

## **"I'm Glad I'm not me!" Marking Transivity in Don't Look Back**

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## "I'm glad I'm not me!" Marking transitivity in *Don't look back*

[David Baker](#)

*Even as a folk singer, Bob Dylan moved too fast, learned too quickly, made the old new too easily; to many he was always suspect. (Greil Marcus)*

[\[1\]](#)

*What happened, [in the sixties] happened so fast, that people are still trying to figure it out. (Bob Dylan)* [\[2\]](#)

*If necessary, [Dylan will] sing songs he repudiated. For example, he sang many songs in England he no longer sings here because the English audience is two years behind his American image. (Israel G. Young, 1965)* [\[3\]](#)

*Are you gonna see the concert tonight? Are you gonna hear it? ... It's gonna happen fast and you're not gonna get it all. And you might even hear the wrong words.... (Dylan to Horace Judson in *Don't look back*)*

*Don't look back* (USA 1967), the documentary of Bob Dylan's 1965 concert tour of England, was only the first of a long string of "rock docs" made by Don Pennebaker. The film has come to be regarded as an exemplary case of US cinema verité (sometimes referred to as direct cinema), a key text in a tradition begun by *Primary* (USA 1960), Robert Drew's documentary which follows the trajectories of both John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey through the 1960 Wisconsin primary election. [\[4\]](#)

As has often been remarked, one of the basic promises of 1960s US cinema verité was the recording and presentation of "truth" as a result of the access made available due to the use of the new lightweight cameras and innovations in recording technology. [\[5\]](#) Both camera and director were understood as acting unobtrusively as a kind of "fly-on-the wall". By (largely) eschewing such cueing techniques as commentary, titles and interview, verité promised a kind of unmediated access to a particular event, resulting in a new ability to look at what was really going on behind-the-scenes.

For viewers interested in going beyond a naïve conception of vérité which sees it as a kind of direct, unmediated documentation of reality or truth, there are two basic ways of accessing Pennebaker's film: firstly a recognition of a relationship between vérité and ethnography understood particularly in terms of celebrity; secondly a consideration of vérité as utilizing a kind of liberal democratic principle. Both of these approaches possess the not inconsiderable virtue of recognising that vérité does not stand outside that which it represents and shine the light of truth upon it, rather that vérité must be understood as an artefact of the values and beliefs of the culture which produced it. In this essay I seek to consider these approaches and add a third means for accessing *Don't look back* by recognizing a correlation between the aims of vérité with what I will describe as an ideology of rock. Rock becomes a subject for vérité not merely because they happen to emerge at the same time and rock makes an interesting subject, but because at least for a time in the 1960s the aims of vérité and what we might hesitatingly call the aims of rock appear to overlap. The ideology of rock is predicated upon the expansion of the category of youth begun in the 1950s: youth understood firstly as a demographic and a market, then by the mid 1960s as a movement. This expansion of the idea and the reach of youth has routinely been represented in terms of music.<sup>[6]</sup>

Vérité shares with rock the foregrounding of a particular set of values: in particular a set of ideas around issues such as mobility, freedom and authenticity. This set of issues, I argue, cluster around the general concept of transitivity--the ability of the (rock) self to maintain a state of ceaseless physical mobility (and thus to exist in a continuous state of transition) as well as to ceaselessly transform. In taking seriously this transitive aspect of both *Don't look back* as well as the youth culture it seeks to represent, this paper tentatively develops what it describes as a transitive hermeneutics, an attempt to develop some techniques for reading objects that are quite literally "in flight". This hermeneutic approach is complicated by the fact that in its representation of Bob Dylan, the film itself engages in the very same transitive hermeneutics.

## **Verité/ethnography/celebrity**

The traditionally dominant approach to *Don't look back* is that endorsed by Pennebaker himself. Here vérité is understood as a very particular form of ethnographic filmmaking. The ethnographer usually goes into a culture (often tribal) other than his own and attempts to record it in a fair and objective manner sympathetic to the internal workings of that culture.<sup>[7]</sup> For the vérité filmmaker in the Drew Associates tradition (as opposed to, say, the institutional vérité associated with the work of Frederic Wiseman),<sup>[8]</sup> the exotic otherworld is the world of celebrity, most famously the worlds of politicians or artistic performers. The filmmaker enters into the world of celebrity and hopes to observe and capture a series of moments of crisis, or the celebrity going through some kind of change.<sup>[9]</sup>

Pennebaker explains:

*Watching Dylan go through the process of becoming more and more celebrated was really interesting because I don't think anybody can ever imagine that. For a normal person, you have no idea what the stresses are, what the downside is.... If the only other people in the world that are as famous as you are the Beatles, they are your friends.* [\[10\]](#)

Most critical discussions of *Don't look back* have tended to begin from Pennebaker's central working assumption that verité functions as a form of "celebrity ethnography"; indeed the idea of verité as an ethnography of celebrity has since become something of a truism. Although I am broadly sympathetic with this approach, two significant problems have dogged verité's attempts to render access to ethnographic truth: on the one hand the eventual formalisation of verité style, and on the other the problem of partiality.

From a contemporary perspective, verité stylistics have come to dominate documentary film-making, indeed for many, verité might now be regarded as basic documentary house-style. Contemporary audiences have learnt to read verité style as a technique for claiming to represent truth rather than as a marker of truth itself.

In their attempts to present authentic images that demonstrate the veracity of the access they have achieved, Drew Associates developed the set of stylistic elements that have come to be associated with early verité:

*the restless, wandering movements of lightweight, hand-held cameras; the blurred grainy images of fast monochrome film; the preference for (even unintelligible) synchronous sound over authoritative voice-over narration; and the impromptu performances of apparently preoccupied social actors.* [\[11\]](#)

Indeed we might go so far as to claim that there was a kind of unofficial and heuristic Ten Commandments of verité style in the hands of Drew Associates filmmakers:

### Ten Commandments of classic cinema vérité©

Thou Shalt not stage or rehearse events (though one should aim to be present and filming when significant events are occurring).

Thou Shalt not conduct interviews (though one is at liberty to film already occurring interviews - eg Press Interviews).

Thou Shalt not editorialise by providing voice-over commentary.

Thou Shalt not use film lights additional to the light already available in a scene.

Thou Shalt use long takes (as opposed to rapid editing).

Thou Shalt not use dissolves (which imply a too obvious process of elision on the part of an editor).

Thou Shalt not use any 'library' or 'extraneous' footage or sound.

Thou Shalt use subjects who appear to be oblivious to the presence of the camera.

Thou Shalt keep the camera crew unobtrusive.

Thou Shalt keep events in the order in which they occurred.

This set of commandments was roughly adhered to, but routinely broken due to the demands placed on vérité© by its promise to make accessible that which has been hidden, while at the same time attempting to address its audience in as clear a manner as possible. Thus even as classic an example of vérité© as *Don't look back* can be seen to "break" several of these rules. Some obvious examples: 1. library footage is utilized in the "Only a pawn in their

game" sequence, which somewhat mythically aims to show Dylan's origins<sup>[12]</sup> ; 2. The first four minutes of *Don't look back*: the "Subterranean homesick blues" promotional clip and the footage of Dylan about to go on stage, were all shot in London at the *end* of the tour; 3. The footage of the Albert Hall concert towards the end of the film ("The times they are a-changin'"/"Bob Dylan's dream"/"It's alright ma, I'm only bleeding"/"Gates of Eden") utilizes a series of dissolves in order to represent concert highlights

The main problem verité has faced is not, however, a failure of consistency. There is no real point in charging verité with having set up a rigid set of commandments which it then subsequently fails to follow. The rules were always heuristic and any particular act of rule breaking was motivated by reasonable and explicable concerns. The problem for verité has rather been that it has become something of a victim of its own success. Verité has established a stylistics of authenticity that has become overwhelmingly dominant across a range of media. Verité as a technique for representing authenticity and actuality has now become a mainstay of not only documentary film and news reportage but also of fictional film, music video and even advertising. The contemporary pervasiveness of verité as technique can facilitate a certain weariness among audiences long used to seeing verité style as a fictional claim to authenticity. This is not quite an argument that there is somehow an authentic verité and an inauthentic verité, but it does mean that contextual factors such as the aims of the filmmaker, the representational environment, and the generic location of particular footage become extremely important in developing an understanding of particular examples of verité footage.

The second problem that has dogged verité in its "Drew Associates" incarnation has been the problem of "partiality", the observation at once banal and complex that verité style can by definition only offer one perspective due to the particular material being filmed, editing decisions and so on. One of the main ways this problem develops in relation to *Don't look back* concerns the question of character. As mentioned above, one of Pennebaker's explicit aims was to present Dylan in a series of crisis moments, to focus on how he handled the extraordinarily difficult period when he was becoming a significant celebrity.

A number of critics ignore this problematic of crisis and view the film as no more than a severe indictment of "Dylan the man." Their responses illustrate the problem of partiality. Leonard Maltin describes the film thus: "[A] candid documentary of Dylan's '65 concert tour, highlighted by his pseudo-hip personality."<sup>[13]</sup> Roger Ebert begins his 2002 reappraisal of the film with the following:

*What a jerk Bob Dylan was in 1965. What an immature, self-important, inflated, cruel, shallow little creature, lacking in empathy and*

*contemptuous of anyone who was not himself or his lackey. Did we actually once take this twirp [sic] as our folk god?*<sup>[14]</sup>

In his 1967 *New York Times* discussion of the film, Richard Goldstein arrives at the opposite conclusion:

*This credibility gap between medium and message is furthered here by the presence of Dylan's manager, Albert Grossman, as the movie's producer. It is a bad omen when an artist's manager produces a film about his client. At worst Don't look back could have been a commercial. With Grossman's presence felt during the crucial cutting and editing this film is at best a commissioned portrait. It's an artistic job, but still a bit flattering around the edges.*<sup>[15]</sup>

In these responses we see how the question of framing becomes central to the way in which character is analysed. Maltin and Ebert both adopt a reading frame in which verit  offers a kind of unmediated truth. They take seriously and literally the idea that verit  offers unmediated access behind the scenes. In disregard of the framing offered by Pennebaker that focuses attention on the pressures Dylan is responding to as a celebrity, Maltin and Ebert read the film entirely in terms of a negative judgement of character.<sup>[16]</sup> On the other hand Goldstein utilizes a different framing and, due to Grossman's status as producer, quite logically reads the film as something between a commercial and a "commissioned portrait." These arguments demonstrate how incredibly difficult it is to separate character from framing in a representational genre as apparently "unmediated" as observational cinema

Dylan, who never really wanted the film released but was not enough opposed to it to prevent it, commented upon this aspect of the film in 1978:

*Don't look back was...somebody else's movie ... I don't think it was accurate at all in terms of showing my formative years. It showed only one side. He [Pennebaker] made it seem like I wasn't doing anything but living in hotel rooms, playing the typewriter and holding press conferences for journalists. Throwing some bottles, there's something about that in the movie. Joan Baez is in it. All that is true, you know. But it's one-sided.*<sup>[17]</sup>

Dylan's concerns about the "one-sidedness" of the film voice an understandable defensiveness about its representation of his character. Indeed by all accounts a scene like the infamous "who threw the glass" tantrum bears out Dylan's concerns. Read as simple observational cinema, this scene shows Dylan apparently losing his cool completely, throwing a tantrum whose vehemence is grossly disproportionate to the fact that someone has, apparently, thrown a glass out the window. (This might be one of the reasons Maltin refers to Dylan as "pseudo-hip": someone who was "genuinely hip" would not have lost his cool here). However, eyewitness Anthea Joseph's version of this event is as follows: "these two bozos had locked themselves in the bathroom, where it had

beautiful glass shelves--those wonderful sort of thirties bathrooms! They were just chucking them out [the window]."<sup>[18]</sup> The semantic problem around the meaning of the word "glass" in the first instance demonstrates a weakness in observational cinema in that the raw image can not be appropriately contextualised: what we see on screen looks as though someone is throwing a tantrum over something as minor as a drinking glass thrown out the window. We have no way of knowing from the footage we see that it is not a drinks glass he is referring to but in fact some extremely valuable bathroom shelving. More important even than the limitations of an observational cinema, is that in this instance Pennebaker's general framing principle--the idea of representing the difficulties of coming to terms with celebrity--has overridden any imperative to show exactly what occurred. Considering the "who threw the glass" scene it would seem that Dylan has very good reason to be concerned that the "partial" reading of his actions and thus his character might well be licensed by the truth claims verit   makes for itself.

In summary, it is important to recognize Pennebaker's framing principle whereby *Don't look back* can be understood in terms of its ethnographic work on celebrity, particularly the idea of a celebrity facing a series of crisis moments where the very notion of celebrity threatens to overwhelm the person thrown into this role. However we must also be mindful of the problems this framing raises both in terms of reading the formal properties of verit   as well as the problem of partiality.

The problem of partiality raises the issue of truth in a different way. The intentions of the verit   filmmaker (defined here as the framing principle which organises filmic material) both authenticate certain truths as well as license the circulation of particular truths. However, the filmmaker's intentions become only one framing principle among several. Depending upon the reading frame adopted, the Dylan of *Don't look back* is any of several characters--a celebrity going through a crisis, a shallow twerp, and a flattering commissioned portrait.

### **Verit   as an expression of a liberal democratic principle.**

If the analysis of *Don't look back* in terms of ethnography/celebrity marks some definitive limitations around the issues of stylistics and partiality, a second kind of analysis of *Don't look back* promises to short-circuit these problems. This analysis involves a consideration of the film in terms derived from Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery's observation that American liberalism is one of the primary philosophical underpinnings of cinema verit  . Allen and Gomery equate verit   with the idea of an enquiring and critical press, allowing filmmakers access to social problems as well as allowing social subjects to speak for themselves. The task of the filmmaker is not to advocate a specific program of social change, but to reveal the truth of a social situation.<sup>[19]</sup>



Jeanne Hall usefully develops an analysis of *Don't look back* in terms of its "systematic critique of the dominant media informed by a liberal view of the role of the press in contemporary democracy."<sup>[20]</sup> Hall proposes four strategies by which *Don't look back* undertakes this critique: 1. Let Dylan do it directly (eg. explicit media critiques in press interviews); 2. Let Dylan do it indirectly (eg. responding to outrageous stories printed about him in the press); 3. Allow the visuals to show the opposite of what Dylan says to the press and/or what the press reports about him; 4. Abort (or even omit) potentially productive interviews where Dylan is not openly condescending to or contemptuous of the reporter (for example the friendly pre-interview discussion with an interviewer from the African service of the BBC. The actual interview aired by the BBC is replaced in the film by the civil rights library footage).<sup>[21]</sup>

Hall's is an extremely suggestive analysis of *Don't look back*, yet it too has several problems. Hall's argument that "Pennebaker's philosophy of filmmaking, much like Drew and Leacock's, can be seen to grow out of a liberal concern for the proper role of the press in democratic societies"<sup>[22]</sup> works primarily by drawing an analogy between Pennebaker's work and that of Drew and Leacock. The argument is much more difficult to sustain in the light of the films Pennebaker went on to make which are, as mentioned above, by and large rock docs. By definition Hall's analysis focuses exclusively upon the aspects of *Don't look back* that are concerned with Dylan's relationship with the media--interviews, press reports etc. Although this is clearly a significant and major part of the film, it is only partial, and excludes analysis of those aspects of the film that don't fit the thesis: celebrity, performance, back-stage, travel, fans etc.

More importantly, it is difficult to sustain a thesis that *Don't look back* presents a systematic critique of dominant media, whether through Dylan's own comments or through editorialising work performed by Pennebaker. As the following excerpt from Clinton Heylin indicates, Dylan's critique of the media was not particularly systematic:

*A further press conference the following day at the Savoy Hotel found him less cooperative and, as the round of interviews filled up the three days before his first concert in Sheffield, the interminable questions--always obvious, often patronizing his work and his fans; witness Maureen Cleaves' question in Don't look back: Do your fans understand a word of what you sing?--rapidly burned out his short fuse. Subsequent interviews with the 'straight press' would be exercises in obfuscation, Dylan always mercilessly putting down his interviewers. Yet in the company of hipper members of the music press, like Ray Coleman of Melody maker or amateur student journalists he occasionally encountered along the way, he dropped the game board to give straight answers to honest questions. Interviewed in Sheffield for the university paper, he even gave a surprisingly frank explanation of 'newspaper reporters.'*

Bob Dylan: They ask the wrong questions, like,

*What did you have for breakfast, What's your favourite colour', stuff like that. Newspaper reporters, man, they're just hung-up writers, frustrated novelists, they don't hurt me none by putting fancy labels on me. They got all those preconceived ideas about me, so I just play up to them. [1965]*

[\[23\]](#)

From this point of view, Dylan's relationship with the media is better considered as a fairly unsystematic amalgam of a couple of different problematics. On the one hand this relationship is shaped by the sense that in 1965 he felt boxed in by a press who had failed to notice his shift from the "finger-pointing" and balladeering songs of the early phase of his career to the musically more urgent songs with largely symbolist lyrics he was currently writing. On the other hand Dylan's relationship with the media is typified by an Us vs. Them structure: Dylan identifies with younger, hipper journalists and works hard to define himself in opposition to the "straight press", that patronized Dylan and simply failed to understand both his work and his audience.

Hall's emphasis on the manner in which verité allows filmmakers access to social problems as well as allowing social subjects to speak for themselves results in a kind of over-determined analysis which forces a reading of *Don't look back* as systematic social critique. What is valuable about her approach is the insight that verité is itself a social phenomenon underpinned by a critical and enquiring American liberal ideology.

## **Correlation between the aims of verité and "rock ideology"**

A straightforward emphasis on verité as a form of celebrity ethnography with an accompanying stylistics of truth is extremely useful for orientation, but risks fetishising these stylistics and producing a series of problems around the partiality of represented truth. Hall's approach alerts us to the manner in which verité, as a form of representation, is not only underpinned by a particular liberal ideology concerned with being critical and enquiring, but is itself a particular kind of historical artefact.

A third approach to *Don't look back*, some of the contours of which I seek to develop here, emerges from the simple observation that there is a remarkable correlation between US verité filmmaking and what we might call "rock ideology," particularly in the 1960s. In this way it, like Hall's approach, is concerned with the way verité is grounded in the values and beliefs of its time. The issue is not simply the coincidence that so much US verité filmmaking took rock music as its topic, but that there were a clear set of similarities between the objectives of verité and the objectives of rock, both in

terms of rock's lyrical content and in its privileging and mythologising of particular lifestyles and forms of self-fashioning.

Both Allan and Gomery, as well as Bill Nichols, point to the manner in which verité<sup>24</sup> arose in the post-war context, and authors such as Lawrence Grossberg and Thomas Doherty have discussed the way in which rock emerges out of the post-war historical experience of increasing prosperity and consumerism and the rise and rise of youth culture.<sup>[24]</sup> Verité<sup>24</sup> and rock coincide around three ideological vectors that are of crucial significance to rock as ideology:

First *mobility*. The highly mobile camera and crew are absolutely basic to verité. Their mobility enables them to follow their performers around and to gain access to situations closed to previous documentary forms. Furthermore, this mobility facilitates a new speed of response on the part of camera and crew, so that documentary footage achieves a spontaneity hitherto unavailable to filmmakers. Mobility for rock is routinely understood in several ways: the ability to sustain movement (by youth access to a car or motorbike); speed (the ability to move fast); as well as transformation (both personal and social). The expression of new documentary values is enabled by new technology, just as expression of rock's value of mobility is enabled by economic prosperity that put technology in the hands of the young.

Second *freedom*. Mobility facilitates freedom and there is a consequent interdependence between the two. Verité<sup>24</sup> has a fundamental concern with freedom of access, the ability of the camera to quite literally go anywhere. In rock ideology freedom is understood partly in terms of hedonism, partly in terms of a kind of restless freedom of movement and access, and partly in terms of freedom of thought and speech which in the 1960s was connected to a separation between youth and adult culture ("your sons and your daughters are beyond your command"). One crucial effect of this emphasis on freedom is a concern with and valorisation of the concept of spontaneity: for the filmmaker an emphasis on the unplanned moment, for rock an individualistic belief in the kind of freedom to do anything and to be anything whenever one chooses to do so.

Third *authenticity*. Both verité<sup>24</sup> and rock could in the 1960s be understood as asserting a commitment to truth. Both the verité<sup>24</sup> film-maker and the rock artist expressed their commitment to truth through an uncompromised relationship to both their material and to their audience; this uncompromised relationship underpinned both rock and verité<sup>24</sup>'s claims to authenticity, and was, of course, always in danger of "selling-out." *Don't look back* captures a moment where the figure of Bob Dylan is in the act of shifting from a "folk Dylan" to a "rock Dylan." Dylan's folk authenticity was predicated upon a relationship with folk traditions and the civil rights movement. Folk authenticity is past oriented, acoustic oriented and pre-modern culture oriented. Rock

authenticity, by contrast, is future oriented, speed oriented and technology oriented. The "rock Dylan" seeks not to be characterised as a spokesman for folk traditions and civil rights politics, he seeks rather to avoid being framed by any particular representational system. The technique he adopts to do so is to wear multiple masks.

## **VeritÃ© and rock: narrative transitivity, dislocated character**

I seek now to develop an account of *Don't look back* that considers the film as an interesting conjunction between the aims of veritÃ© and the ideology of rock, which marks Dylan's shift from folk to rock authenticity. Considered in terms of an ideology concerned with issues of mobility, speed and authenticity, *Don't look back* might best be described a transitive documentary--a documentary that is "in flight" as it were. Rather than peering behind the scenes and registering the truth that lies behind them, *Don't look back* is a documentary that is at every moment registering a central subject who is constantly undergoing transformation. Likewise, the documentary is itself subject to transformation. *Don't look back* cannot be understood as a coherent or unified text any more than "Bob Dylan" can be understood as a unified character: text and character are objects that might best be described always already dislocated--temporally, spatially, aesthetically. Evidence of shared values, beliefs and aesthetic priorities of verite and rock, neither text nor character stays still long enough to reveal a truth that can be easily pinned down.

The Dylan of *Don't look back* is acutely aware of an enormous gap between Dylan the celebrity and what we might call "Dylan the man." Early in the film, on learning of a newspaper report that he smokes eighty cigarettes a day, Dylan wryly comments: "I'm glad I'm not me!" *Don't look back* represents "Dylan the man" as a multiple, heterogenous figure. C.P. Lee, though we might wish to quibble with his employment of the notion of "innateness", has neatly described the "hybrid" nature of the Dylan character in the film:

*We see Dylan interacting with a variety of people in many different situations and, though some may argue that it is a cultivated mystique, Dylan's changing behaviour--hip one second, petulant the next--is an innate chameleon-like response to suit given situations. In Don't look back he is at times disengagingly charming, at others blisteringly acerbic in his handling of naïve hangers on.* [\[25\]](#)

The question of truth emerges explicitly in *Don't look back* in the vitriolic exchange towards the end of the film between Dylan and *Time magazine* reporter Horace Judson. [\[26\]](#) Dylan forcibly tells Judson that:

*The truth is just a plain picture...of a tramp vomiting into the sewer ... and next door to the picture...Mr Rockefeller or...C.W. Jones on the subway*

*going to work.... Just make some sort of collage of pictures, which they [Time magazine] don't do...there's no ideas in Time magazine, there's just these facts.*

Dylan is quite angry at this point, and the argument emerges not as a fully worked out case, but as a position hesitatingly developed on the spot. The position Dylan develops here serves usefully as an interpretative "key" for understanding the film as a whole. Documentary truth here might be understood not as a series of "facts" presented for the edification or titillation of an audience seeking to know the man behind the myth, rather documentary "truth" might itself best be considered in a kind of dialogic fashion as a series of often contradictory or even unrelated images juxtaposed with one another. In these terms, Dylan's and Verité's notion of truth have much in common. The refusal of conventional orientation techniques (voice-over, titles) that was so evident in the Drew and Associates' documentaries of the 1960s might also be read in this light. Cinematic "truth" from this point of view is a series of aesthetic dislocations: it does not focus upon a particular truth inherent in this or that image but is built up through a series of comparisons between these disparate images.

*Don't look back* is also transitive in the sense that it is a film that is both spatially and temporally dislocated, committed to a representation and a milieu that are always on the move. The tour itself was very short and very quick: eight shows, the first show occurring in Sheffield on 30 April, the final taking place in the Albert Hall, London, on May 10. (See appendix 1 for a full list of tour dates) Indeed, Dylan "spent longer in England (and Europe) at the end of his tour than on the road,"<sup>[27]</sup> yet *Don't look back* records only the period of the four days preceding the Sheffield show (the Heathrow airport "Keep a good head and always carry a light bulb" press conference at London airport occurred on 26 April), and concludes immediately following the final Albert Hall concert. *Don't look back* bustles its way through this hectic schedule, documenting scenes of mobility: airports, cars, and automobiles, alongside concert footage, backstage, press interviews and so on. Dylan is most certainly thrown into what for him was an unprecedented degree of pop celebrity, dislocated spatially both by being in a foreign country and by being constantly on the move or at least in spaces of transition (hotel rooms, airports etc).

Transitivity is likewise a central feature of the early rock docs. The two most significant rock docs made prior to *Don't look back*--Koenig and Kreuter's *Lonely boy* (1962, made for the National Film Board of Canada), and the Maysles brothers' *What's happening! The Beatles in the USA* (USA 1964)--both mark important transitive moments in the careers of their respective artists. *Lonely boy* represents the moment where Paul Anka makes a career shift from "teen idol" to "adult entertainer" and is of particular interest because Anka is oscillating between the two modalities, while *What's happening!* captures the Beatles thrown into an unprecedented situation of pop celebrity in the US.

*Don't look back* ratchets up this notion of transitivity, marking as it does a point in Dylan's career that is quite remarkable for its dislocation on several levels. We can consider the ways that, as a speech act, the title of the film serves to frame our reading of it. Whereas the later sixties "festival" documentaries tended to have descriptive titles, largely of locations (*Festival, Monterey pop, Woodstock*),<sup>[28]</sup> the titles of the early transitive rock docs tended to be performative illocutions. The title *Lonely boy* (also the title of Anka's 1959 number one hit single) is assertive. The title serves to foreground a particular aspect of Anka's "character," and signals in large part the work the film performs: the self-conscious analysis and examination of the very deliberate work involved in creating a star whose image very carefully works the trope of the "lonely boy." *What's happening!* is also assertive, taking radio DJ Murray the K's famous signature call and using it to assert that indeed the Beatles are precisely what is happening. The title *Don't look back* is, by contrast, directive, an entreaty to the audience (which may well include Dylan) that things are moving fast in new and as yet uncharted directions that require one to keep eyes forward. Furthermore, *Don't look back* serves as a kind of ironic warning about the act of viewing this particular film: to view the film is to look back. If one is caught looking back one is in danger of being captured, of being frozen in a particular historical moment.

The facts indicate that *Don't look back* was already "out of time" at its San Francisco premiere on 17 May 1967. As Clinton Heylin puts it: "the film reinforced a general perception of Dylan that was already outmoded."<sup>[29]</sup> By the time of the film's premier, an enormous amount had happened to the folk minstrel of the 1965 English tour: Dylan had recorded the two major "rock" albums *Highway 61 revisited* (1965) and *Blonde on blonde* (1966) and had been playing with amplified instruments and a rock backing band since the Newport Folk Festival in July 1965. Furthermore, he had suffered the trauma of and the convalescence from the motorbike accident of 29 July 1966, and, by the time of the release of *Don't look back*, was already working with the Band on what would later become known as the *Basement tapes* album. He was also at work on *Eat the document*, the film of the 1966 English tour, which developed an entirely different set of aesthetic and editing ideas from *Don't look back*<sup>[30]</sup>. By 1967 Dylan had moved an enormous distance from the character in *Don't look back*.

This sense of obsolescence is also a feature internal to the film. By the time of the UK tour Dylan had already recorded the half band, half acoustic *Bringing it all back home* (1965), and the first single from that album reached number nine in the UK charts in April. However the English tour was an acoustic tour, one which primarily showcased material from Dylan's earlier acoustic albums, principally *The times they are-a changing* (1964) which had been recorded some two years earlier, though the eponymous single had reached number nine in March, just prior to the tour. This tension between a Dylan who is ready to move on to rock and amplification (articulated most neatly in the scene where Dylan is delightedly surveying electric guitars in a music shop window) but

is still somewhat routinely playing the older acoustic material is absolutely central to *Don't look back*:

*I was doing fine, you know, singing and playing my guitar. It was a sure thing...I was getting very bored with that...I knew what the audience was going to do, how they would react. It was very automatic.* [\[31\]](#)

## Tension between the "old" and the "new": Joan Baez and Donovan

Appropriate to its emphasis on transitivity and change *Don't look back* is generally structured in terms of a distinction between the old and the new.

Through the course of the film, this tension between the old and the new works itself out in a fairly systematic way. Having already considered Dylan's relationship with the mainstream press as structured in terms of a distinction between old and new, I will consider two further elements of this tension here.

First is Dylan's relationship with Joan Baez. It is well known that in the period represented by *Don't look back*, as far as Dylan was concerned, the relationship with Baez was already over. Baez was "hanging around" on the England tour expecting to sing on stage with Dylan (as he had just done on her US tour) but Dylan was refusing to allow her on stage. Dylan's triangular relationship with Baez and Sara Lowndes, his future wife, has been discussed in detail elsewhere. [\[32\]](#) In the early 1970s Baez commented on the situation as follows:

*And by the time we got to England, whatever had happened in Bobby's mind--I'd never seen him less healthy than he was in England--he was a wreck and he wouldn't ask me on the stage to sing. And I was really surprised. I was very, very, very hurt. I was miserable. I was a complete ass; I should have left. I mean, I should have left after that first concert. But there's something about situations like that--you hang around. I stayed for two weeks, and then when I walked out the door in the film, I never came back after that.* [\[33\]](#)

The scenes that immediately precede Baez walking out the door are, it must be said, quite brutal: In the Savoy Hotel, Baez attempts to gain Dylan's attention by singing "Percy's song" while Dylan steadfastly types and keeps his back to her; Neuwirth explains to Baez that she is "fagged out" and that she's wearing a see-through blouse and Dylan "don't even want her." However, the film doesn't dramatise Baez's walking out the door in the manner described in Baez's account. The scene immediately following has her in a car with Dylan, then a scene or two later she is singing piercingly high notes in the company of Dylan, Neuwirth and Tom Wilson. It is only after these scenes that Baez disappears from the film.

It is not really useful here to worry about whether Baez, in her recollection of events, somehow got it wrong: she may or may not have. *Don't look back* is clearly not interested in making itself an account of the relationship between Dylan and Baez. In terms of the tension *Don't look back* maintains between

Dylan's "folk" past and his "electric" future, Baez's function in the film is to be associated with the "folk" past. In the Savoy Hotel Dylan/Baez scene, after Baez has played the (as yet) incomplete Dylan song "Love is just a four letter word," Baez suggests that if he finishes it she will sing it. Dylan mumbles evasively and there is a cut immediately to the next scene, as though there is to be no further discussion about completing the song--Dylan has moved on and will not look back.<sup>[34]</sup> In another example, when Baez walks out the door, the camera lingers for some time on Dylan furiously typing. He pays no attention to her departure; rather he is intent on his current project. The admonition not to "look back" here quite literally pertains to Dylan. Early in the film a photographer fails to recognise her instantly: "strewth! I didn't recognise you, I'm sorry, I've been looking for you all day!" From this point on the film figures Baez as a character who, ignored and out of step, does not belong to the restless mobile present of *Don't look back*.

The figure who clearly does belong to the restless future projected by *Don't look back* is Alan Ginsberg. Ginsberg gets prime position in the "Subterranean homesick blues" "promo clip" that opens (announces) the film, conversing with Bob Neuwirth on the left hand side of the frame for the duration of the shot. Ginsberg recurs in the very drunken Savoy Hotel party scene towards the end of the film, immediately after the "who threw the glass" incident has been resolved. The following exchange occurs between Dylan and folk singer Derroll Adams:

*Dylan: Are there any poets around like Alan Ginsberg around man?*

*Adams: No. No nothing like that...Dominic Behan.*

*Dylan: No. I don't want to hear anybody like Dominic Behan man.*

It is Ginsberg, rather than the political balladeer Dominic Behan who is clearly pointing the way forward for Dylan in 1965, a Dylan represented by the contemporary British media as a political balladeer himself. The recurring "Dylan against Donovan" trope that helps structure the film can also be seen in this light. At the time of the 1965 tour, the British media was heavily touting Donovan as the "new Dylan." Given the speed with which Dylan was moving, the very idea of Dylan novation represented by Donovan was already obsolete, thus the mock tension between Donovan and Dylan throughout the film is better seen as a kind of battle between an old and a new Dylan, culminating in the scene where the two trade off songs. This scene has quite often been interpreted as a kind of summation of the battle between them, a battle that Dylan wins.<sup>[35]</sup> Dylan's "victory" is precisely one of the old vs. the new Dylan-- Donovan's song is a nice sweet though harmless ballad, while Dylan's is the recent acerbic "It's all over now, Baby Blue."<sup>[36]</sup>

I would speculate here that it is quite possible that Baez is also a Dylan target in the song trade-off scene. The scene parallels the earlier Savoy hotel scene



where Baez and Dylan are trading songs: Baez sings a couple of Dylan songs ("Percy's song", "Love is just a four letter word") in, we have assumed, an attempt to woo him. Dylan replies not with new material but with a couple of half remembered Hank Williams songs. Shortly after this scene Baez is in the back of a car singing "It's all over now, Baby Blue" while substituting the word "banana" (she's eating a banana) for the word "fire" ("Yonder stands your orphan with his gun/crying like a banana in the sun"). There is a quite arresting moment when Dylan performs this song for Donovan. As Dylan begins his delivery of the lines Baez had earlier bowdlerised, he looks directly at the camera (for the only time in the film apart from the "Subterranean" promo clip), grins, and, for no apparent reason, massively over-emphasises the word "orphan." Dylan might well be saying directly to Baez here "this is how the song goes." If this is the case then at this time, in this context, "It's all over now, Baby Blue" might well be directed explicitly as a goodbye to Baez. Likewise, Dylan's reclaiming of the song suggests that Baez's playfulness with the new song is deemed illegitimate.

A complex ethical issue is raised in Dylan's various exchanges with Baez, Donovan and Brendan Behan. I have been arguing that *Don't look back*, is a verit  attempt to represent Dylan's restless and highly mobile aesthetic development and transformation. By necessity this development is represented externally: Verit  can't interview Dylan and by definition it can't have access to his private thoughts. What it can do though is to establish a kind of objective correlative for Dylan's (internal) aesthetic transformation, in its representation of Dylan's relationship with particular individuals. This raises a major difficulty in terms of the ethics of verite: in externalising Dylan's internal aesthetic problematic and utilising particular individuals in order to do it, these individuals are being exploited by the verit  process--they are being used as a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. It may be that this sense of exploitation--these individuals being used by the film in order to represent and explain Dylan's world--is what critics like Maltin and Ebert are responding to. Because Maltin and Ebert read the film at a fairly na ve level, (eg. the film goes back-stage to represent the truth of Dylan) they place all of the blame for this exploitation on "Dylan the man" rather than analysing the very problematics of verit  itself: as we have seen verit  invests in the notion of change and mobility. This investment shapes the editorial choices and the characterisations that result.

## **Tension between the "old" and the "new": music and narrative structure**

A second way this tension between an old and a new aesthetic works itself out is through the structuring of musical material through the course of the film. Pennebaker has said that he didn't feel that playing live was the most important part of *Don't look back*,<sup>[37]</sup> and this is certainly borne out by a consideration of the amount of screen-time live performance takes up in the film. A total of approximately thirty-five minutes (just over one third) of the film is devoted to music: Dylan live; Dylan or others (Baez, Alan Price, Donovan) performing "backstage" (often, but not always, hotel rooms); Dylan songs overheard on radio or some other diegetic source; other sources, eg. the promo film for "Subterranean homesick blues" which opens the film and the file

footage of "Only a pawn in their game." Of this material, just over fourteen minutes of the film is "live" footage of Dylan in performance.

Like the film's construction of Dylan and the people around him, the presentation of musical material in the film is systematic rather than contingent. To begin with we can contrast the relative fortunes of the two singles released in Britain immediately prior to the tour: "Subterranean homesick blues" and "The times they are a-changing": "Subterranean" represented a new Dylan, highlighting Dylan's contemporary sound, symbolist lyrics and individualist persona, while "Times" represented the older, balladeering style and activist/communitarian persona. Although the bulk of *Don't look back* is presented more or less in chronological order, as mentioned above the opening four minutes (the "Subterranean" promo clip and backstage footage immediately preceding one of the Albert Hall concerts) were some of the last to be filmed, thus their temporal dislocation is worth looking at more closely.

These opening scenes have a clear function of framing the film in quite specific ways. As C.P. Lee nicely puts it: "the raucous, punk-like 'Subterranean' is ushering in a whole new era of sound, and yet Pennebaker has chosen to place it like a slap in the face at the top of the movie--Wham!--No introduction, no quarter asked, no quarter given."<sup>[38]</sup> "Subterranean homesick blues", and the sound it ushers in, provides the audience with a place from which to judge the guitarist/troubadour of the remainder of the film. From its opening moment the film thus presents itself as dislocated from itself. The folk Dylan it portrays persistently at odds with the rock Dylan of the opening, thus in its emphasis on what I have called transitivity, it moves from what is portrayed as a dislocated, out of date, and thus "inauthentic" representation of Dylan to a more authentic one, the "rock" Dylan of the present, still in motion or in progress by the end of the film.

After Neuwirth and Ginsberg have concluded the "Subterranean" sequence by taking their walking-canes and ambling "off-stage," there is a cut to backstage Dylan nervously preparing to go on stage. He's fretting about *his* cane, which he can't find. He finds it just before he goes out to perform. Dylan goes onstage to applause while the screen goes black. The audio is Dylan performing "All I really want to do" while the visual is Bob Dylan's signature over the black background, followed by the other featured performers in the film. Only then does the "film proper" begin with Dylan and his entourage arriving at Heathrow airport to begin the tour.

There is more going on here than simply positioning the audience with the "later" rather than the "earlier" Dylan. We might note that Dylan didn't vary his song list on the English tour, always opening with "The times they are a-changing." At every concert, "All I really want to do" was the second to last song performed (see appendix 2). Thus, although the impression is created here that Dylan has gone on stage and opened with "All I really want to do," this is in

fact an editing decision. The result of this editing decision is that the two opening songs of the film serve to characterise Dylan in an interestingly complex way. The public Dylan is both the raucous, confused, snarling, adrenaline-charged Dylan of "Subterranean", and the mellow, friendly, non-judgemental Dylan of "All I really want to do."

As Ellen Willis pointed out in her brilliant 1967 essay on Dylan, the most tempting way to understand Dylan as a popular cultural hero is to "forget his public presence, listen to his songs." However, Willis is unsatisfied with this, arguing that it "won't do. For Dylan has exploited his image as a vehicle for artistic statement."<sup>[39]</sup> The opening section of the film establishes not simply the multiple character who emerges from contrast between the two songs "Subterranean" and "All I really want to do", it also includes one particular version of a backstage Dylan: (understandably) nervy before going onstage, but also affected--looking around for his cane. Even before the landing at Heathrow Airport the viewer has been presented with multiple and contradictory Dylans, both onstage (the songs) and backstage. Further, I suspect, the decision to begin with a backstage Dylan who then goes onstage is a signal to the audience that the Dylan of the remainder of *Don't look back* is a character who--as numerous commentators have pointed out--is always "on", a kind of method-actor who is acutely aware of his performance in front of the supposedly "fly-on-the-wall" camera.<sup>[40]</sup>

Whereas "Subterranean" functions in terms of both positioning the audience in a particular present, as well as contrasting with other material in order to characterise Dylan, "Times" functions in terms of its repetitions. Various commentators have pointed out that by the time of the English tour Dylan was tired of and bored with his earlier material, in particular "Times" (indeed the song had been dropped from his set list in US concerts immediately prior to the tour, but as a current single was reinstated for the English audience).<sup>[41]</sup>

To consider the function of "Times" in terms of repetition, we need to consider the structure of *Don't look back* as a whole. I have outlined in extremely general terms the structure of the film in appendix 3. Even a cursory glance at this structure reveals that *Don't look back* is structured in the manner of a fictional "rock n roll" feature film employing the familiar "the kids want to put on a rock n roll show and manage to do so against all odds" narrative. In this sense *Don't look back* is structured teleologically: everything moves toward the big Royal Albert Hall show at the end of the film where all elements of Dylan's journey--backstage, the press, fans and ultimately performance--are brought to their logical conclusion. On the way to this culmination (the tour has proceeded through the provinces and concludes in a metropolitan performance of which he can be proud) Dylan has overcome various hindrances: the press (which doesn't understand either Dylan or "young people"), technical glitches (the lost cane, the harmonica and the PA that don't work), difficult people (in particular Baez) and competing stars (Donovan). He has also been helped by various people: fans; Grossman as business manager (we might

acknowledge Tito Burns here also); Neuwirth as tour manager; people like Alan Price and Derroll Adams providing local knowledge and so on. Various locations provide stages for different kinds of musical performance (hotel rooms, radio broadcasts, backstage, onstage etc). Like *A hard day's night* (UK 1964) which concludes with a concert at the Scala Theatre, *Don't look back* culminates in a concert at the Royal Albert Hall (Dylan in fact played *two* Royal Albert concerts, but, in keeping with the "putting on a show" narrative, there is absolutely no way of knowing this from looking at the film itself).

Within this general structure, *Don't look back* presents excerpts from no less than four different performances of the song "Times" (the only other song presented more than once in the film is "It's all over now, Baby Blue", as discussed above. Half a dozen of the songs performed on the tour are not presented in any form on the film at all). It is only fifteen minutes into the film that the first concert footage occurs, in Sheffield, and for the next fifteen minutes of the film concentrates on performances and fan exchanges in the North. In this part of the film, "Times" is played three times, twice live (the brief and perfunctory Sheffield performance as well as the disaster at Liverpool where it takes some time before the PA is plugged in) and once overheard on the radio (the song is number sixteen on the charts). During this part of the film Dylan also discusses "Times" with a young female fan in Liverpool--she likes the song rather than his new material; Dylan teasingly responds: "Oh, you're one of those. I understand now." This constant repetition of "Times" in such a short period of film-time serves to make it outstay its welcome for the film's audience as well as for Dylan: there is a certain weariness concerning "Times" in the film which results quite simply from this repetition. The song is then featured on one more occasion in the film, at the beginning of the Royal Albert Hall concert. By the time of this performance--the climax of the film--the song brings with it all the baggage it has accrued from the earlier repetitions.

Dylan may well have been bored with "Times" by the time of the English tour, but it is the editing decision to show so many repetitions of the song during a short period early in the film that serves to make it "stale" in the film. The film *wants* you to be bored with "Times." By the time of the final concert the *film* audience (unlike, presumably, the concert audience, but like Dylan) wants to get the opening song over and done with and get onto the new stuff.

The film draws a contrast between a musical past and present in a couple of other ways. Firstly, there is a direct contrast between the opening sections of the film and the material from the Northern concerts. The early parts of the film represent, indeed perhaps fetishize the Dylan of the present moment. This *present* is represented in the interviews where the very "now" Mr. Dylan has verbal exchanges with journalists who "don't get it," and thus are marked as being of a different generation or time. The musical present is, as we have already mentioned, represented by the "Subterranean" promo which opens the film and a little later by a scene in a hotel room where a recording of "Maggie's farm" is played so loudly that it drowns out the conversation. In contrast to

this music of the current moment, the various live performances in the North all feature older material: "Times" and "To Ramona" in Sheffield; "Times" in Liverpool; "The lonesome death of Hattie Carroll" in Leicester; "Don't think twice, it's all right" in Newcastle.<sup>[42]</sup>

Secondly, the film's culminating Albert Hall concert (a fiction created by the film as we noted earlier in that it was actually two separate concerts), for the first time introduces Dylan's current songs into his live performance. Although there was no variation to the song list in the actual concerts on the tour, the Albert Hall concert footage distinguishes this concert from previous concerts as it both includes Dylan's current songs and likewise changes the set order. It begins as always with "Times," but then fades into "Talkin' World War Three blues" (from the *Freewheelin'* album), a song that had opened the second half of the concert. The rest of the songs on screen are, in order, "It's all right ma, I'm only bleeding," "Gates of Eden," and "Love minus zero/no limit." This ordering does not correspond to the set list at all (see appendix 2). The function of this reordering is to make the Albert Hall performance--the culmination of the film--appear to move systematically from older to more recent songs in a way that mirrors the organisation of the film itself.

The structuring of musical material in the film then is quite explicitly in terms of a contrast between older and newer material and a privileging of the latter. In order to illustrate this contrast I have considered here the relative fortunes of the two songs "Subterranean homesick blues" and "The times they are a changing"; the contrast between music that is happening "now" as exemplified by the opening of the film and older music as exemplified by "Times" as well as other songs performed in the provincial concerts in the North. I have also considered the careful manner in which the Royal Albert Hall concert is edited so as to move from older to newer material. This careful structuring of musical material combines with a representation of Dylan which works by contrasting him with figures representing the old, in particular Donovan and Joan Baez.

As a result, the truth represented by verit  film in this instance, is, despite what it appears to promise, not so much a concern with access to the real man backstage as with film aligning itself with certain "rock n roll truths": in particular the fundamental importance placed upon the concepts of mobility, freedom and authenticity, which I have summarised as the documentary's emphasis on transitivity.

## Conclusion

Howard Alk, the cameraman on *Don't look back* who on occasions appears on-screen, had a view of verit  that contrasts in interesting ways with Pennebaker's view that the filmmaker watches the celebrity going through some kind of change and hopes to capture something of it. For Alk, verit  was an arena where "truth and fiction collide."<sup>[43]</sup> The fact that Dylan collaborated with Alk on subsequent film projects such as *Eat the document* (Dylan, USA

1968) and *Renaldo and Clara* (Dylan, USA 1976) gives a strong indication as to where Dylan's own heart lay in this matter.

Despite the significant differences between the two views of verité, they are not mutually exclusive--both are incorporated by the aesthetic of what I have called "transitivity." The productive tension between the two views has been instrumental in generating the kind of analysis I have sought to develop here.

As we witnessed from the early films *Lonely boy!* and *What's happening! The Beatles in the USA*, there is no doubt that a basic feature of verité treatments of popular musical stars was the recording of celebrities going through changes. *Don't look back* radicalizes this transitivity: it is no longer simply the ethnographic point of recording some of the changes a star goes through and the person's reaction to them, but rather of marking the manner in which both the star and the documentary itself are *defined* by this very transitivity, and thus by the values of a rock ideology that they share.

*Don't look back* also radicalizes the idea of truth and fiction colliding. One aspect of this, as we have been exploring here, is the ways in which fictional tropes structure reality footage. I have considered here the way that characters serve to represent Dylan's aesthetic development. I have also considered the way in which fictional narrative strategies structure the film and, along with song ordering, serve to make particular arguments around mobility and transformation.

There is much more to this point than the banal observation that even the most realist of documentary filmmakers use fictional techniques in order to structure reality. The reality that fictional tropes work to structure are themselves the product of a series of fictions. Among these structuring fictions is what I have been referring to as rock ideology--the commitment to values such as mobility, speed, spontaneity, freedom, authenticity. I've summarised these in their particular role in verité cinema as transitivity, which I have discussed in the context of *Don't look back* as an emphasis on change and movement and dislocation in the service of authenticity. This is just one example of the productiveness of rock ideology: rock ideology facilitates the bringing into history of fictional entities such as lyrics, music, narratives, personal images (eg clothes, haircuts), lifestyles, mythologies (including ways of dividing the world into us against them), criticism, and so on. As a case like *Don't look back* makes clear, these fictions themselves have had very real and demonstrable transformational effects on participants (eg. celebrities and their entourages), observers (eg. filmmakers and critics), and audiences.

Despite the fact that it clearly breaks a number of the "commandments" of verité filmmaking, *Don't look back* remains an example of "classic" verité. It is about as close to a "pure" example of verité as we are going to get. *Don't look back*, which both thematises and dramatises the notion of transitivity in relation to the figure of Bob Dylan, also signals a historical moment of transitivity for both rock and for verité. *Don't look back* marks the end of the

verit  ethnographic exploration of the notion of the rock celebrity working through a situation of crisis and transformation. As rock developed in both self-confidence and in self-reflexivity through the rest of the 1960s and beyond, verit  also underwent considerable transformation.

After *Don't look back*, 1960s rock verit  would appear to have gone in two different directions. One direction--evidenced most notably by the extraordinary series of documentaries concerning the Rolling Stones which include *One plus one* (UK 1968), and *Cocksucker blues* (USA 1972)--would with varying forms of self-reflexivity, radicalize the representation and analysis of rock celebrity, and in the process problematise the very idea that documentary might be something *opposed* to or different from fiction. Another direction, exemplified by the "festival" rock docs of the late sixties (eg. *Monterey Pop* and *Woodstock*), explicitly takes up the growing confidence of 1960s youth counter-culture as a mass or movement and its expression through music. In these films the counter-cultural and crisis-ridden elements witnessed in relation to celebrity in *Don't look back* are democratised, as the crowd itself becomes a central character and actor: performers appear as elements of this crowd rather than, as in previous documentaries, celebrities who are by definition removed from the crowd. <sup>[44]</sup> In these films, 'transitivity' has become a mass movement.

In tracking these transformations and developments, verit  proved itself to be perfectly capable of transforming itself. Classic verit , the technique adopted for *Don't look back*, was in these later films able to accommodate techniques that would have been anathema to a hard-core proponent: interview, voice-over, diegetic breaches, split-screen and so on. This does not mean that verit  and its practitioners sold out or became decadent. Quite the contrary, by virtue of this transformation verit  demonstrated its shared commitment to values such as mobility, freedom and spontaneity.

My thanks and gratitude to Amanda Howell and Cory Messenger for the incisiveness of their comments and suggestions regarding this paper.

## APPENDIX 1

Dylan's 1965 English tour dates.

30 Apr - The Oval, City Hall, Sheffield

1 May - Odean, Liverpool

2 May - De Monfort Hall, Leicester

5 May - Town Hall, Birmingham

6 May - City Hall, Newcastle

7 May - Free Trade Hall, Manchester

9 May - Royal Albert Hall, London

10 May - Royal Albert Hall, London

Source: Olof Björner, "Still on the road: 1965 concerts, interviews and recording sessions,

[http://www.bjorner.com/DSN00785%20\(65\).htm#DSN01000](http://www.bjorner.com/DSN00785%20(65).htm#DSN01000) (2000)

## **APPENDIX 2**

Set List for the 1965 English Tour

1. The Times They Are A-Changin'
2. To Ramona
3. Gates Of Eden
4. If You Gotta Go, Go Now
5. It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)
6. Love Minus Zero/No Limit
7. Mr. Tambourine Man



*Interval*

8. Talking World War III Blues

9. Don't Think Twice, It's All Right

10. With God On Our Side

11. She Belongs To Me

12. It Ain't Me, Babe

13. The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll

14. All I Really Want To Do

15. It's All Over Now, Baby Blue

Constructed from: Björner

### **APPENDIX 3**

Structure of *Don't Look Back*

0.00 *London* "Subterranean" promo, backstage, "All I Really Want to Do" (titles)

4.00 *London* Backstage, primarily press conferences (contrast between playing with press and respect shown to BBC African service)

15.15 *Sheffield* Performance ("Times"/"Ramona") and reviews

20.50 *Liverpool* Fans (Girls, discussion re "Times"). Performance ("Times" not plugged in)

24.10 *Leicester* "Times" on car radio (no. 16) Performance ("Hattie Carroll") Fans (Guys who play Dylan's songs as rock)

30.00 *Savoy Hotel London I* Dylan vs. Baez (also back of car)

38.30 *Birmingham* Last of Baez; Dylan goes onstage but no concert footage

39.45 Grossman and Tito Burns "doing business"

46.00 Dylan checking out guitars/ Dylan at piano composing

48.00 *Newcastle* Fans/Interview with "Science Student"/High Sheriff's Lady/Alan Price sings George Formby/Performance ("Don't Think Twice, It's Alright")/Train

1.02.30 *Manchester* Sound Check and Taxi

1.05.00 *Savoy Hotel London II* Drunken party ("Who threw the glass?"/Dylan vs. Donovan)

1.14.30 *Royal Albert Hall* Checking out stage/crowd/harmonica problems

1.16.40 *Royal Albert Hall* Interview Horace Judson

1.23.10 *Royal Albert Hall* Backstage/audience arrival

1.26.00 *Royal Albert Hall Performance* ("Times," "Talking World War III Blues," "It's Alright Ma, I'm Only Bleeding," "Gates of Eden," "Love Minus Zero/No Limit)

1.33.50 *London In Limo Leaving concert*

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## Endnotes

(To return to your place in the text, simply click on the endnote number)

[1] Greil Marcus, *Invisible republic: Bob Dylan's basement tapes* (London: Picador, 1998), 28.

[2] Cited in Luke Crampton and Dafydd Rees, *Rock and roll year by year* (New York: DK Publishing, 2003), 90.

[3] Israel G. Young, "Frets and Frails" in ed. Craig McGregor, *Bob Dylan: a retrospective* (London: Picador, 1975), p 70. (Reprinted from *Sing Out!* November 1965)

[4] Pennebaker, who worked on *Primary* as a photographer, has gone on to build a career making documentaries about rock artists such as Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, and Depeche Mode. More recently, Pennebaker has directed films such as *Down from the Mountain* (USA 2000), a documentary showcasing the musical artists who contributed to the Coen Brother's feature *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (USA 2000) and *Only the Strong Survive* (USA 2002), an examination of various important Stax records artists.

[5] See David Bordwell, and Kristen Thompson, *Film art* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), 406ff; David Cook, *A history of narrative film* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 962; and William H. Phillips, *Film: an introduction* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999), 324-25.

[6] For a detailed outlining of the notion of rock as ideology see the Lawrence Grossberg books *We gotta get out of this place: popular conservatism and postmodern culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and *Dancing in spite of myself* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

[7] See Karl G. Heider, *Ethnographic film* (Austin: University of Texas Press). Heider, 1976), Solveig Freudentahl, "What to tell and how to show it: issues in

anthropological filmmaking," in *Anthropological filmmaking*, ed. Jack R. Rollwagen (London: Harwood, 1990), 123-134, and Timothy Asch, "The ethics of anthropological film-making," in *Film as ethnography*, eds. Peter Crawford and David Turton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 196-204, for particularly clear and useful outlines of the key representational and ethical issues involved in ethnographic filmmaking.

[8] In films such as *Titicut follies* (Wiseman, USA 1967), *High School* (Wiseman, USA 1968) and *Hospital* (USA 1970) Wiseman famously took the camera into relatively closed organisations, such as an institution for the criminally insane, a high school and a hospital, and filmed the inmates going about their business.

[9] Clinton Heylin (*Behind the shades: the biography--take two* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001) describes this as Pennebaker's view of cinema verite.

[10] Heylin, 189.

[11] Jeanne Hall, "'Don't you ever just watch?' American cinema verit  and *Don't look back*" in *Documenting the documentary: close readings of documentary film and video*, eds. Barry Keith Grant and Jeanette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1998), 224.

[12] This footage was shot by Ed Emshwiller at a civil rights voters registration rally at Silas Mages's Farm in Greenwood, Mississippi on 6 July, 1963 (C.P. Lee, *Like a bullet of light: the films of Bob Dylan* (London: Helter Skelter, 2000, 34, although Lee erroneously dates this footage as 1964). For a more detailed background to the shooting of this footage, see Heylin, 121.

[13] Leonard Maltin, *Leonard Maltin's 2001 movie and video guide* (New York: Signet, 2000), 373.

[14] Roger Ebert, "*Don't look back*," *Chicago Sun-Times*

<http://www.docurama.com/press/Bob%20Dylan%20Chicago%20Sun%20Times%20Review.htm> (2002)

[15] Richard Goldstein "*Don't look back*" in McGregor, 127.

[16] It is not impossible however that Ebert numbers among those who have never forgiven Dylan for deliberately moving away from his position as "folk" hero, and recognises in *Don't look back* a record of the moment of transformation in Dylan.

[17] Heylin, 184.

[18] Cited in Heylin, 191; see also Lee, 27-29. My hunch is that the Dylan's "hotel trashing scene" in *Hearts of fire* (USA 1987) is in part a sly allusion to the "who threw the glass" scene.

[19] Robert Allan and Douglas Gomery, *Film history, theory and practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 233-34.

[20] Hall, 236.

[21] Hall, 229-235.

[22] Hall, 224-25.

[23] Heylin, 187.

[24] See Grossberg (1992, 131-259) for an analysis of the rise of youth culture and consumerism in relation to rock music and ideology. The standard account of this phenomenon in relation to film made for or about youth remains Thomas Doherty's *Teenagers and teen pics: the juvenilization of American movies in the 1950s* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002). The similarities between verit © and rock correlate with Allan and Gomery's insistence on principles of democratic liberalism, indeed rock music is I suspect literally unthinkable outside such an ideological framework. At certain moments, particularly when rock takes itself seriously (as in the case of Dylan circa 1965) rock might well be seen as an alternative free press dedicated to spreading truths--both delightful and uncomfortable--which the mainstream press might well ignore. From this point of view it might be said that rock democratizes rebellion. Bill Nichols' now classic discussion of what he calls observational cinema (*Representing reality: issues and concepts in documentary* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) tends to regard it as solving a set of problems of democratic articulation left unsolved by what he terms classic or expository documentary (134-37).

[25] Lee, 23.

[26] Although on screen we see only Dylan's verbal onslaught, according to Anthea Joseph, who witnessed the exchange, Judson was "quite abusive as well. He was really upset...not properly briefed, treating Bob as some sort of curiosity, not as a serious artist." (Heylin, 187).

[27] Heylin, 193.

[28] *Festival* (Lerner, USA 1967), *Monterey pop* (Pennebaker, USA 1968), *Woodstock* (Wadleigh, USA 1970).

[29] Heylin, 270.

[30] For a thorough account of the making of *Eat the document*, see Lee, 39-63.

[31] Dylan, 1965 (quoted in Heylin, 193).

[32] See for example Heylin and Lee. Also Anthony Scaduto, *Bob Dylan* (London: Abacus, 1972) and David Hajdu, *Positively Fourth street: the lives and times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Farina and Richard Farina* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002).

[33] Scaduto, 197.

[34] In fact the song was completed and was included on *Any day now*, Baez's 1968 album consisting entirely of Dylan songs.

[35] See for example Hall (233) and Lee (29).

[36] It could reasonably be argued that Dylan expresses a genuine appreciation of Donovan's song, and that Donovan explicitly asks Dylan to perform "It's all over now, Baby Blue." (We might add here that Donovan famously wrote the phrases on a considerable number of the cards Dylan utilized on the "Subterranean homesick blues" promo). This expression of civility between them does not alter the way in which this scene functions within the film as the culmination of a battle. Indeed, the lyrics Dylan sings ("The vagabond who's rapping at your door/Is standing in the clothes that you once wore/Strike another match, go start anew/And it's all over now, Baby Blue") appear to relate quite directly to the relationship between Dylan and Donovan. Before taking sides here, we do well to recall that Dylan developed his own career by styling himself directly on the work of others (most famously Dave van Ronk

and Woody Guthrie). It may well be the case that it was through rock that Dylan found his own artistic "voice". Donovan, of course, went on to develop his own unmistakable style and "sound."

[37] Heylin, 193.

[38] Lee, 19.

[39] Ellen Willis, "Dylan," in McGregor, 135.

[40] David Ehrenstein and Bill Reed, *Rock on film* (New York: Delilah Books, 1982. 180-81), Heylin (189-90), Lee (23-24) and Willis all make variations of this point.

[41] See Heylin (193), Lee (26), and Scaduto (211).

[42] For more details see Olof Björner, *Still on the road: 1965 concerts, interviews and recording sessions*, [http://www.bjorner.com/DSN00785%20\(65\).htm#DSN01000](http://www.bjorner.com/DSN00785%20(65).htm#DSN01000) (2000).

[43] Heylin, 424

[44] Two other films featuring the Rolling Stones: *The Stones in the park* (Woodhead, UK 1969), *Gimme shelter* (Maysles, US 1970), are of considerable interest because they share features of both the "self-reflexive celebrity" documentary and the "festival" documentary. In *Gimme shelter* the relationship between youth culture, the celebrity, and the crowd is of course particularly problematised.

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