pause that marks this last change in direction, he shakes his head and shrugs slightly as he admits, “But I suppose I am”. The lack of concern suggested by these nonchalant movements carries through to the end of the sequence, as Cohen gets a mischievous glint in his eye and breaks out in a wide smile as he finishes up his equivocal self-description. In contrast to both the dark and brooding confidence suggested by his performance choices before the cut, and the hesitant regret evoked by his language and nonverbal behaviours immediately after it, Cohen here presents himself in a manner that conveys bemused and unconcerned acceptance of his apparent inconsistencies. By cycling rapidly through this complex range of extra-
linguistic cues (which are well captured in the synch sound, medium close up used for this sequence), Cohen thus contributes considerably to the film’s sense that he is a figure of opposites.

The same is true of his performances in enacted scenes. In several of these sequences, for instance, Cohen augments the text’s image of his clashing attributes by way of the relationship he cultivates with the camera. For much of the film, he is seen wandering around Montréal in a process of what appears to be intense observation. While he never breaks with the representational convention established for such moments by overtly looking at the camera itself, his carriage and positioning nonetheless manifest a sense of conscious staginess that suggests he is presenting himself to be looked at even as busies himself with the act of looking. The moment at which he is first seen walking around a Montréal park provides a striking case in point.

Here, Brittain and Owen create an initial sense of presentationalism by establishing a fixed, quasi-theatrical frame into which Cohen can insert himself as an object of our contemplation; a static, low angle shot of some wooded parkland is held for four seconds before Cohen enters – like a player taking the stage – at frame left. Cohen augments this stagy moment, however, by placing himself (surely at the filmmakers’ behest) rather precisely within this pre-established composition. He enters the frame slowly, and pauses so that his body is both centered onscreen and bordered attractively by the arching branches of two large trees. He then proceeds to look slowly from right to left, squinting and pushing out his lower jaw in an almost exaggeratedly pensive expression. Nonetheless, even as he maintains this clearly arranged position, Cohen also partially upholds the ruse that he is simply observing the park around him by never explicitly acknowledging the camera to
which his actions are so clearly keyed. By cultivating this complex balance of representationalism and presentationalism, Cohen (in combination with the directors who encouraged/allowed such a mixture of signs) constructs a moment that is at once a continuation of his diegetic activities and a clear pose for his extended audience. In so doing, he invests his textual character with yet another paradoxical attribute, rather obviously presenting himself as both subject and object, observer and observed.

In other enacted scenes, Cohen’s contradictoriness is emphasized even further through his own co-present voiceover commentary. At such moments, Brittain and Owen again contribute to the construction of Cohen’s documentary identity through filmic means, insofar as the process of adding non-simultaneous voiceover forces a relationship between visual and aural performance choices that were not initially conceived in propinquity. The relationships fostered by this filmmaker-governed process of juxtaposition, however, are nonetheless ultimately formed from the raw material of performance. At one point in Ladies and Gentlemen…, for instance, Cohen’s voiceover narration invests his visible onscreen actions with a sense of complexity and inconsistency that they otherwise might not evoke. As he is seen conversing with other nighthawks in Ben’s diner, he appears untroubled, relaxed and happy. Filmed from behind in a medium long shot, he reclines comfortably as he sits at a table with three others, his arm slung loosely across the backrest of a chair. By these postural means, Cohen communicates a sense of repose even though his face cannot be seen and his (simultaneous) comments are inaudible. In fact, this impression of insouciant relaxation is maintained by Cohen’s kinesic choices throughout the sequence. The camera follows him as he leaves the group and joins another man at a table nearby, for example, capturing his confident, ambling gait by virtue of its relatively great distance. Likewise, a subsequent cut
in to a tight medium shot directs attention to Cohen’s calm and apparently untroubled face, which quickly settles into a broad and contented smile.

Simultaneously, however, Cohen’s self-description on the soundtrack gives his actions a more dark and laborious cast, characterizing this apparently unconcerned get together as “the first rebellious act a man can perform – refusing to sleep”. He continues:

That’s the real rebellion against life and the generative process. That’s the real human idea. ‘I refuse to sleep. I’m going to, um, I’m going to protest the idea of sleep by turning night into day. I’m going to revel and drink and womanize all night, and this way I show time, death, the natural process of destruction, decay and regeneration, I show it all that – with my mind and my will – I, man, triumph.

In and of themselves, these words serve to connect opposites, conjoining leisure and effort, night and day, revels and rebellion. These contradictions are made all the more striking, though, by the contrast between Cohen’s lyrical and emphatic delivery and the visible sense of casual pleasure he manifests concurrently onscreen. His round tones and rhythmic variations in tempo serve to underscore the seriousness and formality of his exhortation (made all the more obvious by the ‘um’ that momentarily shatters his oratorical delivery), while his tendency to shift his pitch for, and/or pause before and after, words such as ‘refuse’, ‘protest’, ‘time’, and ‘death’ gives these heavy words particular emphasis. In this respect, Cohen’s vocal performance accents struggle and seriousness, while his visible actions evoke a sense of halcyon repose. His antithetical personality is thus again betokened by his mediated performance in this documentary text.

Other performance contexts in which Cohen appears over the course of the film include synch sound enacted scenes, formal performances within the diegetic world, and a reflexive moment in which he’s filmed viewing footage from the film itself. While each of these frameworks facilitates moments of performance that contribute to the construction of
his paradoxical character, perhaps the clearest indication of this process can be seen in the
*Chronique d’un été*-inspired self-conscious scene at the film’s end. Here, Cohen is required
to modulate his everyday self-presentation techniques in response to the extremely unusual
task of watching himself construct a documentary performance. In addition to creating a
novel and unfamiliar framework in which a documentary subject must enact his identity,
however, this nonfiction context also literalizes – and affords Cohen the opportunity to make
explicit – his status as both observer and observed.

On the one hand, Cohen’s performance within the footage being viewed already
contributes to the construction of this antonymic image. As in many of the enacted scenes
throughout the film, he once again cultivates a mixture of presentationalism and
representationalism in this case; he refrains from explicitly acknowledging the camera as he
goes about bathing, but nonetheless professes his constant awareness of being viewed by
writing ‘Caveat Emptor’ – a warning to the film viewer – on the bathroom wall.
Simultaneously, though, the choices that Cohen makes as he views this already complex
performance serve to draw out, underline, and add to its contradictions.

From the outset of the sequence, his commentary makes explicit his status as both
watcher and watched; as footage from the documentary itself rolls on the image track, the
very first words we hear Cohen speak in voiceover are: “it’s a very privileged thing to be
able to see yourself sleeping.” Throughout the scene, in fact, Cohen’s performance seems
designed to emphasize that he is at once a viewer in the screening room and a viewed object
in the film screened. Cuts away from the footage to close ups of the poet-songwriter’s
watching face suggest that he looks on at the film-within-the-film in fascination, his eyes
unblinking, his mouth slightly agape and his head cocked contemplatively to one side. His
near constant stream of talk likewise reinforces his position as an interpreting spectator, particularly when he states: “This is a situation which – for whatever the reason – a man has allowed a number of strangers into his bathroom.” With this comment, Cohen points forcefully toward his status as an outside observer by utilizing the words “a man” in lieu of the personal pronoun ‘I.’ At the same time, however, the general thrust of this statement serves to highlight the rather invasive process of observation that a documentary subject endured in the process of filming, and, of course, one is always aware that the man in question is Cohen himself. In this respect, Cohen’s performance suggests that he is engaged in a process of intense scrutiny that ultimately uncovers his own status as scrutinized object.

His performance choices in this sequence point toward a number of additional contradictions in his character as well. As he watches himself in the bathtub, for instance, Cohen’s offscreen voice suggests that he finds this intensive observation of his private affairs both “sinister” and “flattering”, accenting these discrepant words by a marked pause after each. Through this choice of language and paralinguistic emphasis, Cohen demonstrates the simultaneous resentment of and desire for public attention that David Boucher claims have marked the poet-songwriter’s career (43).

In like fashion, Cohen’s self-presentation within this unique documentary context also implies that he sees his performance in the film as both constructed and illuminating, both ‘false’ and ‘true’. As has been noted widely,¹⁰ his onscreen explanation of the decision to write ‘Caveat Emptor’ on the bathroom wall suggests that this documentary and his performance within it should be taken with a large grain of salt. By leaving this message, Cohen declares in close up, he wanted to warn viewers that the film “is not entirely devoid of the con”. A quick zoom in to an even tighter shot of his laughing face then gives this claim
particular emphasis, encouraging spectators to view it as a key to Cohen’s complex inner life and thereby suggesting forcefully that the poet-songwriter places little stock in the truth value of the film we’ve just observed.

Immediately following this account, however, a cut to another portion of the sequence once more reveals Cohen conveying a rather different message. As additional footage from the documentary plays onscreen, Cohen is again heard in voiceover, now stating pensively: “I look much more like a man than I thought. In fact, I think I’ve had a very, very … mistaken conception about what style of man I was. I think the whole thing is changing now”. His voice is soft and airy as he speaks, issuing forth in rather high-pitched, melodic cadences that construct an impression of thoughtful self-reflection. An ensuing cut to a close up of his face amplifies this sense of serious contemplation, suggesting that Cohen is again staring interestedly at the images of himself as he articulates this realization, his head tilted inquisitively to one side and his gaze fixed firmly in the direction of the film playing before him. Finally, another marked zoom in affords this moment special emphasis as well, highlighting Cohen’s introspective expression (itself augmented by the momentary furrowing of his brow) and suggesting that this claim too provides special insight into his character. By combining these filmically-emphasized nonverbal markers of sincere reflection with a verbal statement that proclaims the instructiveness of the footage, Cohen complicates his earlier warning and intimates that his performance in the film is edifying even if it was put on. As such, in combination with the filmmakers who chose to include this moment and to juxtapose it with his earlier, contradictory claims, Cohen again unites concepts that are traditionally viewed as antithetical (in this case, ‘acting’ and ‘truth’) and points toward their potential uselessness as oppositional descriptive categories.
In each of the performance contexts in which he appears, then, Cohen activates several of the tools available to nonfiction performers in a manner that makes the paradoxical aspect of his star image particularly salient. At the same time, other performing individuals also contribute to the construction of this contradictory documentary identity by way of a process that might be called altercasting. Sociologists and social psychologists generally use this term to refer to the way in which individuals attempt to characterize or ‘place’ one another during everyday encounters; in Weinstein and Deutchberger’s terms, altercasting is “projecting an identity, to be assumed by other[s] with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent with one’s own goals” (qtd. in Malone 101). If we extend the sense of the term here to include the general way in which one’s actions might speak to or “cast” the personality or identity of another, however, it is also broadly applicable to the majority of documentary texts. Given that most nonfiction films and television programs situate any given individual’s self-presentational activities within what Audrey Levasseur calls “a web of other performances” (52), documentary characters are often shaped not only by the efforts of the individual embodying the identity in question, but also by the actions and activities of additional people appearing in the text (combined, of course, with any number of formal choices outside of performance). In addition to participating in filmic self-presentation, that is, nonfiction subjects also frequently impinge upon and contribute to the production of other documentary identities involved in the film or program at hand.

In Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen, several performers beyond Cohen himself contribute to the construction of the poet-songwriter’s complex and intricate documentary identity. The individuals interacting with Cohen in enacted sequences contribute to this characterization by way of their responses to his unorthodox actions, for
instance, as do the audiences seen responding to his performances at public poetry readings. Perhaps the clearest example of altercasting in the film, however, can be found in the voiceover performance of director Donald Brittain. Throughout the text, Brittain proclaims and underlines the contradictions in Cohen’s personality, using a traditional voice-of-God delivery that invests these inconsistent claims with considerable weight and credibility.

When the director describes Cohen’s “typically unorthodox” days as a McGill student, for instance, his authoritative voiceover delivery both authenticates the inconsistent ideas of which he speaks and makes their inconsistency especially apparent. He states: “[Cohen] won election as president of the debating union, and then refused to call debates. He hated the concept of fraternities, but won election as president of a fraternity, and then fought to retain its exclusive Jewish character.” By pausing between the opposed clauses of each of these statements and varying his intonation to emphasize the contradictions the statements describe, Brittain’s vocal delivery here serves to render Cohen’s unpredictable personality especially apparent. His pitch rises dramatically as he says “debating union”, for instance, and then drops sharply on the word “debates”, painting an aural contrast that highlights the incongruity of a non-debating debater in the process. At the same time, however, the confident, unemotional nature of this vocal performance evokes a sense of omniscience that surrounds the incongruity under discussion with an air of plausibility. Brittain utters these descriptions of Cohen’s logically opposed actions at a moderate pace, his words uninterrupted by hesitations or non-lexical utterances that might evoke a sense of uncertainty, and his measured, round tones (coloured by the slightest hint of a formal British accent) reminiscent of the polished male voices that Bill Nichols has called “a hallmark” of the “voice-of-God tradition” (Introduction 105). By marshalling these conventional
paralinguistic markers of disinterestedness and authority, Brittain’s voiceover performance here implicitly argues that Cohen’s apparent contradictoriness is nonetheless an incontrovertible, undeniable fact. As such, this filmmaker contributes to the construction of his subject’s documentary identity through his performance choices as well as through his manipulations of cinematography, editing and other elements of film form.

As all of the preceding examples indicate, Cohen and his fellow performers play a considerable role in determining the version of the poet’s character advanced within *Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen*. While knowledge of Cohen’s star image might predispose viewers to read him as a paradoxical figure within the film, the individuals who appear onscreen nevertheless make a range of verbal and nonverbal choices that activate, emphasize and augment this particular facet of the Cohen lore. As such, these performance choices – though not entirely autonomous or all-powerful – should not be overlooked.

This sense of the necessity of considering the performer’s role in the mimetic construction of character becomes particularly clear when one compares the version of Cohen’s documentary identity advanced by *Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen* with that put forth in *Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man*. Whereas the 1965 film casts its title character as a contradictory, trickster-like figure, Lian Lunson’s more recent text downplays these paradoxical tendencies and instead portrays Cohen as a specific kind of modern-day saint. Because this shift in characterization is achieved at least partially through performance, it ultimately demonstrates the way in which changes in the documentary subject’s work can foreground different aspects of the same, abiding image text.

Like his antithetical personality, Cohen’s obsession with saintliness has been an oft discussed, enduring aspect of his star persona. Several Cohen critics note the way in which
many of his writings advocate a process of sanctification through self-abnegation, for instance, while others argue that Cohen himself has attempted to achieve this kind of martyrdom outside of his work. By continually drawing and redrawing a connection between the poet-songwriter and beatific self-sacrifice, the popular discourse surrounding this nonfiction subject might make knowledgeable viewers especially likely to attend to any canonical threads of his character presented in Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man. Nonetheless, star text alone is not sufficient to determine this characterization. Given the multiple meanings that have been attached repeatedly to Cohen over the years, spectators are predisposed to a range of possible, overlapping interpretations of his textual identity in this film; we might be just as attuned to indicators of Cohen’s much-discussed depression or to signs of the paradoxical tendencies foregrounded in Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen as we are to markers of his potential sanctification. Ultimately, it is elements of the text itself – including performance – that render the self-sacrificial facet of Cohen’s image particularly salient.

Indeed, several aspects of Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man contribute to the apotheosizing of its title character. The opening credit sequence, for instance, mobilizes a number of devices that cast Cohen as a larger than life, rather mystical presence willing to abandon himself for some higher cause. The very first shot – a close up of a bust of a Dionysus-like figure – immediately evokes a sense of transcendence that is subsequently attached to Cohen himself by way of a printed title. The coming film, this title suggests, documents a concert in which a group of artists gathered “to pay tribute to the great Leonard Cohen” (emphasis added). This sense of Cohen’s superlative status is further underlined on the soundtrack by the lyrics of his song “Waiting for the Miracle”. We hear Cohen intone:
“Baby I’ve been waiting / I’ve been waiting night and day / I didn’t see the time / I waited half my life away / There were lots of invitations / I know you sent me some / But I was waiting for the miracle, for the miracle to come.” Again, these words position Cohen as an individual willing to forsake his average existence in the pursuit of something thaumaturgic.

Two further factors also contribute emphatically to this opening sequence’s mounting image of exceptional self-sacrifice. Following the introduction of the performers participating in the tribute concert, Lunson lingers on a silhouette of Cohen’s profile, manipulating the image so that the songwriter’s shadowy form disappears, reappears and moves erratically around the frame. At the same time, she accompanies this preternatural and somewhat depersonalizing image with an aural montage that emphasizes Cohen’s willingness to sacrifice his personality for others. We hear Cohen repeat, “I’m your man” three times, before rapidly edited, overlapping segments of his speech list some of the forms he’s assumed as part of earning this designation. He says: “If you want a boxer… poet… if you want a driver… singer… I was known as a monk, as a ladies’ man… writer… father figure.” Part way through this list, Lunson fades to a black and white photograph of Cohen, zooming in to an extreme close up of his penetrating and inscrutable eyes. His voice on the soundtrack then repeats “I’m your man” a fourth time, and the film’s title appears onscreen. This complex combination of images and sounds does much to underline a conception of Cohen as a shifting, saintly figure who abdicates his own worldly identity in the service of others. This sequence, then, along with the title it introduces, establishes the film’s vision of Cohen, in Walter Mosley’s words, as “the man who is for us” (par.17).

This pre-title segment also begins to indicate the way in which performance serves as part of the textual machinery emphasizing the saintly thread of Cohen’s image. It is Cohen’s
previously recorded words, after all, which Lunson arranges into the aural montage of identity-abandonment at the close of the credits, and his deep, gravelly rendition of “Waiting for the Miracle” that makes the suffering hinted at in the lyrics particularly pointed at the outset. In this respect, the opening credits foretell the remainder of the film, in which performance plays an especially important role in fixing Cohen’s documentary identity.

While certain non-performative devices that figure in the pre-title sequence (such as the use of shadowy silhouettes and iconic photos of Cohen) return throughout *I’m Your Man*, it is the mediated performance choices of the various participants that contribute most strongly to the film’s beatification of its central character.

Cohen himself, for instance, largely appears within the familiar context of the ‘talking heads’ interview, once again making a range of self-presentational choices that contribute to the construction of his documentary identity. Most obviously in this regard, he consistently deploys small-scale kinesic and paralinguistic cues that are well captured in the synch sound, medium close to close up shots that Lunson uses to render his interviews, each of which help to generate a sense that he is amenable to self-effacement. Compared to his varied and often effusive interview statements in *Ladies and Gentlemen*..., Cohen’s self-presentation in Lunson’s film is always quiet, cool and restrained. As reviewer Roger Moore points out, Cohen “remains inscrutable” in his interviews (par.7); he is “soft-spoken and sometimes self-deprecating” (DeBell 6), and perpetually maintains what Robert Denerstein refers to as the “unflappable demeanor of *Star Trek*’s Mr. Spock” (8D, italics added). Whatever the reasons behind this method (be they guardedness, humility, or accident), its ultimate effect is a sense of willful self-erasure of the sort that Cohen himself equates with sainthood in his writings.
Perhaps the clearest example of this process comes during the sequence in which Cohen speaks of his decision to enter a Buddhist monastery. As is frequently the case in this film, Lunson here chooses to frame her poet-subject in an intimate close up as he speaks, “pulling in” – as Chris Knight puts it – “so tightly on Cohen’s craggy features that his slightest move threatens to slide one side of his face out of focus” (B1). Insofar as loss of focus rarely becomes a pronounced problem, however, this shot set-up serves to accentuate how little Cohen actually does move across this interview; it thus works in combination with this performer’s general physical stasis to construct a sense of tranquil, almost ethereal calm.

At the same time, this tight framing – in combination with the synch sound used for the sequence – foregrounds and focuses attention on Cohen’s muted facial expressions and quietly soothing baritone voice, allowing them too to contribute significantly to the process of characterizing the poet-songwriter as a serene and self-sacrificial figure.

As he begins to recount the story of what attracted him to the monastery, for instance, Cohen’s pitch modulates only slightly, and his voice never rises above a breathy, battered purr that suggests a transcendent calm after the storm. Likewise, his face betrays only minor shifts in emotion, remaining relatively neutral but for a few self-deprecating smiles and punctuating eyebrow flashes that momentarily lighten his impassive visage and create an impression similar to that evoked by his gnarled, but relaxed voice. In this manner, Cohen’s self-presentation hints at the hardships he has endured, but refuses to allow them to become central. Instead, the dominant message constructed by his performance choices is one of stoic self-control.

The theme of self-sacrifice for a higher cause – to which Cohen’s self-effacing manner only hints – is then taken up more explicitly in this interviewee’s verbal self-
presentation as the sequence progresses. Two passages of his recounted story seem especially noteworthy in this regard. In the first, Cohen proclaims, “If Roshi [Cohen’s Zen master] had been a… uh, you know, professor of physics in Heidelberg, you know, I would have learned German and moved to Heidelberg. I just felt that there was something that Roshi had to show me.” Soon after, he continues:

And so [Roshi] became a part of my life and a, and a… a deep friend – in the real sense of friendship. Someone who really cared about, uh… or didn’t care, I’m not quite sure which it is – who deeply didn’t care about who I was, and therefore, who I was began to wither, and um, the less I was of who I was, the better I felt.

With these words, Cohen articulates his propensity for self-expunction in no uncertain terms. His first sentences aver his willingness to shift and/or cede his identity in search of something greater than himself, while the second passage builds toward a final affirmation of self-abnegation. His extra-linguistic choices simultaneously help to emphasize this verbal endorsement of self-sacrifice, drawing particular attention to key markers of identity abandonment. Cohen pauses markedly both before and after he says “wither,” for instance, setting this word that most clearly evokes the fading of his worldly personality off from the others that surround it. He further underscores this important term by looking up toward the offscreen interviewer, raising his eyebrows, and nodding slightly as he utters it. Cohen’s slight nonverbal modulations – themselves underlined by the tight close up in which they appear – thus help to emphasize his willing desertion of selfhood by both inflecting this explicit claim to relinquished identity and by remaining generally understated and subdued.

If Cohen’s interview performances position him as a modest individual open to abrogating his own personality, other moments in the film indicate his saintliness even more emphatically. Talking heads interviews with a variety of musicians who count Cohen
amongst their influences, for instance, allow several other individuals to contribute to his documentary identity by way of altercasting; in most cases, these additional participants discuss Cohen with a reverence that positions the songwriter as an object of worship. Perhaps the most compelling indication of Cohen’s saintly potential, however, is to be found in the tribute concert performances that are woven throughout the film.

This is perhaps a surprising contention, insofar as the filmic recording of formalized diegetic performances creates a performance context that can limit documentary subjects’ ‘expressive’ potential. Daniel Eagan points to some of the challenges of concert film performance in his discussion of *I’m Your Man*. He writes:

> Most concert films follow familiar formulas, and this one is no exception. Songs are captured by two or three cameras stationed far away from the stage and usually above eye level. … It's a method that makes it difficult to become engaged with the performers, unless like Bono they project enough personality to fill an arena. In what's also become a genre trope, Lunson cuts away from performances for explanatory comments from Cohen and others, a strategy that distracts attention from the songs and the musicians. (107)

In spite of these difficulties, a variety of the performers in *I’m Your Man* manage (Bono-like, in Eagan’s terms) to articulate unique and vibrant personalities of their own through their interpretations of Cohen’s songs. At the same time, rather than merely “distract[ing] attention from the songs and the musicians” (ibid), the process of cutting between the concert performances and Cohen’s self-deprecating interviews creates a strong and suggestive bond between the two. In particular, the striking interpretations of Cohen’s songs generate a clear picture of one higher cause that the songwriter’s willful self-suppression serves: Cohen’s work, it appears, provides a means for others to construct and convey their own identities.

In an interview with Michael Harris, Cohen once claimed: “Almost all my songs can be sung any way. They can be sung as tough songs or as gentle songs or as contemplative
songs or as courting songs” (46). In *I’m Your Man*, the numerous individuals interpreting Cohen’s work lend credence to this claim. These performers provide startlingly different renditions of some of Cohen’s best-known pieces, cleaving the songs from Cohen’s specific temperament (indeed, Eagan notes that the performances “are often at odds with Cohen's own interpretations” (107)), and revealing the work’s capacity to serve as a vehicle for a range of personalities and sensibilities. As Sean P. Means points out, the performances run the gamut from “Nick Cave’s lounge-lizard renditions of ‘Suzanne’ and ‘I’m Your Man’” to “Rufus Wainwright’s soulful versions of ‘Chelsea Hotel No. 2’ and ‘Hallelujah’” (“Leonard Cohen” par. 2). Kerry Gold likewise notes that the film showcases “Antony’s quavering falsetto turning [''If It Be Your Will’'] into pure angelic soul,” and Jarvis Cocker “imprinting a western-themed [''I Can’t Forget’'] with his own unmistakable [sic] arch delivery” (C3). Whatever the approach” – Ty Burr adds – “the songs are sturdy enough to support it” (“Mystery Unsolved” D8). Together, these comments begin to illustrate the way in which *I’m Your Man*’s tribute performances position Cohen’s work as a template for the expression of unique and varied identities.

In his version of “Everybody Knows”, for instance, Rufus Wainwright inflects Cohen’s melody and lyrics in a manner that creates a strong image of his (Wainwright’s) stylish, sardonic personality. Captured from a variety of perspectives by Lunson’s zooming, handheld camera, Wainwright “dances (part samba, part tango) his way through” the song (Ringel Gillespie E3), bringing out and amplifying what Michael Sragow calls “the gleeful doomsday irony” latent in the lyrics (par.11). Lunson’s camera zooms in to frame him in a tight medium long shot as he sings the dark lines “Everybody knows that the war is over / Everybody knows that the good guys lost”, for instance, thereby allowing viewers to observe
several means by which this performer invests these sinister words with a sense of his own ostentatiously mordant personality. The moderate focal length reveals both Wainwright’s jaunty and rhythmic hip movements, for example, as well as the sly smile on his face and the knowing glint in his eye.

Throughout the song, Wainwright also makes a number of paralinguistic choices that further this image of ironic wit, playfully shifting the volume, breathiness and tone of his voice in a manner that belies the seriousness of the lyrics he sings. He rolls his ‘r’ dramatically as he begins the final word of the line “the rich get rich”, for instance, producing an exaggerated, rather comical growl; later, he raises his voice into a light and breathy register (modifying Cohen’s melody to some degree) as he sings the supremely heavy lyric, “everybody knows that the plague is coming.” As a result all of these choices, Wainwright finally suggests – in Walter Mosley’s words – that he “revel[s] in the cruelty of the lyrics” (par.15). Through his unique interpretation of Cohen’s work, he constructs an image of himself as a man who indeed “knows” of the world’s evils and injustices, but who has learned to cope with misfortune through sarcasm and flair. His performance thus credits Cohen indirectly with a strong sense of generosity and benevolence, demonstrating the way in which the singer-songwriter’s music can serve, and help to create, others’ identities. As such, Wainwright (along with the other individuals appearing in the tribute concert), lends credence to Geoff Pevere’s claim that “we’re told all we need to know about why [Cohen] matters once the performers take the stage: this is music, both spiritual and sensual, made for bold feats of interpretation” (C1).

A dissolve to a brief shot of Cohen himself part way through the song further amplifies this characterizing process by immediately conjoining Wainwright’s performance
to the composer-saint (in the film’s terms) who enabled it. Framed in another tight close up, Cohen declares, “The Wainwrights are bringing my work to life. I really appreciate that,” before another dissolve returns us to the musical number at hand. By editing in this brief comment from Cohen himself, Lunson effectively reminds us that the song through which Wainwright here expresses himself is indeed Cohen’s work. At the same time, this brief inclusion constructs a striking contrast between Wainwright’s flashy and colourful performance and Cohen’s typical self-restraint. The poet-songwriter’s modesty is again betokened by the way in which he credits others for invigorating his writings, while his unmoving posture and characteristically quiet and gravelly voice make Wainwright’s nasal intonations and broad movements appear all the more vibrant in comparison. Interestingly, Cohen’s face also becomes slightly more animated than usual as he makes this comment about others interpreting his work, breaking out into a broad, extended smile that suggests more genuine emotion than he has displayed for much of the film. In the context of the Wainwright performance with which Lunson surrounds it, this slight shift in Cohen’s nonverbal presentation intimates that the songwriter’s greatest joy consists of providing others with templates for their own self-expression. Editing and performance thus again work together in this concert sequence to construct a sense of Cohen’s generous, self-abnegating personality.

This characterization becomes especially clear in the film’s final moments, wherein Cohen appears for the first time outside of the interviews that have been woven throughout the text. Joined by U2, he now engages in a formalized performance staged solely for Lunson’s camera, singing his haunting ballad ‘Tower of Song’. Just as the diegetic concert appearances impinged upon the performance choices of the individuals appearing within
them, so too does this new context place a range of restrictions on Cohen’s self-presentational choices. He must also activate quotidian performance techniques within a heightened, stylized context, and construct his current self-image in relation to pre-formulated, well-known lyrics and notes. Unlike the concert performers, though, Cohen is permitted to direct his performance specifically at the absent film audience, who comprise his only spectators at this moment (outside of the film crew and the other performers who surround him).

While, in theory, this shift to a single audience ought to allow Cohen to convey a more vivid and detailed version of himself to the documentary spectator in this moment than is possible for the divided tribute concert performer, he nonetheless maintains the restrained, self-sacrificing performance style that he has called upon throughout the film’s interviews. As a result, he constructs what Dennis King calls “a calm, transcendent, understated moment” that is “oddly subdued but nevertheless stirring” (D3). 18 Cohen’s face, generally captured in close- or medium close ups, remains set in an impassive mask for the majority of the song, and he passes up on the chance to connect with and communicate to his viewers through gaze. Instead of addressing the camera directly, he alternates between a heavy-lidded stare aimed somewhere in the distance above the camera, and self-deprecating, downward glances at his microphone. At the same time, Cohen’s insistently low and gravelly singing voice extends the image of stoic self-control achieved by his paralinguistic techniques in the interview segments. Its rough, weathered quality points toward the adversity that Cohen has suffered, while its unmodulating quietness and calm downplays this suffering and suggests that he bears his burdens with almost superhuman composure. Unlike Wainwright and many of the other performers featured in the tribute concert, who use Cohen’s songs as a basis for
demonstrating vibrant, individual personalities, Cohen himself interprets his work in a manner that deemphasizes his worldly character traits and casts him as a relatively neutral, serene presence. In the process, he again illustrates his self-sacrificial tendencies, creating a controlled and temperate version of his work which makes the personalities indicated in others’ more dramatic renditions seem all the more dynamic by comparison.

As a result of this combination of performance choices, *Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man* ultimately positions its central character as a close approximation of the kind of saintly figure that Cohen himself espoused in *Beautiful Losers*. As Desmond Pacey suggests, “‘I’ becomes a saint at the end of the novel because by exiling himself to the wilderness he has purged himself of pride and selfishness and made of himself an empty vessel into which divine love can pour” (22). Likewise, in *I’m Your Man*, Cohen’s self-deprecating performance strips his documentary identity down to a most basic level, while the work of the individuals appearing in the tribute concert fill this shell with the love of other human— as opposed to divine— agents. This characterization surely picks up on threads of Cohen’s longstanding star image; indeed, the above reference to Pacey’s 1967 article makes clear that similar ideas have been circulating around Cohen and his work for some time. For this version of Cohen to be mobilized and made central in *I’m Your Man*, however, particular formal choices— including the actions and activities of performers— are required.

In addition to indicating the important way in which performance interacts with star text in determining character, *I’m Your Man* also makes clear the general expectation for mimetic characterization in documentary texts. Several reviewers criticized Lunson’s film for failing to provide any clear insight into Cohen’s mundane, personal characteristics; for many authors, that is, the emptied out, saintly Leonard Cohen offered up by the text strains the
limits of plausibility too much. Bruce Westbrook faults the film’s “gushy testimonials,” for example, finally suggesting that “this botched biopic leaves us asking, ‘And which man is that?’” (3). Jason Anderson likewise positions the film as an example of hagiographic mythmaking: “The air of reverence is so thick,” he writes, “you could scrape off a layer and spread it on toast … it’s not hard to feel that all the adulation and genuflection gets a little much” (SW26). Perhaps most clearly, John Lewis writes that *I'm Your Man* “only bolsters the quasi-mystical aura that surrounds the Canadian and turns even the biggest rock stars into worshipful pilgrims” (68). Each of these reviewers notes rightly that the film is less interested in Cohen’s day-to-day personality than it is in his iconic status; in casting this characterological focus as a problem, however, they underline the unspoken rule that documentary characters need to resemble real-world personages, for whom, supposedly, mundane concerns of personality are central.

But *should* documentary characters be restricted to this rigorously mimetic level? If ‘Leonard Cohen’ does serve as an idea, or a concept, or an icon for real-world individuals such as the other performers featured in this film, might it not be valid for a documentary text to present him in such abstract terms? Insofar as it raises such questions, *Leonard Cohen: I'm Your Man* provides a particularly interesting example of documentary character construction. It fulfills the typical, mimetic function of nonfiction characterization, creating an image of a retiring, self-sacrificial Leonard Cohen that we might not believe, but can nonetheless accept as a human possibility. At the same time, in its movement towards depersonalizing Cohen completely and treating him as an abstract vessel, the film begins to point toward the possibility of non-mimetic documentary identities. In this manner, *I'm Your Man* corroborates Bill Nichols’ sense that nonfiction films can both refer “to the historical body of
a social actor” and effect a “transformation of the body through the iconography of the heroic or mythic” (“History” 10). It also underlines one fact that Nichols overlooks: the performative labour of the film’s subjects contributes to the construction of documentary identities on both the mimetic and the non-mimetic levels.

**The Thematic Function of Performance – *Pour la suite du monde***

Through the non-mimetic components of its central character, *Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man* begins to suggest the potential complexity and variability of the documentary identities that nonfiction performance helps to construct. While these multifaceted nonfiction characters possess an interest in and of themselves, however, they also frequently play a pointed role in determining the meaning(s) of the texts in which they figure. James Phelan refers to this process (in relation to the novel) as the thematic function of characterization. Frequently, Phelan says, characters are endowed with attributes that are “viewed as vehicles to express ideas or as representative of a larger class than the individual character” (12). An author can then develop these traits such that they perform a thematic service, demonstrating “some proposition or propositions about the class of people or the dramatized ideas” (13). This section will illustrate the same process at work in documentary texts, underlining the way in which the nonfiction performer participates in carrying it out.

The existing literature of relevance to the documentary performer’s work begins to substantiate the notion that nonfiction performance helps to secure textual meanings, just as it lays the groundwork for an understanding of the performer’s mimetic role. Scholars discussing everyday self-presentation often note the way in which performers participate in what Anne Rawls has called “the constitutive achievement of intelligibility,” for example, while screen acting analysts such as Paul McDonald have demonstrated the extent to which
“the minute actions of the actor reveal a larger understanding of the character’s involvement with the circumstances of the narrative” (32). Documentary scholars, however, have by and large overlooked the idea that nonfiction subjects might wield the ability to affect the sense and significance of situations by constructing characters through performative acts.

Bill Nichols begins to gesture towards this argument when he suggests that a nonfiction film might represent a social actor “within a narrative field as a character (an agent of narrative functions)” (“History” 10). If nonfiction subjects serve as causal forces within documentary narratives, then they must surely affect the conclusions that can be drawn from those narratives by helping to determine what happens. Typically, though, Nichols pays little attention to the way in which performance participates in this process. Stella Bruzzi, conversely, articulates the nonfiction performer’s role in the construction of meaning more forcefully, positioning the performance for the camera as “the ‘ultimate document’, as the truth around which a documentary text is built” (New Documentary 126). Even Bruzzi’s analyses, however, remain focused on one kind of ‘truth’ towards which nonfiction subjects can contribute; she attends throughout her discussion to the way in which individual performances help to reveal and/or deny the fact that documentaries prompt and produce the situations that they document. While this is certainly an important insight, it doesn’t begin to account for the range of themes and arguments that nonfiction subjects help to shape. In order to build on and elaborate the initial observations made by scholars such as Nichols and Bruzzi, then, the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to a detailed analysis of the meanings formed by performance within one particular documentary text: Pierre Perrault’s and Michel Brault’s Pour la suite du monde (Canada, 1963).
Unlike the Leonard Cohen documentaries discussed above, *Pour la suite du monde* has received a great deal of critical and scholarly attention. As David Clandfield notes, this is a text that has been “selected for top ten lists, garlanded with awards, used in university film courses, [and] cited and written about by almost every critic and scholar of films made in Canada” (“Linking” 71-72). In fact, the film has earned such a central place in discussions of Canadian and Québécois cinema that, in Clandfield’s opinion, that there is little to say about it that hasn’t already been said (ibid). From my perspective, however, this extensive discourse makes *Pour la suite du monde* an exceptionally interesting test case by which to illustrate the documentary performer’s influence on textual meaning. Since interpretations of the film abound, there are several understandings of the text to which performance might be seen to contribute. At the same time, the novel insights afforded by attention to the documentary subject’s work might serve to clarify debates within the literature about the film’s implications, and/or to point toward new readings that have thus far been overlooked.

In this respect, an analysis of performance in *Pour la suite du monde* has the potential to demonstrate that the nonfiction subject’s labour can both shape commonly held understandings of a canonical film and suggest new interpretations of it. Whereas my discussion of *Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen* and *Leonard Cohen: I’m Your Man* sought to initiate scholarly dialogue about two neglected texts as it illustrated a major function of documentary performance, then, the following analysis will establish a task fulfilled by the nonfiction subject while simultaneously indicating the way in which performance study can make a demonstrable contribution to an apparently saturated field.

Despite being characterized by a diversity of emphases and approaches, the literature pertaining to *Pour la suite du monde* is marked by widespread attention to one common
theme. As Charlie Michael notes, “Perrault’s film is commonly read as a meditation on the relationships between an antiquated rustic community and the encroaching elements of the modern world” (44). More specifically, several authors view the film, in its documenting of an attempt to revive the defunct ritual of whale hunting within the small francophone community of l’Île-aux-Coudres, as a rumination on the possibility of a distinct, Québécois culture withstanding the onslaught of modern pressures to assimilation. In David Clandfield’s words, “Pour la suite du monde [is] not an entertaining piece of folklore but an effort to stimulate awareness about identity, community, and nationhood in a changing world, to raise questions about the prospects of survival when the sense of a collective past is threatened with oblivion” (Pierre Perrault 24). Likewise, Yves Lever writes, “the entire film is a response to this question: how can a community make itself vibrant and sustainable?” (27, my translation). Indeed, “this question” of community survival seems to be evoked so strongly by the film that it is difficult for viewers to ignore.

The specific answers that the film proposes to this difficult question are a much more uncertain matter, as the vision that Perrault’s and Brault’s film paints of l’Île-aux-Coudres’ cultural prospects is an issue of some debate within the existing literature. On the one hand, several critics claim that the film articulates an optimistic message of local re-affirmation through its revival of a vanished community ritual. Gwenn Scheppler, for example, writes, “At the beginning of the film, the island is excluded from the world, but by the end it takes a place in the cultural space of the North American economy by expressing its particularity as a francophone island. In this sense, la suite du monde, the continuation of the world, becomes effectively possible” (47). In contrast, other scholars have argued that Pour la suite du monde in fact documents a society on the brink of annihilation. Perhaps most clearly in this
regard, Peter Harcourt notes several moments in *Pour la suite du monde* that prefigure what he sees as the “death of a way of life” documented in Perrault’s later Île-aux-Coudres film, *Les voitures d’eau* (Canada, 1968). Finally, Harcourt concludes unequivocally, “[i]n spite of the title of the film, this world as we are experiencing it will not continue” (129).  

The Île-aux-Coudres citizens who participate in *Pour la suite du monde* make a range of performance choices that contribute significantly to each of these two major interpretations. Indeed, the performance contexts that the filmmakers have chosen for this documentary make the islanders’ role in articulating cultural meanings especially pronounced. As has been pointed out widely, the film’s central structuring device is effectually one large reenactment of a particular sort; the inhabitants of l’Île-aux-Coudres attempt to revivify a long-lost community practice, and thus recreate a historical moment for the benefit of Perrault’s and Brault’s camera. Unlike films such as *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, USA, 1922), however, there is no attempt in *Pour la suite du monde* to disguise the 'past-ness' of the cultural practices being reenacted. The opening title proclaims expressly that the revival of the hunt has been initiated at the filmmakers' behest, and many of the scenes that follow focus on the community's difficulties with and uncertainties about reestablishing this old tradition. This unique set of factors constructs a framework that makes the islanders’ performance choices especially likely to point toward questions of community perseverance. It requires the individuals taking part to modify their everyday self-presentational techniques not only in response to the presence of the camera, but also in relation to an unusual and/or no longer familiar situation that is tightly and explicitly connected to a sense of fading local identity. Thus framed, their actions and activities seem particularly indicative of that identity's potential vitality and endurance.
In addition to this overarching reenactment, the individuals featured in *Pour la suite du monde* are also obliged to enact their identities within sequences that centre on and showcase local traditions that were still extant at the moment of filming. Between scenes charting the development of the renewed hunt, Perrault and Brault insert footage of the subjects attending church; of Alexis Tremblay recounting the Island’s history; of various citizens participating in an auction for the “souls” who watch over their community; and of Grand-Louis Harvey and his compatriots celebrating at a mid-Lenten festival, for instance. These sequences take a variety of different forms – from synch sound or voiced-over enacted scenes to performances within the diegetic world – and thus impinge upon the performers’ self-presentation in a range of ways that should by now be familiar. Like the (re)enacted scenes that comprise the revival of the ‘pêche à marsouin,’ however, these additional performances of culture also place the islanders within a loaded context that primes audiences to read their actions as markers of community identity. These sequences again force the Île-aux-Coudres citizens to perform themselves in relation to regional customs, and thereby encourage spectators to interpret the subjects’ self-presentation activities in a similarly comparative manner.

Just as they encroach upon and affect the performance choices that *Pour la suite du monde*’s subjects make,\(^27\) then, the nonfiction conventions chosen by Perrault and Brault also influence the way in which those choices are read and understood by the film’s viewers. By pushing audiences to interpret the islanders’ actions as indicators of cultural identity, longevity and vivacity, these performance contexts transform self-presentation choices into key pieces of evidence that help to determine the widely-discussed interpretations of the film outlined above. For instance, many of the sequences that Peter Harcourt describes as pointing
most clearly to the imminent disappearance of the traditional Île-aux-Coudres way of life depend on the expressive actions of the islanders to gain their thematic resonance. When Grand-Louis Harvey gives some children Easter Water to drink, the younger generation’s relative ignorance of local tradition is conveyed largely by their bemused and somewhat awkward expressions and gestures. As Harcourt himself admits, the children “seem to tolerate [Grand-Louis], taking little sips and making strange faces, almost as if embarrassed” (129). In so doing, these young performers point toward a generational gap in the Île-aux-Coudres community, and, by extension, toward the impending abandonment of this tradition they don’t seem to understand. Similarly, the sense of doubt that pervades the end of the film is built up partially through Léopold Tremblay’s tense posture, serious expressions, and concerned language as he speaks with his father about the fact that the hunt only turned up one stray beluga. In each of these cases, performance plays a significant role in promoting the ‘pessimistic’ reading of the film advanced by Harcourt and others.

A detailed consideration of the islanders’ performance choices, however, ultimately corroborates the interpretation that understands the film to provide a more hopeful view of l’Île-aux-Coudres’ cultural future. Through the way they construct and develop their documentary identities over the course of the film, the individuals featured in Pour la suite du monde demonstrate not only the intricate web of personalities and relationships that comprise the island society, but also the extent to which that community is reinvigorated by the renewed whale hunt, and, by extension, by the film itself. As such, careful analysis of performance choices across the film suggests a way of resolving a standing debate within the literature, even as it illustrates the documentary subject’s role in constructing the meaning of nonfiction texts.
Early in *Pour la suite du monde*, the performance choices made by the subjects do much to establish their unique character traits, and thus to indicate the differences and divisions existing within the Île-aux-Coudres community. In fact, while many writers have noted the generational divide that is explored in the film,\(^{28}\) closer attention to performance emphasizes the numerous differences that exist *within* age groups on l’Île-aux-Coudres as well. Most obviously, the three elders on which the film focuses – Alexis Tremblay, Grand-Louis Harvey, and Abel Harvey – each present themselves in drastically different ways that belie any sense of generational unity that might otherwise be observed. Where Grand-Louis is consistently animated and loquacious in his stories and reminiscences, Alexis’ own acts of storytelling tend to be rather measured and restrained. As François Baby puts it, Grand-Louis is “the poet of exclamations and superlatives,” whereas Alexis is “the sage… the prophet” (136, my translation). On the other hand, as the third representative of the older cohort, Père Abel talks comparatively little. Unlike Louis and Alexis, with their near-constant recitations, Abel largely only speaks when spoken to, and is often shown overseeing a scene in rather stoic silence. He is, in Perrault’s words, “the unbreakable man” (18, my translation). Thus, while all three of these men may be representative of a single generation and ultimately share similar beliefs, the way in which they perform themselves at the beginning of this film nonetheless sets them up as strikingly divergent individuals with as many attributes dividing them as binding them together. By extension, their drastically different forms of self-presentation also point toward the divisions and uncertainties that threaten the Île-aux-Coudres community.

A particularly vivid demonstration of this process can be seen in the sequence that runs from the end of the shareholders’ meeting through to the beginning of the first trip in
search of the old weir. The segment begins with a synch sound enacted scene during which Grand-Louis recounts one of his characteristically colourful stories to a group of assembled children. Despite being filmed from the side (at distances ranging from the medium shot to close up range) and not directing his performance at the camera specifically, Louis nonetheless conveys his upbeat, active and convivial personality to the film viewer as well as to his onscreen audience at this moment.

As he tells the tale of how the hunt once reinvigorated him after a particularly harrowing adventure on horseback, he speaks at a brisk, excited pace, and modulates his voice expressively. His pitch drops suddenly and dramatically, for instance, when he first mentions the pain caused by his rapid-fire ride, helping to emphasize the sense of gravity he wishes to confer on his injuries. Likewise, his sudden employment of voiced sound effects, such as the “ra-ba-tat” he uses to suggest the noise made by the horse’s hooves, vary his vocal patterns and help to construct a vivid sonic image of the scene he’s attempting to evoke. Finally, having built his story up and amplified the sense of excitement attached to it by increasing both his tempo and his pitch steadily, Louis pauses and takes a deep breath before coming to his central point about the reinvigorating powers of the hunt. Following a cut into a tight close up that further amplifies the sense that this storyteller has reached his dramatic climax, he declares confidently that the next hunt will also possess this rejuvenating power, repeating the pronouncement for further emphasis and effect. Through this range of vocal and verbal modulations, Louis demonstrates his unique and distinctive character, indicating both his skill as a storyteller and the optimism, energy and good faith that mark his personality.
At the same time, Louis’ physical mannerisms also contribute importantly to the expressive, energetic self-image that he fashions in this scene. Throughout his recitation, this performer gesticulates with joyous abandon, painting the picture of his tale visually as much as aurally. He literally reenacts the process of horseback riding, for instance, and also points physically to several discrete locations as if to help lay out the geography of his remembered scene. At times, he gets so carried away with his tale that he seems unconcerned with modulating his actions to fit the camera’s viewpoint; his expansive gestures are barely contained by the medium to medium close frame, and – at one point – Brault has to reposition the camera to follow Louis as he walks toward his listeners excitedly. As this last point suggests, Louis’ kinesic choices also demonstrate his extraversion and sociality; he maintains eye contact with his audience throughout much of his story, and frequently leans in to address them more directly. Like his expressive vocal delivery, Louis’ animated physicality in this sequence positions him as a uniquely vibrant, energetic and gregarious individual. It does much to cement Perrault’s impression that “Grand-Louis is a ham” (10, my translation). “He is the teller of wonders. The wind that blows. And he offers nothing but exclamations” (qtd. in Duburger 357, my translation).

In marked contrast, Alexis’ performance choices in the modified interview sequence that follows indicate that he is private and reflective where Louis is outgoing and unreserved. For instance, though the initial cut from a close up of Louis to one of Alexis emphasizes their physical similarities, Alexis promptly puts an end to any thoughts of resemblance by pausing for several seconds before he starts to speak. (Of course, the editor who chose to include these quiet moments must also be credited for helping to construct this effect). This amount of silence was certainly never allowed to elapse while Louis was onscreen, and its emphatic
presence here marks Alexis as uniquely methodical and rational. Interestingly, when he finally does begin to talk (ostensibly in response to an edited-out question from Perrault), Alexis takes up a topic not unlike the one just addressed by Louis, describing the whale hunt as “the most exhilarating fishing… that gives the most passion to man” (my translation). Where Louis’ vocal delivery was energetic and highly varied, though, Alexis speaks at a measured pace and in a consistently hushed, almost melancholy tone. Furthermore, while Louis danced around with frenetic abandon as he spoke, Alexis is entirely still in this brief section, barely moving but for some slow blinks and contemplative smiles that suggest his introspection. The camera need not move to follow him, but can remain in a static, tight close up that captures the small expressions that flit across his face and further distinguish him from his animated colleague. Hence, even though their stories make the same ultimate point, Alexis’ and Louis’ divergent performances in these consecutive scenes reveal just how different the two men actually are. By placing these drastically different renditions of the same idea one after the other, Perrault and Brault draw this comparison especially clearly.

In the subsequent synch sound enacted scene, Père Abel presents himself as yet another unique personality amongst the island elders. Here, as he leads the first attempt to locate the remnants of the old beluga trap, Abel distinguishes himself immediately from both Louis and Alexis by speaking only when it is absolutely necessary. As younger men row energetically on all sides of him, Abel simply kneels in the middle of the boat, his central positioning and unwavering stance reflecting his position as the natural leader of the group (despite the fact that he is captured from behind for much of the sequence). Brault’s shaky, handheld camera contrasts with and emphasizes the fisherman’s strength and physical stability, moving up to capture Abel in medium close profile as he surveys the river calmly
and with an expert’s eye. After twelve full seconds without speaking (again, semiotically-rich seconds that are only available to viewers via the filmmakers’ decision to include them), Abel finally turns his head and announces, in a brusque and authoritative fashion, that the fishermen need to travel farther southward. The ‘maître de pêche’ then returns to silently keeping watch over the scene, further cementing his status as a stoic, no-nonsense sort of individual who differs considerably from Alexis and Louis.

As all of this suggests, the way in which these three elder characters perform themselves early in the film constructs a remarkably vivid sense of their divergent personalities. Even when espousing similar ideas, Abel, Louis and Alexis could not be more distinct one from the other. Moreover, this process of establishing a discrete, individual personality through performance is by no means limited to these three characters. Close attention to Léopold’s vocal and gestural choices near the beginning of the text, for instance, clearly suggests the extent to which he differs not only from older community members such as his father and Grand-Louis, but also from individuals – such as Joachim Harvey – who are closer to his own age. In this respect, attention to the islanders’ work in the initial portions of Pour la suite du monde corroborates Peter Harcourt’s argument that “if distinctions are made between the generations” in the film, “distinctions are made within them as well” (127).

Continuing attention to performance, however, ultimately substantiates a view of the film that differs considerably from Harcourt’s own. This alternate interpretation is evoked most strongly by the clear shifts in the way that Pour la suite du monde’s subjects present themselves over the course of the film. While the islanders’ performances at the beginning of the text do much to emphasize their individuality and difference, their techniques of self-presentation become much more uniform as the trap revival progresses. The three elders, for
example, whose performance choices differed so drastically early on, start to appear rather similar as the film nears its final moments. In particular, Alexis and Abel (and many of the younger characters as well), begin to behave more and more like the always energetic and optimistic Grand-Louis. Significantly, this remarkable transformation suggests the actual reinvigorating and consolidating effect that restoration of the hunt may have had on the community after all.

When the fishermen discover the initial whale in the trap, for instance, the quiet stoicism that characterizes Abel’s appearances at the beginning of the film is replaced by rather effusive excitement. This formerly restrained individual begins to speak frequently and colourfully from offscreen as he and Léopold approach the weir, and doesn’t stop throughout much of the rest of the scene. Most emphatically, as the men approach their catch, Abel moves into the handheld, medium long shot by which Brault renders the moment and literally greets the trapped beast in a witty, jocular tone. Raising both his pitch and his volume far above their usual level, he jokingly addresses the whale as his “old friend” (my translation), welcoming the creature with a friendly pat on its side. Having celebrated the success of the hunt in this quirky, demonstrative manner, Abel then encourages the other fishermen to do the same. After a cut to a shot from the other side of the harts that displays him from the front, he is seen shouting and gesturing for his compatriots to come and shake the whale’s ‘hand.’ In this relatively exuberant response – the excitement of which is mirrored by Brault’s unstable, bouncing camera – Abel too seems to have picked up some Grand-Louis-like joie de vivre, expressing himself and his emotions much more fully and insistently than he had in the early portions of the film.
Perhaps this sense of transformation is most completely realized, though, in Alexis’ reaction to the news of the whale in the weir. In an initial long shot that reveals his whole body, Alexis rushes from Léopold’s truck with far more physical energy than he has heretofore displayed and moves to shake Abel’s hand just as Abel had done with the whale itself. Where he previously moved only rarely, and in slight, slow increments at that, Alexis here takes broad and expansive steps, raising his knees vigorously and swinging his arm with abandon. At the same time, instead of resorting to the sort of deliberate and ponderous speech patterns that he used throughout the beginning of the film, this performer now speaks quickly and with abandon, his rapid pace and raised pitch indicating his considerable excitement and emotion. Finally, following a cut in to a medium close up that focuses attention on his excited face and animated hand gestures, Alexis reinforces the impression that he has shifted from a habit of introspection and reminiscence to one of Grand-Louis-like re-enactment by physically demonstrating the shiver that ran through him upon hearing the news of the catch. In fact, when Louis himself arrives on the scene and rushes excitedly to congratulate Abel moments later, his performance is remarkably similar to the one just offered by Alexis, a fact emphasized by the almost identical framing that Brault uses to film the two arrivals. In combination with cinematographic choices, then, performance renders the newfound unity and similarity of the community particularly apparent.

This sense of Alexis’ and Abel’s movement toward a more Louis-like mode of self presentation culminates in the two men’s extended conversation on the hill at the end of the film. At this point, well after the initial excitement of the catch has died down, both of these island elders remain far more energetic and enthusiastic than they had been early in the film,
and this marked change suggests that the revival of the hunt may well have had a lasting impact on their characters. Shot from the side in a medium close up that allows him to communicate through both his facial expressions and through movements of his head and upper body, Alexis tells Abel about the trip to New York in the same animated manner that characterized his reaction to the initial success of the trap. He smiles and laughs as he describes seeing a nude mannequin in a New York shop window, for instance, modulating his voice expressively and barely pausing for breath between sentences. Moreover, while maintaining a seated position on the hillside, Alexis nonetheless adds additional colour to his anecdote by way of communicative gesture, almost constantly moving some combination of his head, arms, and torso in visual accompaniment to (and extension of) his words.

Similarly, through his performance choices, Abel continues to convey the cheerful, talkative personality that first appeared during his encounter with the trapped whale. As a matter of fact, he now appears to have become quite garrulous and lighthearted indeed, interjecting from offscreen at several times throughout Alexis’ story and joking – in his own medium close ups – about everything from his wife to the possibility of catching the first whale’s mother. Again, at this late juncture in the film, both Alexis and Abel make use of performance strategies that are quite similar to those typically used by Grand-Louis. They speak quickly, constantly, and expressively, all the while employing energetic movements to clarify and emphasize their emotions. As such, both men seem far more social, upbeat and contented than they did at the beginning of the film, and thus suggest that the renewal of the hunt has reinvigorated them, just as Grand-Louis predicted it would.

In this respect, careful attention to the islanders’ performances over the course of *Pour la suite du monde* provides some compelling insights into the film and its larger
thematic implications. By gradually shifting from widely discrepant brands of self-presentation towards a much more uniform performance style, these individuals’ performance choices (as framed and edited by Perrault and Brault) underline both the initial divisions within their community, and the way in which the process of reviving an obsolete tradition has made them into a much more cohesive, homogeneous group. In this sense, these performers both confirm and deny René Prédal’s opinion that “each [of the islanders filmed by Perrault and Brault] vibrated in unison with the expression of a Grand-Louis” (189, my translation). While this Grand-Louis-inspired unity certainly characterizes the community at the end of Pour la suite du monde, it is definitively absent at the film’s outset. As a result, the mediated work of the islanders in this film doesn’t suggest that cohesion and unanimity are responsible for the success of the hunt (as Prédal claims), but rather indicates that the hunt itself possesses transformative, unifying powers. Though this revived community tradition may not fully protect the Île-aux-Coudres community from the onslaught of modernity and assimilation, the clear performance shifts of these documentary subjects intimate that it has nonetheless transformed, reinvigorated and reunited a variety of community members for the time being at least. This striking demonstration of efficacy provides compelling evidence for those who understand the film to provide a workable program for cultural perseverance. It illustrates that the resuscitation of local tradition can have a community-strengthening effect, and thus suggests that the islanders will have a functional means of (at least partial) defense at their disposal for years to come.

In addition to corroborating this interpretation that has been widely debated, however, the performance choices of the individuals in Pour la suite du monde also generate a range of related meanings that have not received a great deal of attention. Most notably, the fact that
all of the people featured in the film become progressively more like Grand-Louis ultimately endows this individual with an unusual significance that has heretofore been almost entirely overlooked. In fact, several authors position Alexis as the central character in *Pour la suite du monde*, while Michel Brûlé claims that, by the end of the film, “the world belongs to Léopold” (42, my translation). Attention to performance, however, nominates Louis as the film’s figure of primary import. By extension, certain characteristics associated with this favoured individual are also given special weight. First and foremost amongst these emphasized attributes is Louis’ tendency to participate in active, social performances of culture.

To be sure, whereas Alexis prefers (initially, at least) to reminisce in isolation or to read from Cartier’s diary, Grand-Louis takes part in public, community rituals throughout *Pour la suite du monde*. In addition to being a cantor at the local church, he is also involved (unlike Alexis, Léopold or Abel) in both the auction for the souls and the traditional mid-lent celebration. What’s more, Louis repeatedly takes it upon himself to explain and demonstrate local custom (even outside of the hunt) to members of the younger generation. Rather than simply telling stories though (as Alexis might), Louis literally reenacts, and thus resurrects, rituals. When he gives the children Easter water to drink, for example, he successfully engages them in a local tradition, whether or not they fully appreciate its symbolic weight. Indeed, even when he isn’t literally renewing a tradition in this way, his animated, highly physical storytelling often involves vigorous reenactment (as in the horseback mime), which ultimately has the same effect of revivifying a past moment within the present. Stated simply, Louis continuously resurrects local tradition through *doing*. As Perrault says, “he imitates the old gestures… He confounds the past and the future” (23, my translation). With this in mind,
perhaps it is not surprising that others on the island become more like Louis once they are brought to actively and socially participate in the revival of local custom through the film itself.

This emphasis on doing, constructed by the film’s performers through their gradual assumption of Grand-Louis-like characteristics, suggests that many of the most commonly held assumptions about *Pour la suite du monde*, and about Perrault’s work in general, need to be refined. In particular, this new focus demands that we begin talking about the filmmaker’s oeuvre as something other than a “cinéma de la parole” (Melnyk 131). Perrault’s desire to capture distinctly francophone forms of oral communication on film is well known, and the widespread process of accenting this aspect of his films is captured in Gwenn Scheppler’s reading of *Pour la suite du monde*. “Speech,” according to Scheppler, “is the driving element of the film, its structure and goal: Perrault wants to make Québécois speech, *la parlure*, heard” (46). Even those scholars who acknowledge the importance of action within Perrault’s work nonetheless suggest that the director values doing and speaking uniformly. David Clandfield, for instance, writes, Perrault “denies a hierarchy of verbal and non-verbal codes, granting equal value to gestural and verbal enactments of cultural events to the extent that the one merges into the other as communal celebration” (“Ritual” 141). On the contrary, attention to performance in *Pour la suite du monde* suggests that action is key to cultural endurance. Oral performance may participate in the perpetuation of local identity, but it is only the active enactment of culture that allows for the kind of revitalization documented in the film. In this respect, the performer’s work in *Pour la suite du monde* also corroborates a notion that — to my knowledge — Guy Gauthier is alone in underlining. “Perrault isn’t content
with collecting words,” Gauthier writes, “he wants those words to be immersed in action, 
where they confront the resistance of elemental forces” (210, my translation).

Beyond pointing towards their potential for cultural longevity, then, the performers in
Pour la suite du monde also suggest the necessity of revising our understanding of how this 
longevity might be achieved. They underline that la parlure must be accompanied and given 
life by the active performance of cultural tradition. This is the secret that Grand-Louis 
Harvey already knew (however instinctively) before Perrault and Brault arrived on the scene, 
and the secret that the film retroactively suggests is at least partially responsible for his 
considerable perseverance, optimism and bonhomie. Moreover, this is also the lesson that the 
other islanders learn in the process of making the film; they are impelled to participate in 
Grand-Louis-like reenactment, and thus are revitalized and invigorated themselves.

As this last point suggests, the transformation effected by the Île-aux-Coudres citizens 
over the course of Pour la suite du monde also points to one other under-acknowledged 
meaning advanced by the film. By demonstrating the rejuvenating effects of the hunt, and by 
lauding Grand-Louis’ tendency to reenact and revivify traditions more generally, the 
islanders also validate Perrault’s and Brault’s filmmaking method. Against critics who fault 
the filmmakers for interfering in the community and for ‘fictionalizing’ its members’ 
actions, the islanders’ performed transformation valorizes of the process of reviving defunct 
rituals that lies at the film’s core. By extension, this transformation also suggests that 
interventionist filmmaking might have an appreciable real world effect. Perrault himself has 
argued that his Île-aux-Coudres films had this kind of positive influence on the community 
they documented. “I rehabilitated them,” he once said of the islanders and his experiences 
filming them. (qtd. in Perraton 104, my translation). The actions of the performers in Pour la
suite du monde suggest that this is not just egotistical posturing. Their performative work vividly demonstrates the kind of rehabilitation that can be achieved through a reenactment that – as the film’s opening titles remind us – the filmmakers themselves provoked.

**Conclusion**

*Pour la suite du monde*, like *Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen* and *Leonard Cohen, I’m Your Man*, illustrates clearly the first and most basic function of the documentary performer’s work. By mobilizing the techniques and tools discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, nonfiction subjects play a significant role in the construction of documentary characters. These characters may be mimetic representations of plausible people (as is typically the case), or non-mimetic delineations of human abstractions (as *Leonard Cohen, I’m Your Man* begins to illustrate); our sense of their nature may be influenced heavily by the work of extratextual factors (including star image), or only mildly. So long as individuals appear in documentary texts, however, their performative choices work with other formal devices to help determine documentary identities to some degree. Furthermore, the characters that performance helps to produce have a range of additional functions that merit further exploration. By examining *Pour la suite du monde*, this chapter has illustrated one significant task fulfilled by documentary characters in action; through the complex and shifting ways in which they construct their identities, the performers of *Pour la suite du monde* exert an indelible influence on the larger meaning(s) advanced by the documentary text in which they figure. Subsequent chapters will demonstrate how the characters embodied by nonfiction subjects can perform a variety of other services as well.

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1 Phelan notes that some novels may eschew this mimetic function. He writes: “In works where the traits fail to coalesce into the portrait of a possible person, e.g., Swift’s creation of Gulliver, or some modern works intent on destroying the mimetic illusion, a character will have mimetic dimensions.
without a mimetic function” (11). Arguably however, these modern works might themselves be seen as mimetic, echoing the contemporary vision of identity as unknowable, multiple and in flux. (See the subsequent note for further elaboration on this point).

2 This is not to suggest that these plausible humans are simply reflections of existing real world individuals. In fact, as Murray Smith points out, there is a fundamental problem with the widespread tendency to equate ‘the mimetic’ with ‘the natural,’ insomuch as this conflation of terms elides the fact that mimesis always entails a culturally-contingent process of representation. He writes: even “praising something for its ‘realism’ depends implicitly on recognizing that it is not of the same order as the thing imitated, that an effort of construction was necessary to produce the effect” (Engaging 32-33). My understanding of mimesis then, like Smith’s, is not a naïve view “in which narratives and other forms of representation are thought to re-present ‘transparently’ a set of events which have occurred or which might occur” (ibid 33). Rather, I simply take the term to designate a relation of imitation, by which art objects stand as conventionally determined analogues for real-world counterparts (which themselves needn’t be seen as fixed or essentialized). Furthermore, because the type of convention used to create a mimetic effect can vary widely across time and place, the conceivable human identities found within documentary texts needn’t necessarily be created by way of traditional ‘Realist’ or ‘Naturalist’ representational processes. Given the recent understanding of identity as performed, mutable and discursively determined, for example, a “plausible person”, in Phelan’s terms, might just as feasibly be constructed in an overt, non-Realist style as through traditional representational Naturalism.

3 Sociological/psychological researchers who demonstrate this kind of attention to the way in which everyday performance contributes to the construction of personality/character include: Addington; Burgoon; DePaulo; Goffman; Leary (Self-Presentation); Leary and Kowalski; Lovell; Mahl and Schulze; Malone; Martin Ginis and Leary; Mehrabian; O’Callaghan and Doyle; Pin and Turndorf; Pollock; Roth; Schlenker; Schlenker and Pontari; Schneider; Stretesky and Pogrebin; Strong; Tedeschi; etc. Outside of psychological/sociological circles, Judith Butler and her followers make a similar point from a different perspective. Amongst screen acting scholars, the argument that performance contributes importantly to character construction is endorsed by: Baron (“Performances”); Baron, Carson and Tomasulo; Braddy; Dyer (Stars); Hoffner and Cantor; Klevan; Kozloff; Larue and Zucker; Lothe; Maltby; McDonald; Michaels; Newman; Pearson (“A Star”); Potts; M. Smith (Engaging); Wexman (Creating); etc. Valdes also points implicitly in this direction when he notes the way in which behavioural features such as facial expressions and gestures, amongst other things, contribute to characterization in Casablanca and Frida (143-150). Together, then, these authors position the actor’s work as a key element within what Gerald Mead calls the “‘rhetoric’ of character representation”, underlining that it must be seen as part of the formal machinery through which “we come to recognize and understand fictional characters” onscreen (451).

4 At the same time, the films also demonstrate the way in which even celebrity performance is inevitably framed by and filtered through the filmmaking apparatus and the documentary conventions chosen by the filmmaker. While known performers such as Cohen may have more experience with constructing their personae and/or more influence during the process of filming, the elements of their performances that end up in the final version of the text are nonetheless ultimately a product of the filmmaker’s choices in terms of framing, editing, mixing, and the like.

5 For example, any of the several films focusing on Bob Dylan (Dont Look Back [D.A. Pennebaker, USA, 1967], No Direction Home: Bob Dylan [Martin Scorsese, USA, 2005]); on the Rolling Stones (Sympathy for the Devil [Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1968], Gimme Shelter [Albert and David Maysles,

6 The following list provides a small sampling of the texts that contribute to these enduring aspects of Cohen’s persona. For comments about the dark and pessimistic nature of the Cohen image, see: “Black Romanticism”; G. Brown; M. Brown; Davey; Djwa; Donaldson; Duffy; Enright; Gitlin; Goldstein; Huston; Johnson (“Our Poet”); Kirk; J. McKenna; Morley; Nunziata; Pacey; Pirrie; Rodriguez; Rogers; Scobie (“Introduction”); Scobie (“Magic”); Skelton Grant; P. Smith (“Sincerely”); Snider; Spencer; Wain; Walsh; Wren. For allusions to his wit and comedy, see: G. Brown; Djwa; Duffy; J. Johnston; Kleiman; Morley; Ondaatje; Pacey; Spencer; M. Wilson. For discussions of (and/or statements indicative of) his paradoxical personality, see: “Black Romanticism”; Bromige; G. Brown; M. Brown; de Lisle; Djwa; Duffy; Gitlin; Gnarowski; Goldstein; M. Harris; Huston; Johnson (“Our Poet”); King; Kirk; J. McKenna; Morley; Nunziata; Ondaatje; Pacey; Phipps; Robbins; Rodriguez; Rose (“Documentary is Ode”); P. Smith (“Sincerely”); Spencer; Sward; M. Wilson. For commentary surrounding his status as genius, prophet and/or saint, see: Anderson (“New Skins”); Barbour; G. Brown; Burk; “Capturing the Cohen Effect”; Clarkson (“Counterpoint”); Dragland; Gitlin; Glover; M. Harris; Johnson (“Our Poet”); Kleiman; Pacey; Rodriguez; Schwartz; Scobie (“Magic”); Sward. For references to his fashion sense, see: M. Brown; Burk; Chonin; Clarkson (“Counterpoint”); Deutschmann; M. Harris; Huston; Johnson (“Our Poet”); Kirk; Lumsden; Nunziata; Walsh. For commentary about Cohen’s attachment to and exploits with women, see: J. Adams; Barbour; “Black Romanticism”; G. Brown; M. Brown; Codrescu; Davey; Johnson (“Our Poet”); Johnson (“Rear-View”); Kleiman; Lumsden; Ondaatje; Rogers; Scobie (“Untitled”); Spencer; and Walsh. Much of Cohen’s writing also displays this emphasis, as does his appearance in the NFB film Angel (Derek May, Canada, 1966). For remarks about his love for cigarettes and/or alcohol, see: M. Brown; Burk; Chonin; Deutschmann; Enright; Huston; Johnson (“Our Poet”); Kirk; Nunziata; Pirrie; Rogers; P. Smith (“Sincerely”); Walsh.

7 Of course, there are exceptions to both sides of this equation. Star personalities can appear under their own names in fictional texts (as did Orson Welles in an episode of I Love Lucy, for instance), and/or act other personalities in documentaries (as do Willem Dafoe, Robert DeNiro, and the countless others who voice letters written by troops in Dear America: Letters Home from VietNam [Bill Couterie, USA, 1987]). By and large, however, the statement holds true.

8 On the one hand, this is not a controversial supposition. Dyer emphasized years ago that stars contribute to the construction of character though both their images and their performative labour (Stars 126). Subsequent scholars, however, have tended to overlook the way in which character signifies. As recently as 2006, for instance, Karen Hollinger claimed, “in spite of [a few] insightful forays into the investigation of star acting, it remains an area that calls out for further analysis” (54). Most significantly in terms of the present argument, the notion of performance and star image interacting in the creation of cinematic character has been largely ignored, while studies alluding to the way in which persona alone influences the perception of character are far more common. See, for example, Maria La Place’s extended consideration of the way in which an awareness of “the Bette Davis discourse” (43) exerts a strong influence of our understanding of Charlotte Vale’s ‘cure’ in Now, Voyager (Irving Rapper, USA, 1942). Indeed, even studies that purport to take up the interplay of image and acting often discuss performance in general terms only, as though it were synonymous with character. John Ellis, for example, discusses the way in which “the star performance in fiction”
can mesh with, contradict or selectively utilize elements of the star image (545). He stops short of analyzing the actor’s work itself, however, and rather focuses on the characteristics of the fictional figures played by actors without considering how those characteristics are formed in performance. Other work which treats star acting often tends to focus on the type of acting characteristic of either individual stars or of star performers in general, rather than examining the way in which performance choices of whatever style help to construct character (see, for example, Geraghty (“Re-examining”); Hollinger; B. King; etc.)

9 Many early commentators note the prominence of contradiction in Cohen’s poetry, novels, and songs, for instance, implicitly (and sometimes quite overtly) connecting this feature to the personality of the writer himself. Desmond Pacey, for one, writes, “[t]he first poem in Let Us Compare Mythologies, ‘Elegy’, exhibits a number of characteristics which recur throughout [Cohen’s] work: … [including] his fascination with situations which mingle violence and tenderness to heighten the effect of both” (6). Likewise, in 1966, Dennis Duffy argued that – like Cohen himself – the novel Beautiful Losers constituted a “fusion of seemingly discordant elements into a coherent whole” (31). More recently, Pia Smith claimed that Cohen “exercises his poet’s right to reduce all things to an equal plane: lust and holiness, heaven and hell, garbage and flowers. He embraces complexity and darkness as openly as he does spirituality, joy and humour” (43). Other pieces demonstrating this attention to Cohen’s paradoxical tendencies are cited in note 6 above.

10 See, for example: Cecil; Nadel (A Life).

11 In films such as Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples’ Temple (Stanley Nelson, USA, 2006) and The U.S. vs. John Lennon (David Leaf and John Scheinfeld, USA, 2006), for example, the central subjects (Jim Jones and John Lennon, respectively) are no longer alive to perform themselves for the documentary camera; nonetheless, the performative work of other filmic participants helps to craft an image of these deceased figures as surely as do Jones’/Lennon’s appearances in archival footage and a range of other formal techniques outside of performance. Likewise, the actions and reactions of various customers and of other bible vendors condition our understanding of Paul Brennan in Salesman (Albert and David Maysles, USA, 1968); Werner Herzog’s voiceover narration frames our perception of Graham Dorrington in The White Diamond (Werner Herzog, Germany, 2005) and of Dieter Dengler in Little Dieter Needs to Fly (Werner Herzog, Germany, 1997); the interview performances of various curmudgeonly individuals contribute to Alan Zweig’s self-portrait in I, Curmudgeon (Alan Zweig, Canada, 2004), etc. In each case, an impression of certain documentary subjects is built up and conveyed in part through the communicative actions of others.

12 According to Desmond Pacey, for instance, “Voluntary loss of the self for some higher cause is … the main theme of Beautiful Losers” (18), and this theme is also adumbrated in earlier Cohen texts such as Flowers for Hitler and The Favourite Game. In like manner, Michael Gnarowski describes Cohen’s second novel as a work wherein “human beings are taught to obliterate themselves into sainthood” (6). Further references can be found in note 6.

13 In a c.1970 review, for example, Burr Snider alluded to Cohen’s quasi-religious, self-sacrificial tendencies by writing that the poet-songwriter “waves his never-healing stigmata scars in our faces to show us what we’ve done to him” (59), while, in a 1969 interview with Michael Harris, Cohen himself admitted: “I think I went through a saintly phase where I was consciously trying to model myself on what I thought a saint was” (54). Adrienne Clarkson summed up this line of popular opinion in a piece written in honour of Cohen’s sixtieth birthday in 1994. “Leonard Cohen,” Clarkson

14 Here, I use the word knowledgeable simply to denote awareness of Cohen’s persona; it is not meant in an evaluative sense.

15 Bell; Brenner; Burr (“Mystery Unsolved”); Caden; Eagan; E. Grant; Griffin; Gritten; Gross; Holden (“Documentary”); Hornaday (“‘Cohen’, ‘Leonard Cohen’”); D. King; Knight; Lawson; Mosley; Nesbit; Pevere; Phillips; Puig (“‘Man’”); Rea; Ringel Gillespie; Seymour; Sinagra; Susman; Swietek; R. Thomas; Turner; and Zacharek also remark on Cohen’s reserve and self-deprecation to varying extents. See also: “Leonard Cohen” (Evening Standard).

16 Anderson (“New Skins”) and Sragow make similar points, noting the multiple ways in which many of Cohen’s songs have been interpreted by cover artists.

17 Other reviewers who note the diverse interpretations of Cohen’s songs in this film include: Eagan; Germain; Griffin; D. King; Kipp; J. Lewis; Persall; Pevere; Ringel Gillespie; Rose (“Documentary”); Turner.

18 Several other reviewers also note the understated, reserved nature of this performance, including: Burr (“Mystery Unsolved”); Caden; Gold; Kirland; Lorentzen; Persall; Zacharek and – in less complimentary terms – Benziker and R. Thomas.

19 Many reviewers in fact note (or make comments that allude to) the film’s hagiographic nature. See, for instance: Antani (“Leonard Cohen”); Benziker; Brenner; Burk; Burr (“Mystery Unsolved”); DeBell; Eagan; Farber; Fox; E. Grant; Groen; Gross; Harrington; T. Johnston; D. Jones: Kiefer; D. King; Knight; Koehler (“Leonard Cohen”); “Life and Loves”; Lockwood; Maurstad; Moore; Morgenstern; Nesbit; Pevere; Phipps; Puig (“‘Man’”); Ramos; Schwartz; Sinagra; Turner; C. Wilson; Wright; and Zacharek.

20 Other scholars who discuss the way in which everyday performance helps to determine situational meaning include: Bloch; Brissett and Edgley; Leary (Self-Presentation); Liddicoat; Malone; Schlenker and Pontari; etc.

21 Similar arguments can also be found within: Baron (“Performances”); Baron, Carson and Tomasulo – and several articles within this anthology; Esslin; Knobloch; Watney; Wexman (Creating); Wexman (“Kinesics”); etc.

22 Here, Nichols draws upon an understanding of character initiated by Aristotle and later taken up and extended by 20th-Century Structuralists such as Tomashevsky, Barthes and Branigan. According to this view, characters are merely functions of plots; they should not be understood as discrete beings, but rather only as aggregates of the attributes that narratives require them to possess (see Chatman, Frow, J. Phelan and M. Smith [Engaging] for summaries of this approach). As actual human beings, however, documentary subjects cannot be fully subordinated to the plots in which they figure. Nichols thus suggests that the bodies in documentaries are both characters and “historical person[s]” (“History” 10). While I agree with this basic contention, I see no need to advance a term in addition to ‘character’ to describe it. Indeed, an alternate, equally common conception of character (perhaps espoused most clearly by late 19th-Century playwrights and dramatic theorists such as Ibsen,
Strindberg and Shaw) understands the term to denote representations of human beings whose traits exceed the plot(s) in which they figure and help to determine narrative actions. (Throughout the famous preface to *Miss Julie*, for instance, Strindberg describes his title character as though she were an actual individual, and notes the way in which many of her traits and attributes motivate the events of the plot.) In this sense, a character is something close to a “historical person” in Nichols’ terms. With all this in mind, I follow authors such as James Phelan and Murray Smith (*Engaging*) in combining the humanist and structuralist approaches to character, and use the term to describe textual figures in their dual capacity as personages and agents. In this sense, my view approaches the position suggested by Henry James when he asks: “What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?” (qtd. in Chatman 112-113).


24 Other critics who advance this kind of optimistic reading of the film include: the anonymous author of an article in *Films à l’écran* (“Pour la Suite”); Alcaïdé; Baby; Clandfield (“Linking”); Clandfield (*Pierre Perrault*); Gauthier; Perraton and Desautels; Poirier; and Prédal. Perrault himself also points toward this interpretation when he writes, “These first films [including *Pour la suite du monde*] took part in this desire to take literally a present that asks questions of the future by invoking the past. Not to renounce anything, but to come to occupy all territories. And first of all, that of an identity that was initially only memory and pretense.” (9, my translation). Finally, an article in *La Presse* advocates this reading retrospectively, detailing the way in which the renewed whale hunt was kept up on l’Île-aux-Coudres in the years following the film, and in fact became more successful as time passed (“Pour la suite”).

25 Other scholars on this side of the interpretive divide (though many don’t make the argument as emphatically as Harcourt) include: Berson; Brûlé; Lacroix; Lever; and J. White, each of whom acknowledge the uncertainty of the islanders’ future at the end of the film. While his focus is slightly different, Bill Marshall points toward another fashion in which *Pour la suite du monde* indicates the islanders’ unsure and compromised position. The power of “the appeal to ‘tradition’” in the film, Marshall says, is complicated by the fact that this “appeal is constructed through technology and a federal institution” (31).

26 Scholars who discuss the film as reenactment include Michael and Perraton. Conversely, Gilles Marsolais rejects this view, suggesting that the film constitutes an “arousal” of the islanders’ own desires, rather than a provocation or reenactment (106).

27 In fact, the above discussion doesn’t come close to exhausting the number of ways in which the specific nonfiction practices employed by the filmmakers impinge upon the islanders’ work. Several authors have noted that Perrault and Brault pre-staged several scenes, for example, requiring the subjects to carry out their various self-presentational choices within set, externally determined positions. (See, for example: Clandfield [“Linking”]; Michael; J. White.). There is also an extensive literature discussing the way in which the islanders can often be seen explicitly modifying their everyday actions in relation to the camera (See, for example: Clandfield [“Linking”]; Marquis; Marsolais). In this respect, *Pour la suite du monde* provides a particularly clear example of the three stages of documentary performance outlined in Chapter One.

28 See, for example, Basile; Brûlé.
As Perrault describes, “Père Abel commands. He speaks like a rock” (23, my translation).

This contention can be found, for example, in: Carrière; Marsolais; Perraton; Perrault; Perreault; and Scheppler.

Other scholars discussing the centrality of the spoken word within Perrault’s oeuvre include: Daudelin; Duburger; Lever; Marcorelles; Marie; Marsolais; Melançon; Perrault; Pilard; and Pontaut.

See also: Baby, who notes that the individuals in Perrault’s films must perform both by living their lives (in action) and recounting their lives (in words). Again, though, Baby gives equal emphasis to both of these processes.

See, for example, Basile; Pontaut.
Chapter 3: Performance and Sociality

In nonfiction texts, as in fictional films and in life, performance is a multi-functional activity. While the documentary participant’s ‘expressive’ labour serves to construct and communicate her/his character first and foremost, it also fulfills a range of additional tasks. Central amongst these secondary functions is the negotiation of hegemonic social norms. During their appearances onscreen, nonfiction subjects not only enact their specific personalities, emotions and relationships, but also perform their position(s) within larger, discursively governed identity categories such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, class and dis/ability. They – like all of us - do gender, ethnicity, and the like, and in the process reinforce, inflect and/or subvert normative behavior patterns attributed to particular identity groups and widely mistaken as ‘natural.’1 This kind of politically charged identity work thus constitutes a second major function within my poetics of nonfiction performance.

Considerable support for the notion that documentary performance serves to perpetuate, complicate and/or undercut dominant understandings of various social categories can be drawn from the literatures investigating everyday self-presentation and screen acting. Scholars examining both of these phenomena have underlined repeatedly the way in which individual enactments of identity serve to replicate and/or to destabilize dominant discursive constructions.2 Because quotidian communicative activity and film acting constitute the first two levels of the documentary subject’s work, this substantial body of research also suggests the plausibility of considering the extent to which the performer’s labour might strengthen and/or undercut identity norms in the documentary context.

With this in mind, this chapter will explore and substantiate the argument that the nonfiction ‘social actor’ effectively propagates and/or undermines normative identity
constructions. On one hand, this is not a novel contention; many studies examining documentary performance underline the ways in which nonfiction subjects enact and negotiate various subject positions. This research notwithstanding, performance remains an under-acknowledged consideration within the scholarly work devoted to documentary representation. Just as the performer’s labour is overlooked and/or glossed over within the majority of the research pertaining to constructions of race, gender, etc. within fictional films, so too is her/his work ignored within much of the literature that examines the political efficacy of nonfiction representations. In this respect, many more investigations of the identity work accomplished by documentary performance are necessary in order to redress this longstanding imbalance.

Furthermore, while the small body of documentary performance-conscious literature lays the foundation for a consideration of the ideological efficacy of nonfiction enactments, it too leaves plenty of work to be done. To begin with, much of this material is somewhat limited inasmuch as it restricts its attention to individual (and rather atypical) texts that foreground and emphasize performance as an obvious formal component. While this is an understandable choice, this strict focus nonetheless overlooks a large portion of the nonfiction performance spectrum. In the process, it also contributes indirectly to a misguided and problematic sense that only certain kinds of documentaries actually involve performance in any case (mainly those that make use of dramatizations and reenactments, that feature actors playing roles outside of their own identities, or that involve obvious ‘playing up’ for the camera).

At the same time, much of the literature that acknowledges the ideological valences of the documentary subject’s identity work also suffers from a compelling lack of detail.
Many authors refer to performance only briefly, and/or refrain from backing up their general comments on the topic with detailed and thorough analysis of individual subjects’ specific communicative choices. In this respect, they fail to consider the work of documentary performance in its full complexity, and also run the risk of downplaying (or at least not emphasizing adequately) the concrete materiality through which performative subjectivities must be realized. As Elin Diamond writes, it is only when “performativity materializes as performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation … between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment, [that] we have access to cultural meanings and critique. Performativity … must be rooted in the materiality and historical density of performance” (5). With all of this in mind, the analyses in this chapter will attempt to build on a scholarly foundation that is at once too limited and specific (in its selection of texts) and too vague (in its engagement with the actual features and processes of performance). By examining the ideological contours of specific performance choices in documentaries that aren’t explicitly ‘performance based,’ I will provide more thorough and compelling evidence of the nonfiction subject’s participation in identity politics.

In particular, I will demonstrate the way in which documentary performances can support and/or subvert dominant conceptions of individual subject positions by discussing the enactment of masculinities within two related, but rather different documentary texts. The first of these – “The Case of Milo Radulovich, AO589839” (Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly, USA, 1953) – is an episode of CBS News’ See It Now that originally aired on October 20, 1953; the second – Emile de Antonio’s Point of Order! (USA, 1963) – is a compilation film comprised of footage from the Army-McCarthy Hearings, which themselves took place less than a year after the Radulovich broadcast went live. By focusing
on the way in which nonfiction subjects negotiate period-specific constructions of the masculine gender within these two pieces, I will not only demonstrate the documentary participant’s ability to reinforce and/or to undermine normative identity constructions, but also participate in the process of deconstructing a subject position – namely, hegemonic masculinity – that has often been naturalized and policed especially emphatically.

Before proceeding further, I should acknowledge that focusing on the performance of masculinities alone is a drastic oversimplification of the complexity of performative identity work. As Diana Saco underlines, “identity should be regarded as a composite term signifying the multiple subjectivities that comprise one’s sense of who one is” (24, emphasis in original). One is never simply doing gender, for instance; such performances are combined with enactments of sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, dis/ability, profession, and countless other subject positions. Indeed, as Megan E. Abbott has argued, various discourses – such as those of gender, sexuality and race – are often intertwined in significant ways (4). In the interests of maintaining clarity within a chapter of this length, however, I have chosen to attend to masculinities alone and in detail, given their salience within the documentaries under consideration and their relative under-representation within the literature devoted to identity politics. While studies interrogating the construction of maleness have become increasingly common in recent years, they are still drastically outnumbered by investigations of femininity and of various minoritarian groups. What follows is thus also an attempt to direct attention to an object of inquiry that remains comparatively under-explored.

**An Individualist… Just Like the Rest of Us – “The Case of Milo Radulovich”**

In the moments before the “The Case of Milo Radulovich, AO589839” was aired on October 20, 1953, Edward R. Murrow is said to have turned to producer Fred Friendly and
warned, “things will never be the same around here after tonight” (Friendly 3-4). In line with this widely cited bit of television lore, the Radulovich episode of See It Now has often been positioned as a watershed text within the history of small screen documentary. Shortly after the program went live on CBS, for instance, New York Times critic Jack Gould dubbed it “a long step forward in television journalism” (X13). A. William Bluem later agreed, positioning the Radulovich broadcast as “a turning point in television history” (qtd. in Rosteck “Synecdoche” 230). The program – a sympathetic investigation of an Air Force lieutenant dismissed from the service on the grounds of his family’s potential Communist sympathies – has been credited with forcing the Air Force to reinstate the dismissed flyer, solidifying new standards in broadcast journalism, speeding the demise of McCarthyism, and demonstrating the public service potential of the television medium for the first time.7

As Dinah Lynn Zeiger points out, however, “Such effusive praise is a double-edged sword: for while it honors the integrity of the producers and the network for revealing the plight of one man, it also creates an echo chamber, obscuring other equally significant messages contained in the visual and verbal narrative” (281). Rarely acknowledged amidst what Eric Barnouw calls the “many paeans of praise” (177) directed toward the text, for instance, is the way in which the program showcases and emphasizes gendered performances that repeat, inflect and ultimately solidify the version of masculinity positioned as normative in 1950s American culture. In this respect, the text is decidedly less groundbreaking or progressive than its legend suggests.

In fact, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” indicates strikingly the way in which documentary performers – like their everyday and fictional film counterparts – might serve to fortify and secure what R.W. Connell has termed “hegemonic masculinity” (Masculinities
In spite of the necessary multiplicity and heterogeneity of gender practices at any given socio-historical moment, Connell writes, “one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (ibid).

When the Radulovich episode of See It Now was produced in 1953, the conventionalized masculine pattern to which all others were subordinated in the United States was that of the suburban, breadwinning father – the eponymous ‘man in the gray flannel suit.’ Though historians of the 1950s such as James Gilbert contend that we must “change our assumption that there was a single, prevailing, agreed-upon norm of masculinity during the decade” (8), a wide variety of evidence nonetheless indicates that the model of the straight, white, middle class, father-provider was regularized especially emphatically in the U.S. during the postwar years. Elaine Tyler May, for instance, notes the centrality of the home in 1950s American life, and ultimately concludes that this climate of “[d]omestic containment was bolstered by a powerful political culture that rewarded its adherents and marginalized its detractors” (14). Stephanie Coontz likewise describes the 1950s as “a profamily period if there ever was one” (qtd. in Karner 201), while Robert H. Bremner adds that within this emphatically domestic context, “husbands were constantly admonished to devote more time to home and family” (6). In response to such pressures, it appears that many American men adopted and performed the breadwinner model in their daily lives, helping to secure its hegemony by accepting and repeating its basic terms.

Films and television shows also played an important part in securing this masculine prototype, not least of all by making domestic concerns a central aspect of their male
characters’ existences. As Stella Bruzzi points out, the 1950s were an especially fertile period for Hollywood films pertaining to fatherhood (Bringing xv). Domestic melodramas and family centered comedies were relatively numerous, and ‘masculine’ genres formerly noted for their ruggedly individualist male characters began to make use of a familial framework as well. Dads proliferated in small screen programming too, becoming a particularly common feature of the many popular sitcoms featuring middle class male characters. As Elaine Tyler May writes, on a variety of programs “fatherhood became the center of a man’s identity. Viewers never saw the father of ‘Father Knows Best’ at work or knew the occupation of the Nelson’s lovable dad, Ozzie. They were fathers pure and simple” (146).

“The Case Of Milo Radulovich” likewise helps to endorse the notion that middle class, heterosexual domesticity is the ‘normal’ and expected way of life for American men by casting its central male character as a family man first and foremost. Indeed, as Dinah Lynn Zeiger suggests, the program “focus[es] on family relationships” despite the ostensibly public nature of the issue at hand, “stag[ing] the debate over whether Radulovich posed a security threat within the living rooms of its protagonists” (129n). The lieutenant himself is filmed strictly inside his middle class suburban home, wearing casual, well-kept clothes and flanked during interviews by a family photograph on one side and his stylishly attired wife on the other. His parents and sister are shown in similar household settings. Even Radulovich’s military service and education are positioned in relation to domestic ideals, insofar as Murrow’s initial voiceover description of them is played over a lengthy, panning long shot of tree lined streets, wooden frame houses and quaint shops within the Michigan suburb in which Radulovich lives.
Perhaps most significantly in this regard, Radulovich’s dismissal from the Air Force is framed precisely as a family problem – and one that cuts two ways. First of all, the discharge itself is cast as an unjust attack against familial loyalty. As Radulovich notes in his initial interview sequence, the specific allegation that the Air Force has proffered against him is maintaining “a close and continuing relationship with [his] dad and [his] sister over the years.” Secondly, the case is positioned as especially problematic insofar as it might adversely affect Radulovich’s status as a father and breadwinner. Radulovich again points toward this issue himself in his initial interview comments. “Anybody that is labeled with a security risk, in these days,” he says, “simply won’t be able to find employment in his field of work. … If the Air Force won’t have me, I ask the question: who else will?” By including this comment within Radulovich’s first appearance onscreen, the text begins to lay the foundation for its argument that – as Zeiger suggests – this documentary subject’s “real worry concerns his ability to provide for his family” (284).

Not surprisingly, performance plays a significant part in this process of casting Radulovich as a family man above all else. In each of the three performance contexts in which the program’s participants appear – interviews, voiceover and reportage – they make a range of communicative choices that help to solidify the sense that fatherhood and family are defining aspects of Milo Radulovich’s life. In interview sequences in which he is seen and/or heard, for instance, reporter Joe Wershba continually returns the subjects to kinship issues, implicitly suggesting the centrality of family in their lives in the process. In one sequence, for instance, he asks Radulovich’s wife Nancy (from offscreen) to comment on her husband’s actions from her position “as a mother with two kids”, emphasizing the fact of her parenthood – and, by extension, Milo’s – by raising his pitch for and pausing after the final two words of
this description. Subsequently, he asks Radulovich himself to offer an opinion as to what might happen to the couple’s children as a result of their father’s dismissal, using a confident, matter of fact tone that suggests that such family-related questions are a ‘natural’ and obvious means of addressing the domestically inclined individual before him. Wershba speaks quickly and without pause as he makes this inquiry, for example, elaborating on its basic terms only by specifying the ages – five years and five months – of the two Radulovich tots. In this manner, his offscreen voice reemphasizes the fact that Radulovich has two young children to take care of and simultaneously implies that questions of fatherhood will be immediately clear, salient and acceptable to this home-loving interviewee.

In contrast, when – later in the sequence – he asks Radulovich a question that is not clearly related to the lieutenant’s status as father and/or family member, Wershba hesitates noticeably. “Maybe you’ve thought about this too,” he begins, his tentative phrasing acknowledging that the ensuing line of inquiry will be less attuned to Radulovich’s own concerns than his previous probes have been. A non-lexical ‘uh’ and a marked pause follow, uncharacteristically breaking up the flow of Wershba’s offscreen delivery, and thereby augmenting the sense of the impending query’s difference and potential inappropriateness. Finally the uncertain question is revealed: “Just what is your view of democracy?”, Wershba asks. By prefacing this abstract, political inquiry with a hedging and uncertain introductory clause, the reporter implies that issues of politics and the public sphere might well be foreign to Radulovich’s mindset; at the very least, he intimates, such issues are not as central to the lieutenant’s thinking as are the domestic issues raised unwaveringly throughout the remainder of the interview.
In their responses to these leading questions, Milo and Nancy Radulovich corroborate Wershba’s apparent sense that family is a preeminent aspect of Milo’s existence. For example, Nancy emphatically positions her husband and his actions in relation to the family unit by moving from the third-person singular pronoun “he” to the first person plural pronouns “we” and “us” in her responses. She wouldn’t want Milo to simply accept his dismissal, she says, because “If he did it would be admitting to something that we aren’t guilty of. … I don’t see how this should have happened to us when we have done nothing to warrant it.” Slight upward modulations in her pitch as she utters her first “we” and later says “us” make these markers of Radulovich’s inclusion in the domestic group especially pronounced. Given his tight connection to a family body, Nancy thus implies, an attack on Milo constitutes an attack on his wife and children as well. By extension, Milo’s actions to clear his name are cast as a decision motivated by concern for the family group as a whole.

The image track ratifies Nancy’s verbal and vocal placement of her husband as a concerned family man at this moment as well. A medium long shot taken from in front and to the left of Nancy captures not only her and Wershba (in profile, facing his interviewee), but also Milo himself at the opposite end of the couch. While Wershba’s knees and a stack of papers prevent the lieutenant from sitting in close physical proximity to his wife, he nonetheless conveys his connection to and respect for her by sitting quietly and gazing intently in her direction as she articulates her response. Furthermore, Milo substantiates Nancy’s characterization of him and his actions by nodding slightly in agreement as she suggests that to remain silent would be to blemish the whole family unduly. Placed within this staged configuration that opens up the opportunity of monitoring his reactions to his
wife’s statements (and indeed, even prompts such monitoring to some degree), Milo responds in a manner that once more points toward his position as the supportive, breadwinning father.

Radulovich most clearly indicates the centrality of his family within his life, however, in his own responses to Wershba’s queries in this sequence. Framed in medium close-ups that provide clear access to his facial expressions and construct a rather intimate connection between him and the audience, Milo performs his considerable attachment to his relatives in a variety of ways. To begin with, though he’s never especially demonstrative, Radulovich becomes most noticeably moved when talking about his kin and/or perceived attacks against them. As Thomas Rosteck notes, for instance, when Milo discusses the fact that his discharge was based on his close relationship to his father and sister, “his anger is clearly evident and at times rises to the surface” (See It Now 72). Similarly, the moderate expression of sadness that he conveys as he speaks about the effects of his ordeal on his children alerts us to the stock he places in his role as a father. He looks downward slightly more often than normal as he discusses his fears for his kids, for example, his upper body otherwise remaining almost entirely still and slack. His voice likewise begins to suggest some of the paralinguistic markers of sorrow, becoming somewhat more lax than usual and losing much of the sharpness and intensity that it had in past responses. At the same time, a cut in to a tighter medium close-up allows us to read these slight variations in his demeanor and cues us to understand this particular emotionally coded response as especially significant and noteworthy.

While such moments of increased emotional display serve to communicate Milo’s connection to his relatives especially clearly, they are not the only means by which his status as a family man is emphasized during his responses in this sequence. Sporadic cutaways to
medium close ups of Nancy looking in his apparent direction with an expression of quiet concern on her face suggest that she is listening to him supportively, and continually reframe him as a member of a close matrimonial partnership. Moreover, his initial difficulty in replying to Wershba’s question about democracy ratifies the notion – originally suggested by the reporter’s hesitant introduction to the question – that abstract issues of politics are not Radulovich’s primary area of concern. Whereas his responses to queries about his family came quickly and without hesitation (or at least the footage is edited in a manner that makes it appear that this was the case), Radulovich pauses for a few seconds after Wershba initiates this different, publicly-minded line of discussion. He then offers a drawn-out, “well…” and pauses again, confirming through this extended delay that he has been asked to speak on an unfamiliar issue. Finally, as he begins his response proper, Milo stares downward in an unblinking expression that suggests he is deep in thought, and his eyebrows raise and arch in a manner that indicates his incredulity by mirroring the brow position typically associated with surprise (Ekman and Friesen 45). Though he arrives shortly at an eloquent definition of the democratic ideal, this initial display of uncertainty once more suggests that Radulovich is more immediately comfortable discussing home and family. While Wershba continually positions Radulovich as a family man, then, Milo’s own responses corroborate and extend this characterization.

As even this one interview sequence demonstrates, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” – like many pop cultural texts of the time – contributes to the hegemony of the breadwinner figure by casting its protagonist as a father above all else. In addition to citing and corroborating the domestic component of the exalted masculine pattern, however, the program also repeats and emphasizes the second commonly discussed attribute of the
hegemonic gray flannel model: sensitivity to others and commitment to personal restraint. In order to achieve ‘mature’ and ‘normal’ masculinity in Cold War America, men were not only encouraged to embrace the heterosexual, middle class, nuclear family, but also to eschew individualist desires and to place their faith in what Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak call “security through compliance with the system” (7). William Whyte made note of this pressure to endorse conservative, communal standards as early as 1956, pointing to the recent development and widespread acceptance of a “social ethic” that encouraged the American male to “collaborat[e] with others” and “sublimat[e] himself in the group” (7-8). Whereas past eras had valorized a form of masculine gender practice that was tough, independent, and self-concerned, then, the preferred masculine model of 1950s America stressed sensitivity, cooperation and “other-direction” (Riesman 17-24).16

This component of the hegemonic model was also taken up and endorsed by a range of films and television programs. As Peter Biskind has pointed out, for example, many contemporary films advocated the era’s gentle and emotionally responsive pattern of masculinity by featuring convivial, tender and vulnerable male characters as their protagonists (257).17 At the same time, however, many of these texts also suggested that masculine emotionality should not be allowed to shade over into self-absorbed narcissism by positioning their most temperamental and demonstrative male figures (often played by actors such as James Dean, Montgomery Clift and Marlon Brando) as immature “boys who are not men” (Cohan 202). In this manner, Hollywood helped to advocate a middle-of-the-road, self-effacing brand of masculinity that matched the communal hegemonic ideal by eschewing both cold, callous ambition and ‘excessive,’ egotistical emotionality.
Like many of its fictional film and television counterparts, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” also participates in the naturalization of the moderately sensitive gray flannel model by constructing and endorsing gentle, self-sacrificing masculine exemplars. To be sure, Radulovich is not only positioned as a father in the text, but is further cast as a specific kind of father – one who is calm, rational, self-effacing and attuned to the needs of others. As noted above, tight medium close ups often cue us to monitor Milo’s expressions quite closely, and his actions within this communicatively rich shot configuration point toward his complex emotional life. At the same time, however, Radulovich never allows his emotional displays to become broad or emphatic; he is always moderate in his actions and delivery and thus appears to be the antithesis of individualist self-absorption. Murrow himself is said to have noted this complex balancing act within Radulovich’s self-representation, applauding the lieutenant for his ability to demonstrate simultaneously the “fire in his belly” and his impressive personal control (Friendly 7).

Oftentimes, this picture of moderated, other-conscious sensitivity is accomplished by marshalling only a fraction of the cues known to point toward a given emotional state. When he speaks about his children in the interview sequence referred to above, for instance, Radulovich’s sorrow is betokened through only a few of the relevant nonverbal signals; his voice does not decrease significantly in pitch or tempo, for example, nor does he pause more frequently or assume the full facial expression generally correlated with sadness. Furthermore, the shifts in vocal intensity, direction of gaze and amount of movement that do point toward this speaker’s unhappiness are not exaggerated enough to make him appear overcome by his feelings or in any way out of control. As such, this response ultimately suggests the restrained and moderated sorrow of a sensitive, but unselfish man who is aware
that extreme displays of emotion might embarrass others or attract undue attention to his own feelings and desires. It indicates, that is, that this Air Force Lieutenant – like William Whyte’s prototypical “organization man” – has become “skillfully ‘normal’” by learning to conceal or downplay his personal ambitions and dissatisfactions to some extent (401), even as he speaks out against the organization that is attempting to exclude him.

In this respect, Radulovich’s controversial and ostensibly counter-hegemonic choice to fight against his dismissal is again placed safely within the confines of the normative gender model. Not only is his seeming resistance reframed as a selfless action undertaken to protect his family, it is also carried out in the controlled, other-directed manner currently being championed in a variety of cultural forums. To be sure, Radulovich never becomes excessively agitated over the course of the program, despite the gravity of his situation, and thus he continually downplays the notion that he is acting out of irrational ambition or egotistical self-concern. He is not a revolutionary attempting to change the system, he intimates, but rather a moderate, sensible individual seeking to regain his place within it (indeed, outside of appearing on Murrow’s program, the only thing Radulovich has really done to articulate his dissent is refuse to resign and thereby accept his expulsion from the ‘normal’ way of life). Like a range of 1950s films and television programs, then, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” cites and reproduces the normative gray flannel model of masculinity by constructing a central character who is both a concerned breadwinner father and a restrained, self-sacrificing organization man.

The supposed normality of this two-part hegemonic pattern is further emphasized in the text by virtue of the fact that the majority of the men who appear onscreen share Milo’s middle-of-the-road sensitivity and concern for the nuclear family. As Thomas Rosteck points
out, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” positions its central figure as a “most typical man” through a variety of formal means, not least of which is the inclusion of interviews with several other performers that offer uniform statements of support for and agreement with the lieutenant’s actions (“Synecdoche” 233). While Rosteck focuses largely on the content of these performers’ statements, though, the connection between Radulovich and these others is also intimated through the relative homogeneity of their kinesic and paralinguistic choices. The town marshal who is interviewed in the program’s middle section, for instance, corroborates and universalizes Milo’s attachment to family by stating, “Certainly he can’t condemn his father … I couldn’t do that; neither could any other boy who had a father.” It is not merely these words that serve to duplicate and naturalize Milo’s familial affections, however, but also the fact that the marshal raises his pitch markedly as he says “certainly”, “I” and “other” – precisely those terms that indicate the surety and supposed commonality of his assertion.

Moreover, the marshal’s performance in this sequence is evocative of a restrained and moderate sensitivity not unlike Radulovich’s own. Though he points toward the sorrow that he feels for his neighbour by remaining still and speaking in a relatively low-pitched, quiet, and breathy voice, he never manifests sadness cues of a sufficient number or intensity to make him appear overcome by emotion of an extreme sort. Captured in one of the film’s ubiquitous medium close ups that prompt examination of subtle expressions and themselves intimate a similarity between their subjects, this performer thereby repeats and extends Milo’s reserved enactment of the hegemonic gray flannel norm.

In fact, even the men who seem most separate from Milo’s prototypical suburban community enact and thus help to normalize the version of masculinity espoused by the
lieutenant and his neighbours. Despite his status as a member of an urban, intellectual elite, for instance, Murrow both emphasizes familial terms in his voiceovers and onscreen addresses, and subtly implies his distaste for Milo’s situation without abandoning the restraint and self-control expected of news reporters.²⁰ Milo’s working-class, immigrant father likewise repeats these family-centered, moderately sensitive patterns of behaviour when he appears onscreen, thereby allying himself with the other men in the text in spite of the fact that he is initially differentiated from them by virtue of his heavy Serbian accent. This uniformity of masculine performance permits the text to insinuate the regularity of the breadwinner male most emphatically, suggesting that all men are finally the same, even when ‘superficial’ differences of location, class or ethnicity might appear to divide them.

Ultimately, then, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” disavows what Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman describe as the necessary “plurality and diversity of men’s experiences attitudes, beliefs, situations, practices and institutions” (4). Instead, it offers only multiple instantiations of the currently exalted form of masculine gender practice, helping to secure this hegemonic model by (falsely) universalizing it. This virtual equation of the breadwinner role and manhood as such is not the only way in which the program and its performances work to stabilize gray flannel masculinity, however. Notably, the text also buttresses the normative masculine paradigm of the culture in which it was produced by responding to and downplaying potential problems with and inconsistencies in the paradigm itself.

For example, the program joins many other cultural products of 1950s America in responding to and helping to subdue a widespread and apparently unsettling sense that the cooperative organization man was in fact little more than a mindless, complaisant conformist. While William Whyte and David Riesman have become known as the most famous
contemporaneous critics of their culture’s tendency to censure individuality, their anti-conformist sentiments were by no means unique. In fact, by 1954, concerns about American other-directedness had become so commonplace that William F. Buckley could claim, “all conversations or discursive roads, from no matter where, lead to this subject” (308).

Indeed, throughout the 1950s, concerned authors and orators decried Americans’ submissive acquiescence to group norms from pulpits, rostrums, and typewriters across the country. In a November, 1954 lecture, for instance, psychologist Robert Mitchell Lindner asked:

[M]ust you conform, must we conform? This is the question that confronts every man today, the question that must be answered before silence descends and the voice of humanity fades to a whimper. It is a question only a few fortunate ones can still ask, a question that cannot even be raised behind the barbed wire where half of humanity lives. Must we conform? Must we fit ourselves in the pattern that molds Mass Man? Must we bend, submit, adjust, give in? Must we, finally, cease to be men? The forces of Society tell us that we must (166).

Lindner, not surprisingly, disagreed. So too did several other commentators, who spoke out against the mounting uniformity they perceived within various segments of the American populace. Perhaps the most common target at which allegations of mindless mass thinking were leveled, however, was the middle-class, suburban male. In fact, by 1959 Russell Baker was able to argue that conformity had overtaken the U.S. Senate by way of the aphoristic suggestion that the Upper House had “fallen to the men in gray flannel suits” (SM11). The breadwinner-executive uniform, it seems, quickly became shorthand for, and synonymous with, the notion of blind compliance with group standards.

In order for the other-directed masculine model to retain its hegemonic status, this growing tendency to equate the man in the gray flannel suit with the denigrated conformist automaton had to be contained and/or curtailed. A variety of practices appear to have
participated in this process. Several contemporary texts downplayed the sense of submissive obedience conjoined to the breadwinner role,\textsuperscript{24} for instance, while others advocated popular leisure activities as means for men to assert their individuality outside of the stultifying corporate world.\textsuperscript{25} Perhaps most persuasively, some authors and lecturers acknowledged the man in the gray flannel suit’s endorsement of communal standards, but attempted to cast this process in a positive light.\textsuperscript{26} By way of such claims, organization men were encouraged to view criticisms of their other-directedness as the misguided carping of immature egotists. They were prompted to believe – as Norman Podhoretz argued – “that ‘conformity’ did not necessarily mean dullness and unthinking conventionality, that, indeed, there was great beauty, profound significance in a man’s struggle to achieve freedom through submission to conditions” (qtd. in Miller and Nowak 237).

Like these other texts and documents, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” – and, specifically, the performances within it – also work to re-secure the hegemonic model of masculinity in the face of charges of conformism and mindlessness. To begin with, like Henry Fonda’s character in \textit{12 Angry Men}, Radulovich himself demonstrates repeatedly the potential for individual thought within the confines of the dominant masculine pattern. While he refuses to denounce his sister for her potential Communist views, for instance, Radulovich nonetheless makes quite clear in one of his interview sequences that he doesn’t necessarily agree with his family’s political leanings either. Captured in yet another of the text’s medium close-ups, he gazes confidently offscreen (ostensibly in Wershba’s direction) and says unequivocally, “what political opinions or activities [my sister] engages in are her own affair, because they certainly do not influence me.” As he utters the final clause of this statement, Radulovich claims his capacity for individual thought especially forcefully. He shakes his
head emphatically as he speaks, and raises his pitch to underline the words ‘certainly,’ ‘not,’ and ‘me.’ The result of this constellation of performance choices is an image of a man who sees himself as guided by his own internal compass in spite of his dedication to the family group.

A similar sense of individual decision-making colours Milo’s commentary about the Air Force as well. When he speaks of his superiors’ suggestion that he cut ties with his sister and father, for example, Radulovich (again framed in a static, frontal medium close up) indicates his unwillingness to embrace company standards that conflict with his own sense of right and wrong by stating, “I simply cannot see that type of reasoning.” This assertion follows immediately on the heels of Radulovich’s previous comment, issuing forth without even the brief pause that usually demarcates the end of his sentences, and thus creating an extreme sense of his rather determined self-assurance. He then continues to marshal paralinguistic displays of confidence and certainty as he utters the statement itself, raising his pitch markedly from its previous level and speaking quickly and without hesitation. At the same time, he also amplifies this nonverbal picture of resoluteness by raising his open right hand into the bottom of the frame and then quickly lowering it to smack his (offscreen) lap in a manner that intimates the firmness of his opinions. Despite elsewhere underlining his status as a loyal and devoted member of the Air Force, then (and, indeed, fighting to prevent his expulsion from it), Radulovich nonetheless also demonstrates that he thinks for himself rather than simply toeing the company line.

In this respect, Radulovich’s performance choices argue that a man can be a devoted member of both family and corporate groups without abandoning his individual identity and personal standards. Concurrently, other performers in the text indicate that denying this
potential for individuality within the mass is a pathological, un-American aberration of justice. Radulovich’s lawyer makes this point explicitly early in the text, for instance, dubbing the notion of guilt by relationship “inhuman and cruel” and equating the Air Force’s actions in the Radulovich case with the ruthless practices of the Third Reich. Likewise, in his closing editorial, Murrow’s performance choices also emphasize the indecency of evaluating an individual on the grounds of his/her associations and thereby disavowing his/her ability to think for him/herself.

Shortly after a slow track in to a tight medium close up that attaches a sense of solemn importance to his subsequent commentary, Murrow intones, “We believe that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, even though that iniquity be proved. And in this case, it was not.” As Thomas Rosteck notes, throughout the sequence that contains this assertion, Murrow’s “tone is formal, the voice calm and deliberate—the sense, one of gravity” (See It Now 74). This particular sentence, however, is given added weight by virtue of two further performance variables. First, Murrow pauses markedly after saying “We believe,” thereby building up suspense for and helping to emphasize the words that follow. Secondly, after he says “son,” Murrow turns his head from the downward tilted, three quarter profile position it maintains for much of the closing segment and addresses the camera directly for the longest stretch in the sequence thus far. His newly revealed face takes on a grave expression as he condemns the notion of adjudging guilt by group membership, further emphasizing the troubling impropriety of the concept in the process. Simultaneously, his extended, unyielding gaze into the camera foregrounds this lesson as especially significant and works in conjunction with the close camera position to construct a sense of intimacy that implicates the viewer personally in the injustices under consideration.
Despite maintaining the reserve expected within a mainstream news broadcast then, Murrow articulates his own position – and the text’s overall moral – clearly through his restrained performance choices.28 Assuming that a person cedes her/his individuality upon becoming a group member, he suggests, is not only untenable, but also unjust. While this message is admittedly issued in the context of the anti-Communist hysteria sweeping the nation in the early 1950s, it serves equally – ironically enough – as a salve by which to counter the liberal, anti-conformist discourse that positioned itself in opposition to McCarthyist witch-hunting. Presupposing that a man in a gray flannel suit is an unthinking automaton, the text implies, is as much an abrogation of justice as is taking for granted that an individual shares the views of his potentially Communist kin. Blanket accusations of mindless conformity are always unfounded.

The other male members of Radulovich’s suburban community that appear in the program further augment this position by supporting the lieutenant’s nonconformist act of conscience. To be sure, the men of Dexter, Michigan (as represented in the text) resemble Milo Radulovich not only in their personal restraint and their respect for the family unit, but also in their willingness to speak up against the injustices of the organization in this particular case. To a man, they acknowledge in their interviews that Radulovich has not gotten a fair deal, and thus imply that many other-directed, suburban fathers and workers are willing to take a stand against corporate practices if said practices run counter to ‘what’s right.’ Insofar as it paradoxically unites the Dexter men in a shared act of conscientious nonconformity, then, this uniform opposition to the Air Force’s actions insinuates that the apparent conventionality that characterizes the suburban breadwinner is actually a matter of misidentification. While all suburban males may resemble one another, the program argues,
this similarity is not the result of blind acceptance of group norms as much as it is a consequence of separate individuals mindfully endorsing virtuous beliefs such as those that the text itself positions as righteous and necessary.

Furthermore, insofar as these men share the text’s most valued attribute – acknowledging the potential for individuality within a group – the other characteristics that bind them are afforded a sense of rectitude by association. These additional common features, of course, are precisely the defining elements of the masculine breadwinner pattern. Sensitivity, moderation, and attachment to family are thus positioned alongside the celebrated act of speaking out against injustice as constituent elements of an intelligent, noble pattern of being. In the process, the text clearly echoes Podhoretz’s claim “that ‘conformity’ [does] not necessarily mean dullness and unthinking conventionality” (qtd. in Miller and Nowak 237). Instead, the homogeneity that marks the masculine suburban population is recast as what Thomas Rosteck calls “a common sense consensus” (“Synecdoche” 237).

By smoothing over criticisms of middle class, suburban conformity in this way, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” strengthens and reaffirms the hegemonic model of masculinity especially effectively. While some aspects of the program may warrant the revolutionary label that the text has been afforded, then, its performances of gender – like many everyday and screen performances – can be seen to have played a significant part in maintaining the contemporary status quo.

**A Couple of Joes – Recycling Hegemonic Masculinities in Point of Order**

Like “The Case of Milo Radulovich,” Emile de Antonio’s *Point of Order* examines an incident that arose out of the tense and uncertain political climate of Cold War America. In the late spring of 1954, a congressional inquiry was commenced in order to investigate
what Thomas Doherty describes as “a convoluted series of charges levelled by [Republican Senator Joseph] McCarthy at the United States Army and vice versa” (“Point” 34). The Army claimed that members of McCarthy’s staff were using their political power to attempt to achieve undue privileges for a young Private – G. David Schine – who was also one of the Senator’s operatives; McCarthy countered that the Army was holding Schine captive in order to prevent his (McCarthy’s) committee from unmasking subversives in the military. The entire proceedings – which increasingly pitted the vitriolic Senator from Wisconsin against Chief Army Counsel Joseph N. Welch – were transmitted on national TV, turning the event into what Randolph Lewis has called “the first great confluence of politics and entertainment that television offered” (Emile 29). Point of Order constitutes a condensed and rearranged version of this “bizarre political spectacle” (Lewis ibid), edited by de Antonio from kinescopes of the original broadcasts almost a decade after they first aired.

Point of Order also resembles the Murrow-Radulovich program in that it too has been described as a radical, transformational nonfiction text. Writing to two of his colleagues in the 1970s, de Antonio dubbed the film “the first political documentary in the U.S. after World War II as well as a documentary which, in opposition to prevailing trends, also changed the form of documentary” (“Letter” 156). Critics, both at the time of the film’s release and in the years to follow, have by and large agreed. During the film’s initial run in 1964, for instance, Bosley Crowther called the film an “unusual and daring” experiment in documentary production (“Trying Anything” X1). He also applauded the text for echoing and reviving the political efficacy of the initial hearing broadcasts, which many believe precipitated the Senator’s downfall in 1954 (ibid).29 Years later, Thomas Doherty concurred, calling the film “A genuine media milestone” that worked to keep the hearings’ negative
vision of the Wisconsin Senator “alive in popular memory” (*Cold War* 247). Inasmuch as it both redacted a television moment of ostensible political import and revived the socially critical compilation film format pioneered by documentarists such as Esfir Shub (*Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, Russia, 1927), Frank Capra (*Why We Fight*, USA, 1943-1945), and Alain Resnais (*Night and Fog*, France, 1955), then, *Point of Order* is often considered to rank amongst the most efficacious and socially significant of documentary film texts.\(^{30}\)

Its radical aims and tendencies notwithstanding, de Antonio’s pioneering film presents a somewhat more complicated ideological picture when its representations of gender are taken into account. In its editing and reorganization of archival footage, the film constructs a sense that the initial Army-McCarthy broadcasts worked to advocate elements of the breadwinner role when they aired in 1954, even as they simultaneously underlined the unnatural, performed status of that model. Perhaps more interestingly, however, by reviving, streamlining and intensifying this moment of gender performance a decade after its original television transmission, de Antonio’s film also champions a partial, strategic adherence to the 1950s version of mainstream masculinity precisely at the moment that the dominance of that model was beginning to wane.\(^{31}\) In this respect at least, the film might be seen as at least moderately retrograde, in spite of its straightforwardly progressive reputation. It thus constitutes an interesting companion piece to “The Case of Milo Radulovich,” providing a drastically different example of the way in which apparently radical documentary texts might perform complex, unexpected kinds of ideological work.

In addition to demonstrating an alternate, somewhat more equivocal way in which nonfiction performance might promote the 1950s breadwinner model (both at the moment of its primacy and years thereafter), however, *Point of Order* also provides an opportunity to
consider the way in which this political activity plays out within a documentary context that seems especially provocative from the standpoint of performance analysis. Unlike their counterparts in “The Case of Milo Radulovich” (and, indeed, all of the texts discussed in this study thus far), the performances in *Point of Order* are not conceived specifically for the text at hand. Rather, as fixed elements of pre-existing ‘found’ footage, they are marked by an ineluctable sense of pastness that has a variety of noteworthy implications. Perhaps most significantly from my perspective, the set, inflexible nature of the profilmic material in compilation documentaries has led many scholars to focus on editing as the dominant means by which the meanings and implications of such films are shaped. Vance Kepley, Jr. for instance, points out that – in films such as *Point of Order* – “the [archival] image’s range of available meanings is restricted by incorporation into the whole, or possibly displaced by new meanings defined by the new context” (213). Without disputing the validity of this argument, I’d like to suggest that the strict focus on the function of editing within compilation documentaries has precluded potentially useful analysis of the archival material itself. To be sure, de Antonio’s selection and reorganization of the one hundred and eighty-eight hours of kinescoped hearing footage play a definitive role in shaping *Point of Order*’s meanings and ideological effects. Within this overall shaping framework, however, the performances contained in the original footage contribute significantly to the film’s intricate vision of masculinity by providing much of the raw material that de Antonio edits and arranges into suggestive, meaningful patterns.

The elements of McCarthy’s performance that de Antonio chooses to include in the film, for instance, do much to construct a sense that men who deviate from the gentle, cooperative breadwinner pattern of the 1950s are problematic aberrations that need to be
controlled. In this respect, *Point of Order* suggests that the Army-McCarthy hearings participated in the common 1950s strategy of securing the gray flannel version of manhood by demonizing its alternatives. Several scholars have documented the ways in which 1950s media texts worked to criticize older, inner-directed versions of tough masculinity and to thereby advocate (whether expressly or implicitly) the more cooperative, familial model exalted during the decade.

Stella Bruzzi, for instance, suggests that the savage fathers of Westerns such as *Gunman’s Walk* (Phil Karlson, USA, 1958) ultimately functioned to underline the extent to which “the crude, old-fashioned patriarchal position ha[d] become untenable” in post-War America (*Bringing* 66). Likewise, Steven Cohan argues that the psychotic tough guys of 1950s thrillers and crime movies served to pathologize the rough, macho male and thus “to justify the need for social control of male aggression” (116). Peter Biskind pursues this idea in particular detail, enumerating the countless ways in which the strong, individualist, male protagonist of earlier decades was disassembled and critiqued in fifties films. He writes, “Almost every major male star of the thirties and forties associated with this [tough] version of masculinity took the roles with which he was synonymous and transformed them, in the fifties, into neurotics or psychotics” (252). By marking the macho, independent hero as insane, corrupt, and/or ineffective in this way, Hollywood films participated indirectly in the popularization and normalization of the domestic, cooperative male model that eschewed such aggressive machismo.33

Contemporary reviews suggest that the Army-McCarthy hearings operated to implicitly bolster the dominant model of accommodating, sensitive masculinity in this fashion as well. Many reporters covering the investigations noted McCarthy’s stubborn
refusal to abide by the rules and regulations established for the inquest, for instance, as well as the deleterious outcomes to which his self-concerned, uncooperative behaviour seemed to lead. Reviewing the proceedings in the May 10, 1954 edition of *The New Republic*, Michael Straight claimed:

> [McCarthy] interrupted continuously to denounce all interruptions. He broke up every line of argument with points of order, and went on to make his own arguments, all ‘highly important.’ He drove the inquiry into the swamps and forests of motives and side associations and kept it there by making every comment a personal slur that no honorable man could suffer in silence (6).³⁴

*Point of Order*’s abridged and reordered version of events corroborates this argument with striking clarity. Throughout the film, de Antonio frequently includes shots of McCarthy comporting himself in a manner that suggests his (McCarthy’s) complete disregard for the organizational order, and transforming the proceedings into a confused debacle in the process. A case in point comes early in the film, when the Senator halts the flow of the investigations in order to respond to what he perceives as an affront to his personal integrity during Senator John McClellan’s questioning of Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens.

In a static medium shot taken from directly in front of him, McCarthy intones dramatically, “I want to point out that I think that question is completely improper and unfair. The implication is that this Chairman could have been bought off.” He continues over a cut to another medium shot that is taken from slightly to his left and thus catches his sideways glance and reveals his indignant expression more fully. “All the evidence is that this Chairman could under no circumstances have been bought off this investigation.” As McCarthy issues this indignant response on his own behalf, he demonstrates his willingness to seize the committee room floor forcefully for his own ends by displaying unabashedly several of the nonverbal markers of anger and aggression. He leans forward in his chair
menacingly, his shoulders tense and his left hand clenched into a tight fist. His head also
thrusts forward rapidly at several points as he speaks, jerking about to emphasize his rage on
words like “improper” and “unfair.” Simultaneously, McCarthy manifests the vast majority
of the vocalic cues associated with anger as well, raising his voice in pitch, tempo, volume
and stridency to the extent that his ire overtakes the proceedings and momentarily becomes
their central focus. Unlike the moderate and self-sacrificing organization man, then,
McCarthy indicates through such outbursts that he is more than willing to allow his extreme
emotions to occupy centre stage, even if they interfere with the smooth running of the
governmental system that he is expected to serve.

In fact, McCarthy’s personally motivated interruptions only become more extreme,
numerous, and disruptive as the film progresses. He cuts others off in order to insert his own
testimony and opinions at nearly every turn, repeatedly slowing the proceedings down and
sending them off on numerous unexpected tangents. At one point, McCarthy even interjects
as Senator Karl Mundt – the temporary Committee Chairman - attempts to argue a point on
his (McCarthy’s) behalf. As Mundt begins to explain to Army lawyer Joseph Welch that the
Wisconsin Senator cannot be forced to divulge the provenance of an F.B.I. document that has
been introduced, McCarthy interrupts no less than three times, determinedly repeating, “May
I say Mr. Chair…” and forcing Mundt to bang his gavel and reiterate “The Chair has the
floor” in response. By including several moments at which the Senator’s unrestrained
behaviour impedes the progress of the investigations in this manner, Point of Order intimates
that the Army-McCarthy hearings – like many 1950s television texts – worked to imply the
rectitude of the dominant model of masculinity by demonstrating the flaws in alternate
models of gender practice. It suggests, that is, that the initial broadcasts taught contemporary
viewers that uncooperative, rebellious, McCarthy-like enactments of manhood have harmful effects and should thus be avoided and/or contained.

In addition to positioning the Army-McCarthy hearings as an object lesson in the necessity of the organizational order, McCarthy’s self-presentation within *Point of Order* also validates the notion that the original hearing broadcasts served to cast brutal, insensitive brands of masculinity as problematic and undesirable. Accounts written by several of the hearings’ original viewers suggest that the junior Senator from Wisconsin comported himself in an excessively vicious and unsavory manner during the televised proceedings. In the process, these contemporary descriptions also intimate that the Senator’s performance served to associate tough, virile masculinity with inhuman cruelty and to thereby downgrade its status as a socially valid form of masculine gender practice.

In a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post and Times Herald*, for instance, Harold C. Anderson wrote: “Senator McCarthy dominated the hearings with speeches … replete with name calling, accusations and innuendoes. Perhaps it has been a salutary thing for the American people to see this vulgar bully for what he is” (22). Others pathologized McCarthy’s tough, obstreperous behavior more explicitly. A reporter in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, for example, argued, “Senator McCarthy has shown himself to be evil and unmatched in malice” (qtd. in “Editorial Views” 6), while the editor of the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* found the hearings to reveal that the Senator’s “obsessive hunt for subversives at times borders on lunacy” (ibid). Michael Straight agreed, noting, “In some obscure way [McCarthy] seemed to love tension, to feed on conflict, to draw nourishment, as a sadist might from inflicting punishment and, as a masochist, to derive pleasure from being hated and feared” (‘Ordeal’, 7). Perhaps the clearest example of this kind of response, however,
can be found in another letter to the editor printed in the *Washington Post and Times Herald*. Here, Sam Blumenson describes McCarthy’s onscreen appearance at the hearings by reference to Dostoevsky’s description of tyranny. He writes: “‘The best man in the world can become crude and callous though habit to the point of bestiality.’ These wise words … came to my mind while watching the outrageous antics of the junior Senator from Wisconsin, at the Army-McCarthy hearings” (B4).

In line with these descriptions, McCarthy demonstrates a ruthless, unfeeling roughness throughout *Point of Order* that makes him stand out from the other individuals onscreen. He browbeats witnesses with a chilling nonchalance, never hesitating, as an author reviewing the hearings in *Time* magazine put it, to punch “harder and lower” (“Investigations. Pin Wheels” 12). Following the introduction of an executive order that stipulates that Army officials cannot be forced to testify about confidential matters, for example, McCarthy resorts to a clever personal attack on the man who delivered the Presidential decree – Army lawyer John Adams. Again framed in a frontal, static, medium shot, McCarthy interjects, stating, “May I say that I think if the witness asserts a type of 5th Amendment privilege here, some Presidential privilege, I, I think that the Chair should allow him to do it.” As he speaks, the Senator keeps his upper body turned to the right, away from Adams on his left and the camera in front of him and toward Committee Chairman Karl Mundt. As such, he physically emphasizes his implicit verbal claim that his attentions are focused on the Chairman and the way in which the proceedings are being conducted. Under this guise however, McCarthy eagerly underscores his allegation that the witness has invoked the 5th Amendment – an act at the time taken as synonymous with admitting Communist sympathies – by drawing out the word ‘a’ and pausing before he utters the damaging
accusation. He then further underlines this charge by glancing up in the direction of the camera for emphasis as he speaks the damning words.

A subsequent cutaway to a medium shot of Adams reveals the lawyer reacting in restrained anger to this thinly veiled, unfounded assault on his character. He stares sharply off screen left toward McCarthy and attempts to defend himself – as McCarthy himself might do – by interrupting. In Adams’ case, however, interjection is unsuccessful. While he exclaims, “I’m not asserting 5th Amendment privilege, Senator,” McCarthy simply keeps talking over top of him from offscreen, nearly drowning out Adams’ objection by virtue of his greater volume and verbosity. Such virtual dominance and cold determination in fact characterize the Senator’s performance for the remainder of the sequence. He cruelly pursues his accusation despite protests from both Mundt and Adams, reiterating the smear two further times and thus accentuating it by repetition as well as by force of articulation. Furthermore, de Antonio edits the sequence such that it ends with one of these reiterations, thereby suggesting that McCarthy doggedly maintains his bitter line of attack until he is able to have the last word and deliver the definitive blow. By including and emphasizing moments at which the Senator engages willingly in this sort of brutal, underhanded character defamation, Point of Order lends credence to claims that the original broadcasts revealed McCarthy as an unfeeling, inhumane brute who – in Michael Straight’s words – “could slip a knife into any man as he patted him on the back” (“Ordeal” 7).

Point of Order does not simply demonstrate the way in which McCarthy’s repellant television performance served to indicate the problematic nature of non-hegemonic gender practices in the 1950s, however. It also augments the initial broadcasts’ sense of the Senator’s aberration and thereby articulates the hearings’ gender-relevant lessons especially
forcefully for its 1960s audiences. On one hand, this is accomplished simply by including a vast number of examples of McCarthy’s deviant and/or indecent behaviour at the investigations within the abridged filmic text. In addition to featuring several moments at which the Senator engages in the kinds of selfish interruption and/or reckless cruelty described above, for instance, *Point of Order* also makes use of a range of sequences in which McCarthy appears to be somewhat out of step with the rest of the individuals in the hearing room. He is often shown chortling snidely at his own jokes while everyone else remains silent, for example, or making serious proclamations that are greeted with derisive laughter. At times, McCarthy also indicates his instability and/or insincerity by shifting suddenly, even within a single shot, from displays of solemn concern to a breathy, disquieting giggle that suggests he is taking some form of bizarre pleasure from the unfortunate circumstances in which he is embroiled.37 By virtue of the sheer amount of time they take up in a 97-minute text, such moments make McCarthy’s peculiarity and potential pathology particularly apparent. Accordingly, *Point of Order* might be said to demonstrate the drawbacks of unconventional, McCarthyesque masculinity even more unequivocally than did the material from which it was assembled.

The ways in which de Antonio arranges and works with the original performances also enhance the gender-relevant argument that those performances helped to articulate when they first aired in 1954. As Vance Kepley, Jr., has illustrated, for instance, de Antonio’s drastic reordering of the hearing footage serves to construct a compelling sense of McCarthy’s downfall that was absent in the initial broadcasts. In de Antonio’s non-chronological version of events, examples of the Senator’s abnormality and reprehensibility are made to appear successively more numerous and extreme, culminating in two specific
episodes that indicate McCarthy’s deviance most emphatically and point toward his ultimate demise. To begin with, in a favoured position near the end of the film, de Antonio inserts an exchange during which McCarthy viciously and needlessly smears a young lawyer named Fred Fischer who works with Army Counsel Joseph Welch. Finally, following Welch’s moving condemnation of McCarthy in response to this indecent attack, de Antonio finishes off the film with a sequence in which the Senator rails on determinedly while the other Committee members and the audience ignore him and begin to leave the room. As Randolph Lewis claims, this ending not only implies McCarthy’s eventual loss of power and personal prestige, but also “suggests an aberrant quality to the junior Senator from Wisconsin, as if he were a political pathology that could be isolated, then expelled from the body politic after the heroic diagnosis of Joseph Welch” (Emile 39).

By thus providing Point of Order with a climax and meaningful denouement that the hearings themselves lacked, de Antonio’s editing choices surely indicate – as Kepley argues – “the extent to which the meanings of historical events can be altered when incorporated into an edited compilation documentary” (202). At the same time, however, the sense of McCarthy’s ruin engineered by de Antonio’s structuring choices also serves to extend and emphasize a gender argument already latent in the original text. By underscoring the negative elements of McCarthy’s version of masculinity and manufacturing a clear, unpleasant conclusion to which such enactments might lead, Point of Order constructs an especially effective lesson in the pitfalls of tough, inner-directed gender practice.

Furthermore, while the editing enhances this demonstration of the abnormality and immorality of insensitive, rebellious masculinity, a range of performance choices – from McCarthy’s sadistic smile as he initiates his savage attack on an individual in no way
involved with the proceedings, to Welch’s eloquent demonstration of righteous outrage on behalf of his wronged co-worker – provide the raw material upon which this argument is built. In this respect, then, the edited and re-presented performances in *Point of Order* participate in the ideologically complicit task of criticizing and re-pathologizing the individualist, uncooperative version of masculinity that was seen as socially threatening a decade prior.

In addition to vilifying alternative masculinities in this way, the condensed and reorganized performances in *Point of Order* also support and strengthen the gray flannel version of manhood by championing it more explicitly. Through its orchestration of Joseph Welch’s self-presentational choices, for example, the film implies that the original Army-McCarthy television coverage also valorized the masculine norm of the 1950s by pointing directly toward that norm’s beneficial aspects. Countless contemporary responses to the televised proceedings intimate that Welch’s onscreen comportment often matched the existing standards of normative masculinity quite closely. His moderation, affability and kindly temperament are frequently noted and praised by reviewers, for example, suggesting that the lawyer shared the sensitivity and restraint usually attributed to the ideal breadwinner father. An article in *Life* magazine offers a useful case in point,\(^{39}\) describing the Army Counsel as “a gentleman and a scholar, a man of delicate courtesy and subtle wit” (“Men McCarthy” 48).\(^{40}\) Insofar as the hearings’ original viewers commend Welch for his kind and temperate demeanor in this manner, they implicitly indicate the way in which adherence to currently normative standards of masculinity appeared especially effective and beneficial in the context of the Army-McCarthy broadcasts.
As presented in *Point of Order*, Welch’s performance choices indeed suggest that his appearance in the televised hearing coverage worked (at least partially) to validate gentle, cooperative masculinity in this fashion. Throughout the early portions of the film, for instance, he’s seen interrupting others far less often than are McCarthy and many of the remaining participants, and he often appears willing to cede the floor graciously when he is himself cut off or spoken over. The first time he’s heard from in de Antonio’s version of events, for example, Welch immediately corroborates the view – offered by a *Washington Post* reporter on June 18, 1954 – that “His urbanity and courtesy were distinguished in a proceeding where bad manners and name-calling flourished” (“End of Circus” 28). Framed in a medium shot, the lawyer pauses obligingly in mid-sentence when McCarthy begins to speak out of turn. He leans forward as though he didn’t quite hear the interjection and raises his eyebrows slightly to express his interest in what the Senator may have said. He then politely asks McCarthy to repeat himself, finalizing the impression that he is willing to be civil rather than simply disregarding others’ comments as the Senator himself so often does. Because he demonstrates this sort of respect for others and concern for decorum to a much greater extent than do many of the other hearing participants throughout the beginning of the film, Welch comes across as one of the most gracious and likable characters onscreen.

Furthermore, Welch’s controlled patience and good-natured civility in this initial sequence are shown to lead him to a minor victory within the context of the trial at hand. At the moment of the Senator’s interruption, Welch had been attempting to introduce evidence that would refute McCarthy’s claim to ignorance of a particular document. By permitting this disruption to unfold calmly and without objection, however, the lawyer successfully lets McCarthy help him articulate the point even more damningly.
“Don’t tell me I notarized it [the document in question],” McCarthy repeats after Welch suggests that he didn’t hear the Senator’s comment. The lawyer then pauses and responds, with a note of laughter in his voice, “No, you merely signed it,” causing the Committee Room audience to erupt in raucous laughter. A cut back to a medium shot of Welch as he speaks augments the sense of quiet cleverness already suggested by his sharp retort and by the impish, singsong tone in which he utters it. The new vantage reveals a Puckish twinkle in Welch’s eye and a genial smile on his face, simultaneously making him appear likable by underscoring his good natured affability and canny charm, and intimating the pleasurable successes to which such attributes might lead. While still permitting him to convey his initial argument about McCarthy’s dishonesty, then, Welch’s willingness to entertain the Senator’s disruption also ultimately affords him the opportunity to illustrate his own wit, to win the favour of audiences both in the committee room and at home, and to transform McCarthy momentarily into an object of derision without engaging in obvious cruelty. As such, this well-mannered acceptance of interruptions – followed up by a witty, but restrained response – both indicates Welch’s connection to the accommodating, self-controlled hegemonic norm and points toward the positive outcomes that might attach to endorsing and enacting such a version of masculinity.

As the film proceeds, however, this straightforward process is complicated somewhat by virtue of the fact that Welch’s enactment of the dominant breadwinner model is increasingly revealed as a strategic performance. In this respect, de Antonio’s edited and reorganized version of the Army-McCarthy footage replicates and enhances an instructive shift in Welch’s self-presentational techniques noted by several of the hearings’ initial viewers. Writing in the May 17, 1954 edition Life magazine, for instance, a reporter
described the way in which the Army Counsel’s apparent mildness and docility had revealed themselves as shrewd legal devices over the course of the televised proceedings. During the early days of the hearings, s/he detailed:

*a relative wrote to [Welch’s] wife at home complimenting him for being ‘so sweet and gentle.’ Learning of this remark, Welch commented privately, ‘They won’t think I’m sweet and gentle when I start cross-examination.’ His prediction could not possibly have been more apt. Two minutes after Welch began questioning McCarthy’s Roy Cohn, it was obvious that here was one of the deftest surgeons in courtroom history. It took only that long to make Roy Cohn, the scourge of Capitol Hill, Torquemada’s heir as a prosecutor, look like a 27-year-old apprentice still wet behind the ears. After that Welch was always good for at least one wonderful pigsticking laugh a day. … His elaborate politeness and gentility mask a highly active, well-disciplined, bear-trap mind (“Men McCarthy” 48).

An article in *The New Republic* concurred, noting that – while Welch at first appeared to be “just another of secretary Stevens’ mistakes” – his deft, partial enactment of the non-combative breadwinner model ultimately positioned him as “a figure who is a match for McCarthy at last” (“Washington Wire” 2).

In the condensed version of his performance offered up by *Point of Order*, Welch can be seen to engage in a variety of performative strategies that might prompt the kind of shift in public opinion detailed by the *Life* and *New Republic* reporters. Following the initial sequences of the film, in which Welch is largely absent or enacts the dominant breadwinner role in a relatively straightforward fashion, de Antonio includes several moments at which the Army lawyer punctures his restrained and obliging performance with displays of stern, rather cantankerous toughness. When McCarthy investigator James Juliana repeatedly evades his questions about a doctored photograph that has been entered into evidence, for instance, Welch becomes frustrated and chides the witness firmly from offscreen. He uncharacteristically cuts Juliana off just before the latter completes another transparently
false claim, his voice becoming noticeably lower in pitch and more terse than it had been during his previous questions. “You did know what hung on Schine’s wall when that [the original photo] was handed to you sir,” Welch asserts determinedly, emphasizing the word “did” by way of volume and pitch shifts, and thereby underscoring the certainty of his refutation. By aurally indicating his capacity to be quarrelsome and authoritarian in this manner, the lawyer problematizes his status as a representative of the accommodating, non-confrontational masculine model. He indicates that – while he may not be as vicious or brutal as McCarthy – he is certainly willing to engage in battle when the situation demands it, and thus intimates that cooperativeness and passivity are not necessarily stable, all-encompassing aspects of his personality.

While, on one hand, such petulant outbursts illustrate that good-natured cooperation may be fleeting and not always plausible, they also – paradoxically – help to re-secure the hegemonic, breadwinner norm by defending it against compelling contemporary criticisms. Just as the performances in “The Case of Milo Radulovich” worked to counter the common connection between gray flannel manhood and mindless conformity, so too do the sporadic displays of Welch’s pugnacity preserved in Point of Order suggest that the lawyer’s appearance within the Army-McCarthy broadcasts helped to subdue the fear that the other-directed organization man was in fact emasculated and powerless.

Insofar as the breadwinner model stressed stereotypically feminine characteristics such as sensitivity, gentleness, self-sacrifice, and domesticity, it was in many ways a curious “answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (Connell, Masculinities 77), and one that many 1950s commentators viewed with some alarm. Authors in popular and scholarly magazines worried about the weakening of American manhood, for example, and – as
Arlene Skolnick notes—“comic strips and television programs poked fun at emasculated, ‘henpecked’ males like Dagwood Bumstead” (71).\textsuperscript{42} By 1957, Helen Mayer Hacker suggested that this dissatisfaction extended to many gray flannel men themselves. “To change Congreve’s phrase,” she wrote, “many men seem to see themselves as dwindling into a husband or other female appendage” (228).\textsuperscript{43} Insofar as it vacillates between moments of kindness and moments of combativeness, however, Welch’s performance indicates that a gentle temperament need not preclude the possibility of being strong and assertive when necessary. That is, his performance suggests, as did a 1956 article in \textit{Life} magazine, that men can, and should, “reinforce[] tenderness with strength” (Coughlan 116).\textsuperscript{44}

Perhaps more interestingly, the latter two thirds of the film also feature several sequences in which Welch simultaneously destabilizes and advocates the contemporarily dominant version of masculinity more directly. In particular, de Antonio preserves a range of footage from the initial broadcasts in which Welch can be seen exaggerating his gentlemanliness and civility for comedic effect, and/or combining evidence of these normative attributes with incongruent displays of toughness and truculence. At such instances, the Army Counsel effectively denaturalizes the hegemonic pattern of masculine behaviour endorsed by texts such as “The Case of Milo Radulovich” by indicating that pattern’s acted status. At the same time, however, he also illustrates the strategic efficacy of this constructed gender model, utilizing his comic ruse of other-direction—as a \textit{New Republic} author put it—“to put a polished dart, poisoned with humor, into McCarthy’s hide” (“Washington Wire” 2). The moment noted by the \textit{Life} correspondent—during which Welch cross-examines McCarthy lawyer Roy Cohn about the infamous cropped photo—provides an illustrative example of this process.
This sequence begins as Welch – first heard in voiceover atop a medium shot of a rather stern looking Ray Jenkins\textsuperscript{45} – verbally underscores the fact that he is not representing Cohn despite the fact that they have been placed at the same table. While this initial comment begins to imply the Army Counsel’s distaste for and active opposition to McCarthy’s chief attorney, however, a cut to a medium shot of the two men undercuts and complicates the potential combativeness of Welch’s words. Seated next to and turned to face Cohn, Welch performs a rather pronounced physical image of submissiveness. He maintains a slouched posture, keeps his head tilted slightly downward, and never moves his arms from their position close to his body as he speaks, for instance, manifesting an extreme version of the infrequent gesturing and closed body position commonly attributed to docile, compliant individuals. At the same time, he also takes the comparative lack of facial expressivity thought to accompany deferential behaviour to its virtual limit, maintaining an unchanging, deadpan expression, with his eyebrows raised slightly throughout his preliminary statement.\textsuperscript{46} By making this sort of emphatic kinesic claim to submissiveness even as he issues a mildly confrontational comment, Welch creates a provocative juxtaposition that further complicates his relationship to the contemporarily dominant version of masculine gender practice. He suggests that his supposed cooperation and kindliness co-exist with a degree of impudence and aggressiveness, and – as the mild laughter that fills the hearing room following his disclaimer attests – that skilful enactment of normative standards may help to make these latter attributes more palatable.

This process of using displays of docility and graciousness as a means of successfully landing blows against an opponent only becomes more pronounced as the sequence continues. Still captured in the same medium shot, Welch augments and cements his physical
portrayal of submissiveness, listening intently as Cohn asserts that he feels no need for legal representation. The Army lawyer keeps his gaze fixed attentively on the witness, refusing to interrupt as Cohn issues a lengthy proclamation and barely moving but for a few pronounced, allegedly supportive nods. He then amplifies this rather emphatic image of friendly cooperation still further as he resumes speaking, fully underlining its status as a valuable, rather cunning performance in the process.

A faint smile of appeasement appears on the Army Counsel’s lips and his voice issues forth in a high pitched, exaggeratedly honeyed tone as he insults Cohn rather directly. “In all modesty sir,” Welch says, – using formal, well-mannered language to introduce and temper a sarcastic rebuff – “I am content that it should appear from my end that I am not your counsel.” His slightly down-turned head moves languidly from side to side in a mock picture of obsequiousness as he issues this rather cheeky, discourteous statement, working in concert with his airy and rather too mellifluous vocal delivery – and with the insolence of the statement itself – to highlight the falsity of the lawyer’s politeness. Finally, Welch again underscores the unnatural, constructed nature of his civility by letting this extreme mask of graciousness fall somewhat as he draws his statement to a close. As he speaks the damning words “not your counsel,” Welch lowers his pitch, slows his pace and nods emphatically, thereby ensuring that his insult is not entirely obscured by the friendly and submissive tone in which much of it has been uttered. The success of this complex performance is then indicated by a loud burst of laughter from the onscreen spectators, and further emphasized by a subsequent cutaway to a shot of the previously scowling Ray Jenkins, now chortling appreciatively.
By combining rather overdone markers of the breadwinner model with biting, oppositional blows in this manner, Welch indicates – at several junctures across the film – that normative attributes such as cooperation and gentleness constitute surface constructions rather than enduring, ‘natural’ traits. At the same time, the onscreen manifestations of approval that frequently greet his deft manoeuvrings – such as the supportive laughter noted above – render the efficacy of the lawyer’s method unmistakable. Through its condensation and arrangement of Welch’s performance, then, *Point of Order* suggests that the original Army-McCarthy broadcasts may have offered a more complex, partial endorsement of the hegemonic masculine model than did many of their contemporary small screen counterparts (including “The Case of Milo Radulovich”). Welch finally champions the gray flannel version of manhood not as an inalterable ‘way of being,’ but rather as a valuable constellation of artificial self-presentation techniques.

De Antonio’s re-presentation of Welch’s performance does not simply construct an argument about the way in which that self-presentation work functioned in its initial context, however; his directorial choices also emphasize and augment the program’s original gender-relevant messages in a manner that makes them seem especially persuasive years after their initial articulation. Just as the condensation and reorganization of the hearing footage serve to amplify the initial broadcasts’ image of McCarthy’s boorish and unsavoury character and to fabricate a sense of his ultimate downfall, so too do these choices emphasize Welch’s clever manipulation of dominant standards and work to position the lawyer as the heroic figure most fully responsible for finally putting McCarthy in his place.

As Kepley has noted, for instance, the decision to exclude Welch from all but silent cutaways in the early portion of the film helps to cast the lawyer as an especially capable
opponent to McCarthy. Insofar as de Antonio clusters examples of the Senator’s minor victories during the trial in the text’s first moments, the choice to delay Welch’s active participation until the focus has shifted to McCarthy’s lies and machinations positions the lawyer as the agent who effectively precipitates the reversal in the Senator’s fortunes (208). Moreover, the climactic placement of the confrontation about Fred Fischer – in which Welch performs a serious version of his exaggerated organization man persona and again earns the approval of the onscreen audience in the process48 – serves to underscore the lawyer’s ultimate triumph as much as it accentuates McCarthy’s precipitous downfall. Following this crowning achievement, Welch is largely absent from the film’s conclusion, despite the fact that he actively participated in the events represented in this final sequence during the original trial. As Kepley argues, the Army Counsel “is allowed to exit from the film on a triumphal note – complete with audience ovation” (211). De Antonio’s re-arrangement and abridgment of Welch’s performance thus again underscores the lawyer’s efficacy, intensifying the initial broadcasts’ demonstration of the strategic value of gray flannel masculinity in the process. As a result, *Point of Order* prompts spectators – both in 1964 and since – to reconsider and nuance the clichéd image of the 1950s suburban breadwinner. It suggests that cooperation and other-direction can constitute valuable and cunning means of countering a brutal demagogue like Joseph McCarthy, and thus shouldn’t be condemned unequivocally or disregarded as quaintly passé.

The performances in *Point of Order* and “The Case of Milo Radulovich” thus carry out conservative gender work in different ways and to varying extents. While the Murrow broadcast reproduces and fortifies contemporary gender norms in a rather uncomplicated fashion, de Antonio’s film champions those norms even as it finally indicates their
constructed and performed nature. For all its conservative force, however, “The Case of Milo Radulovich” also manifests brief indications of the way in which nonfiction performance might serve to contest or destabilize hegemonic gender norms. The passing flashes of bitterness that Milo displays when discussing his unfortunate predicament, for instance, might prompt viewers to consider momentarily the way in which the established social system can fail to protect even those who endorse it most heartily. Murrow’s clear demonstration of support for the ousted lieutenant might be understood as slightly progressive as well, insofar as it counters the longstanding broadcasting rule that “the audience should be left with no impression as to which side the analyst himself actually favors” (Friendly 10), despite being typically moderate and restrained in approach.

Furthermore, an alternate reading of Point of Order might suggest that its destabilizing potential is not limited to demonstrating the constructed nature of normative masculine attributes. Rather than understanding Welch’s complex performance to demonstrate the practical utility of the breadwinner model, for instance, some might take his obvious posturing and his combination of sensitivity and truculence as indications of the cooperative breadwinner father’s ultimate similarity to the monstrous Senator that the film so clearly denigrates. Indeed, de Antonio himself has endorsed this interpretation of the text, even though – as Robert Koehler notes – the director’s “argument can be argued against itself, with the film providing plenty of counterpoint” (“Point” 66).

Inasmuch as they contain variously pronounced glimmers of this disruptive activity even while supporting the status quo, then, the performances in “The Case of Milo Radulovich” and Point of Order begin to indicate the complexity of the political work that can be carried out by documentary performance. Just as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson
suggest that everyday autobiographical practices constitute “a repository of imposed subjectivities but also a means of resisting complicity in their operations” (21), so too do these two documentary texts imply that nonfiction performance might serve to maintain and to destabilize social norms simultaneously. They begin to imply, that is, that John Tulloch’s description of everyday performances might apply equally to the documentary context. Identity enactments, Tulloch argues, must be seen “as embedded in ‘liturgy’ but also as ‘ludic’ excess, as limited by ‘canonical theatre’ but also as ‘political intervention’, as ‘citation’ but also as transformative practice” (10). While “The Case of Milo Radulovich” and (to a lesser extent) Point of Order illustrate the canonical side of this equation especially forcefully, neither text forecloses the possibility that the documentary subject might destabilize normative gender practices as well.

**Conclusion**

Insofar as the brand of masculinity taken as hegemonic at any given historical juncture is normalized insistently, used to define “what it means to be a man” (P. Smith, “Introduction” 3) and ultimately deployed as a means of securing patriarchal authority, its status as a discursively governed construction (like that of whiteness and heterosexuality, which it usually encompasses) must be continually noted and reemphasized. Just as John T. Warren suggests that whiteness studies are necessary “to mark and thus make visible the unmarked cultural center of power” (Performing 15), so too can analyses of hegemonic masculinity help to partially destabilize systems of patriarchal dominance by underlining the culturally determined, often fractured artifice of masculine norms.

This process seems especially important in relation to nonfiction films and television programs. Given the widespread impression that documentaries simply record pre-existing
‘truths’ (and, indeed the equally common sense that nonfiction subjects are not performers), enactments of dominant masculinities in documentaries might disguise their representational status nearly as effectively as do their counterparts in many everyday contexts. Curiously, however, nonfiction scholars have not afforded much attention to this process. The texts I have examined in this chapter have been selected with precisely this oversight in mind. In addition to demonstrating clearly that the support and/or destabilization of identity norms is a second major function of nonfiction performance, these documentaries also permit me to extend to nonfiction films the increasingly common, but perpetually necessary, attempt within film studies “to de-universalize the male subject” (Gates 6) by underlining the fact that ostensibly ‘natural’ standards of masculinity are established, maintained and contested through performance.

1 This argument, of course, is informed by the theoretical notion of performativity, which stipulates that supposedly fixed and predetermined attributes such as race, sexuality and gender exist only in performance. As Debby Thompson points out, for authors such as Judith Butler, “gender identity – or any other kind of identity – is not something that you have, but something that you do – or, at least something that you have ‘only’ by doing it again and again and again” (132). See also: Bell and Blaeuer; Butler (Bodies); Butler (Gender); Butler (“Performative Acts”); Butler (Undoing); Diamond; Dow and Wood; Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick; Schechner; West and Fenstermaker; and Wood (“Gender”); etc.

2 In the everyday context, scholars demonstrating the way in which performance serves to fortify normative identity constructs include: Abrams, Anderson-Nathe and Aguilar; Allen; Bell and Blaeuer; Bosse; Brittan; Cameron; Jewkes; Leyser; Long and Hylton; Magnuson and Dundes; Perry; Scheibel; Stoudt; Tehranian; M. Thomas; Warren (“Doing”); Warren (Performing); West and Fenstermaker; and Wood (Gendered); etc. In contrast, T. Anderson; Amaya; Brickell; Bucholtz; Butler (Gender); Butler (Undoing); Gherardi; Hale; Hilslon and Giridharan; Kuppers (Disability); Lin; Martin Alcoff and Gray-Rosendale; J. Miller; Ostrov Weisser; Rutledge Shields and Coughlin; S. Smith; Thornton; Townsley and Geist; J. Watson; and several articles within Bucholtz, Liang and Sutton, amongst others, underline the extent to which quotidian performances can destabilize hegemonic norms. Still other scholars indicate that everyday enactments can perform conservative and/or transgressive work simultaneously. See, for instance: Crawford and Kaufman; Guano; H. Harris; Hasbrook and Harris; Manderson and Peake; Pascoe; Smith and Watson; Tulloch; Walker; and Walkerdine; etc. In the field of screen acting scholarship, Abbott; B. Baker; Battles and Hilton-Morrow; Benhoff and Griffin; Biskind; Branston; Dyer (“Homosexuality”); Chopra-Gant; Cohan; Dyer (“White”); N. Evans; Fischer; Gates; Geraghty (“Albert Finney”); Hatty; Holmlund (Impossible); Kuppers (“Wheelchair”); Mellen; Naremore; Ryall; Shugart (“Reinventing”); Thornley;
and Wexman (Creating), amongst others, have demonstrated the film performer’s capacity to reproduce and strengthen dominant versions of gender, sexuality, race, etc. Other scholars, however, demonstrate the subversive potential of screen performance (though many of these don’t focus specifically on performance or discuss it in great detail). See, for instance: Ashcraft and Flores; Balfour; Beugnet; Bingham; Bogle; Carson; Cooper; Dixon; Dyer (“Rock”); Dyer (“White”); Hinton; Holmlund (“Masculinity”); Kirkham and Thumim; Knobloch; McNally; Medhurst; K. Page; Penley; Robinson; Shugart (“Parody”); Sikov; Straayer (“She-Man”); Swanson; Tasker (“Dumb Movies”); Tasker (Spectacular); Vincendeau; Weiss; etc. While many of these scholars allude to the way in which film performance can both contest and reproduce hegemonic norms, Hollinger; and Radstone make this point especially clearly.

Alongside the accounts (listed in note 3 above) that demonstrate the way in which screen acting contributes to the figuration and/or transgression of cultural norms, an equal or greater number of works discuss the political work of representation in film and TV without specific attention to the performer’s work. Mulvey’s seminal theorization of gender in film largely ignores the actor, for instance, and countless authors have since followed her lead. Reviews of some of this work that glosses over and/or overlooks the performer’s role in film/TV’s ideological functioning can be found in Brooks and Hébert; Byars; Dow; Sloop; and Stam. See also: Barton; Bruzzi (Bringing); Churchill; Connelly; Corber (In the Name); Diawara; Doty; Edwards; Gaines (“White”); S. Hall (“Cultural”); hooks (“Oppositional”); Jeffords (“Can Masculinity”); Jeffords (Hard); Krutnik; Neale; Quinn; S. Ray; Rowe; Shohat; Torres; etc.

Amongst others, Cole and King; Foster; Holmlund (Impossible); hooks (“Paris”) Jones; Lane; and Vavrus explore the issue of nonfiction representation without acknowledging performance and/or investigating it in any detail. So too do many of the studies in Holmlund and Fuchs absent or gloss over the documentary ‘actor’s’ work in this way.

Hladki focuses on The Body Beautiful (Ngozi Onwurah, England, 1991), for instance, while A. Lawrence discusses Surname Viet, Given Name Nam (Trinh T. Minh-ha, USA, 1989). Perhaps the most common text to be discussed in terms of performance is Jennie Livingston’s Paris Is Burning (USA, 1990). See, for example, Bruzzi; Butler; Flinn; Fuchs; Goldsby; and P. Phelan.

Butler (Bodies); Chasnoff; Fuchs (“Hard”); Goldsby; Hladki; Kuppers (“Wheelchair”); Levasseur; and Waugh (“Walking”), amongst others, demonstrate this relative lack of attention to specific performance choices.

The first of these claims can be found in Crosby (“Murrow”); Doherty (Cold War); Friendly; Kendrick; Leab; McEnteer; Sperber; etc. The second appears in Friendly; Gould; Kendrick; Leab; Sperber; and Zeiger. Barnouw (Tube); Doherty (Cold War); and Sperber articulate the third of these arguments, while the final point can be found in Gould.

Countless scholars acknowledge that the concept of masculinity as a uniform, homogeneous construct in any context must be replaced by an acknowledgement of masculinities in the plural. See, for example: Brod and Kaufman; Connell (Masculinities); Connell (The Men); Fine and Kuriloff; Hatty; McKay, Messner and Sabo; P. Smith (“Introduction”); and Swain, amongst others.

Articles by Barclay (“What Every Father”) and Coughlan offer contemporary examples of this process of encouraging the father to participate in domestic activities, while Barbara Ehrenreich describes the way in which the medical establishment worked to enforce the normative breadwinner
role as well (15). See also: Griswold, who provides evidence that points to the readiness with which middle class white men accepted these exhortations (190-193).

10 Westerns such as *Shane* (George Stevens, USA, 1953), *Broken Lance* (Edward Dmytryk, USA, 1954), and *Gunman’s Walk* (Phil Karlson, USA, 1958) turned on questions of fatherhood and family, for instance, as did noirish thrillers such as *The Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, USA, 1955) and *The Narrow Margin* (Richard Fleischer, USA, 1952). Often, Peter Biskind points out, “fifties [film] cops were no longer single; they had wives and kids, who tied them securely to society, like Joseph Cotton in Bud Boetticher’s *A Killer is Loose* (1956) or Glenn Ford in Fritz Lang’s *The Big Heat* (1953)” (56).

11 The text examined in the pages that follow is actually a slightly abridged version of the Radulovich broadcast contained within *The Edward R. Murrow Television Collection: The McCarthy Years* (New Video Group 2005). Approximately 3 minutes of the original program – none of which seem to have a major bearing on the argument to be advanced here – have been excised in this variant.

12 While Nigel Ward (2006) notes that ‘schwa’ sounds such as ‘uh’ generally serve as neutral fillers rather than communicatively rich signifiers (157), the relative absence of non-lexical utterances within Wershba’s questions throughout this interview nonetheless make this particular ‘uh’ stand out. As a result, the sound does help to indicate a particular kind of hesitation in this instance.

13 The only specific anger cue that Rosteck notes Radulovich mobilizing in this sequence is the emphatic, jerky pointing of his hand. In fact, Milo manifests a number of additional, commonly noted markers of displeasure at this moment as well. He narrows his eyes into tense slits (cf Ekman and Friesen) and thrusts his head forward slightly (Coulson), for instance, while his voice takes on a slightly strident tone and his pitch vacillates erratically (Murray and Arnott; Roehman, Diamond and Amir; Scherer and Oshinsky; Whiteside; etc.). Though these signals of umbrage subside slightly as Milo talks about his family members themselves, they return when he later proclaims his connection to his relatives most clearly. “I certainly can’t cut the blood tie,” he states, “nor do I wish to cut the blood tie” his head moving back and forth emphatically and his pitch and volume rising to make the word “wish” seem especially adamant and pronounced.

14 Downward gaze, relative immobility and lack of muscle tension have been found to be indicators of sadness in a variety of studies. One or more of these cues has been associated with sadness by Atkinson et al.; Boone and Cunningham (“Children’s Decoding”); Boone and Cunningham (“Children’s Expression”); Coulson; Dahl and Friberg; Sogon and Masutani; Tracy and Robins; Wallbott; and Wallbott and Scherer, for example.

15 This collection of paralinguistic sadness cues draws from evidence reported by: Juslin and Laukka; Nwe, Foo and DeSilva; Scherer (“Expression”); Scherer (“Vocal Affect”); Scherer and Oshinsky; Whiteside; etc.

16 For secondary descriptions of this process, see Corber (*Homosexuality*); Griswold.

17 Stars such as Rock Hudson, James Dean and Anthony Perkins, Biskind argues, were “in close touch with their feelings (or could be made to be); they cooperated rather than competed; they put family ahead of career, were moderate in their ambitions, attuned to the needs of others, were not afraid or reluctant to ask for help, and some even had an inner life” (257). In fact, even older stars like
Gregory Peck, James Stewart and Henry Fonda played more sensitive, community-minded characters in films such as *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Nunnally Johnson, USA, 1956), *Broken Arrow* (Delmer Daves, USA, 1950) and *12 Angry Men* (Sidney Lumet, USA, 1957), and the new gentle form of masculinity infiltrated genres ranging from Melodrama and Comedy to the Western, the Sports Film and the Biblical Epic (Biskind 256-262). James Gilbert suggests that the long-running sitcom *Ozzie and Harriet* also functioned at least partially to secure the hegemonic pattern of masculine enactment, dubbing the show “the drama of the happy accommodation to ‘other-direction’” (12).

18 Banse and Scherer; Breitenstein, Van Lancker, and Daum; Breznitz; Ekman and Friesen; Juslin and Laukka; Scherer (“Expression”); Siegmund and Boyle; Sobin and Alpert; and Wallbott and Scherer, amongst others, have each noted one or more of these additional nonverbal markers of sadness.

19 Perhaps the clearest indicator of Milo’s thoroughgoing ‘organization man’ status can be seen in his initial interview appearance. “If the Air Force won’t have me,” he says, “I ask the question, who else will?” In framing his problem this way, Milo marks the ‘naturalness’ and desirability of the system from which he has been excluded particularly clearly. Finding a new, self-directed means of occupation is not considered, nor is changing the system itself.

20 In this manner, Murrow not only mimics the currently dominant pattern of masculinity, but also suggests an awareness of the confines of the documentary context in which he performs.

21 The following is a small selection of primary texts demonstrating this contemporary concern with American conformity. Additional examples can be found in the discussion on pp. 165-166. A. Adams; Barclay (“Group Conformity”); Barclay (“Too Much Popularity”); Berle Cites Need; Brower; Carleton; Chiaromonte; Dodds; “Emphasis on Conformity Attacked”; Evans Asbury (“End Conformity”); Frankel; Freeman; Hand; “Historian Depicts Man”; Gruenberg; Hoffman; E. Johnston; “Kirk Backs Right”; Lindsay (“June Sages”); Lindsay (“Need to Get Ready”); D.A. McKenna; M. Murphy; Oakes; Patten; “The People”; Schlesinger; “Scientist Pleads”; Spender; Spiegel; Talese (“Gray-Flannel-Suit Men”); N. Thomas; Valentine; and Wehrwein. In 1954, a new journal was even established in the name of opposing the contemporary climate of alleged uniformity. *Dissent*, the inaugural issue informed readers, would serve to counter “the bleak atmosphere of conformism that pervades the political and intellectual life of the United States” (“A Word to Our Readers” 3).

22 Irving Howe bemoaned the increasing homogenization that he believed to characterize the American academic community, for instance, while a journalist writing in *The Washington Post and Times Herald* in 1955 suggested that “a tremendous passion for conformity” marked contemporary youth (“Conformity and Delinquency” E4).

23 As Kyle A. Cuordileone points out, for example, “both [Riesman’s] *The Lonely Crowd* and [Whyte’s] *The Organization Man* were keyed to men”, and - in the case of Whyte’s text – to middle class, white collar workers in particular (118). In fact, much of the anti-conformity literature of the 1950s echoed these seminal documents by focusing on the atrophying of individuality amongst white, male business executives and middle-class, suburban fathers. See, for example: “Emphasis on Conformity Attacked”; Leonard (qtd. in Cuordileone); “Panel on Ivy”; Spectorsky (“Of Man”); Stevenson (qtd. in Cuordileone and in Evans Asbury “End Conformity”); Talese (“Indians”); “Too Much ‘Yes-Man-Ship’”; Vidal (qtd. in Griswold); Wehrwein; and Wolfson. Popular contemporary novels such as *When the Bough Breaks*, *Revolutionary Road*, *Sincerely, Willis Wayne*, *From the Dark Tower*, *Driven* and *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* also emphasized the stultifying conventionality
that accompanied the breadwinner role. See: A. Boucher; Spectorsky (“Wages”); and “Too Much Yes-Man-Ship” for further discussion.

24 Early in the decade, for instance, Ralph G. Martin assured his New York Times readers that no one in the New Suburbia “worries about keeping up with the Joneses” (SM16), while a 1959 article claimed that the problem of cookie cutter similarity in middle class homes was but a brief trend that had quickly passed (“The American Home” SMA38). In the interim, novels such as Durable Fire promised white collar executives that “corporate life can be beautiful” (Culligan E6), and films like 12 Angry Men argued that mild, cooperative organization men could still speak their minds and help to achieve positive ends while operating within the confines of a group-dependent system (Biskind 54-55).

25 In 1958, Albert Roland suggested that the popular Do-It-Yourself trend helped to prevent conformity in this manner. Labouring in the home workshop, Roland wrote, “strengthens [men’s] feeling of individual identity within their group” (163).

26 A survey conducted by Dr. C. Harold Carson, for instance, might have bolstered suburban fathers’ confidence by reporting, “‘Keeping up with the Joneses’ is the best thing that can happen to the average American’” (“Still Okay” 27). See also: Hickman.

27 Each of these paralinguistic choices was found to convey a sense of speaker confidence in a study by Scherer, London and Wolf.

28 By conveying a clear opinion while obeying some of the codes of the journalistic profession in this way, Murrow – like Radulovich – also begins to suggest the extent to which an individual might retain his/her personal integrity while operating (at least partially) within the confines of the system.

29 David T. Bazelon, for instance, writes, “There is no question but that it [the television record of the hearings] changed the history of this country” (11). Similar, if less extravagant, evaluations can be found in H. Anderson; Barnouw (Tube); Bayley; Benton; Crosby (“Too Much Television”); Doherty (Cold War); Doherty (“Point”); “Editorial Views”; “End of the Circus”; Faesch; Goldman; “Hearings Must Go On”; “Interest in Army”; “Investigations. To the Point”; W.H. Lawrence (“Impact”); Lindsay (“Right to Civility”); “McCarthy’s Last Stand”; Oshinsky; Redmond; Reston; Stroudt; Sulzbacher; “Washington Wire”; and W.S. White.

30 Crist; Crowther (“54 Army-McCarthy Hearings”); Doherty (“Point”); Kauffmann; Kellner and Streible; Koehler (“Point”); R. Lewis (Emile); and Slye also advance arguments of this sort.

31 Steven Cohan suggests that the “youthful, virile, aristocratic and intellectual persona” of John F. Kennedy “set a different tone” for masculinity and initiated a shift in hegemonic norms upon the new President’s election in 1960 (x). Likewise, Barbara Ehrenreich argues that the 1960s counterculture also delivered a blow to the hegemony of the breadwinner model, as the youthful hippie population constituted “an army of young people for whom the conventions – marriage, career, material success, etc. – were simply ‘unreal’” (108). Finally, Stella Bruzzi claims that films responded to this shifting climate and helped to usher in the demise of the 1950s normative male as well. During the 1960s and 1970s, she notes, “Hollywood, in part, demonstrated and narrativised the problems with the conventional family structure” (Bringing x)
Point of Order’s subjects appear within a performance context that seems particularly complex and difficult to navigate. In addition to having their work edited and re-organized drastically by de Antonio after the fact, the participants were also forced to contend with the numerous restrictions and challenges of the initial hearing setting. The rules and regulations of the governmental inquest forced individuals to respond publicly and under oath to questions outside of their choosing, for example, and also created strict limitations as to who could speak when and for how long. Simultaneously, the hearing performers were also faced with the problem of appearing before multiple audiences, and had to attempt to gear their performances to the other participants in the trial, to the gallery audience present in the caucus room, and to the extensive television audience simultaneously.

Several authors have discussed the way in which James Stewart’s performances in Anthony Mann westerns also participated in this process of hystericizing the tough hero. See, for instance, Basinger; Bingham.

See: “All Summer Long”; H. Anderson; “Hearing is Marked”; “Hearings Must Go On”; “Investigations. To the Point”; “Mundt Doesn’t ‘Covet’”; “Point of Order”; “Senate Probe”; etc. for similar evaluations.

This list of nonverbal markers of anger has been assembled from results listed by Atkinson et al.; Banse and Scherer; Breitenstein, Van Lancker and Daum; Coulson; Dahl and Friberg; de Meijer; Justlin and Laukka; Montepare et al.; Murray and Arnott; Rochman, Diamond and Amir; Scherer (“Expression”); Scherer (“Vocal Affect”); Scherer and Oshinsky; Sobin and Alpert; Sogon and Matsutani; Wallbott; Wallbott and Scherer; Whiteside; and Williams and Stevens.

In addition to the pieces cited in the body of the text, see also: “Calm Before a Storm”; “End of the Circus”; “Investigations. Pin Wheels”; “Investigations. To The Point”; W.H. Lawrence (“Impact”); Lindsay, (“Right to Civility”); Reston; A. Roth; Straight (“McCarthy”); and Straight (“McCarthy Won’t Name”). Several additional contemporary reviews praise Welch more generally, without drawing specific attention to the way in which he enacts elements

In fact, even McCarthy’s supporters noted his harsh and extreme manner in the television broadcasts. In a letter to the editor of the Washington Post and Times Herald, C.A. Castle dubbed McCarthy “a belligerent man”, while nonetheless expressing his respect for the Senator (B4). Likewise, Ward Castle described the Wisconsin Senator as “a rough, tough fellow” in a similar letter in the Wall Street Journal (10).

While this behaviour might be more apparent in Point of Order’s condensed version of events, some evidence suggests that the viewers picked up on these shifts in McCarthy’s countenance when the hearings originally aired as well. One reviewer, for instance, described the Senator as “alternately grinning and scowling” (W.H. Lawrence “Secret F.B.I. Paper” 21).

In addition to saving this moment for the film’s climax, de Antonio further emphasizes it by refraining from shortening it to the brief duration of many other sequences in the film. As Kepley notes, the confrontation between McCarthy and Welch “is shown in something approximating real time, with only a few lines from the original event edited out” (205). Furthermore, Kepley also points out that de Antonio’s editing also increases the apparent insensitivity and cruelty of McCarthy’s actions in various ways (210-211).

Other examples can be found in “End of the Circus”; Evans Asbury (“Welch”); Marder (“Cohn Admits”); and Marder (“McCarthy Won’t Name”). Several additional contemporary reviews praise Welch more generally, without drawing specific attention to the way in which he enacts elements.
of the gray flannel masculine model. See, for example: Jackson; Straight (“Growth”); “Washington Wire”; and White.

Interestingly, this author also emphasizes Welch’s connection to the hegemonic model in his/her description of the lawyer’s life outside of the hearings. Welch’s status as a committed and cooperative husband and father is emphasized, as is his daily commute from the family’s large suburban home into his job in the city. Attention is also paid to the way in which Welch spends his leisure time around the house, and his enjoyment of consumer luxuries, from clothes, to furniture, to electric light switches. As such, the lawyer’s status as the Army-McCarthy hearings’ clearest representative of the dominant masculine model is made even more emphatic by the discourse surrounding the broadcasts.

Steven Cohan cites several evocative examples of this process. See pp 34, 56. Primary materials that demonstrate and/or allude to this concern include: de Riencourt; McIntire; M. Mead (“Job”); Schlesinger; Spectorsky (“Of Man”); Uttal; S. Wilson (“The Woman”); etc.

Spigel discusses a range of small screen texts that operated in this manner, while Paul Wells notes several examples of “shrinking masculinity” (181) in science fiction B-films of the day. (Wells, however, reads these films as criticizing patriarchal dominance, rather than ridiculing masculine ‘weakness’ per se.)

Other secondary descriptions of the climate of uncertainty surrounding the man in the gray flannel suit’s ‘feminization’ can be found in: B. Baker; Cuordileone.

In this respect, the film suggests that the original hearing broadcasts joined a variety of other cultural texts that also sought to deny the potential enervation and impotence of the suburban organization man. Some pieces in contemporary newspapers and journals flatly denied this connection between cooperation and emasculation, for instance (e.g. Barclay (“Trousered”); Mead (“Job”); “Priest Does Honor”; Silberg), while others argued that men’s participation in child rearing and other ‘feminine’ tasks constituted a way of asserting authority outside of the stratified working world, and/or a necessary means of countering the ‘dangerous’ control that women wielded in the home (e.g. Coughlan. See: May; Griswold; and Skolnick for further examples of this second set of strategies.). Roland Marchand points out that masculine leisure activities such as football and hot rodding worked to establish the way in which ‘manly’ potency might be demonstrated within the confines of the consumerist, breadwinner role. Finally, Elaine Tyler May, Steven Cohan, and Nina Clare Leibman have argued that many films and television programs also worked to defend the suburban father against allegations of ‘feminization,’ dramatizing – in Cohan’s words – the potential to enact one’s “masculine position as head of the family in the setting of home life, not work” (53).

Jenkins is the lawyer who was called in to question both parties to the dispute.

This set of nonverbal markers of submissiveness has been compiled from research by: Burgoon; Burgoon and LePoire; Burgoon, Johnson and Toch; Carney, Hall and LeBeau; Dunbar and Burgoon; Ekman and Friesen; Hall, Coats and LeBeau; Tiedens and Fragale; etc.

Many of these additional cues of docility and acquiescence are also noted in the research cited in note 46 above.
While less obviously exaggerated than many of his earlier, comic displays, Welch’s response to McCarthy’s accusation nonetheless combines extreme markers of sensitivity and gentleness with a range of cues that point to the constructedness of his performance. He indicates the extent to which the Senator’s attack has wounded him personally by looking downward, with the inner corners of his eyebrows raised and drawn together in the fashion typically associated with sorrow as he begins to speak, for instance. He then further augments this picture of sensitive distress by manifesting the soft and deep tone of voice and the slow rate of speech thought to convey sadness throughout the remainder of his response. At the same time, however, the repeated pattern of rising and falling intonation that Welch utilizes as he speaks, and the marked pauses he takes after many iterations of this pattern, break his response up into marked clauses and emphasize the rather formal, lyric quality of his words. Thus – as Thomas Doherty points out – “Some viewers, then and since, have suspected Welch’s seemingly spontaneous outburst was actually rehearsed, that the rhythms of his address scanned a little too poetically to be unscripted (‘It is true he is still with Hale and Dorr/It is true that he will continue to be with Hale and Dorr/It is, I regret to say, equally true that he will bear a scar needlessly inflicted by you’)” (“Point” 36). By combining effective signals of a gentle and kindly temperament with a vague indication of construction and performance, then, Welch again suggests the artificial nature of his enactment of the suburban breadwinner model. The powerful character of his potentially pre-scripted prose, and the loud burst of applause he receives from the audience at the end of the sequence, however, alsounderline the potential strategic value of such performed choices once more.

In “The Point of View in Point of Order,” de Antonio argues: “Neither the hearings nor the film is a good guy/bad guy situation. All are implicated since he ‘made it.’” (150). He also goes on to claim unequivocally, “The hero is not Joseph Welch (a great lawyer and great actor) but the camera” (ibid).

While many commentators corroborate the notion that Welch stands out as the film’s clear hero, a few discussions of the film argue that – as Rick Slye puts it – “Welch comes off as scarcely better than his adversary, using the same sordid tactics as McCarthy” (46). This less common reading can also be found in Mitch Tuchman’s 1990 review of the film, and – to a lesser extent – Chuck McCann’s brief discussion of it as well.
Chapter 4: Performance, Emotion and Politics

Thus far, I have demonstrated the way in which nonfiction performances work to shape viewers’ perception(s) of individual documentary characters, and – by extension – to guide our understanding(s) of both the texts and the broader socio-cultural identity groups within which those characters figure. Further examination of the screen acting and everyday communication literatures, however, suggests that – in addition to cuing interpretation(s) along each of these dimensions – the work of documentary subjects can also serve to engage viewers on a more emotional level. In his discussion of fictional screen performances, for instance, Johannes Riis emphasizes that acting “has an interactive effect upon the spectator” (149), inciting “sympathy, disgust, desire, admiration or even indifference, to name just a few possible reactions” (“Film Acting” 151). Likewise, James A. Russell, Jo-Anne Bachorowki, and José-Miguel Fernández-Dols note that facial and vocal expressions enacted within quotidian settings can also “function to alter the receiver’s state, especially affect” (335). In light of such claims, and given the now familiar connections between everyday communication, screen acting and nonfiction performance, this chapter positions the elicitation of spectator affect as a third significant function of the documentary participant’s work. Even as nonfiction subjects guide interpretation and understanding at a variety of levels, I argue, they also carry out actions that have the potential to elude significant affective reactions from their viewers.

While the notion that performative activity can impinge upon audience moods and emotions is common within the literatures devoted to both screen acting and everyday interaction,\(^1\) it has not – to my knowledge – been explored by scholars interested in documentary performance. In fact, despite the widespread attention that has been afforded to
emotion within cinema studies in recent years, nonfiction film scholarship as a whole is largely bereft of analyses and/or theoretical formulations that take affect into serious account. On one hand, this isn’t surprising, given the persistent separation between reason and emotion in the popular consciousness and the emphatic alignment of documentary with what Bill Nichols calls “discourses of sobriety” (Representing Reality 3-4). As Anne Rutherford points out, nonfiction theory has long been marked by “an assumed opposition between intellect and feeling that disallows any understanding of embodied thought,” and by the consequent belief “that aesthetics and affect threaten the credibility of the documentary” (128). Insofar as scholars in a range of fields are increasingly recognizing what Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith call “the inadequacies of a strong Cartesian division between the mind and the body” (2), however, it now seems necessary to acknowledge the extent to which affect can and does figure within even the most sober and ostensibly ‘rational’ forms of discourse, including documentary film.

In fact, an appreciation of nonfiction texts’ capacity to stimulate and shape emotional responses seems particularly essential when one considers the central role that affect has been shown to play in persuasion and political action. In recent years, researchers have demonstrated that emotional states exert a significant effect on multifarious kinds of social judgment, ranging from legal decisions and voter choices to product evaluations and belief formations. Such scholars have also provided considerable evidence for David Hume’s 270-year-old claim that reason without passion is “perfectly inert” (qtd. in Frijda, Manstead and Bem, “The Influence” 3), illustrating the way in which emotion serves as a powerful motivator that can encourage individuals to engage in or avoid any number of activities and behaviours. Inasmuch as one of the primary functions of documentary texts is to persuade
viewers and/or to promote certain courses of action (Renov, “Towards” 28-30), this considerable body of research suggests that affect has a crucial role to play within much nonfiction production. Indeed, of the few scholars who have considered documentary’s ability to issue emotional appeals, several have focused precisely on the way in which affective responses to nonfiction films impinge upon and interact with such texts’ persuasive capabilities. None of these authors, however, make more than passing mention of the role that performance choices play in engendering nonfiction film’s emotional effects.

In order to build on these initial arguments, this chapter will illustrate the way in which documentary performers encourage emotional responses from viewers, and thereby contribute significantly to the political efficacy of nonfiction texts. An analysis of performance in two nonfiction films pertaining to the current Iraq War – Patricia Foulkrod’s *The Ground Truth* (USA, 2006) and Nina Davenport’s *Operation Filmmaker* (USA, 2007) – will provide support for this position. These texts seem especially apt candidates for scrutiny here given their membership within one of the most extensive bodies of recent radical documentary practice. As Pat Aufderheide points out, “political documentary is growing rapidly in popularity” at present (56), and films about Iraq have become especially common. “Iraq documentaries have rushed in,” Aufderheide writes, “to fill gaps in mainstream media coverage” (57). Nonetheless, several scholars have expressed uncertainty about the extent to which such films actually serve to effectuate the social change that they seek. Bill Nichols, for instance, asks:

But are the numerous, often terrific documentaries of recent years on the Iraq War, the Bush White House, … the terrors of a so-called war on terrorism, and the horrors of ethnic conflict and genocidal cleansings as powerful an antidote as one might think? I often wonder … (“What Current” 85-86).
If the affect aroused by documentary performers can serve to promote or to discourage attitudinal change and/or social action, then a consideration of such performer-prompted emotion is an essential part of answering Nichols’ question accurately.

By extension, such a consideration should also shed light on the vexing issue of affect’s place within nonfiction films devoted to charged matters of public policy. Documentarists representing warfare and related issues must always decide whether to appeal explicitly to the considerable emotion that might be evoked by their topic (as does Michael Moore in Fahrenheit 9/11 [USA, 2004], for example), or to attempt a more cool, clinical approach (such as that evinced by Robert Greenwald in Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War [USA, 2003]). By demonstrating the potential cognitive and behavioural consequences of the feelings invited by performers in two films that take the former line of attack, I hope to underline the considerable benefits, as well as some of the limitations, of emotional appeals within the recent wave of radical nonfiction texts. In addition to illustrating another heretofore overlooked function of the documentary subject’s work, then, an analysis of performance in these specific Iraq films will allow me to simultaneously contribute to a timely debate concerning the socio-political efficaciousness of current nonfiction practice.  

**Making the Choir Sing – The Ground Truth**

In an online summary of its recent activities, American activist group MoveOn.org notes a campaign during which “Tens of thousands of MoveOn members got together at movie nights all over the country to to [sic] watch the powerful documentary, The Ground Truth and then write letters pushing Congress to stop the escalation [of the War in Iraq]” (“Current Campaigns” par. 8). Ostensibly, Foulkrod’s film – a collection of ‘talking heads’
testimonials from returned veterans scarred by and vehemently opposed to the War – here served as a catalyst, stimulating spectators to undertake concrete social action. Similar stories of the film’s potential political significance abound. Laura Rico, for example, reports that a Lutheran minister in Corona, California “decided to screen the film for church members … to inspire ‘public moral deliberation’ on the [Iraq] conflict” (B1). Likewise, a reporter in the Capital Times and Wisconsin State Journal quotes one of the organizers of a Veterans for Peace event in Madison, Wisconsin, who showed The Ground Truth before “call[ing] people to action to help fight for peace and justice” (“Film is Part” A2). Indeed, many reviewers argue that the film issues a potent political charge even when it is not included within organized activist campaigns. Claudia Puig calls the text “a cinematic call to arms” (D17), for instance, while Ty Burr contends that it offers an “implicit challenge” to its audience that is difficult to ignore (“Ground Truth” D11).

To the extent that this sense of the film’s political efficacy is valid, the issue of how it achieves its persuasive and provocative force seems especially pressing. Like Jane Gaines, then, I am interested here in “the question of what it might be that moves viewers to want to act, that moves them to do something instead of nothing in relation to the political situation illustrated on the screen” (“Political Mimesis” 89). For both Gaines and myself, the visceral impact of the documentary text is key in this regard. In presenting themselves onscreen (even within the tight boundaries of the static, medium close to close frame in which they are usually filmed), the veterans featured in The Ground Truth help to impel a range of affective reactions that might, in turn, incite viewers to join the cause that the text espouses. As reviewer Desson Thomson puts it, the film “is mostly a string of talking-head interviews, but those talking heads … are compelling” (T42). That said, however, the emotional responses
that these ‘talking head’ performers help to elicit are by no means guaranteed. In fact, while no filmic text can dictate spectator response entirely, *The Ground Truth* seems especially likely to move some viewers in undesired ways, thereby prompting such individuals to refuse, reject, or even actively oppose the film’s call to arms. The affect generated in part by *The Ground Truth*’s performers can thus be seen as multiply influential, impinging on the film’s political efficacy in manifold, complex ways. While, on one hand, it contributes significantly to the film’s oft-discussed radical charge, it simultaneously has the potential to motivate a subset of viewers to disregard the text and its claims.

This sense that *The Ground Truth*’s performances might invite a range of visceral reactions underscores the fact that emotion can be an especially singular, personal phenomenon. As Gay Hawkins puts it, “when we talk about affect we are talking about individuality … affect forces you to speak only of yourself” (par.2). That said, however, a large body of psychological emotion research documents general conditions that reliably stimulate particular affect states in an above average number of people. Robin L. Nabi points out that fear, for instance, “is generally aroused when a situation is perceived as both threatening to one’s physical or psychological self and out of one’s control” (“Discrete Emotions” 291); likewise, sadness is typically provoked “by physical or psychological loss or separation … or by failure to achieve a goal ” (ibid 294). While respecting the idiosyncratic nature of emotional response by emphasizing individual perceptions and personal goals, such prototypical elicitation patterns simultaneously make it possible to talk about affect with some degree of precision. Concomitantly, they also permit us to begin to understand some of the ways in which documentary texts commonly move their viewers. Insofar as nonfiction films and their constituent elements (including performance) help to
construct events that a number of viewers will perceive in one of these typical emotion-exciting ways, they are likely to invite the relevant affective response especially forcefully.

This is not to suggest, however, that our responses to prototypical emotion elicitors within nonfiction films will mirror our real world reactions to such stimuli exactly. While much research suggests that our affective reactions to documentaries and to everyday situations have a great deal in common, there are nonetheless important differences between the two contexts, which should not be overlooked. Perhaps most significantly in this regard, spectatorial responses to emotion-provoking situations in documentaries – as in fictional films – are contingent upon the way in which those stimuli are placed within and framed by the unfolding filmic text. Should a documentarian rapidly juxtapose events known to stir incongruent feelings such as sadness and contentment, for instance, the usual emotional effect of the secondary affective appeal will likely be altered. Moreover, one also needs to account for the way in which patterns of everyday emotion arousal can be augmented, complicated or even supplanted in nonfiction films by way of specific filmic devices. Camera movements, editing patterns and musical cues (amongst other stylistic choices) colour our understanding of the extent to which an event onscreen constitutes a prototypical emotion-inciting situation, and may also stimulate emotion in a direct, nonprototypical fashion. In order to discuss adequately the way in which a documentary such as The Ground Truth invites emotional responses, then, it is necessary to consider how common, everyday emotion elicitors are worked into the unfolding fabric of a specifically filmic text.

The necessary first step in this process is to attend to the way in which various cues are used to establish an emotional tenor at the outset of a given documentary. As Greg M.
Smith argues, the beginning of a film occupies an especially significant affective position, orienting viewers emotionally and guiding our reactions to the text that follows (44). In *The Ground Truth*, specifically, the opening sequences make use a number of emotion cues – including elements of performance – in order to establish an initial mood of sympathy. In line with Candace Clark’s argument that “sympathy sentiment generally arises when one perceives that something negative and unjust – ‘bad luck’ – has happened to a worthy person” (46), the film immediately works to persuade viewers that the veterans participating in the text are creditable individuals who have been forced to endure events of a distressing and unwarranted nature.

To begin with, an introductory montage consisting of images of wounded and dying soldiers, set to the accompaniment of mournful synthesizers and strings, immediately reminds viewers of the drastic and gory consequences of warfare. A title card containing a quotation from James Hillman’s “A Terrible Love of War” then furthers this sense of the horrors of combat, reading “The return from the killing fields is more than a debriefing… it is a slow ascent from hell.” In Greg Smith’s terms, this initial sequence invites a diffuse mood of sorrow and concern, a “lower-level emotional state” which initiates viewers’ affective systems and frames our reactions to successive events (42). More specifically, when we are subsequently introduced to particular soldiers in typical talking heads interviews, the mood created by this opening montage keeps a sense of the extreme tortures that these individuals may have been forced to endure fresh in our minds, laying the groundwork for the evocation of sympathy in the process.

In order to fully warrant a sympathetic response, however, these individual veterans must demonstrate that they, specifically, have endured suffering of an extreme and
undeserved nature. As such, the majority of the initial interview sequences are devoted to demonstrating the featured soldiers’ status as upright and respectable people who became involved in the military for a variety of unobjectionable and/or innocent reasons. Framed in intimate medium close to close ups that encourage viewers to engage with them, the interviewees are shown explaining their reasons for enlisting in rapid succession. Robert Acosta shakes his head, shrugs bitterly and looks downward with a saddened expression as he recalls that joining the army provided a way out of his impoverished neighbourhood and an alternative to joining many of his friends in prison; Demond Mullins speaks in a slow and sorrowful voice as he remembers signing up with the National Guard for the educational benefits, after a recruiter assured him that he would only be deployed Stateside; Melissa Stockwell smiles proudly and shakes her head for emphasis as she discusses how patriotism provoked her to enlist during her sophomore year of college. By clearly articulating honourable and/or understandable motives of this sort, the interviewees begin to establish immediately that they are the kind of reasonable people who merit our sympathy. At the same time, the distraught and embittered expressions displayed by individuals such as Mullins and Acosta, and the sombre string music that plays softly behind many of the interviews, sustain the mood established by the opening sequence and begin to point toward the hardships that these reasonable people have endured.

Once the initial grounds for sympathy have thus been established through self-presentational choices and other filmic elements, the film proceeds to construct several moments that invite sympathetic response in an increasingly pronounced manner. In this respect, The Ground Truth provides a strong example of Greg M. Smith’s model of filmic affect, which postulates that any mood created by a film must be punctuated by “occasional
moments of strong emotion” if it is not to dissipate and decay (43). An early interview, in which Army Private Herold Noel attempts to explain some of the factors that make the Iraq conflict an especially harrowing experience, provides a workable example of this kind of dense emotional cuing.

Another static, frontally positioned medium close up gives audience members clear access to – and keeps attention focused on – Noel’s facial expression as he claims forcefully, “This war’s a different war.” Thus foregrounded, Noel’s generally impassive face shifts in concert with his voice as he speaks, giving his claim about the uniqueness of the Iraq experience particular emphasis. As he utters the words “this” and “different,” for instance, Noel simultaneously flashes his eyebrows, shakes his head, and raises his pitch, thereby underscoring these central terms and conveying his argument especially persuasively. In this manner, Noel’s performance begins to invite a sympathetic response, suggesting the extent of the horrors to which he and his fellow soldiers have been subjected.

Following this initial claim, sympathy cues become more insistent and thickly layered as the sequence proceeds. The difficulty of the situation in Iraq, for example, is communicated not only by Noel’s self-presentational choices, but also by a range of additional visual and aural signals. At the same time, the content of Noel’s speech and the seriousness with which he utters his words augment the sense that he is an individual worthy of our compassion. As he says, “And you lookin’ at these kids laying on the floor dead, and you see your child’s face laying on that floor,” for instance, Noel clearly demonstrates his endorsement of dominant ethical standards and his refusal to dehumanize the ‘enemy.’ His voice, heard in voiceover atop melancholy synthesizer music and disturbing still photos of injured or dying young Iraqis, raises in pitch to stress the words “kids” and “dead,”
underscoring the notion that he is eminently conscious of the injustice of killing innocent children. The word ‘your’ in the subsequent clause is afforded similar paralinguistic emphasis, and thus again positions Noel as a creditable individual by pointing toward his awareness of the shared humanity of Iraqi and American youth. At the same time, the marked pause he takes after the word “dead” and the general downward inflection he utilizes for the final portion of this utterance work in concert with the graphic images and haunting music to construct a compelling impression of the grave and horrendous nature of the events being described. Here, then, performance works in tandem with other cues such as music and interspersed still photos to create an especially strong sense that soldiers such as Noel are good people who have been placed in a very bad situation. It thus helps to encourage sympathetic response particularly forcefully.

Sympathy appeals of this sort abound and become more explicit and intense throughout the film. As the soldiers report the injuries they incurred overseas, for instance, or movingly detail their ongoing battles with guilt, depression and post-traumatic stress, their self-presentational choices – like Noel’s in the sequence discussed above – work in concert with other filmic cues to demonstrate their status as upright, reasonable people who have weathered terrible storms and are continuing to suffer at the moment of filming. In this sense, performance functions throughout The Ground Truth to help construct events that will evoke sympathy in a large number of viewers. Of course, some spectators could choose to interpret the situations represented in an alternate, non-sympathetic fashion, and others simply might not find the events onscreen compelling enough to trigger strong emotional reactions. As Lauren Berlant points out, at times, “the aesthetic and political spectacle of suffering vulnerability seems to bring out something terrible, a drive not to feel compassion or
sympathy, an aversion to a moral claim on the spectator to engage, when all the spectator wants to do is to turn away quickly and harshly” (“Introduction” 10-11). The numerous elements of the film – including performance – that repeatedly and ardently position the individuals onscreen as both worthy and suffering, however, work especially hard to make this evasion of sympathy unlikely. Indeed, reviews suggest that the text successfully arouses a compassionate response in many of its spectators, as authors describe The Ground Truth as a heart wrenching film, which – in James Verniere’s terms – “will move you to pity and awe” (E13).20

To the extent that the film succeeds in producing this kind of sympathetic response, it arguably also increases its efficaciousness as a persuasive socio-political text. As Nico Frijda points out, emotions may be conceived of as “action tendencies” that make certain kinds of behavioral response especially likely (The Emotions 71). Sympathy, specifically, is understood as a motivating force that – in Jonathan Haidt’s words – “makes people want to help, comfort, or otherwise alleviate the suffering of the other” (“Moral Emotions” 862).21 Countless empirical studies document this positive correlation between incited sympathy and prosocial behavior,22 demonstrating that sympathetic response can encourage helping even in situations of “easy escape” (Eisenberg et al., “Relation of Sympathy” 63). The sympathy stimulated (in part) by The Ground Truth’s performers, then, ought to rouse affected spectators to engage in social action designed to relieve the suffering of veterans such as those represented onscreen.

In spite of the considerable evidence linking sympathy and prosocial behavior, however, several scholars nonetheless contend that compassionate responses to films are limited at best in their capacity to promote definite altruistic action. Following the common
reading of Aristotle that equates catharsis with purgation, for instance, many argue that the evocation of pity by cultural texts leads only to a diminution of sympathetic affect by the text’s end and thus a decreased likelihood to undertake subsequent social action.\textsuperscript{23} That said, several alternate interpretations of catharsis have been advanced,\textsuperscript{24} and – as Mark Schaller notes – “the experimental literature offers very little support for the catharsis [as purgation] hypothesis” in any case (287). Perhaps more damningly, many theorists claim that tragic texts are actually enjoyable insofar as they produce positive meta-emotions that might serve to cancel out at least partially the motivating effects of sympathy. According to this argument, the act of feeling bad for represented others ultimately makes viewers feel good about themselves, prompting – in Kathleen Woodward’s words – “the feeling of self-satisfaction that we wish to do the right thing and hence are virtuous” (71).\textsuperscript{25} While it may provide the initial motivation for prosocial behavior, then, the sympathy spurred by \textit{The Ground Truth} may not be sufficient to provoke political action in and of itself.

In order to prevent its evoked sympathy from devolving into inert self-satisfaction, \textit{The Ground Truth} moves to invite a number of additional, complementary emotions that have themselves been shown to counter passivity and to incite social action. Foremost amongst these secondary affective responses is indignant anger or moral outrage. The general understanding of this particular species of anger suggests that it is prototypically generated in response to unmerited affronts to the self or to valued others and entities. James M. Jasper, for instance, suggests that one becomes morally indignant “when the objects of [one’s] affection are threatened in some way” (“Emotions of Protest” 409), while Jonathan Haidt describes anger as “a response to \textit{unjustified} insults” that can be triggered even “in third-party situations, in which the self has no stake” (“Moral Emotions” 856). In this respect, the
eliciting conditions of anger are similar to those of sympathy; both emotions can be incited by the perception that undue negative circumstances have befallen individuals or objects deemed worthy. Anger, however, differs from sympathetic distress in that it entails a shift of attention from the victim to the perpetrator. As Gerald L. Clore and David B. Centerbar put it, “anger requires the displeasure to occur in the context of assumed agency” (139). Should the perception of injustice be accompanied by an attribution of blame for that injustice, then, anger and indignation are likely to follow.

In *The Ground Truth*, moments that cue us to assign blame for the veterans’ ongoing suffering become increasingly common as the film progresses. In reviewer Jay Antani’s words, after our sympathy has been aroused in the film’s first sections, “Foulkrod makes sure to alchemize our pain into focused rage, as, one by one, her interviewees speak out against the military establishment’s indifference or unwillingness to address their situation” (par.4). At one moment, for example, Marine Staff Sergeant Jimmy J. Massey tells the story of visiting a Veterans’ Administration psychologist to seek help for his ongoing struggles with war-related depression and guilt. Filmed in a static medium close up that captures him in semi-profile as he fishes, this veteran becomes noticeably distraught as he recalls that he was refused help on the grounds that his enduring distress made him a conscientious objector in the eyes of the military.

Massey’s eyebrows shoot upwards dramatically after he recounts the psychologist’s insensitive comment, for instance, suggesting the shock and indignation he experienced upon having his willing service discounted and his problems summarily dismissed. He then pauses briefly, allowing the indecency of the psychologist’s words to register before cementing a sense of their impropriety by emitting two short, bitter laughs and going on to detail his
outraged reaction to this affront. He shakes his head bitterly and passes his hand rapidly in front of his chest as he says, “I lost it,” visually demonstrating the intensity of his response to this unexpected slight. He then goes on to indicate the offensiveness and audacity of the psychologist’s words once more, turning away from the camera, bending down slightly and shaking his head in apparent disbelief as he recounts, “I said: what?” Massey prolongs the initial ‘wh’ sound of this final word as if to indicate that the doctor’s comment was so grievous that it momentarily interfered with his ability to speak, and then underlines his shock yet again by finally voicing the interrogative in a high and breathy tone indicative of incredulity.

By such means, Massey’s self-presentational choices – conveyed lucidly by the static medium close up and the clear synch sound used to film them – do much to illustrate the grossly unfair and uncaring nature of the Veterans Administration’s dealings with returned soldiers. Whereas several other sequences simply encouraged us to view the interviewees as good people who are suffering unduly, then, Massey’s performance here assigns blame as well, suggesting that the military establishment is in large part responsible for the unchecked continuation of veterans’ distress. As such, his self-presentational work in this interview invites considerable anger toward the armed services and its administrative branches. Concurrently, the music underscoring Massey’s performance supplements this affective appeal, creating a subtle visceral cue to fury through its tense upward modulations and percussive drumbeats. In light of these combined emotion signals, moments such as this seem especially likely to move spectators to moral outrage. Indeed, like Antani, many reviewers count indignation towards the Defense Department and its subsidiaries amongst their emotional reactions to the text.27
This is not to suggest, however, that *The Ground Truth* abandons its appeal to sympathy entirely in its later moments. Rather, by interspersing strong anger cues amidst equally strong sympathy prompts, the latter half of the film invites a shifting, complex blend of complementary emotional reactions from its viewers. In Greg M. Smith’s terms, an initial mood of sympathy is punctuated by moments designed to produce outrage, after which outrage persists as a mood of its own until further concentrated cues for sympathy or indignation shift or sustain our affective state once more. This kind of alternating visceral reaction is not uncommon in response to everyday encounters with injustice; as Martin Hoffman points out, “one’s feelings may [often] alternate between empathic [sic] and sympathetic distress and empathic [sic] anger” (“Contribution of empathy” 54). Not surprisingly, (given the general lack of attention to affect in nonfiction scholarship), however, such multi-layered emotional activity has not been adequately acknowledged as an effective persuasive strategy by theorists of documentary film. By asking spectators to experience both sympathetic concern for the veterans and moral outrage at the military establishment, *The Ground Truth* augments its political charge to no small degree.

First of all, moral indignation must itself be seen as a powerful force that has the capacity to promote behaviour complementary to that spurred by sympathy and compassion. Whereas sympathy is generally understood to encourage action that might alleviate victims’ distress, anger in response to the plight of others has often been shown to motivate acts designed to punish or otherwise contain those responsible for perceived injustice (Haidt, “Moral Emotions” 856). In the context of political movements, specifically, anger has often been positioned as what Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta call “the basis for mobilization” (“Introduction” 16). To the extent that it succeeds in inciting anger, then,
*The Ground Truth* should provoke viewers to protest the military’s treatment of returned vets and to push for changes in the system as a means of disciplining the institution and making it responsible for its improper actions. At the same time, the film’s evocation of sympathy should stimulate spectators to engage in these very same activities in the hopes of aiding the suffering individuals seen onscreen. By inviting two emotional states known to promote behaviour designed to remedy injustices, that is, *The Ground Truth* is especially likely to encourage viewers to do something on behalf of the represented veterans and their cause.

Simultaneously, anger can also help to cancel out some of the potential passivity that has been argued to attach to sympathy alone. While – theoretically speaking – moral outrage, like compassion, might confer upon those experiencing it the positive charge that comes with recognizing one’s own virtue, anger’s status as the most potent of emotions makes it far less susceptible than sympathy to becoming an end in itself. As Marlene K. Sokolon points out, “Aristotle devotes the most attention to anger because anger is the paradigmatic emotion and is the most potentially motivating of all emotions” (*Political Emotions*, 51). Likewise, Leah Bradshaw includes anger and indignation amongst the “forceful passions and virtues” that she sees as far more effective at promoting action than “the ‘soft,’ diffuse, and passive emotions of compassion and pity” (187). Given that anger represents this kind of particularly compelling motivational force, the outrage promoted by *The Ground Truth* might feasibly override or make it difficult to rest upon any feelings of complacent self-satisfaction that the film simultaneously offers. The strong catalyzing abilities of anger render passivity especially unlikely, and might in turn free sympathy to carry out its own motivational work more effectively.
Nonetheless, *The Ground Truth* is not content to let its political persuasiveness rest on even the powerful combination of sympathy and anger alone. Instead, it continues to weave supplementary affective appeals into its final section in order to increase its motivational force. Perhaps most compellingly in this regard, a few of the interviews included in the film promote intense feelings of guilt and regret. As Daniel J. O’Keefe describes, “Guilt can be understood broadly as a negative emotional state aroused when an actor’s conduct is at variance with an actor’s own standards” (629). Like outrage, then, guilt is frequently triggered in response to assessing responsibility for a particular undesirable action or event; it involves – in June Tangney and colleagues’ words – “a negative evaluation of a specific behavior” (“Are Shame and Guilt Related” 257). With guilt, however, blame is placed squarely upon the self. As such, if an event encourages what Tamara J. Ferguson et al. call “self-perceptions of responsibility for an untoward outcome or state of affairs” (332), it will likely succeed in arousing guilt.

In *The Ground Truth*, certain interview sequences ask viewers to acknowledge their culpability for the negative situation represented onscreen in precisely this manner. When Army Specialist Aidan Delgado discusses the public treatment of Iraq vets near the text’s end, for instance, “the film’s unforgiving spotlight,” as Ty Burr puts it, “suddenly shines out at the audience sitting in the dark” (“Culture Clash” D11). Captured in one of the film’s ubiquitous tight, medium close ups, Delgado claims unequivocally, “Americans want to honour the veterans in, like, a very cursory way. You know, putting a yellow sticker on their car, having a little parade or welcome back. But they don’t want to honour the veterans by really, like, listening to what they have to say.” Just as Jimmy Massey’s performance choices previously pointed to the egregious harm caused by a specific VA psychologist’s actions,
Delgado here underlines the blameworthy and problematic nature of particular behaviours in which audience members themselves may well have engaged.

His voice issues forth in a rather contemptuous singsong as he speaks the phrase about ribbons and parades, for example, repeatedly rising and falling in mirrored pitch vacillations that indicate his disdain for the ‘supportive’ actions likely endorsed by several of his viewers. Having paralinguistically underlined the shallow and inconsequential nature of the help that many Americans provide veterans in this manner, Delgado then continues to indicate the significance and necessity of more essential forms of support that he feels the general populace systematically avoid. He leans forward slightly, jerks his head back and forth tensely, and widens his eyes in an imploring fashion as he talks about the widespread unwillingness to actually listen to vets, for instance, painting a visual picture of his desire for people to understand the importance of the actions they fail to undertake. The word ‘listening’ is afforded particular magnitude, as Delgado raises his pitch on the first syllable of the word and simultaneously lifts his upturned left hand, closes his fingers and draws his arm down and out of the frame in a gesture of emphasis. By way of such self-presentational choices, Delgado encourages audience members to reevaluate their own interactions with returning soldiers, simultaneously indicating the flaws in the actions in which most people engage and the potential benefits of the behaviours they often neglect to consider. Thus, if an individual audience member understands her/himself as part of the majority that Delgado describes, s/he will likely be moved to guilt at this moment. In fact, in light of the film’s previous evocations of sympathy for vets like Delgado, feelings of responsibility and remorse in response to this interview should be remarkably acute.
While such invitations to guilt and regret are not as common as the appeals to sympathy and outrage throughout *The Ground Truth*, they may be especially useful in securing the text’s persuasive abilities. As Brian Lickel and his colleagues point out, “guilt predicts approach-related responses meant to repair the damage that was caused by the guilt-eliciting event, and in fact several studies indicate that guilt is particularly linked to a desire to confess, apologize, or atone for one’s own wrongdoings” (146). By momentarily arousing feelings of guilt in many spectators, then, *The Ground Truth* makes those spectators particularly likely to engage in activities designed to make amends for their perceived misdeeds. Such reparative actions, including actively supporting and listening to veterans in the manner Delgado describes, are surely also motivated by the sympathetic desire to relieve others’ suffering, reflecting June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing’s claim that “guilt and empathy may work together in a mutually enhancing fashion” (81). In this respect, guilt helps to make viewers even more likely to engage in certain behaviours that the film has already begun to impel by way of sympathy. Just as the combination of sympathy and anger is especially effective at provoking *The Ground Truth*’s audience to work for reforms to the military establishment, that is, so too does the film’s amalgamation of sympathy and guilt create a potent charge that will compel many viewers to interact with and attend to individual veterans in a more sensitive fashion.

Like anger, guilt also plays an important part in preventing the film’s evoked sympathy from dissipating and being replaced by self-congratulatory passivity. To the extent that one feels at least partially responsible for the suffering of others witnessed onscreen, it is difficult to simultaneously feel virtuous for engaging sympathetically with that imaged distress. Along these lines, some research has demonstrated that guilt is an important tool for
thwarting sympathy’s tendency to provide what Michalinos Zembylas calls “the illusion of a just response” (14). Estella and Alexander Williams Chizhik, for instance, claim that “without the feelings of guilt leading from the perception of responsibility for social inequity to a belief that those responsible should work toward social equity, true change in lifestyle may only be in thought but not in deed” (295). As such, by adding guilt to its complex affective fabric, The Ground Truth enhances its capacity to provoke social action once more.

Finally, this persuasive potential is amplified still further in the film’s final moments by the inclusion of appeals to an emotion known as elevation. As defined by Jonathan Haidt, this rarely discussed emotion involves feelings of warmth and admiration, and “is triggered by witnessing acts of human moral beauty or virtue” (“Positive Emotion” abstract). With this in mind, a documentary such as The Ground Truth can excite feelings of elevation in some viewers by constructing situations indicative of what Haidt elsewhere describes as “humanity’s higher or better nature” (“Moral Emotions” 864).33

The final minutes of The Ground Truth are rich with such situations, as the veterans shift from detailing the negative experiences they have endured to describing their ongoing efforts to oppose the War, to help other soldiers and veterans, and to battle governmental injustices of all sorts. As Jay Antani points out, the film works hard in its final third to demonstrate that “[t]hese soldiers aren’t passive victims” (par. 5). Army Ranger Chad Reiber is shown working for the National Veterans Foundation, for example, and subsequently explains that he is willing to endure the pain of publicly recounting his own war-related experiences in the hopes that doing so might inspire others to seek help. Ex-Army Sergeant Camilo Mejia describes how he became a committed activist after spending nine months in jail for publicly criticizing the Iraq conflict. Kelly Dougherty, Michael Blake and Demond
Mullins are shown speaking at rallies against the War, while several of the interviewees appear at a march in New Orleans to protest the government’s response to Hurricane Katrina. Many viewers might interpret sequences such as these, which suggest the subjects’ willingness to engage in altruistic behaviour despite their own personal hardships, as exemplars of the kind of self-sacrificial, inspirational action that elicits elevation. Indeed, at least one reviewer describes experiencing an emotional reaction of just this sort in response to the film’s final moments, calling it “uplifting to see damaged servicemen and –women heal through action, establishing activist organizations that offer services to fellow vets and raise awareness among the public” (Ellingson, par. 2).

An especially complex example of this process occurs in the film’s penultimate interview sequence, during which former Marine Sean Huze describes his refusal to absolve himself for his wartime transgressions. In still another static medium close up, accompanied by synthesizer music that is only slightly less melancholy than the music featured throughout much of the rest of the film, Huze states, “maybe I shouldn’t be let off the hook, you know? And maybe that’s not the point of this is for me to ever let myself off the hook. The point’s to be wiser, and to learn from it.” Though Huze doesn’t directly demonstrate the kind of philanthropic behaviour typically known to elicit elevation here, he nonetheless creates a strong sense of his exceptional moral fibre by indicating his unwillingness to pardon himself when several others would. His facial and vocalic choices, isolated and emphasized by the close framing and clear synch sound, play a large part in conveying this impression.

Huze pauses, looks slightly offscreen, shakes his head, and blinks his tear-filled eyes before initially suggesting that he should not be granted absolution, for instance, indicating the substantiality of his guilt and distress (and inviting a sympathetic response in the
process). He then immediately demonstrates his acceptance of and determination to live with this anguish, however, breaking out into a sheepish and resigned smile and nodding emphatically as he claims that he shouldn’t be “let off the hook,” in spite of his remorse. Huze subsequently fortifies this image of self-punishing determination as the sequence progresses, staring seriously towards the offscreen interviewer with an expression of solemn resolve, and emphasizing key words such as “ever” and “wiser” by way of upward pitch modulations. In this manner, he clearly indicates his refusal to indulge in the kind of self-serving confession that Sara Ahmed has labeled problematic.

Some declarations of shame, Ahmed points out, work primarily to “absolv[e] individuals of guilt” (101), functioning “as evidence of the restoration of an identity of which we can be proud (the fact that we are shamed by this past ‘shows’ that we are now good and caring subjects)” (109-110). Huze’s self-reproach, on the other hand, demonstrates a more compelling goodness, insofar as it refuses a simple reestablishment of such pride. Rather than acknowledging his former misdeeds as a means of suggesting how much he has changed, Huze underscores through his words and his paralinguistic and kinesic choices that he is interested in maintaining his self-directed pain because it is morally necessary and because it might enable him to become a better person in the future. As such, his confession takes on an unexpected, rather inspirational tone, becoming what Ahmed calls “an act of shame that is not only before others, but for others” (120). Consequently, this self-sacrificial admission invites viewers to experience elevation alongside the sympathy it arouses simultaneously (in combination with the relatively gloomy music). In fact, as Flo Leibowitz suggests of “scene[s] of loss” in women’s films, “the feeling of sorrow enhances the admiration” (222).
The significance of such appeals to elevation should not be underestimated, as this emotion – like sympathy, outrage and guilt – has been understood to encourage those experiencing it to engage in prosocial behavior. As Jonathan Haidt points out, elevation produces a “generalized desire to become a better person oneself and to follow the example of the moral exemplar. … It opens people up to new possibilities for action and thought” (“Moral Emotions” 864). As such, elevation contributes still another motivational charge to *The Ground Truth*’s persuasive project, provoking viewers to engage in self-sacrificial, altruistic behaviours similar to those endorsed by the affect-inducing individuals onscreen. The Huze interview, for instance, might inspire us to embrace, maintain and emphatically follow up on our own feelings of guilt, roused by the text itself minutes prior. More generally, the elevation-spurred desire to follow the example of the onscreen vets should make spectators more likely to participate in either of the two broad kinds of social action encouraged by the film, working in concert with sympathy and anger to urge viewers to speak out against the military establishment, and with sympathy and guilt to prompt individuals to seek out and help individual veterans.

By carefully marshalling this complex series of emotional reactions, then, *The Ground Truth* makes its challenge to viewers especially difficult to ignore. An initial mood of sympathy cues spectators to want to help the veterans onscreen, and subsequent alternations between appeals to sympathy and to anger give this desire additional force and direction. Towards the end of the film, isolated moments of strong guilt cuing sporadically interrupt the shifting blend of outrage and compassion, again enhancing the text’s motivational potency and helping to endorse a second specific kind of helping behaviour. The film then shifts emphatically to a mood of elevation in its final moments, constructing
yet another emotional charge that works congruently with the other affective appeals issued throughout the text. Finally, in *The Ground Truth*’s last interview, Foulkrod marshals appeals to all four of these emotions in rapid succession, thereby increasing the likelihood that each of these kinds of feeling will still be active to motivate action once the film is complete.\(^{34}\)

In this final interview, Camilo Mejia offers an apology to the people of Iraq and a message of hope to his fellow soldiers. His tear-filled eyes and laborious vocal delivery evoke a sense of sympathy for his suffering, while his meticulous enumeration of behaviours for which he is sorry cues spectators to feel guilty for their own participation in similar misdeeds. At the same time, Mejia’s mention of his prison time rekindles our anger toward the military establishment responsible for his unjust incarceration, while his stated willingness to endure “jail … disgrace or shame” in order to follow his conscience inspires a feeling of elevation. The film’s emotional cues outside of performance are also in full effect here, as a cutaway to a medium long shot of weeping veterans embracing one another enhances the call for sympathy, while the synthesizer underscoring modulates from the moderately haunting melody used to accompany Huze’s earlier admission of guilt to a more uplifting tune in a major key as Mejia completes his own inspirational message. By such means, Foulkrod ends the film on a particularly powerful note, potentially leaving many viewers in the throes of four complementary emotions known to motivate prosocial action. This final invitation to feel, along with the complex mixture of affective appeals throughout the film, should thus be seen as at least partially responsible for *The Ground Truth*’s oft-discussed political potency.

That said, however, the film’s emotional project is by no means guaranteed to succeed. As mentioned previously, the uncertainty and individuality of emotional response
mean that the pattern outlined above, though common, will not be universal. Nor will all spectators be so moved that they experience sufficient motivation to engage in tangible, real-world action once the film is complete. Perhaps more significantly, however, certain features of *The Ground Truth* may make some viewers especially likely to refuse its predominant emotional appeals and to respond with alternate affective reactions. These undesired responses, in turn, have the potential to motivate attitudes and behaviours drastically different from those endorsed by the film and its subjects.

In particular, the unaccented and forceful manner in which the film presents its pro-vet, anti-military case seems likely to encourage some viewers to experience anger and indignation directed at targets beyond those that the text suggests. As Jessica Reaves notes, *The Ground Truth* presents “an unmistakable anti-war agenda; no opposing views are given screen time, and each soldier [Foulkrod] profiles has, at the very least, serious doubts about the current war” (6). While this focused stance makes the film’s emotional appeals particularly compelling, it also sets the text up for condemnation from those inclined to disagree with its claims. Because – as Bill Nichols points out – the impossible ideal of documentary objectivity is still widespread, critics can easily dismiss partisan films such as *The Ground Truth* on the grounds that they are “bad journalism and therefore unworthy of our attention” (“What Current” 86). Perhaps more problematically, empirical studies have shown that the perception of media bias that runs counter to one’s personal beliefs predicts not simply dismissal of the text in question, but rather active anger towards it (Hwang et al. 87). This text-directed outrage – what Ed Tan would refer to as an “artefact emotion” (*Emotion* 65) – in turn makes it more likely that affected viewers will engage in action designed to redress the film’s perceived imbalance or to otherwise punish those responsible
for its making. As such, spectators who support the current Iraq conflict or the military administration in general should be angered by *The Ground Truth*’s one-sided presentation, and thus rendered likely to speak up against the text and/or to engage in activities that counter its ostensible political goals.

This outrage toward the text itself ought to be especially pronounced in spectators who take the film’s claims as a concerted personal attack. The uncompromisingly negative picture that the film and its performers paint of the military establishment, for instance, (exemplified by Massey’s discussion of his experiences with the VA psychiatrist), seems likely to prompt some armed services personnel to feel individually vilified and maligned. Likewise, many soldiers and vets will likely also find themselves slighted by Foulkrod and her subjects, since – as James Bowman puts it – “The more [the interviewees] complain about the unprecedented awfulness of their experiences, the more [Foulkrod] implies that those who quietly go on doing their duty without complaining or opposing the war must be either vicious or stupid” (par. 13).

When – near the film’s end – Chad Reiber proclaims, “There was … nothing honorable about what we did,” for example, he effectively accuses *all* soldiers of participating in disreputable wartime activities by his use of the first person plural pronoun. He then augments this charge as the segment continues, subtly denouncing not only his own actions, but also those of his fellow recruits through verbal and nonverbal choices. Again framed in a static medium close up, he states: “There was stuff that I did that was … or that I *saw …* that had nothing to do with being honourable.” Though – in and of itself – this claim implicates Reiber as much as it does those whose actions he only observed, the ex-Army Ranger nonetheless draws particular attention to the unsavoury acts of others by thrusting his
head forward (from its typical, backward-leaning position) and raising his pitch markedly as he utters the word ‘saw’. At the same time, his refusal to name these others specifically constructs a sense of the generality of evil within the American army, raising the possibility that any and all soldiers (with the exception of those – like himself – who actively repent for their actions) might be the absent, impenitent perpetrators of the mysterious and awful “things he saw.” Surely, some members of the armed forces will thus perceive this interview sequence as an indirect assault on them as individuals, and subsequently become incensed toward Reiber and the text in which he figures. Furthermore, given that the anger elicited by personal insult is widely associated with a desire “to strike out at, attack, or in some way get back at the anger source” (Nabi, “Discrete Emotions” 293), such spectators will also be especially likely to contest the film and its exhortations. In fact, given that many individuals thus affected are also likely to be bothered by the text’s strong anti-war bias, their opposition should be especially potent and active.

With all this in mind, it seems that The Ground Truth and its performances have the potential to promote two drastically different sets of emotional responses relatively reliably. By extension, the film also makes two conflicting patterns of subsequent real world action especially likely. Individuals already sympathetic to the film’s cause or not strongly connected to the parties criticized onscreen might experience the text’s preferred affective reactions, and thus leave the theatre motivated to join in the kinds of behaviour it endorses. Conversely, spectators holding alternate viewpoints might be moved to such anger towards the film and its participants that they feel bound to defend themselves and their opinions by speaking and/or acting out against the text and its claims. As such, while The Ground Truth may constitute a compelling catalyst for turning nascent anti-war feelings into active protest,
it also – as Chris Barsanti points out – misses the opportunity “to preach to the unconverted” (“Ground Truth” par. 5). The emotions it invites surely encourage many viewers “to do something instead of nothing in relation to the political situation illustrated on the screen” (Gaines 89), but the actions undertaken might not always be of the sort that Foulkrod hoped.

**An Emotional Lesson about the Power of Emotions – *Operation Filmmaker***

Like *The Ground Truth*, Nina Davenport’s *Operation Filmmaker* has a strong political reputation. Utilizing a combination of archive material, talking heads interviews, diary footage, and sequences caught ‘on the fly,’ the film documents the fallout from actor Liev Schreiber’s attempt to help an Iraqi youth whose film school was destroyed by American bombs; in so doing, many have suggested, it also constructs an evocative parable of the Iraq invasion itself. Mark Holcomb, for instance, notes that the film “slyly plumbs the motivations of indie Hollywood do-goodism for uncomfortable parallels to blinkered neocon nation-building” (par. 1). Likewise, Ty Burr contends, “‘Operation Filmmaker’ draws mordant parallels between what Davenport is doing to [her Iraqi subject] Mohmed and what America is doing to Iraq” (“Culture Clash” D10). Even amongst reviewers who pass over the film’s allegorical status or find its parallels somewhat forced, a sense of the text’s instructional capacity is rife. Nicolas Rapold, for example, claims that the film “goes beyond its Iraq hook to become something of an ethical case study with mix-and-match geopolitical and personal currents and standards” (22), while Cyril Pearl suggests that it offers “startling insight into the dangers of ‘do-gooderism’” more specifically (12).

Whereas *The Ground Truth* illustrates documentary’s capacity to motivate concrete socio-political actions, then, *Operation Filmmaker* points to a different kind of political work that nonfiction texts might perform. By underlining the untoward consequences of impulsive
altruism, the extent to which ostensibly upright actions might serve ulterior motives, and the necessity for thinking before acting, the film discourages viewers from engaging in the kind of emotion-driven behaviour upon which _The Ground Truth_ is built. These evocative lessons, however, fulfill a ideological function of their own, unsettling spectators’ understanding of specific events and of general principles of behaviour, and thus potentially altering our means of knowing and interacting with the world. Where _The Ground Truth_ attempts to impel action, that is, _Operation Filmmaker_ is “a film that lets you think” (Davenport, qtd. in Malik B3).

What has gone generally unacknowledged in the near unanimous recognition of _Operation Filmmaker_’s instructional force, however, is the fact that its compelling socio-political lessons are articulated and rendered potent largely through emotional means. Giving the lie to the facile emotion-reason binary commonly endorsed by neo-Brechtian critics, _Operation Filmmaker_ communicates its warning against emotion-based decision-making precisely by manipulating spectator affect. In this respect, the film provides compelling support for Carl Plantinga’s claim that “critical judgement of the sort Brecht recommends is not only compatible with an emotional response … but is also often implicated in it” (“Spectator Emotion” 150). Concomitantly, it again underlines the necessity of examining documentary affect, pointing out that the emotional reactions invited by documentaries and their performers can prompt shifts in audience values in addition to motivating viewers to act upon previously held beliefs.

Once again, the first step in understanding how the film carries out this complex emotional-political work is to consider the way in which it orients spectators and guides our expectations by creating a specific affective tone at its outset. Like _The Ground Truth_ in its
later sections, *Operation Filmmaker* invites viewers to experience a mixture of complementary emotions in its opening moments, rapidly stringing together appeals to sympathy, guilt and elevation even before the film’s title appears onscreen. Atop percussive music that immediately creates a sense of anticipation and uncertainty, an initial title card explains the film’s back-story. “One year after the invasion of Iraq,” it reads, “Muthana Mohmed, a 25-year-old Shi’ia film student from Baghdad, shared his dream of going to Hollywood, with an MTV audience of millions.” Beyond conveying necessary exposition, this introduction already begins to lay the foundation for sympathetic response, engaging viewers viscerally through its percussive musical accompaniment, and implicitly casting Mohmed (through its text) as an innocent bystander with dreams of escaping the unfortunate post-invasion circumstances in which he is entrapped.

This invitation to feel compassion for Mohmed is then immediately strengthened as the film cuts to footage from the initial MTV broadcast in which he appeared (marked as such by a rectangular matte around the small image and by the MTV logo at the its bottom right hand corner). The young Iraqi’s performance in a first sequence culled from this archive immediately confirms the sense that he is a blameless, engaging individual worthy of our sympathy. Filmed in a medium shot that tracks backwards with him as ambles confidently along a Baghdad street, Mohmed breaks into a broad and charming smile as he says, “I like, uh, Angelina Jolie because she has very, very beautiful lips” (See Figure 4.1). He then supplements this innocuous comment with a sheepish laugh and adds, “I wish to meet her some day”, confirming the sense that he is an amiable man with innocent, if immature, dreams and goals.40
Figure 4.1 - Mohmed suggests his charm and innocence in MTV archive footage

Soon after, additional moments from the MTV broadcast demonstrate strikingly the terrible situation that this genial individual has been forced to endure. A series of brief images of detonating explosives, fires, and decimated buildings create a striking visual reminder of the danger and destruction of the recent conflict in Baghdad, while the simultaneous inclusion of a voiceover in which Mohmed speaks about remaining in his hometown during the war asks us to connect these disturbing images to his individual plight. Finally, a cut to a medium shot of Mohmed seated in his home makes the sequence’s appeal to sympathy complete. “Just stayed at home,” he says, shaking his head and looking downward with an expression of sorrow that contrasts drastically with the endearing smile he displayed previously. He turns his hands upward in a gesture of resigned powerlessness as he continues, “Just, like, wait for, for, for death” and underlines this sense of impotence and vulnerability by looking up at the camera, flashing his eyebrows, and raising his pitch markedly as he speaks the final, most drastic word of this claim (See Figure 4.2). By such means, Mohmed’s re-presented performance choices from the MTV program help to convey
the distressing nature of his circumstances just as they previously pointed towards his affable and innocent personality. Along with a range of filmic cues such as editing (both of the initial broadcast and of Davenport’s condensed version) and music, then, they encourage viewers to respond to him with sympathy.

A second title card, however, marks the beginning of a slight shift in the film’s emotional orientation. This card, which explains that Schreiber fortuitously witnessed the MTV program and then elected to invite Mohmed to work on the set of Everything is Illuminated, begins to elicit feelings of elevation, implying that that the actor is a particularly admirable person who is going out of his way to help an individual in distress. A cut to a subsequent close up of Schreiber’s face cements this impression. As we hear Davenport’s offscreen voice asking him to recount the process by which he chose to contact Mohmed, the actor breaks into a slight smile that indicates the contentment he feels about making this magnanimous gesture while still remaining subtle enough to avoid appearing self-congratulatory. The atypical generosity of Schreiber’s act is then emphasized more fully by a
cut to a medium shot that immediately starts to zoom slowly in towards the actor’s face. The initial greater distance of this shot reveals cues that point toward Schreiber’s ostensible status as a stereotypical Hollywood celebrity; he lounges confidently on his chair, for example, and rests his hand casually on a coffee cup stationed on a nearby table upon which cigarettes and an ashtray have also been arranged. Once these markers of ‘film star nonchalance’ remind us of Schreiber’s relative privilege, however, the zoom in toward his face encourages us to focus on his complex interior life (Plantinga, “Scene of Empathy” 249) and particularly on his willingness to engage in acts of benevolence not commonly attributed to the Hollywood set of which he is a part. The facial expressions emphasized by this gradual zoom, along with simultaneous paralinguistic and musical cues, do much to underline this apparent beneficence (See Figure 4.3).

As he recounts the way in which the experience of viewing Mohmed’s hardships made him feel guilty for focusing on his own, far less pressing problems, for instance, Schreiber speaks in a resonant, rather melancholy voice and alternates between staring pensively downward and looking toward the camera with a sombre expression on his face. This kinesic and paralinguistic display of self-recriminating sorrow joins with the actor’s words in encouraging spectators to acknowledge his social conscience and to admire his willingness to follow up on it. As such, Schreiber’s performance here helps to prompt a feeling of elevation, which is simultaneously encouraged by the marked introduction of moderately paced, driving guitar music in a minor key. At the same time, Schreiber’s rather solemn revelation might also inspire many viewers to share his feelings of guilt, impelling them to recognize their own tendency to focus myopically on comparatively trivial problems.
Figure 4.3 - Performance and a zoom prompt us to look past Schreiber's surface image

Having thereby encouraged viewers’ sympathy, elevation and guilt, the pre-title sequence proceeds to amplify and sustain this multifaceted affective appeal by cycling rapidly amongst strong cues for each of these complementary emotions. An interview with *Everything Is Illuminated* producer Peter Saraf issues an emphatic invitation to guilt, for instance, as it cuts away from a medium close up of Saraf to an image from the MTV broadcast that pictures the bomb-charred Baghdad College of Fine Art. The producer’s voice, continuing in voiceover atop this disturbing image, incriminates viewers quite clearly. “We
bombed his school,” he says slowly and pointedly, implicating all Americans in the damage Mohmed must suffer by his use of the first person plural pronoun. Shortly thereafter, another sequence from the MTV program, in which Mohmed is shown at his destroyed editing station, invites sympathy in an equally insistent manner. As the image track cuts to a slightly low angle, profile medium shot of Mohmed looking down dejectedly at his defunct equipment, the sequence’s ongoing music stops abruptly, as if to alert us of the significance of what is to follow. Mohmed then sighs sadly and pauses before asking, “How can I learn?”, thereby reminding spectators of the way in which he has been deprived of opportunities many Westerners take for granted by no fault of his own. Finally, a vérité-like enacted sequence included just before the film’s title appears onscreen creates a strong appeal to elevation. A handheld medium shot shows Mohmed hugging Schreiber as they first meet at the Prague airport, and later turning excitedly toward the camera with a broad smile on his face as he exclaims, “Is it true?” Mohmed’s clear joy in this sequence suggests the rectitude of Schreiber’s gesture, while the latter’s ensuing offer to push Mohmed’s baggage cart creates a reminder of his down-to-earth, selfless personality. By thus soliciting elevation, this sequence joins with the earlier appeals to sympathy, elevation and guilt in motivating the film’s viewers, like Schreiber himself, to engage in social action that might help Iraqi civilians like Mohmed. Simultaneously, this set of complementary emotional reactions encourages us to expect and desire a happy, heartwarming outcome to the seemingly uplifting story unfolding onscreen.

Not long after this initial sequence, however, these expectations are sharply undercut, transforming the film rapidly into what John Powers calls “a comedy that would have been appreciated by Billy Wilder or Luis Bunuel” (transcribed in “John Powers…” 1). As the
central participants increasingly demonstrate the inaccuracies of our initial understanding of
the situation and its players, the film’s trenchant appeals to sympathy, guilt and elevation are
replaced by sporadic invitations to amusement, the mirthful emotional state that accompanies
the perception of humour. While several theories of comedy and laughter have been
advanced, two of the most well-known and commonly discussed means of eliciting mirth
seem especially relevant here. In the Poetics, Aristotle argues that comedy “consists in some
defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive” (9). Conversely, in The Critique of
Judgment, Immanuel Kant writes, “laughter is an affection arising from the sudden
transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (47). By constructing situations that
both thwart our initial expectations and teem with examples of mild ugliness, Operation
Filmmaker encourages audiences to overturn their initial, sombre affective responses and to
replace these with a feeling of broad, if somewhat rueful, mirth.

Throughout much of the section documenting Mohmed’s time on the Prague set of
Everything is Illuminated, for instance, Operation Filmmaker’s performers manifest a range
of petty flaws that might prompt viewers to reevaluate the initial sense that these individuals
merit our sympathy or admiration. As Peter Travers suggests, the behaviour of Schreiber,
Saraf and the other members of the American contingent is often redolent of “Hollywood at
its worst” (81), constructing a image of egotistical self-concern that belies the opening
sequence’s demonstration of their ostensible magnanimity. When Mohmed is taken to work
with Producer’s Assistant Wendy Finster, for example, her earnest breakdown of her tasks –
along with Mohmed’s bewildered response to it – illustrates the rather selfish and picayune
demands made habitually by producers such as Saraf. Filmed on the fly by Davenport’s
handheld camera, Finster moves about the trailer in which she and Mohmed are stationed,
blithely proclaiming the importance of what appear to be rather inconsequential details. She explains that she has just purchased the fresh tofu expected by one of the producers, for instance, captured in a tight close up that focuses attention on her relatively straight-faced, benignly pleasant expression and thus helps to suggest that her sense of this act’s significance is sincere (See Figure 4.4). “So, at lunch time,” she continues in a high pitched, sunny voice, “we’ll make sure that they have his [food],” underlining the supposed importance of this comparatively trivial task by extending the word ‘sure’ and raising her pitch for emphasis. A subsequent zoom outwards reveals Mohmed in close profile at the left of the shot, and thereby confirms the growing sense of the situation’s preposterousness by allowing us to observe the bemused and rather cynical smile spreading across his face as the PA continues. “What the fuck?” he asks incredulously following a cut to a shot taken outside the trailer, turning toward the camera with a look of amazed disbelief on his face before collapsing in dumbfounded laughter in response to this introduction to the true arrogance of his benefactors.45

Mohmed himself, however, often conveys an impression of rather immature entitlement that makes him seem – in Reed Tucker’s words – “as difficult as the worst Hollywood diva” (47). He becomes sullen and haughty when asked to make photocopies, for instance, pouting and whispering petty complaints to Davenport’s camera. Later, he effectively re-asserts a sense of his self-importance by acquiring a camera and shooting himself in close up, moving his head around and trying out different facial expressions in a manner that suggests he shares the vanity commonly attributed to Hollywood stars (See Figure 4.5). At such moments, Mohmed too helps to upend our expectations of a heartwarming, inspirational story by manifesting grotesque, but relatively harmless forms of
Figure 4.4 – Top: Finster merrily details the producers’ petty demands. Bottom: Mohmed responds incredulously to this introduction to Hollywood ego.

egotism. Like his American counterparts then, he does much to stimulate laughter and amusement in these early sections.

The laughter promoted by such moments is not merely idle. Rather, our amusement here serves several significant rhetorical functions. Perhaps most notably, the derisive mirth we experience at the expense of both Mohmed and his benefactors corroborates Glenn E. Weisfeld’s argument that amusement is instructive. Jokes, Weisfield points out, “often have a
butt, from whom we can learn to avoid missteps” (“Humor Appreciation” 1). In this case, our cynical pleasure at the unexpected conflict that emerges between Schreiber and Mohmed makes the dangers of idealizing people strikingly apparent, pointing out that no one person can be wholly sympathetic or admirable in actual fact. As a result, our mirth edifies us about the stupidity of rushing to action (as does Schreiber) based on romanticized generalizations and unconsidered emotions. At the same time, because the unmasking of the Hollywood contingent’s thorough self-absorption is one of the primary sources of our amusement, our
laughter in these early sections might also prompt us to consider the selfish, egotistical desires that can lurk behind even the most apparently benevolent gestures. In this respect, the humour engendered by performance here helps to reveal what Jane Gaines has called the “thoroughly contradictory” nature of social reality (“Producing” 46), making plain the contrast between stated (and perhaps even believed) goals and the self-serving motivations that finally underlie them.

These amusing lessons are particularly compelling because they follow immediately on the heels of earlier appeals to admiration and sympathy. This rapid, atypical reversal of viewers’ emotions not only works to distance us from the text in the manner that Brecht thought conducive to critical reflection, but also serves to prevent viewers from downplaying the significance of the amusing lessons being advanced. Robin L. Nabi and colleagues have illustrated that viewers often discount straightforwardly humourous texts as ‘mere’ jokes, “intended to entertain rather than inform” and thus finally irrelevant to serious judgments (33). Given that Operation Filmmaker’s instructive mirth is enmeshed within a text that also elicits earnest, non-playful emotions, however, this kind of discounting may be more difficult to accomplish. Furthermore, the process of inviting mirth subsequent to the evocation of sympathy, elevation and guilt also serves to make the warnings articulated through humour feel particularly relevant and acute. Just as Berys Gaut suggests that character identification can function “to show that the values and attitudes under attack are the audience’s own” (216), so too does the fact that viewers are initially encouraged to endorse Operation Filmmaker’s premise via sympathy and related emotional responses work “to drive [its] lesson home” (ibid). As a result, the film becomes not only funny, but also – as Rob Nelson puts it – “disconcertingly so” (71).
In addition to teaching a specific lesson by impelling us to laugh at individuals who previously earned our emotional support, the amusing moments that occur throughout the beginning of Operation Filmmaker might also work to enhance critical thinking more generally. As Rod A. Martin notes, a variety of empirical studies suggest that individuals “experiencing positive emotions (including comedy-induced mirth) … demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility, enabling them to engage in more creative problem solving; more efficient organization and integration of memory; [and] more effective thinking, planning, and judgment” (16). With this in mind, our experience of amusement at Operation Filmmaker’s outset should stimulate a relatively complex cognitive engagement with the text as a whole, prompting viewers to consider the actions and events onscreen from a variety of different angles, for instance, and enhancing their perceptions of the text’s allegorical and personal implications in the process.

This emotion-based encouragement of critical thinking is further enhanced as the text proceeds, as Operation Filmmaker – like The Ground Truth – continues to shift and add to its affective appeals as it unfolds. Whereas Foulkrod’s film successively layered complementary emotions atop one another in order to amplify its clear motivational push, however, Davenport instead continues to spur feelings that are at odds with one another and thus prompt critical rumination. In particular, as the flaws represented onscreen become more vicious and difficult to laugh off, the film begins to elicit a complex blend of anger and sympathy directed towards each of its major players. The inclusion of news footage detailing how Iraqis who have cooperated with Americans are being killed in Baghdad rekindles our sympathy for Mohmed, for instance, while simultaneously provoking anger toward the Americans who brought him into their fold without considering what would happen to him
when the film wrapped. At the same time, however, Mohmed’s tendency to indulge in rather devious scheming is itself maddening, and thus inspires some degree of compassion for the otherwise compromised Americans who must attempt to negotiate his machinations. In one enacted sequence, for example, Mohmed tells Saraf that he (Mohmed) cannot return to Iraq because he has received threats against his life. Framed in medium close up by Davenport’s handheld camera, Mohmed seems sincere and distraught as he makes this statement; his eyebrows are drawn upwards in a manner that indicates slight worry (Ekman and Friesen 177), for instance, and he speaks in a relatively slow and resonant voice indicative of sorrow. In combination with our memory of the earlier news broadcasts and of footage in which Mohmed’s family and friends are seen urging him not to return to Baghdad, these performance choices make the disquieting claim seem eminently plausible, and thus arouse our sympathy for this individual who is ensnared in a situation far more drastic than his minor flaws merit. Concurrently, Saraf’s less than effusive response suggests a refusal of compassion towards an individual he has helped to endanger, and thus seems likely to inspire several audience members’ anger. His suspicion and disbelief are palpable, coming through especially clearly in the atypical downward intonation he uses to ask the withering question, “how?”, and in the cold, impassive expression revealed on his face once Davenport cuts to it (See Figure 4.6). At the same time as it encourages our anger, however, Saraf’s rather hesitant reaction might also remind viewers of the previous moments in which we have seen Mohmed lie and scheme in order to secure what he calls a “temporary solution” to his problems. To the extent that some doubt is thus raised in our minds, we might also experience momentary feelings of outrage with Mohmed and sympathy for Saraf, insofar as it seems that the former is attempting to exploit the terrible situation in his country in order to
manipulate the latter into helping him. Taken together, then, the sequence evokes a set of simultaneous, antagonistic emotions that are difficult to reconcile.

Because this emotional ambivalence leaves us profoundly conflicted and uncertain, it drastically decreases our motivation to act in any clear and decisive fashion. As Andrew J. Weigert argues, “antithetical emotions would require antithetical actions that would block each other” (34); in this case, we cannot concurrently move to punish and to help either
Mohmed or Saraf, at least not in any simple or readily apparent fashion. Like amusement, however, mixed emotions fulfill functions outside of motivating behavior, working – in Carl Plantinga’s words – to “encourage reflection” (“Spectator Emotion” 150). Indeed, while the majority of experimental research examining emotional ambivalence has been dedicated to documenting the mere existence of mixed feelings, some recent studies note that the sense of atypicality accompanying this composite affective experience can foster creativity and stimulate complex thinking. Christina Ting Fong’s work, for instance, “indicate[s] that individuals who are feeling emotionally ambivalent demonstrate an increased sensitivity to associations … due to the fact that emotional ambivalence is interpreted as an unusual emotional experience” (1027).

With this in mind, the concurrent feelings of sympathy and anger we’re invited to feel for Operation Filmmaker’s subjects should awaken us to the complexity of the situation onscreen and encourage us to probe the text for what Fong calls “other unusual relationships” (1019). As a result, we’re more likely to note and attend to all sorts of instructive associations set up by the film, from its stated connection between Operation Iraqi Freedom and the ill-conceived gesture of the left wing liberals onscreen, to its implicit demonstration of the short distance between altruism and self-serving exploitation. Perhaps most importantly, this feeling of ambivalence impels viewers to consider the connections between the complicated situations represented in the text and our own everyday lives, prodding us to remember that our actions – like those of the individuals we’re observing – can have complex and often unexpected consequences and thus should not be entered into lightly.

Appeals to mixed sympathy and anger continue to encourage this kind of critical contemplation throughout much of the rest of the text, with Davenport herself stepping in as
Mohmed’s simultaneous benefactor, exploiter, and victim once Schreiber and Saraf flee the scene. The director repeatedly appears onscreen and/or figures as an offscreen voice as she continues to film Mohmed after shooting on *Everything is Illuminated* has wrapped, and she reveals herself to be just as contradictory and unsettling as her subjects in the process. In one sequence, for instance, Davenport edits together a string of arguments between herself and Mohmed recorded on the fly in Prague shortly after she has helped him apply for a US visa. Throughout these brief clips, her dogged willingness to stick with her subject in spite of his increasingly exasperating and confrontational behaviour serves to solicit our sympathy, casting her as yet another generally good person stuck in a bad situation (See Figure 4.7).

At the same time however, both she and Mohmed make a number of performance choices that also point towards her ulterior motives and thereby provoke indignation with her as well. As the sequence comes to an end, for example, Davenport invites our anger by revealing the way in which she too might be willing to abandon this displaced Iraqi when he no longer serves her selfish goals. Speaking from offscreen atop a medium shot of Mohmed
sitting listlessly in a hotel chair, she says harshly, “I’m going to have to move on to another film at some point,” cuing us to attribute her involvement with Mohmed at least partially to a desire to finish her movie and advance her career. Mohmed himself then renders the growing sense that Davenport is using him (consciously or not) explicit, looking offscreen toward the director and asking witheringly, “What’s your next [film]… a guy from Afghanistan?”

Finally, then, these sequences featuring increasingly messy exchanges between Davenport and her subject help to sustain and augment *Operation Filmmaker*’s appeal to contradictory, mixed emotions throughout its middle and later portions. They thereby also help to promote critical reflection long after the film’s initial conflict has played out.

Moments of strongly cued, unipolar amusement also interrupt the ongoing ambivalent mood from time to time, however, amplifying the film’s instructional capacity in the process. As we witness new characters such as Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson and Alberto Bonilla (an admissions officer at the New York School of Film and Television) rush to ‘save’ Mohmed as rashly and emotionally as did Schreiber and Davenport before them, for example, our awareness of the way in which such decisions are bound to fail forces us to focus on these new subjects’ mild defects and thus prompts laughter at their expense. Bonilla’s reaction to the MTV footage that initially encouraged our own sympathy for Mohmed provides a useful case in point. Framed in a medium close up as he gazes offscreen towards the TV, Bonilla assumes the facial expression prototypically associated with sadness (See Figure 4.8), suggesting that he too is moving towards the kind of ill-considered emotional decision that we’ve seen go so terribly wrong over the course of the film. “I know him,” he later claims emphatically, narrowing his eyes and moving his hand to his heart as he adds, “here.” Given our own intimate experience with Mohmed’s considerable complexity, this categorical
assertion of confidence can only seem dubious and shortsighted, thus prompting us to laugh at this rather presumptuous and easily manipulated individual.

On the one hand, such appeals to amusement augment *Operation Filmmaker*’s ongoing critical project by again capitalizing on laughter’s potential to teach lessons and to stimulate creativity. Moments such as Bonilla’s response to the MTV program articulate the text’s warning about the dangers of uninformed emotional behaviour especially forcefully, in fact, insofar as they ask us to laugh at someone whose actions mirror our own earlier responses rather precisely. While we laugh at Bonilla for his myopically sympathetic reaction and consider the cultural blindness and personal motives that might underlie this response, we might simultaneously be prompted to remember that we too responded with sympathy to the exact text that Bonilla is watching. We are thus implicated unmistakably in our own laughter, and encouraged to make a long-term shift in our behavioral tendencies in order to avoid the ridiculousness to which we have come so close.⁵²
Perhaps more importantly, however, *Operation Filmmaker*’s later appeals to
amusement also serve to increase the efficacy of the moments of emotional ambivalence that
surround them. Several scholars have noted that incompatible mixed feelings tend to be
somewhat disconcerting to the person experiencing them.\(^5\) While this unsettling sensation is
itself productive of critical reflection, it can also become distressing enough that individuals
are motivated to resolve their feelings of ambivalence in order to reestablish a sense of
personal consistency. Jiewen Hong notes that this desire to reduce the discomfort that
attaches to the experience of apparently incompatible emotions can ultimately undo or
override the broadening work that might otherwise be triggered by ambivalence, for example,
prompting people to “narrow their scope of consideration” (39). Ultimately, this contraction
of cognitive focus should result in a reevaluation of events and goals that would allow the
conflicted individual to downplay or reject one of his/her contradictory feelings, and thus to
achieve a more singular, coherent affective state. The disconcerting emotions might also be
abandoned entirely, in favour of an alternate, unipolar affective response (such as anger
toward the text that is eliciting such disharmonious feelings).\(^5\) In order for the complex
situations represented in *Operation Filmmaker* to continue to elicit mixed emotions in a
productive, thought-provoking fashion, then, the distressing properties of affective
ambivalence need to be somehow addressed or contained.

The evocation of amusement provides a workable solution to this problem. As
Barbara Fredrickson and her colleagues have demonstrated, positive emotions such as mirth
“serve as particularly efficient antidotes for the lingering effects of negative emotions, which
narrow individuals’ thought-action repertoires” (“Undoing” 239).\(^5\) Amusement, that is, has a
powerful “undoing effect” (ibid 237). With this in mind, the laughter produced sporadically
throughout *Operation Filmmaker* might at least partially alleviate the distress that builds up across the film as a result of the ongoing conflict between sympathy and anger, thereby preventing viewers from ‘correcting,’ ignoring, or otherwise simplifying our ambivalent feelings when they arise. In this respect, *Operation Filmmaker*’s later moments of mirth not only encourage reflection in and of themselves, but also allow the film’s repeated evocations of ambivalence to stimulate similar cognitive processes more effectively.

By alternating – in its middle and later sections – between moments that spur incompatible feelings of sympathy and anger and moments that elicit amusement, then, *Operation Filmmaker* encourages viewers to remain in a state of constant critical engagement. In Greg M. Smith’s terms, the film repeatedly cues feelings of intense ambivalence, which then persists as a mood until it is punctured by moments of strongly felt mirth. This amusement then itself decays and is eventually replaced when clear calls for contradictory kinds of anger and sympathy again invite ambivalence. In fact, this cycle continues right up to the film’s final title cards, which provide a rapid-fire version of this emotion-cuing process and thus send spectators out of the theatre still engaged in the kind of critical rumination it promotes.

These last cards, which note that Davenport helped Mohmed get an extension on his visa after filming wrapped, only to abandon him in the face of his “escalating demands,” once more inspire considerable emotional ambivalence. On the one hand, the text, along with the slow, melancholy music that accompanies it, seems to encourage our sympathy for both Mohmed and Davenport, pointing equally to Mohmed’s final abandonment by his ‘saviours’ and to his execrable manipulation of them. These same factors, however, also encourage our ongoing anger towards each of the parties, prodding us to deplore Davenport for her cruel
unwillingness to assume final responsibility for a situation she helped to create and to simultaneously condemn Mohmed for alienating and mistreating people through emotional blackmail. Subsequently, the final title card asks us to experience mild amusement one last time, providing an example of the unexpected shifts in language generally thought to underlie wit (Eastman 54). “I had hoped for a happy ending…” the card begins, holding for a full three seconds that build up anticipation for what will come after this ellipsis. The punch line then finally appears at the bottom of the screen, reading, “now I’m just looking for an exit strategy.” Inasmuch as it upends our expectations by cleverly shifting the focus from Mohmed and Davenport to the parallels between their situation and the Iraq quagmire more generally, this final card might impel wry laughter. While it may be – as Karina Longworth suggests – “an easy joke” (par.10), it nonetheless has the potential to reduce the distress that accompanies the mixed feelings just evoked, and thus to encourage viewers to continue pondering the film’s productive and unexpected associations even after the lights come up.

Of course, viewers needn’t necessarily respond to the complex emotion cues that Operation Filmmaker mobilizes up to this final frame in the manner I’ve outlined here. Given that studies have shown that some people find emotional ambivalence especially distressing,\(^{56}\) for instance, it seems reasonable to expect that the sporadic amusement elicited by the film might not be sufficient to prevent all viewers from regulating their emotions in order to reduce the feelings of dissonance that ambivalence creates. Likewise, other research demonstrates that people are slightly more likely to sympathize with individuals with whom they believe they have something in common, ranging from gender or ethnicity to beliefs or personality traits.\(^{57}\) With this in mind, an array of personal factors might intervene to make individual viewers more or less sympathetic to any one of the film’s characters, potentially
upsetting the delicate balance between anger and sympathy upon which much of the film’s
critical potential rests. Indeed, while many reviews suggest that their authors experienced the
contradictory and shifting emotions that the film seems designed to provoke, a few imply
more straightforward affective responses indicative of a complete withholding of sympathy
for one or more of the film’s subjects. To the extent that this is true, individuals in the latter
group will be more motivated to castigate and/or otherwise punish the individual who is the
object of their comparatively unmitigated anger than they are to step back and consider the
implications of the text as a whole.

In many cases, however, Operation Filmmaker seems to successfully kindle
contradictory affective responses that initiate analytical consideration of the events onscreen
and thereby facilitate learning. In this respect, the film corroborates Brecht’s widely
overlooked claim that a socially responsible text “need not by any means be an ‘unfeeling’
creation, or one which leaves the spectator’s feelings out of account” (101). Indeed, just as
The Ground Truth’s capacity to stimulate protest and helping behavior is contingent upon the
affective reactions it arouses, so too is emotion at least partially responsible for Operation
Filmmaker’s status as a “thought-provoking” film (Dunne 1) that “shakes audiences up”
(Davenport, qtd. in Nott 66) and “provoke[s] animated discussions” (Cockrell 1). While the
film ultimately discourages the kind of uncritical, emotionally-driven behaviour advocated
by The Ground Truth, then, it nonetheless complements Foulkrod’s film by demonstrating
the way in which documentary affect might support another kind of ideological project.

Conclusion

As Bill Nichols’ reminds us, the political efficacy of the recent wave of left wing
documentaries is by no means certain. Operation Filmmaker and The Ground Truth,
however, suggest that many of these contemporary nonfiction texts may indeed effectuate some form of social change by virtue of the way in which they invite and orchestrate spectator emotion. Countering the common line of thinking that suggests that anti-war documentaries must eschew the emotion they have the capacity to produce, these films finally “pass [their] political test” – as Jane Gaines has argued of other nonfiction texts – “not in spite of but because of [their] emotional appeals” (“Documentary Radicality” 8). In particular, *The Ground Truth* demonstrates that the elicitation of congruent, clearly focused feelings can be an especially effective way of motivating viewers who already share the viewpoint espoused by the film to act on their existing attitudes, viscerally shaking them from detached complacency to radical protest. *Operation Filmmaker*, on the other hand, encourages contradictory, shifting affective reactions as a means of destabilizing previously held beliefs and behavioural tendencies, and thereby corroborates Carl Plantinga’s claim that “our emotional experience at the movies may affect our ways of thinking” on a long term basis (“Spectator Emotion” 158). Performance, as we have seen, plays a central role in cuing emotional responses in both films, and thus participates in carrying out each of these politically loaded functions. As the third major function of the nonfiction subject’s work, then, the capacity to educe spectator emotion might also be seen in part as the capacity to influence spectator behaviour and thought.

This is not to suggest, however, that all documentaries that mobilize affect will perform radical political work, nor even that the specific emotions engendered by these two texts will always constitute valuable persuasive tools. Marlene K. Sokolon reminds us that “all emotions [have the potential] to facilitate both positive and negative social behaviour” (“Feelings” 171). While our anger might lead us to action designed to remedy injustices, it
may also spur vengeful action that is itself unjust; while our compassion might motivate us to help those in distress, it can also provide us with a means to feel good about ourselves while ultimately ignoring others’ anguish. Furthermore, as the drastically different brands of anger that *The Ground Truth* will evoke in alternate viewers suggest, the persuasive efficacy of any documentary-induced emotion is contingent upon the way in which it is framed and directed by the text itself. *Standard Operating Procedure* (USA, 2008), for instance – Errol Morris’s film about the Abu Ghraib tortures – might elicit such anger and disgust toward the perpetrators seen onscreen that its final message about the necessity of assigning ultimate responsibility to higher political powers will go largely unheeded. Nonetheless, the examples offered by *Operation Filmmaker* and *The Ground Truth* suggest that the emotion activated in part by documentary performers can help to effect social change in some cases and contexts. As a result, like Randolph Lewis, “I remain cautiously hopeful about the political potential of the form” (“no title” 83).

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1 The film actor’s ability to evoke audience emotions was first discussed by Hugo Munsterberg in *The Photoplay: a Psychological Study* and Sergei Eisenstein in “The Montage of Film Attractions”. Since then, it has been returned to relatively frequently by film and media scholars, including: Coplan (“Catching”); Gaut; McDonald; Plantinga (“Scene of Empathy”); Prince; G. Smith; M. Smith (*Engaging Characters*); von Moltke; etc. Linda Williams also moves toward this point (without focusing on the actor specifically) in her discussion of ‘body’ genres such as horror, pornography and melodrama (144). Within the psychological literature devoted to affect in everyday contexts, countless researchers have documented the way in which communicative performance choices help to evoke affective reactions from observers and/or interaction partners (though many don’t take the performer as their explicit/central focus). See, for example: Bachorowski and Owren; Bavelas et al. (“Motor Mimicry”); Bavelas et al. (“Experimental Methods”); Blairy, Herrera and Hess; Bourgeois and Hess; Brown, Bradley and Lang; Bucy; Bucy and Bradley; Carlo et al.; Carr et al.; Coleman and Wu; Dimberg (“Facial Reactions”); Dimberg and Ohman; Dimberg and Thunberg; Dimberg, Thunberg and Elmehe; Eisenberg et al. (“Differentiation”); Eisenberg et al. (“Relation of Sympathy”); Eisenberg et al. (“Sympathy and Personal Distress”); Fabes, Eisenberg and Eisenbud; Goubert et al.; Gross and Levenson; Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson; Hendriks and Vingerhoets; Hemenover and Schimmack; Hess and Blairy; Hess, Philippot and Blairy; Hewig et al.; Hietanen, Surakka and Linnankoski; Hoffman (“Contribution of empathy”); Keltner, Young and Buswell; Kunzmann and Grühn; Lanzetta and Englis; Leary (*Self-Presentation*); Lishner, Cooter and Zald; Miller et al.; Magnée et al.; McHugo, Lanzetta and Bush; McHugo and Smith; Moody et al.; Neumann and Strack; Palomba et al.; Philippot; Roberts, Tsai and Coan; Rottenberg, Ray and Gross;
Sato and Yoshikawa; Sonnby-Borgström, Jönsson and Svensson; Strayer and Schroeder; Sullivan; Sullivan and Masters; Tsai, Levenson and Cartensen; Vrana and Gross; and Yoshikawa and Sato. Interestingly, many of these psychological studies utilize film clips to test subjects’ emotional responsivity to performance choices. In the process, they therefore also provide empirical support for the argument that screen performances reliably promote emotional reactions from spectators.

Many examples of this affective turn in cinema studies will be referred to in the pages that follow. Other key texts include: Carroll (“Paradox of Horror”; “Film Emotion and Genre”); Grodal; Tan (“Film-induced”); and several pieces in Anderson and Anderson; Carroll and Choi; and Plantinga and Smith that are not specifically cited here. As this list suggests, the recent wave of scholarship devoted to film emotion is largely of a cognitivist ilk. Moving away from the vague, often pathologized concepts of desire and pleasure commonly discussed by psychoanalytic film theorists in the 1970s and ‘80s, many film scholars have recently embraced the empirical work of cognitive psychologists as a means of teasing out the ways in which representational texts solicit specific affective responses not unlike those we experience in the course of everyday interactions. As Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith put it, “The cognitive approach stresses the continuities between typical emotions and those experienced in relation to fictions, and this makes available the broad range of psychological research concerning how emotions function” (“Introduction” 7). Interestingly, the application of this psychological research has also led some cognitivist film scholars (e.g. Coplan [“Catching”]; Gaut; Plantinga [“Scene of Empathy”]; M. Smith [Engaging Characters]) to pay slightly more attention to the film performer, prompting them to consider the extent to which facial expressions, for instance, evoke emotions in observers at the cinema as they do in everyday life. In these respects, the cognitivist project is closely tied to my own; like cognitive film scholars, I emphasize the ties between quotidian exchanges and our responses to representational works, and thus draw extensively on empirical work conducted by psychologists and sociologists to illuminate some of the ways in which filmic texts might work on their spectators. The ways in which screen performers, like their everyday counterparts, influence and affect viewers is, of course, my central focus. As such, the cognitive work on filmic affect provides an extensive body of research congruent to my own approach from which I will draw heavily in this chapter. At the same time, however, I also seek to add to and extend this body of scholarship, both by focusing on performance in greater detail, and by attending to the nonfiction realm that cognitive scholars have all but overlooked.

The only exceptions to this general rule that I have come across are Barratt’s, Hawkins’ and Rutherford’s brief articles which make preliminary attempts at theorizing documentary affect, and Fleischmann’s, Gaines’ (“Documentary Radicality”; “Political Mimesis”; “Production”) and Marchessault’s demonstrations of the way in which embodied, affective reactions might serve nonfiction filmmakers’ political ends. Bill Nichols also makes some brief comments about the way in which emotional appeals figure within documentary persuasion in Representing Reality (135-136, 156-160), while E. Ann Kaplan includes a few nonfiction films amongst her varied objects of emotion-centered analysis in Trauma Culture.

See, for example: Bagozzi and Moore; Baron et al.; Brader; Brîñol, Petty and Barden; Buck et al.; Chang; DeSteno et al.; Dillard and Meijnders; Dillard and Nabi; Dillard and Peck; Forgas; Frijda, Manstead and Bem (Emotions and Beliefs); Henderson; Hoffman (“Contribution of empathy”); Kingston and Ferry; Nabi (“Anger, Fear…”); Nabi (“Feeling Resistance”); Niedenthal and Showers; Peters, Lipkus and Diefenbach; Petty, Fabrigar and Wegener; Petty, Gleicher and Baker; Redlawsk; Rosselli, Skelly and Mackie; Rucker and Petty; Schwarz; Schwarz and Bless; Sullivan and Masters; Westen.
Studies and articles demonstrating emotion’s motivational capacity include: Brader; Eisenberg, Losoya and Spinrad; Frijda; Frijda, Manstead and Bem (Emotions and Beliefs); Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (“Introduction”); Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (“Return”); Haidt (“Moral Emotions”); Jasper; Juris; Kingston and Ferry; S. Nichols; Peters, Lipkus and Diefenbach; Tomkins (“Affect Theory”); Tomkins (Affect, Imagery, Consciousness); and Virchow.

In addition to the Gaines, Fleischmann, Marchessault, Nichols and Kaplan pieces cited above, see also a series of articles by R. Lance Holbert and his colleagues, which detail empirical studies demonstrating the political effects of the emotions aroused by Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11. (Holbert and Hanson [“Fahrenheit 9-11”], Holbert and Hanson [“Stepping Beyond”], Holbert et al. [“An Analysis”], Holbert et al. [“Presidential Debate Viewing”]).

Drake Stutesman likewise notes that “A mini ‘Iraq doc’ industry has emerged in the last few years” (7), while Charles Musser discusses many examples of this ‘industry’s’ vast output, and attempts to organize it into distinct phases.

These two specific films have been selected from the mass of emotion-laden Iraq documentaries for a variety of additional reasons. First of all, they have rather different goals, lending credence to Aufderheide’s claim that some Iraq documentaries “have been designed to enlighten and inform, others to mobilize” (57). (Operation Filmmaker is an example of the first grouping, while The Ground Truth represents the latter.) The films likewise make use of two drastically different sets of emotional appeals in order to achieve these divergent ends, and thus begin to indicate the diversity of ways in which emotion might function in current radical nonfiction practice. Finally, unlike films such as Fahrenheit 9/11, neither text has received much in the way of scholarly attention. Gaines (“Production”) and Musser overlook both films, for example, while Aufderheide makes only the briefest mention of The Ground Truth in her discussion of Iraq documentaries. My treatment of the films here, then, is also an attempt to initiate scholarly discussion and debate of two interesting and under-discussed recent texts.

Additional stories of the film’s use within activist and community events can be found in “Focus, AOL seek ‘Truth’”, “Iraq War vets to discuss movie”, “Veterans documentary to debut”, McNary, and C. Michaels.

Other reviewers who point toward the film’s potential to motivate behaviour include: Antani; J. Anderson; Baumgarten; Fauth; Schager; Stamets; Verniere; etc.

Whereas Gaines emphasizes the affective force of “aesthetic supplements” such as music and “tour de force cutting”, however, my central focus will be on the emotion-educing capacity of the performers that she largely overlooks (“Political Mimesis” 99).

See Barratt, for example. Several psychological studies also use nonfiction films to elicit emotion, suggesting that their claims about everyday emotion are clearly relevant to the documentary context (e.g. Bavelas et al. (“Experimental Methods”); Codispoti, Surcinelli and Baldaro; Gomez et al.; Haidt et al. (cited in Haidt “Positive Emotion”); Holmes, Brewin and Hennessy; Kunzmann and Grühn;
Nabi (“‘Feeling’ Resistance”); Palomba et al.; and Strayer and Schroeder.) Marchessault also points toward the connections between everyday emotion and its documentary counterpart when she writes, “we do distinguish between films that are based on something that happened and those based on something that did not. Clearly, our emotional response differs in the two instances” (221).

14 In addition to the abovementioned distinctions between the arousal of emotion in quotidian and documentary settings, for example, one might note that the darkened space of the movie theatre has the potential to relax the grip of everyday “feeling rules” just as it does when we view fiction films (Wiley 175). Likewise, the physical absence of the emotion-provoking stimulus during documentary viewing may make that stimulus somewhat easier to ignore than its real world counterpart (although it should be noted that we frequently respond to elicitors that are not physically before us in our day to day dealings as well). Some of the other differences that Wiley and Frome suggest distinguish everyday emotions and those triggered by fictional films might also be relevant here.

15 As both Greg M. Smith and Jonathan Frome point out, emotion can be aroused by nonprototypical means in everyday life as well (e.g. a rainy day cues us to experience sadness). That said, I refer here to specifically filmic cues that might impel emotion without reference to archetypal elicitors (e.g. fast-paced, rhythmic editing produces a visceral feeling of excitement and anticipation.)

16 Here, I use the term ‘sympathy’ in a relatively precise fashion. While many scholars conflate sympathy and empathy or subsume the former under the general umbrella of empathetic response (see, for instance, Goubert et al.; Hoffman (“Contribution of Empathy); Hoffman (“Empathy”); Plantinga (“Scene of Empathy”); Preston and DeWaal; Strayer and Schroeder; Tan (Emotion); Zillman (“Empathy”); etc.) I follow Nancy Eisenberg in distinguishing between the two related terms as follows:

*Empathy* can be defined as an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition, and which is identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel. … *Sympathy* is defined as an affective response that frequently stems from empathy (but can derive directly from perspective taking or other cognitive processing), and consists of feelings of sorrow or concern for the distressed or needy other (rather than the same emotion as the other person) (“Prosocial Behavior” 254).

While empathy and sympathy are closely related emotional phenomena, then, they are nonetheless distinct and needn’t co-occur. See also: Coplan (“Empathic Engagement”); Eder; Eisenberg (“Empathy and Sympathy”); Eisenberg, Losoya and Spinrad; Eisenberg and Miller; Eisenberg et al. (“Differentiation”); Gruen and Mendelsohn; Miller et al.; Nabi (“Discrete Emotions”); Neill. Without using the terms sympathy and empathy specifically, Munsterberg also drew a similar distinction between ‘feeling with’ and ‘feeling for’ in his discussion of the emotions we experience in relation to film characters.

17 A range of scholars corroborate this sense of the necessary conditions for eliciting sympathy, though many of them utilize other terms to refer to the emotional reaction under consideration. For example, Marlene K. Sokolon suggests that Aristotle defined pity as a distressed response to the undeserved suffering of others (Political Emotions 144). Others note that all affective reactions that constitute congruent responses to the situation of another – of which sympathy as defined here would be one kind – are dependent upon (or made more likely by) a positive evaluation of the individual in question. See, for example: Batson et al. (“An Additional Antecedent”); Konijn and Hoorn; M. Smith
(Engaging Characters); Tan (Emotion); Zillman (“Empathy”); Zillman (“Mechanisms”); and Zillman, Taylor and Lewis. While other scholars imply that the suffering of others is itself enough to inspire sympathy, (e.g. Batson, Fultz and Schoenrade; Nabi (“Discrete Emotions”); Haidt (“Moral Emotions”)), this seems less convincing, especially given the relatively common experience of schadenfreude.

Of course, the process of determining whether or not an individual deserves one’s sympathy involves a value judgment, which will often reflect dominant standards of morality; people who don’t conform to current norms of identity and behaviour can be easily disregarded as unworthy of sympathetic response. In this respect, as Lauren Berlant points out, “compassion can as easily provide an alibi for an ethical or political betrayal as it can initiate a circuit of practical relief” (“Introduction” 11). While sympathy can help motivate socio-political change in some cases, then, it is certainly not an inherently progressive phenomenon.

Noel’s voiceover here clearly frames the stills provided on the image track, encouraging us to view these images specifically as examples of the terrors that American soldiers have been forced to perpetrate and endure. While this process prevents the images from evoking the sort of fleeting, decontextualized emotion that E. Ann Kaplan describes as “empty empathy” (93-100) and allows them to participate in the film’s ongoing evocation of sympathy for Noel and his fellow soldiers, it also has the ethically questionable effect of directing our immediate emotional responses away from the Iraqi citizens shown. As Michael Atkinson notes, “Iraqis, butchered in their homes by the tens of thousands, would surely prefer depression and weeping in their wives’ arms at night to having their families and neighborhoods annihilated” (par.1). This more compelling suffering is glossed over, however, in the service of focusing our compassion squarely towards American veterans.

Other reviews which recount or point toward a sympathetic reaction include “Shocking Violence in Iraq . . .”; Antani; Baumgarten; Clifford; Douglas; Greenberg; Holden; Klein; Proyect (“The Ground Truth”); Puig; Rose; Szymanski; Thomson; Turan; Whipp; and, to a certain extent, Denby and LaSalle. Even some reviewers with negative opinions of the film as a whole concede its sympathetic appeal. Kyle Smith, for instance, describes The Ground Truth’s interviews “wrenching” and alludes to its “many poignant moments” in spite of criticizing its one-sided anti-war position. (53).

Though Haidt uses the term ‘compassion’, rather than ‘sympathy’, the emotion being described is the same. Indeed, some of the evidence he uses to support his claims is drawn from research devoted to sympathy, specifically.

See, for instance, Carlo et al.; Coplan (“Empathic Engagement”); Eisenberg (“Empathy and Sympathy”); Eisenberg (“Prosocial Behavior”); Eisenberg and Miller; Eisenberg et al. (“Relation of Sympathy”); Eisenberg, Losoya and Spinrad; Fabes, Eisenberg and Eisenbud; Haidt (“Moral Emotions”); Henderson; Hoffman (“Contribution of empathy”); Iyer, Leach and Crosby; Jasper; Miller et al.; S. Nichols (though he prefers the term affective ‘concern mechanism’). Many studies that demonstrate the way in which empathy encourages helping are also relevant here, insofar as they utilize the term ‘empathy’ in a broad fashion that includes sympathy as I am defining it. See: Bagozzi and Moore; Batson et al. (“An Additional Antecedent”); Batson et al. (“Information Function”); Batson, Fultz and Schoenrade; Bengtsson; Blader and Tyler; Gault and Sabini; Goubert et al.; Hoffman (“Empathy”); Pagano and Huo; Preston and DeWaal; Strayer and Schroeder; Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek; etc.
This is Brecht’s understanding of the effects of unchecked empathetic spectatorship, for example, and one that has been endorsed by several subsequent scholars and is now often taken as a given. In *Ugly Feelings*, for example, Siân Ngai differentiates emotions such as envy and irritation from pity in part because these “ugly” affects offer no “therapeutic or purifying release” (6). See also: Heath.

Perhaps most famously, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing translated catharsis as “purification” and argued that it “consists in nothing else than the transformation of passions into virtuous habits” (122). “Tragic pity,” Lessing continued, “must not only purify the soul of him who has too much pity, but also of him who has too little” (ibid). By this argument, the experience of feeling pity or compassion in response to cultural texts needn’t necessarily diminish the spectator’s passions in the world outside the theatre; it might also augment them. In any case, Lessing understood the experience of theatrical emotion to have a positive, palpable effect on subsequent real-world behaviour. For a summary of some of the competing uses of ‘catharsis’, see Carlson (*Theories*), pp17-19.

Lauren Berlant makes this argument especially forcefully, claiming that sentimental texts promote a process wherein “the ethical imperative toward social transformation is replaced by a civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy” (“Poor Eliza” 641). Others that endorse the notion that sympathy might “become an end in itself and thwart action” (Woodward 70) include Bradshaw; Oliver; Mills; Ngai (though she mentions this issue only briefly); Spelman (qtd. in Woodward) and Zembylas. E. Ann Kaplan also notes that the empathy evoked by cultural texts might be easily forgotten and thus “empty” if the images producing emotion “are provided without any context or background knowledge” (93) – See note 19.

Aristotle (qtd. in Sokoln Political Emotions) also endorses this eliciting pattern for indignant anger, as do: Fischer and Roseman; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (“Introduction”); Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (“Return”); Hoffman (“Contribution of empathy”); Hoffman (“Empathy”); Jasper and Poulson; Nabi (“Discrete Emotions”); Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek; etc. Rozin et al. also note that anger is triggered by an evaluation of responsibility for an affront, but suggest that it follows perceived violations of autonomy specifically.

See Alter and Grady, for instance. C. Michaels also recounts the fury expressed by a spectator at a screening organized by Military Families for Peace. Others, such as Fauth, Gonzalez, and Schager respond to the film in relatively outraged terms without explicitly describing their reactions as such. Fauth, for instance, writes “In the current Iraq War, … home front support seems to begin and end with yellow car magnets. Lied to by their recruiters, turned into killers by their drill sergeants, sent into impossible situations by their superiors, and tossed aside by their government, these soldiers’ stories deserve to be told and heard” (par.3).

Indeed, even scholars who do discuss documentary emotion tend to either treat affect as a broad, undifferentiated state (e.g. Hawkins, Rutherford), or to focus on one specific feeling such as indignation (Gaines [“Production”]), empathy (Kaplan) or sympathy (Marchessault).

Work outlining anger’s potential to motivate punitive social action includes: Fischer and Manstead; Fischer and Roseman; Gault and Sabini; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (“Return”); Gordijn et al.; Hoffman (“Contribution of empathy”); Hwang et al.; Iyer, Schmader and Lickel; Jasper; Jasper and Poulson; Leach, Iyer and Pedersen; Nabi (“Discrete Emotions”); Pagano and Huo; Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek; Vanderford.
In this respect, guilt is also distinguishable from shame, which “involves a global negative evaluation of the self: the person, as he or she is”, rather than a focus on a particular transgressive behaviour (Tangney et al., “Are Shame and Guilt Related” 257). For more on guilt and its arousal, see: Baumeister, Stillwell and Heatherton (“Personal Narratives”); Baumeister, Stillwell and Heatherton (“Guilt”); Dillard and Nabi; Doosje et al.; Keltner and Buswell; M. Lewis; Lickel et al.; Hoffman (“Contribution of empathy”); Miceli; Tangney; Tangney and Dearing; Tangney et al. (“Are Shame, Guilt and Embarrassment Distinct”); Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek; Vangelisti, Daly and Rudnick, etc.

The motivating potential of guilt has been widely recognized and corroborated. Amongst others, Baumeister, Stillwell and Heatherton (“Guilt”); Baumeister, Stillwell and Heatherton (“Personal Narratives”); Boster et al.; Carlsmith and Gross; Doosje et al.; Eisenberg, Losoya and Spinrad; Fischer and Manstead; Freedman, Wallington and Bless; Hoffman (“Contribution of empathy”); Iyer, Leach and Crosby; Keltner and Buswell; Ketelaar and Au; Konoske, Staple and Graf; M. Lewis; Nabi (“Discrete Emotions”); O’Keefe; Pagano and Huo; Tangney; Tangney and Dearing; Tangney et al. (“Are Shame, Guilt and Embarrassment Distinct”); Tangney et al. (“Relation of Shame”); Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek; and Yinon et al. discuss evidence demonstrating guilt’s role in spurring reparative or self-affirmative behaviour. Leach, Iyer and Pedersen, however, suggest that guilt is not as powerful a motivator as anger (though anger towards the self, which is closely related to guilt, is included in their conceptualization). See also: Iyer, Schmader and Lickel.

In fact, the relative rarity of the film’s guilt-inducing moments might make its motivational capacities even more pronounced, insofar as a variety of research demonstrates that moderate guilt appeals are more persuasive than are their intense or mild counterparts. See: Coulter and Pinto; O’Keefe; Pinto and Priest; Yinon et al., etc.

Indeed, in the one major empirical study of elevation (Haidt et al. 2000), researchers successfully evoked this emotion in the lab by exposing subjects to a documentary film on the life and deeds of Mother Teresa (cited in Haidt, “Positive Emotion” 4). See also: Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek.

This is not to suggest that certain earlier sequences did not also invite more than one of these complementary emotions; indeed, cues to sympathy run fairly commonly throughout the film, despite seeming less prominent than appeals to anger, guilt and/or elevation at individual moments. What is different about the final interview sequence, however, is that it mobilizes clear appeals to all four of the emotions discussed for the first – and only – time.

This kind of observation is common in reviews supporting the film and those rejecting it alike. See, for example, Ellingson, Holden, Klein, Puig, K. Smith. Thomson, and Whipp. Michael Atkinson makes a similar point when he complains that the film elegizes the soldiers (par.1), as does an Army spokeswomen who notes the film’s “definite point of view” (qtd. in “Sarandon Slams” par.5).

Along these lines, Hwang et al. present experimental evidence demonstrating that “media indignation had a significant and positive effect on willingness to engage in [related] discursive activities,” such as signing a petition supporting one’s own opinion of the issue or volunteering for a group endorsing their viewpoint (87).
The film’s status as an instructive, Iraq War metaphor is also noted by Barsanti (“Operation Filmmaker”); Brokaw; Cockrell; Davenport (qtd. in Guzman); Means; Nelson; Powers; Schwarzbaum; Tobias; and Walmark, for example.

In addition to the reviews cited above, see: Dargis; Dunne; Edelstein; Fuchs; Hoberman; Long; Longworth; P. Miller (“Operation Filmmaker”); Monder; Scheck; Travers; and Weitzman.

Similar arguments about emotion’s participation in Brechtian social instruction are made by Gaut and by M. Smith (*Engaging Characters*; “Logic and Legacy”). Bartsch also describes research by Monika Suckfüll, which indicates “that emotional involvement is helpful rather than obstructive for the pursuit of more analytic goals of reception” (127).

Significantly, this initial introduction also encourages Western viewers to sympathize with Mohmed by emphasizing his endorsement of American culture. His stated desire to meet Jolie makes him immediately understandable or familiar to viewers in countries in which such desires are widespread, suggesting that Mohmed is “just like” many North Americans (for example), in spite of his different cultural background and life situation. Perceived similarity has frequently been shown to increase the likelihood of empathetic engagement (defined broadly, in a manner that includes sympathy) with the similar other. See, for example: Batson et al. (“Information Function”); Bourgeois and Hess; Brown, Bradley and Lang; Gruen and Mendelsohn; Eder; Hoffman (“Contribution of empathy”); Hoffner and Cantor; Konijn and Hoorn; N. Roberts; Roberts and Levenson; Tan (*Emotion*); and Westbury and Neumann.

Interestingly, Schreiber’s story in this sequence also provides compelling evidence for the argument -- articulated in this chapter in relation to *The Ground Truth* -- that documentaries can use emotion to impel viewers to engage in concrete socio-political action.

Other reviewers who note the film’s humourous nature include: Burr (“Culture Clash”); Dargis; Hoberman; Horton; Long; Lumenick; Morris (qtd. in Brokaw N13); Nelson; Rapold; and Travers.

While I join many scholars in understanding amusement as an emotion (see, for example: Christie and Friedman; de Sousa; Fredrickson and Branigan; Fredrickson and Levenson; Fredrickson et al. (“Undoing”); Giuliani, McRae and Gross; Hewig et al.; Keltner and Shiota; Plato; Rottenberg, Ray and Gross; Sharpe), it should be noted that this is a matter of some debate. (See: Bergson; Morreall “Humor and Emotion”; and Scruton for opposing arguments, and R. Roberts for a relatively ambivalent position on this issue). Rod A. Martin agrees that the experience arising from the perception of humour constitutes an emotion, but suggests that mirth is a more appropriate label for the feeling in question. Even if amusement is not an emotion in the stringent sense, however, the necessary change in name would not significantly affect the argument being advanced here. As Carl Plantinga points out, “It [amusement] is at least an affective state, and thus has the same rhetorical potential as screen emotions proper.” (“Spectator Emotion” 159n4).

For overviews/examples of some of these theoretical formulations of humour, see: Eitzen; Martin (*Psychology*); Morreall (*Philosophy of Laughter*); Stott; Weisfeld (“Adaptive Value”); Young; Zillman (“Humor and Comedy”); Zillman and Bryant; etc.
Editing, of course, helps to underline the ridiculousness of the situation here, as the process of cutting to Mohmed’s extreme reaction of disbelief outside the trailer immediately after the tofu incident implies a temporal and causal relationship between the two events.

Apte; Bogad; Plantinga (“Spectator Emotion”); Fleischmann, and Weisfeld “Adaptive Value” also note the educational nature of amusement, and/or the ability of jokes to make us criticize the individuals who are their objects.

While this process might encourage us to analyze jokes more carefully, and thus to potentially find fault with their persuasive lessons (cf. Nabi, Moyer-Gusé and Byrne) it should also make us even more receptive to strong, valid arguments. Such a process might be responsible, for instance, for many reviewers’ sense that the film’s smaller-scale warnings about unchecked emotion and shortsighted idealism are compelling while its larger Iraq metaphor is forced or simplistic.

Studies indicating the beneficial cognitive effects of positive emotions generally and/or amusement specifically include: Aspinwall; Estrada, Isen and Young; Fredrickson (“What Good”); Fredrickson (“Role of Positive Emotions”); Fredrickson and Branigan; Fredrickson and Cohn; Fredrickson and Joiner; Isen and Daubman; Isen, Daubman and Nowicki; Isen et al.; Ziv; and some studies cited in Weinberger and Gulas. Some research, however, (e.g. Innes and Ahrens; Nabi (“Discrete Emotions”); Nabi, Moyer-Gusé and Byrne; Petty, Fabrigar and Wegener; Mackie and Worth; Young) suggests that while amusement fosters greater attention and stimulates a greater number of thoughts – those thoughts are typically not of a critical nature (but see Aspinwall for counter-evidence). My assumption is that the shift from seriousness to mirth in Operation Filmmaker might allow viewers to reap the attentional and other cognitive benefits of amusement to some degree, while still maintaining at least a moderately critical perspective. While hypothetical, this suggestion does not seem unreasonable, given evidence cited by Aspinwall that suggests that critical thinking and positive emotion are by no means incompatible.

Another central means by which the film encourages us to renew our compassion for Mohmed is the sporadic inclusion of diary/home movie-like footage filmed by Mohmed’s friends in Iraq (on cameras sent to them by Davenport). As Asmaa Malik points out, this footage “is heartbreaking – not only because it shows the city in ruins, but because it shows the increasing isolation creeping into these young men’s lives” (B3). By demonstrating the dire situation to which Mohmed might have to return, this material pushes us to understand his desperation to stay abroad. It also, incidentally, indicates the extent to which documentary subjects might have to modify their everyday self-presentation within even this potentially least strict nonfiction performance context. While the performer-cinematographers of diary footage are relatively free to choose the activities and topics of discussion in which they engage, they nonetheless must orchestrate these choices in relation to the filming conventions they select to render their actions (frequent acknowledgment of and direct address to the camera is an especially common home movie practice, for instance). Furthermore, there is an implicit pressure for such performers to tailor their actions such that they are pertinent to the film being made; hence, in Operation Filmmaker’s home movie sequences, conversations about/messages to Mohmed are rife, as are descriptions of the terrible situation from which he has escaped. Indeed, the pressure to engage in ‘relevant’ action might be especially acute for these particular subjects, since the footage that they shoot and in which they appear is to be reviewed and edited by another filmmaker before being included (or excised from) the final text.

See, for example: Andrade and Cohen; Fong and Tiedens; Hemenover and Schimmack; Larsen et al. (“Agony of Victory”); Larsen et al. (“Evaluative Space Grid”); Larsen, McGraw and Cacioppo;
Larsen, To, and Fireman; Schimmack; and Williams and Aaker. Hong also provides a review of much of this recent work.

51 Peters, Lipkus and Diefenbach also note the way in which ambivalence might promote attention and careful thinking, while Hong notes that it can lead to a broadening of attention and variety seeking in decision making.

52 Insofar as these moments provoke a drastically different emotional reaction than they might have at the beginning of the text (when similar actions evoked elevation), they also demonstrate strikingly the importance of attending to the way in which emotion elicitors are ordered and framed within the course of an unfolding film.

53 This contention is made by: Andrade and Cohen; Cacioppo, Gardner and Berntson; Larsen et al. (“Evaluative Space Grid”); Peters, Lipkus and Diefenbach; van Harreveld, van der Plight and de Liver; and Williams and Aaker, amongst others.

54 Along these lines, persuasive messages that incite mixed emotions have sometimes been shown to receive less positive evaluations from audiences. See: Hong; Williams and Aaker.

55 Similar evidence for amusement’s ability to regulate distress can be found in Fredrickson and Levenson; Fredrickson et al. (“What Good”); Kuiper and Martin.

56 Williams and Aaker, for instance, note that individuals with “a lower propensity to accept duality” find ambivalence more distressing than those who are more accepting of complexity and contradictoriness (636). Likewise, Hong suggests that “people who construe events at a concrete level” tend to experience more discomfort in relation to mixed feelings (9).

57 Much of this research was already referenced in note 40.

58 See, for example: Barsanti (“Operation Filmmaker”); Brokaw; Burr (“Culture Clash”); Dunne; Edelstein, Fuchs (“Operation Filmmaker”); Guzman; Long; R. Nelson; Nott; Rapold; Travers; etc.

59 Keizer, Monder, Nusair, B. White, and – to a lesser extent - Vice offer vitriolic descriptions of Mohmed, for instance, while Longworth’s and Proyect’s discussions of the film suggest unequivocal anger and disgust towards Schreiber and Saraf.
Conclusion – Additional Functions and Animated Actors

A poetics of cinema – in David Bordwell’s estimation – “puts at the center of its concerns the problem of how art works are constructed to have certain effects and uses” (qtd. in Newman 330). Here, I have adapted this methodology to the specific case of nonfiction performance. I began by proposing a long overdue conceptualization of what the documentary subject’s work actually entails, and extrapolated from this model the specific tools and techniques that such individuals have at their disposal when appearing before the documentarist’s camera. I then proceeded to discuss the ways in which these performance techniques are mobilized in specific nonfiction texts, and to demonstrate that – in the process – they fulfill a variety of significant functions.

Many of the effects and uses of documentary performance that I have traced overlap closely with the functions that Michael Renov positions as fundamental to nonfiction filmmaking as a whole. For example, performance interacts with and facilitates the documentary impulse to “record, reveal, or preserve” entities (“Poetics” 21) by helping to construct the characters, situations and events under scrutiny. Likewise, by encouraging emotional reactions that guide viewers’ behaviour and influence their decision-making processes, nonfiction performers help to determine the capacity of documentaries to persuade spectators or to promote certain courses of action. This imbrication of micro and macro functions (i.e. those pertaining to documentary performance and to documentary as a mode of filmmaking, respectively) suggests that the nonfiction subject’s work is not only an appropriate target of study for documentary scholars, but also perhaps a necessary one. If the nonfiction performer plays a significant role in carrying out some of the central goals of documentary itself, then her/his work must be seen as a crucial element of the form.
This argument only becomes more compelling when one moves to consider functions of documentary performance beyond those I have discussed in detail in this study. The individuals who populate nonfiction films can contribute to the aesthetic, “expressive” work that Renov proposes as a third major function of documentary production, for instance, helping to create striking visual patterns and compositions and/or to engage us with the sensuous qualities of their voices. Alexis Tremblay’s rather hypnotic voiceover recital of selections from Cartier’s diary in *Pour la suite du monde* provides a case in point. His voice is deep and resonant as he speaks Cartier’s lines about the whales that live “between the sea and fresh water” (my translation), for example, and he takes repeated, marked pauses that break each sentence up into multiple subphrases of a few syllables each. By these means, his delivery takes on a rhythmic, quasi-musical flavour that encourages viewers to focus on the euphonic properties of the archaic French he speaks and simultaneously invests the text with a sense of mythic gravity. Thus, even as Tremblay’s performance conveys information about himself (for example, his respect for tradition) and the unfolding documentary ‘plot’ (pointing toward the way in which the current whale hunt will reactivate a link with the islanders’ cultural past), it also helps to construct a moment of expressive, poetic beauty.

Likewise, nonfiction subjects can also participate in the analytical activity common to self-reflexive documentaries and positioned by Renov as a final major tendency of nonfiction filmmaking. In *Operation Filmmaker*, for example, Mohmed’s repeated, angry condemnations of Davenport’s attempts to get a “good story” at the expense of his feelings bring the ethical status of documentary into sharp relief, encouraging viewers to ponder the means by which the images they are watching have been attained. Similarly, Jackie’s heated rejection of Apted’s attempts to define her in *49 Up* asks audiences to consider the way in
which documentary filmmakers habitually impose meanings and construct ‘truths’ through processes of editing and selection. While Davenport and Apted must be credited for including these self-reflexive moments in the films, it is the angry, criticizing performers themselves who prompt viewer reflection on a more immediate level.

Insofar as it can support each of the four major functions that have been attributed to nonfiction filmmaking, documentary performance seems an eminently worthwhile object of inquiry. Indeed, it is my hope that this study has both demonstrated the significance of the documentary subject’s work and encouraged others to examine it more closely themselves. There are still several issues pertaining to nonfiction performance that might be addressed in future research, ranging from the potential existence of specific historical or movement-based documentary performance styles, to the way in which performance figures within hybrid forms such as mockumentary and/or reality television. Perhaps most importantly from my perspective, one might also consider the extent to which nonfiction subjects perform a variety of functions supplementary to those outlined here. The artistic and analytical work mentioned briefly above merits much more detailed examination, for instance, as do other functions not immediately connected to Renov’s general documentary poetics. As one potential example of this latter group, consider the finding – reported by nonverbal communication scholars – that extra-linguistic self-presentational choices have the capacity to either increase audience attention to and understanding of the verbal content of messages, or to “distract and impair comprehension” (Burgoon 368). This work might be adapted and applied to the nonfiction context to consider when and how documentary performers serve to clarify and/or to obscure linguistic arguments through paralinguistic and kinesic choices.
As a means of pointing to additional ways in which nonfiction performance analysis might be pursued, I’d like to conclude by considering a segment from another recent documentary connected to the current Iraq conflict – Richard E. Robbins’ *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience* (USA, 2007). This rather atypical entry in the canon of recent war documentaries is based on the output of the National Endowment for the Arts program from which it takes its name, an initiative that encourages “active duty troops and veterans … to reflect on their service” through writing (“National Initiatives” par.1). Robbins’ film consists of visualized readings of some of the poems, memoirs, diary entries, stories and letters to result from this NEA project, combined with talking heads interviews featuring the soldier-authors themselves and other American veterans-cum-writers. In addition to offering a unique version of the ‘grunt’s-eye view’ of war, much of this material seems especially provocative in relation to the arguments about documentary performance that I’ve been advancing in this study.

The numerous sequences visualizing first person accounts written by the troops, for instance, feature clear examples of documentary acting – that quasi-fictional extreme of the nonfiction performance spectrum wherein individuals consciously enact and present real world characters outside of their own identities. Professional actors including Robert Duvall and Aaron Eckhart recite the pieces in voiceover, constructing aural representations of the authors whose reminiscences they speak in the process. At the same time, many of these sequences also make use of other, unnamed performers who (re)enact the remembered stories on the image track, constructing a visual impression of the soldier-narrators and the other individuals involved in the events under consideration through action, expression and gesture. Finally, then, many of the documentary identities featured in this film are influenced
by the performance work of at least three separate individuals: the real-world performer presenting him/herself within talking heads interviews, and the known and anonymous actors representing that soldier in voice and in body (respectively) in dramatizations of his/her wartime experiences. In this respect, *Operation Homecoming* not only provides numerous examples of documentary acting – a relatively common phenomenon that I haven’t had an opportunity to discuss extensively in this study – but also begins to point to some of the complex ways in which such acting might play out.

In addition to containing provocative examples of this most extreme brand of documentary performance, however, some of the sequences in this film also point toward the potential utility of applying performance analysis to phenomena that don’t strictly qualify as performance at all. Richard Schechner has recently suggested the benefits of this process, claiming that any number of activities and entities that don’t themselves constitute performance can nonetheless be examined fruitfully through a performance studies lens (42). He writes: “To treat any object, work, or product ‘as’ performance – a painting, a novel, a shoe, or anything at all – means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings” (30). Here, I’d like to pursue this argument in a restricted form, considering the interactive efficacy of perhaps the most obvious candidates for examination “as” documentary performance – the actions and attributes of non-human, but human-like figures. Such a move, I believe, indicates yet another productive direction in which work on nonfiction performance might proceed.

One particular moment in *Operation Homecoming* features an especially striking set of quasi-human actions that might be investigated “as” documentary performance in this manner. This sequence – the film’s rendition of a battle chronicle written by Army Specialist
Colby Buzzell – makes use of actual performers only to a limited extent. Professional actor Justin Kirk substitutes for and thus ‘plays’ Buzzell by providing a voiceover rendition of the soldier’s first-person narrative, but the image track is devoid of human subjects; Robbins visualizes this particular recounted event as what might be called a minimally animated graphic novel. As a result, the actual ‘social actors’ discussed in Buzzell’s text are represented onscreen in this documentary reenactment not by flesh-and-blood performers, but rather by artificially constructed artist’s renderings.

Of course, these drawn figures are not documentary performers in the sense that I’ve been using the term throughout this study. They are synthetic entities created specifically for this particular sequence, and thus cannot be understood as individuals who influence spectators by engaging in twice-modified everyday self-presentational activities. Building on Schechner’s argument, however, we might nonetheless read the deployment of these figures “as” performance, construing their drawn ‘actions’ as stylized and artificial versions of actual documentary performance techniques and considering the ways in which these ‘choices’ might communicate to the spectators observing them.

This move to consider the still and animated drawings in this sequence “as” performances is useful, since it opens up additional means of thinking about the effects and functions of the sequence as a whole. In particular, in light of this analytical choice, one might be prompted to consider the extent to which the mock performances involved in the visualization of Buzzell’s story carry out one or more of the tasks attributed to the work of actual nonfiction subjects. Like the ‘true’ performance choices they emulate, for instance, the performance-like activities drawn here play an instrumental role in the construction of character, vividly demonstrating the terror that Buzzell experienced in the face of an armed
ambush on the streets of Mosul. As the voiceover recounts the Army Specialist’s memory of discovering a man with an AK-47 pointed “right at [his] fucking pupils,” for example, a low angle close up of the illustrated Buzzell’s petrified visage suggests the soldier’s considerable distress. As rendered by the sequence’s artists, the face here is frozen in a blend of shock and horror, eyes wide and tense, mouth agape, and eyebrows raised dramatically (See Figure 5.1). A slow zoom in emphasizes this expression of fear, while Kirk’s rushed and breathy vocal delivery and the rumbling musical underscoring make it appear even more arresting and pronounced. In concert with these complementary formal choices, then, the striking facial expression created for the central drawn figure generates a clear sense of Buzzell’s psychological and emotional status at this moment. ‘Kinesic choices’ thus help to construct character even when they are artificially constructed.

At the same time, these simulated nonverbal performance choices also help to secure the overall meaning of the sequence and to invite particular emotional reactions from viewers. The clear terror conveyed in the close up under discussion lays the groundwork for
the story’s final thesis about the decidedly unglamorous, emotionally destructive consequences of warfare, for instance, while later images of ‘Buzzell’ covering his face with his hand and hanging his head sadly as he talks to his Sergeant about the attack cement this argument (See Figure 5.2). Likewise, in combination with other displays (and simultaneous verbal descriptions on the soundtrack) that indicate the animated soldier’s moral fibre, these same pseudo-kinesic choices begin to invite our sympathy for him and – by extension – for the real-world individual that we know he represents. After the voiceover narration establishes Buzzell’s conformity to dominant moral standards by recounting how he disobeyed a command to shoot innocent bystanders, for example, the marked ‘nonverbal cues’ of his distress (such as the expressions of terror and sorrow described above) seem especially moving, insofar as they indicate not only suffering, but the suffering of a figure we’ve been encouraged to view as noble and upright. These drawn ‘performance choices’ thus invite a sympathetic response, which – as Chapter 4 demonstrated – might have a variety of effects on spectators’ subsequent behaviour and thinking.³

Finally, by combining such mock demonstrations of fear and unhappiness with facsimiles of postures and expressions that indicate a resigned toughness, the artists responsible for this animated ‘performance’ also help to construct a version of masculinity that is at once stalwart and sensitive. During a sequence that describes how Buzzell was ordered to leave his armoured vehicle in order to retrieve ammunition while in hostile territory, for instance, drawn still images of his journey (filmed with a bouncing camera to indicate the chaotic uncertainty of the battle) depict the soldier’s determination and resolve even as the simultaneous voiceover recounts his fear. One medium shot shows the figure in the midst of crawling across the vehicle’s roof with a fiercely resolute expression on his face;
his eyelids are tensed into a tight squint as he looks up in the direction of the camera, and his mouth is set in the tense, squarish configuration commonly associated with anger (See Figure 5.3). By these means, the image track constructs a sense of Buzzell’s dauntless tenacity and courage. At the same time, however, the voiceover text, recited in a low, breathy quaver by Kirk, informs us that this apparently unflinching figure was in fact “shaking, scared out of
[his] fucking mind” as he made his heroic trek. By thus combining a visual display of strength and courage with an aural description of fear and uncertainty, the sequence effectively reproduces a common contemporary version of masculine gender practice that is at once tough and fragile. Just as Philippa Gates suggests of many recent films featuring young action stars, it supports a new version of hegemonic masculinity by offering “a hero who can perform as a man of action but at the same time be sensitive, … confused, and vulnerable” (226).

Like many ‘true’ instances of documentary performance, then, the synthetic gestures and expressions of Operation Homecoming’s illustrated figures help to construct nonfictional characters, to guide interpretation of a real world event, to elicit emotional reactions from spectators, and to reproduce a normative version of masculine gender practice. Each of these functions is brought to light by considering the visualization of Buzzell’s text “as” performance, despite the fact that it doesn’t constitute performance in the strict sense of the term. At the same time, this shift in investigative focus also provides a means of considering the characteristics of artificially constructed human figures in documentaries in more detail,
offering up an entire vocabulary of gesture, facial expression, movement, and the like that might be utilized productively in analysis. In light of these gains, the process of examining this drawn sequence from the standpoint of performance study also finally points toward the potential benefits of considering other performance-like materials that feature within nonfiction films from a similar vantage point.

The actions of (non-human) animals provide a useful case in point. While creatures of various species appear frequently within nonfiction texts and carry out a range of activities that influence those texts’ spectators, their non-human status arguably excludes their onscreen conduct from the domain of ‘real’ documentary performance. By examining these behaviours as roughly akin to the self-presentational activities of human agents, however, we might begin to tease out some of the ways in which creatures of the wild that double as nonfiction subjects affect our experiences and interpretations of the films in which they figure. Do the gestures, vocal emissions, and/or expressions of animals in documentaries such as March of the Penguins (Luc Jacquet, France, 2005) or Planet Earth (Alastair Fothergill, UK, 2006) function in a manner congruent to the communicative actions of actual and/or artificial human subjects? Do such activities have alternate effects that might be subsequently considered in relation to instances of ‘true’ nonfiction performance? These sorts of questions stand to provide fascinating insights into a wide range of documentary texts.

Whether living or drawn, human or non-human, the figures that populate nonfiction films and television programs exert an indelible influence on spectatorial experience and understanding. In this study, I have focused on the communicative work of actual, human subjects, illuminating some of the many functions that might be carried out by the broad
spectrum of activity that can be called documentary performance proper. In the course of appearing in a nonfiction text, flesh-and-blood ‘social actors’ help to construct character and meaning, to bolster and/or to destabilize discursively-governed identity categories, and to elicit spectator emotion. As such, these individuals must not be regarded – as they so often have been – simply as part of the profilmic reality represented by nonfiction texts. While the documentary filmmaker surely shapes performances and guides our interpretation(s) of them by way of cinematography, editing, and sound (as I have been at pains to indicate throughout my analyses), it is the documentary subject who ultimately provides much of the material that filmmakers frame, edit and mix into meaningful pictures and patterns. The performing subject is thus an essential component of nonfiction film’s representational apparatus, one which needs to be examined in detail if we are to reach a complete and accurate understanding of the way in which documentary texts signify. By outlining the communicative techniques available to documentary performers, and by demonstrating some of the complex ways in which these techniques might play out within a range of nonfiction texts, I have provided considerable support for this claim.

Furthermore, by endorsing Goffman’s broad definition of performance throughout this study (and indeed, by indicating the possibility of extending what we conceive of “as” performance still further in this conclusion), I have also made first steps to establishing the general applicability of performance analysis to documentary texts. Performance, in Goffman’s terms, does not only figure in those relatively rare documentary cases that involve acting; nor is it restricted to that much broader portion of nonfiction texts wherein individuals actively and consciously modify their behaviour in response to the presence of the camera. Since most any action presented to spectators in a documentary will signify in some way, all
the things that nonfiction subjects do in fact constitute performance, and will inevitably benefit from being analyzed as such. In this respect, Stella Bruzzi’s argument that “performance has always been at the heart of documentary filmmaking” (New Documentary 125) is true in a much broader sense than she initially intended it. Communicative actions are ubiquitous in nonfiction texts; studies that examine those actions and their manifold implications should therefore be equally common. If the initial analyses I have conducted in this study are any indication, the benefits of espousing such an approach stand to be compelling. Documentary performance analysis has the potential to inflect and augment our comprehension of untold numbers of nonfiction texts both currently in existence and yet to be produced, and to supplement our understanding of how such texts relate to, influence and affect their spectators.

1 In fact, a study of mockumentary acting might also serve to illuminate some of the conventions of nonfiction performance as such, insofar as the comic exaggeration of certain performance choices in faux documentaries serves to reveal those choices precisely as common, customarily expected elements of nonfiction discourse.

2 Indeed, the drawing here is almost an exact replica of one of the fear-surprise blends constructed by Ekman and Friesen as an illustrative example (61, figure 21b).

3 While it seems that we might be less likely to respond emotionally to animated characters than we would to images of human beings, some research using computer-generated avatars is beginning to suggest that we respond to artificially composed faces in a manner broadly similar to the way in which we respond to photographs and films of actual human subjects. See, for example, Weyers et al.

4 This vocabulary might be applied not only to the increasing number of animated documentaries (such as Waltz With Bashir [Ari Folman, Israel, 2008], I Met the Walrus [Josh Raskin, Canada, 2007], Grasshopper [Bob Sabiston, US, 2004], Ryan [Chris Landreth, Canada, 2004], Roadhead [Bob Sabiston, US, 1999], Champagne [Michael Sporn, US, 1997], His Mother’s Voice [Dennis Tupicoff, Australia, 1997], Drawn From Memory [Paul Fierlinger, US, 1995], War Story [Peter Lord, UK, 1989], and Going Equipped [Peter Lord, UK, 1987]), but also to the countless still drawings and/or paintings of human figures that feature within a vast number of nonfiction films (including: I Just Didn’t Want to Die [Joe McDonald, Canada, 1991], Just One Big Mess [Cheryl Lean, Canada, 1991], On Strike: The Winnipeg General Strike, 1919 [Joe MacDonald/Clare Johnstone Gilsig, Canada, 1991], They Didn’t Starve Us Out [Patricia Kipping, Canada, 1991], The Burning Times [Donna Read, Canada, 1990], Kurelek [William Pettigrew, Canada, 1967], The Days of Whiskey Gap [Colin
Low, Canada, 1961], The Jolifou Inn [Colin Low, Canada, 1955], and Varley [Allan Wargon, Canada, 1953]). For further discussion of animation and documentary see: DelGaudio.

Of course, not all of the ‘performance’ techniques utilized by human performers are fully applicable in the case of non-human animal subjects. Language is not common to many species, for example, while certain artifactual cues – such as clothing choice – are also unlikely to figure within animal ‘self-presentation.’ Moreover, as the animals under consideration become less human-like, so too do several kinds of facial expression, gesture, etc. become less characteristic of their behaviour. With mammalian (and especially primate) subjects, however, variations of many of the kinds of nonverbal cues I have discussed in relation to human performers might be noted with relative frequency.

Along these lines, much ethological research suggests that animals perform non-verbal displays that are taken by humans to convey particular emotions or personality attributes (see: Darwin; Parr et al; Weitz). As such, spectators might be prone to interpret such displays as markers of an animal’s ‘character.’ Furthermore, some psychological research indicates that the filmed activities of non-human creatures can serve as an elicitor of observer emotions. Fredrickson, for example, has used films of penguins (Fredrickson and Branigan) and of puppies playing (Fredrickson et al., “Undoing Effect") to evoke spectator amusement, while Westbury and Neumann’s studies with animal films demonstrate that “Human beings are capable of generalizing empathic-type responses … to non-human targets” (particularly other mammals). (73).
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