

My Diaries

By: David Perlov

Published in "The Medium in 20th Century Art"

I deal with documentary filmmaking and not with fiction. The circumstances of my cinematic life led me to documentary film, but I also love the genre very much. I am one of the first to make a documentary in the style of a diary. I always had the urge to write an imaginary autobiography that would be pictorial, and when I got the chance to make *Diary*, I saw in it the possibility to trace these autobiographical trails.

I present the people I film with a lot of love; you have to be very patient towards human beings when you shoot them, because documentary characters are individuals and you deprive them of their privacy. I want to flatter them, show them in a good light, and I also prefer to have in my films people who are loved and beautiful. I don't deny there being prejudices in this matter.

The selection I make is through my very subjective eyes: how I perceive a psychological state, how I perceive a character, the way a place looks, a relationship. This is why my personality as a filmmaker is dominant in the film. I am the intermediary between reality and the viewer; I force myself upon the material I deal with (you could see it as a fault), but I think it is to my credit that I don't like "terrible" subjects. I would rather not film war, for example. The documentary filmmaker must sometimes be committed and take sides in these difficult matters; this is why these subjects are presented in the film, but not in a dominant way. I like to show beautiful things in my films, things I love. I like to show the glass "half full", as someone once wrote in a newspaper;-This is how my films are in harmony with life and with my personality, which by nature is optimistic and loves beautiful things.

In this respect my *Diary* is my identity card. I try to touch the delicate border between life and art; making such a personal work is an extremely

difficult and vulnerable process. It's very threatening -- you face the audience, your nerves exposed to everyone, your private life exposed for all to watch.

The camera that shoots sees and doesn't think, but the person operating it does think; he thinks about what and how to shoot; I order the camera to see and shoot what I think it should; the camera is a dead instrument, a voyeur, if there is no human spirit behind it. On the other hand, one could say that a camera shooting without any selection, like the one stationed in front of large department stores, is the truest document. But that is speculative thinking.

In my film *Diary* there is much selection, before shooting and after, and it is extremely tendentious, even though it seems accidental. In my film there's an order in the selection, an order in thinking before shooting and again after it. During the editing you lay everything you shot on a "clean surface", and then you work on this clean surface to think about the order of the film, to build the film. This happens even though *Diary* deals with the most trivial issues.

I very much appreciate the documentary films of Jean Rouché and Frederick Wiseman who are two opposite extremes, but my approach is different. I aim at a maximum choice, a tendentious choice. I fight within myself. I do not direct the film on a factual level, but on a psychological one, for the facts exist without me. The objects I shoot exist, but my focus is selective, for I wish to determine the human relation between the objects, between the characters I film. I love the wonderful relations I can determine between the characters that I film, my scissors make this selection.

My presence itself helps introduce this order; I produce a narrative, and this creates continuity for the viewer. Narration is a tool of the mind and not of the senses. At first I thought to record the narration while shooting, because most of the sentences come up during the actual filming. But then I decided to elaborate the material, to "clean" the narration sentences so they will be grammatically correct; in other words, to be conventional, which means a studio recording, even though the shooting is spontaneous.

I decided to create a diary that doesn't ignore literature. I do not accept the approach that says that in a documentary there is no room for literature. It seems to be a slightly childish approach, for the documentary cinema is very literate, since in life people talk a lot, and also tell things. When somebody tells a story and presents it, displaying the art of storytelling and of performance, my camera remains still as if it had nothing more to do. Moreover, I don't accept the claim that the soundtrack must "be natural" and repeat the spoken words verbatim. And so in places where the words spoken seem trivial to me, I also add my own narration. It has been actually noticed and commended, that I have an original and special approach to the relation between my narration, which sounds literary, and the dialogue and natural speech of the characters. The words, the structure of the sentences, the linguistic aspect and the intonation are extremely dominant in the film *Diary*. This forces the viewer to see the film in a different way than if it was without any soundtrack, or only with narration, or only with the natural dialogue of the characters. The language, the manner of speaking, is a tool of the mind whereas hearing and seeing are tools of the senses, of perception.

The magic lies in the meeting between the verbal elements, i.e. – the natural speech and the narration, and the visual elements. In feature films I enjoy very much hearing someone telling a story.

I take the editing stage of the film very seriously and am very meticulous about it. I take a large number of shots, about 600 for each chapter, when the accepted amount is approximately 200 shots for a similar length. This is why I like working with experienced editors, so I can fully control the editing stage. My editing is such that in the final product I want also to discover the "seams", the raw material, the craft:: the shots, their length, their angles. But I don't want to turn this into an ideology, because then you deal with gimmicks and manipulation, and not with editing. It's like winking at filmmakers, and that doesn't really interest me. The real editing leads to things that do not necessarily exist in the material from the beginning. The essence is in the people, in their gaze, in the way they walk, in their movements. In other words, what is still important is found in the shot itself and not in the

transition between shots, between one sequence and the next. The film doesn't reveal its obvious structure. It is like a subterranean stream, with many misleading turns, and the film structure shouldn't be exposed. This creates a hypnotic effect on the viewer, as well as on me.

The documentary cinema interests me only if I can turn it into something more poetic. Only then does cinema interest me. The documentary cinema has become very journalistic, with a lot of technique involved; too much preparation and preliminary research, so that the subject is all "dried up" by the time the director starts his work.

The documentary material that floods the television channels is dried up, it is indeed effective, there's a state-of-the-art team, an elaborate editorial board, the most advanced technical ability, but only rarely is there an actual encounter between the personality of the reporter and the subject. I personally wouldn't want to make this type of cinema, my films are not journalism. Watching them demands sensibility and some experience with the film medium. I want a stimulating cinema, as much as possible.

I would like now to make a film of small fables. To take a shot – to ask a question with it, to let it linger, and then to look for and film another shot that would be the visual answer to the first. I love searching, innovating.

Taken from *A Conversation in Two Parts* with David Perlov, from "The Medium in 20th Century Arts", Editors: Rachel Bilesky-Cohen and Baruch Blich (1996), published by Or-Am, Tel Aviv and The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Jerusalem.