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Documentary, Performance and Questions of Authenticity

On British Filmmakers Molly Dineen and Nick Broomfield

This article will examine some aspects of the work of two British documentary filmmakers who are frequently bracketed together – Molly Dineen and Nick Broomfield. Although they hardly constitute a movement, Broomfield and Dineen do represent an important historical moment in British documentary filmmaking. They both attended the National Film and Television School (Broomfield in the early 1970s, Dineen in the early 1980s) and were taught by Colin Young, who in turn influenced their style of filmmaking. In an interview coinciding with the UK release of *BIGGIE AND TUPAC* (2002) Broomfield argued:



Nick Broomfield in DRIVING ME CRAZY 1988

«There's no point in pretending the camera's not there. I think what's important is the interaction between the film-makers and those being filmed, and that the audience is aware of the interaction so they can make decisions of their own. When I was at the National Film School, Colin Young, who was my teacher, said that the problem with cinema verité is that you don't know the film-makers behind the camera. The audience doesn't have that information so they don't know what the interaction is. That's the variable that's most influential – it's not the presence of the camera that changes people's behavior, it's the relationship they have with the people behind it (Wood 2005).»

Following on from this, the principal reason Molly Dineen and Nick Broomfield are frequently discussed in tandem is that they both make documentaries that give their audiences a sense of <the film-makers behind the camera> by becoming active presences in otherwise largely observational documentaries. They also both perform a technical role – Broomfield records sound and Dineen is her own cinematographer – and it is via these roles that they interact with their subjects. In his most characteristic films (from the late 1980s to *LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* in 2002) Broomfield appears on screen interrogating his subjects, whilst Dineen's voice can be heard prompting and asking questions from behind the camera. As a result, their films are discourses on the act of filming informed by their own persistent and reflective presence.

After outlining the inherently performative nature of documentary filmmaking in general, I will focus on how authenticity and ownership are, in these directors' films, reinforced as well as questioned, principally through their uses of voiceover and interviews. The films of Broomfield and Dineen are not autobiographical, although they are clearly authored and structured around an awareness and acceptance of their authorial presence. Broomfield

is more interventionist, more the interrogator/agitator; whilst Dineen is observational first and interrogational only second.

Culminating in the work of filmmakers such as Michael Moore, Dineen, and Broomfield, documentary has an established tradition of the performer-director. These filmmakers, to varying degrees, participate in their films as a result of being interested in discovering alternative and less formally restrictive ways of getting to what they perceive to be the essence of their subjects. The overt intervention of the filmmaker definitively signals the death of documentary theory's idealization of the unbiased film by asking, categorically and from within the documentary itself: what else is a documentary but a dialogue between



HOME FROM THE HILL by Molly Dineen, 1987

a filmmaker, a crew, and a situation that, although in existence prior to their arrival, has irrevocably been changed by that arrival? What author/performer-based documentaries reiterate are the twin notions that a documentary is its own document and that the interventionist documentary filmmaker is a fluid entity defined and redefined by every context in which he or she appears. The author-performer is thereby one constituent of a film's ongoing dialectical analysis, a figure about whom, in most documentaries, very little is known or said.

The performative documentary¹ emphasises its constructedness, stresses (and indeed, in Broomfield's case especially, constructs a film around) the frequently hidden or ignored aspects of documentary production such as failed interviews, aborted phone calls, informal exchanges between filmmaker and subject. The elevation of filmic elements that usually, as it were, left on the cutting room floor, is mobilised in the cases of Broomfield and Dineen to heighten the spectator's awareness of a documentary's inherent performative qualities. Documentaries are, I have proposed, performative in the manner identified by Judith Butler and others after J.L. Austin – namely that they function as utterances that simultaneously both describe and perform an action. Austin's radical differentiation between the constative and performative aspects of language (the former simply refers to or describes, the latter performs what it alludes to) has been expanded upon and adapted many times in recent years, but rarely with reference to documentary.² Examples of words that Austin identifies as being <performative utterances> are «I do», said within the context of the marriage ceremony, his reasoning being that «in saying what I do, I actually perform that action» (Austin 1970:235). A parallel is to be found between these linguistic examples and the performative documentary which – whether built around the intrusive presence of the filmmaker or self-conscious performances by its subjects – is the enactment of the notion that a documentary only comes into being as it is performed, that although its factual basis (or document) can pre-date any

recording or representation of it, the film itself is necessarily performative because it is given meaning by the interaction between performance and reality.

The traditional concept of documentary as striving to render reality as faithfully as possible is predicated upon the realist assumption that the production process must be disguised, as was the case with Direct Cinema. Conversely, the new performative documentaries herald a different notion of documentary <truth> that acknowledges the construction and artificiality of even the non-fiction film. The new performative documentaries are simply the most recent articulations of the filmmakers' unease at the assumption that documentaries seek above all to mask the means of production; Broomfield and Dineen – like Michael Moore or Errol Morris in the US – realise and perform the futility of such a masquerade. A prerequisite of many performative documentaries is the inclusion of a notable performance component. If one returns to Austin's speech models, then the presumed diminution of a films' credibility as the performance level increases becomes less of an issue: what filmmakers such as Nick Broomfield or Molly Dineen are doing when they appear on camera and in voice-over, is acting out a documentary. This performativity is based on the idea of disavowal, that simultaneously signals a desire to make a conventional documentary (that is, to give an accurate account of a series of factual events) whilst also indicating, through the mechanisms of performance and an obtrusive authorial presence, the impossibility of the documentary's straightforwardly representational function.

The question of authorship has traditionally proved a thorny problem for the documentary, as the recognised intervention of an auteur disrupts the non-fiction film's supposed allegiance to transparency and truthfulness. As with the theorisation of the auteur in the realm of narrative fiction film, what appears to pose particular difficulties where documentaries are concerned is the author-director. A familiar charge levelled at documentary directors – who, through a variety of means such as voice-over, appearance on camera, and overt stylization, have signalled their control over their work – is that they are needlessly egotistical in not allowing the subject matter to «speak for itself.» But as Broomfield has countered, no one accuses current affairs presenter-reporters of being egotistical merely because their primary mode of information delivery is the piece to camera. The signposting of the documentary author-director or his or her overt intrusion crystallizes documentary's fundamental conflict between subjectivity and objectivity as it has been perhaps too readily assumed that the repression of the author is a necessary precondition to the existence of objectivity.

Although his most recent releases include the dramatised documentaries *GHOSTS* (2006) and *BATTLE FOR HADITHA* (2007), Nick Broomfield's name is most commonly linked with the distinctive cycle of documentaries he directed between *DRIVING ME CRAZY* (1998) and *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* (2003). He is British documentary's <star director> with a distinctive and familiar authorial style and his most famous documentaries follow a similar pattern and contain very similar elements. They are frequently

structured around the hounding of an elusive subject and usually contain a comically unsatisfactory (by conventional standards) interview. Broomfield appears in all of these mid-career films, donning his familiar headphones and brandishing a boom and recorder; he seeks to ingratiate himself with his subjects by appearing naïve and sweet or by gently flirting with them, a tactic that Dineen also deploys with many of her male subjects. Broomfield's ostensibly languid-feeling films are then overlaid with a far more incisive, acute and critical voiceover that undermines or contrasts with the images on the screen.

The central issue when it comes to how one perceives Broomfield's work is the specific persona he performs on camera. Towards the end of *DRIVING ME CRAZY*, a documentary following the rehearsal period and performance of the all-black musical *Body and Soul*, scriptwriter Joe Hindy exclaims, «I don't think you're adorable any more, Nick», a sentiment echoed in *HEIDI FLEISS: HOLLYWOOD MADAM* (1995) when, once again after some time, Madam Alex, one of the film's three protagonists, shouts at Broomfield down the telephone: «You're such a greedy fucking pig. I'm so sick of you.» Broomfield's on-screen persona is the sweet, ingratiating, slightly gullible buffoon; it is only late in the proceedings (if ever) that his subjects realize that this is an act, a ploy on Broomfield's part to get the material he wants. The anger of Hindy and Madam Alex stems from their belated realization that Nick Broomfield the documentary filmmaker is not synonymous with <Nick Broomfield> the charming man with Mickey Mouse earphones and boom who extracts information from them. As I argued in *New Documentary*, Nick Broomfield ≠ <Nick Broomfield>, to adopt Peter Wollen's formula for the auteur, the quotation marks signifying the version of the auteur to be found within the films, the other version being the director the other side of the camera. It is overly simplistic to argue that Nick Broomfield, the author beyond the frame, is irrelevant to how one views and interprets the films in which <Nick Broomfield> appears; rather, it is the dialectic between the two that motivates the documentaries and informs our responses to them. In an interview Broomfield comments: «There's no point in pretending the camera's not there. I think what's important is the interaction between the filmmakers and those being filmed, and the audience is aware of that interaction so they can make decisions of their own» (Wise 18).



DRIVING ME CRAZY, 1988



HEIDI FLEISS: HOLLYWOOD MADAM (1995)

Broomfield's most cohesive and powerful film is *THE LEADER, HIS DRIVER AND THE DRIVER'S WIFE* (1991), a documentary about Eugene Terreblanche, the former leader of the neo-Nazi South African Afrikaner Resistance Movement (the AWB) who was murdered in 2010 allegedly by two of his farm hands, made at a time when apartheid was crumbling. Still reminiscent of his earlier, more obviously committed films, *The Leader* is the apotheosis of Broomfield's amalgamation of political content and performative style. Like all of Broomfield's later auteur-performer films, *The Leader* parallels the amassing of the documentary story about Terreblanche with the experience of making the film, much as Michael Moore does in *ROGER AND ME* (1989), *BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE* (2002) and *FAHRENHEIT 9/11* (2004). Broomfield's performance in *THE LEADER...* is successful because it appears rooted in earnest commitment rather than simple egomania and the resulting documentary powerfully enacts, through the mechanisms of the performative documentary, the real decline of the AWB from sinister, sizeable power to impotent political sideshow.

The moment in *THE LEADER, HIS DRIVER AND THE DRIVER'S WIFE* that most clearly illustrates this is the woeful interview Broomfield is finally granted with Terreblanche. This interview (which comes two-thirds of the way through the film) appears, on the surface, to be inadequate, a <non-interview> in the words of many critics. It comprises an argument between Terreblanche and Broomfield concerning the latter's lateness for an earlier appointment and Terreblanche's repeated misunderstanding of one simple question, which Broomfield has to repeat in slightly modified form several times: when had he decided that the AWB would have to go to war (to preserve white supremacy)? Turning up a few minutes late had been a ploy to anger Terreblanche, for <Nick Broomfield> the provocateur is heard to mumble sweetly that the reason he and the crew were late was that they were «having a cup of tea». Throughout this argument, cinematographer Barry Ackroyd holds the camera steady on Terreblanche (from a low angle, ironically suggestive of power and superiority). While the interview may not yield very much substantial discussion of the AWB's policy, it shows Terreblanche, not Broomfield, to be the buffoon of the encounter (it is significant that, for this sequence, Broomfield remains out of frame): he is offended by Broomfield having turned up late and repeatedly misinterprets the one question posed of him, thinking Broomfield has



THE LEADER, HIS DRIVER AND THE DRIVER'S WIFE, 1991



THE LEADER, HIS DRIVER AND THE DRIVER'S WIFE, 1991

asked him when he will go to war, not when he decided he would have to go to war. The essential performative power of *THE LEADER...* is that it spontaneously captures and plays out the disintegration of Terreblanche's power and concomitantly that of the AWB. This hilariously insubstantial interview – which Terreblanche's driver later describes as the worst he has ever seen his boss give – is the moment when this becomes clear. The performative fluidity is what lends this sequence its comedic as well as ideological value; as Broomfield remarked in an interview about documentary filmmaking: «there is never an opportunity to do a second take» (quoted in Macdonald and Cousins 1996: 364).

If one then contrasts *THE LEADER...* with the much later film *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* (2003), one can see a return to an older, more observational style, but one which is nevertheless still inflected by the performative, spontaneous attitude of the earlier film. *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* was Broomfield's second film about the notorious American female serial killer, Aileen Wuornos, who in 1989 and 1990 committed 7 murders, and was arrested on January 9, 1991. She was executed in Florida at the behest of Governor Jeb Bush on October 9, 2002, having been held on death row at Broward Prison. Wuornos' life story inspired the Academy Award-winning Hollywood movie *MONSTER* (2003), which thanks Broomfield in its credits. Since making *AILEEN WUORNOS: THE SELLING OF A SERIAL KILLER* in 1993

(about Wuornos' arrest, conviction and exploitation at the hands of friends and lawyers) Broomfield had kept in touch with Wuornos. The catalyst for *Life and Death* was Broomfield being served with a subpoena to appear at Wuornos's final appeal prior to execution, after she had changed her plea to murder, having previously sustained that she had committed the murders of 7 clients (whilst working as a prostitute) in self-defence. Broomfield's belief was that Wuornos, whose mental state was fragile, changed her plea in order to hasten her execution and get off death row. Broomfield refers to *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* as «is the most personal and disturbing film I have made» and continues:

«I knew Aileen over the course of 12 years and the barbaric nature of her death had a profound effect on me, and months of nightmares. It was one film I didn't choose to make. I came to it as a witness and ended up attending



THE LEADER, HIS DRIVER AND THE DRIVER'S WIFE, 1991



AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER, 2002

an execution. The violence of taking a life remains the same whether it is legally sanctioned or not. It introduces murder into our vocabulary of behavior (www.nickbroomfield.com).»

At the end of *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* Broomfield appears on camera telling the assembled press «We're executing a person who's mad». Part of this mental instability was, for Broomfield, Wuornos' change of plea from self-defence to murder.

Comparing *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* and *MONSTER*, Tanya Horeck argues that the former conforms to Broomfield's established authorial style in that, «as with his other films, Broomfield and his on-screen performance as documentary filmmaker take centre stage» (Horeck 143).

I would take issue with Horeck here as, it seems to me, that the overtly performative aspects of the director's style are, in the second Wuornos film, significantly diluted. For instance, Broomfield does not brandish his familiar boom or wear his equally familiar headphones and mischievous smile. As with Michael Moore's films, there is, crudely speaking, an inverse correlation between the extent of Broomfield's serious involvement in his subject matter (and indeed, the seriousness of the subject matter itself) and the amount of time he appears onscreen; the less he is a featured presence, the more seriously we should take the documentary. Compared to *AILEEN WURNOS: SELLING OF A SERIAL KILLER*, the later *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* is noticeably less fixated on Broomfield. With this second Wuornos documentary, the director returned to a more politicised and agitational mode of filmmaking reminiscent of early documentaries such as *JUVENILE LIAISONS* (1975) and *SOLDIER GIRLS* (1981). His motivation for *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* was to mount an eloquent argument against the death penalty.

Despite the subdued tenor of both the documentary and Broomfield's performance, *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* is still, like Broomfield's more self-centred mid-period works, a dialectical inquiry, in this instance structured around the collision between Aileen Wuornos' protestations of guilt and the director's conviction that she is mentally fragile and had committed the murders in self-defence. As with many Broomfield films, the pivotal sequence is an interview, but in this instance an unethically fraught one. In the latter part of the documentary Broomfield arrives at the prison to film another interview with Wuornos. He tries to get her to admit on camera that she committed the murders in self-defence after all, but she refuses. Joan Churchill (cinematographer and co-director) rests the camera on the shelf next to Broomfield (Wuornos is the other side of a glass barrier) and tells Aileen that it is turned off, when in truth it is still running. He then whispers



AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER, 2002

to Wuornos through the glass and gets her to admit that he is right. This interview (which took place 6 months prior to Wuornos' execution) is also, ironically, the one time in *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* when Broomfield becomes the visual focus and when we go some way to being permitted a glimpse of a more authentic Aileen Wuornos. In many ways, this is a classic Broomfield moment: he catches his subjects unawares and uses a crafty interview to inadvertently reveal a truth about them and their actions that, hitherto, they had been too alert to divulge. The ethical issues of lying to Wuornos and continuing to film secretly are complex, but as Broomfield explains in retrospective voiceover, this was the only way to get Wuornos to confess that she killed in self-defence. In this instance, commitment is not obscured as Broomfield's authorial presence increases. In many ways, *AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER* proved a shift in style and tone.

This moment is, however, markedly different in tone to the comparable moment in *THE LEADER, HIS DRIVER AND THE DRIVER'S WIFE*, because it is not about Broomfield affirming his superiority and making his subject look foolish; rather, this is a straight investigative moment, motivated by a desire to reveal the truth by any means necessary. The poignancy of this sequence is crucial and moving as both performative subjects, Broomfield and Wuornos, temporarily drop the personae that have become so intensely familiar.

Although Broomfield and Dineen are frequently compared, their attitudes are quite different. Whereas Broomfield is often intrusive and aggressive towards his subjects, Dineen usually befriends them. She has also – in terms of her authorial style – maintained a greater consistency through her career than Broomfield although, as I will discuss later, the amount of voiceover she uses has increased markedly over the years. Dineen has been one of the UK's most notable television documentary filmmakers since her 1985 National Film and Television School graduation film *HOME FROM THE HILL* was bought and re-edited for transmission by the BBC. Dineen, after graduating from the NFTVS, has made a series of subtle observational documentaries for UK television (first for the BBC, latterly for Channel Four). Her contribution to British documentary has been recognised with numerous awards: the Grierson Trustees' Award for her outstanding contribution to the art of documentary in 2003 being flanked by her 2 BAFTAs for *THE ARK* (1989) and *THE LIE OF THE LAND* (2007). Dineen once remarked: «I have made the same film most of my career, about institutional change» (The Guardian, 17.11.2003) which, though overly modest, is partially true, like Jane Austen's view that all her novels worked the same «two inches of ivory». Dineen's interest is very much on people as opposed to politics and her focus on institutions tends not to be slavishly ideological;



HOME FROM THE HILL by Molly Dineen, 1987

instead, she examines institutions via the people who make and work in them, particularly at moments of crisis. Throughout her career Dineen has crafted intelligent and sensitive examples of how the personal can be political, so underpinning her portraits of individuals are weightier issues – colonialism, troops in Northern Ireland, the abolition of the hereditary peers.

One suspects Nick Broomfield of a certain vanity, of liking being on camera: the focus of our gaze and attention. As Molly Dineen also performs the role of cinematographer in her documentaries, this privileged position is denied her. But she nevertheless still manages, quite effectively, to give us the viewers a sense of visually absent self. Both Broomfield and Dineen emphasise rather than suppress their gender, notably by interacting flirtatiously with their interviewees, especially of the opposite sex. Dineen specialises in the mollification of crusty old men and flirtatiousness is an essential element in her armoury. She frequently retains, from her first film to her more recent ones, remarks her interviewees make about her. For instance, when she asks Colonel Hilary Hook in *Home from the Hill* if he is happy, he replies: «Blissfully, in your presence; otherwise I represent divine discontent». In more or less overt ways, the usually older men that populate her documentaries frequently draw attention to her desirable feminine presence the other side of her camera.



HOME FROM THE HILL, 1987



IN THE COMPANY OF MEN, 1995

The opening interview of *IN THE COMPANY OF MEN*, her 1995 series about the Prince of Wales regiment during their tour of duty in Northern Ireland, is with the regiment's commander, Major Crispin Black. Black holds up a copy of the glossy society magazine *The Tatler* («just to conform to stereotype») and, in one of his many reflexive references, urges Dineen to put on weight «so that we can at least have sexual fantasies about you». Dineen is notably at ease with the glorification and exoneration of even regressive masculinity and *IN THE COMPANY OF MEN* is just one of Dineen's elaborate flirtations with a band of unlikely males. In *HEART OF THE ANGEL*, her 1989 documentary about the temporary closure of the Angel underground station in Islington, North London for refurbishment, she spends time with the male workers who repair the tracks of the underground system at night. Dineen's films are not often self-consciously stylised, but here the use of carefully directed lighting to emphasise the contours of the men's grubby torsos as they work in the

dark tunnel stands out, as does the men's boss's comment to Dineen whilst filming: «Do you have to stop my blokes from working, eh?»

The gendered interaction with the male subjects in *HEART OF THE ANGEL* emerges strongly in a beautifully composed interview with the station's grumpy ticket man. The dynamic interaction between Dineen on one side of her camera and interviewees on the other is a persistent feature of her directorial style and one that highlights both her authorial presence and her films' performativity. She has, for example, taken issue with the label <fly-on-the-wall> being applied to her films, arguing that her films are «anything but. I'm eyeing my subjects through a huge movie camera, they're talking to the lens as I'm filming them and the process is very visible» (Goldsmith, 2003). Throughout *HEART OF THE ANGEL* the man in the station ticket office has been prickly and difficult, having asked Dineen early in the film: «Do you think God put you on this earth to point that stupid little camera?». Even the ticket man, however, reaches the stage when he too is forthcoming on camera, initiating a dialogue with Dineen by stating, ostensibly unprompted, «I could do with a change». Dineen's gentle, general questions subsequently try to coax him into expanding upon the significance of <change> and what he would have liked to have been different. Although he denies being depressed, the ticket man ruminates on death and the meaninglessness of life: «No-one asks to be born ... you're born, you live, you die.» Dineen's role in this conversation is ambiguous; partly she manoeuvres the situation so the spectator forms a strong identification with the ticket seller, and partly she maintains her (and our) distance. The mechanism that enforces this equivocation is Dineen's use of her voice. Whilst her voice establishes notions of friendship and intimacy, it remains the tool with which to signal the essential artificiality of the filming situation. The realisation that this moment of revelation takes place in an inherently artificial environment likewise imbues the performances of Dineen's subjects. In the case of the ticket office man, juxtaposed against curious and personal revelations (Dineen: «What would you actually like to achieve?»; ticket man: «I don't really know ... I'd like to have been taller ... had a better education») are ironically informal exchanges with Dineen that once again emphasise the formality of the filming set-up. This conversation (interview being too formal a term) concludes with a short chat that does just this:

Ticket man: «You think I'm gorgeous.»

Dineen: «I think you're wonderful.»

Ticket man: »Can I drink my water now?«

Dineen: «Yes.»

Ticket man: «Thank you».



HEART OF THE ANGEL, 1989

The ticket man is here doing several things: he is reflecting back at Dineen her use of flirtation to elicit good answers to her questions from male subjects; he is indicating that Dineen is ultimately in control of what he says and does in front of the camera and that he, at times, doubts her sincerity. Through this knowingness, he is ultimately shedding doubt on the authenticity of his previous words, prompting us to ponder the multiple levels of his performance as well as Dineen's.

Dineen's documentaries, more clearly than many, are negotiations between the reality before she arrived and intruded and the artificial environment generated by her presence. Within this, Dineen is perpetually oscillating between relinquishing and asserting control. The best moments in the best observational documentaries foreground the unpredictability of the filming process, demonstrating that nothing can substitute for being there with a camera. In her later work this underpinning observational aim that informs all of Dineen's work functions in tandem with an increasingly pronounced use of voiceover, which in turn has the effect of making her much more the subject of her films than she had been earlier in her career.

Although they use interviews to quite different ends – Broomfield's penchant is for catching out his interviewees, whilst Dineen's is for getting them to convey something of their character through interacting with her – the element Broomfield and Dineen (especially in her later films) share is their use of voiceover narration as a means of authoring and commenting upon their films. It is in their use of narration that one understands their basic impulse to demonstrate that documentaries are as much about those who make them as those who feature in them – or at least that they are the result of a fruitful interaction between the two. The documentary filmmaker's need to add his or her voice to their films is, arguably, about marking out territory, about claiming the documentaries as their own and returns us to the issue of authorial vanity. Although visually and thematically consistent throughout her career to date, the ever-present voiceover of Dineen's later films goes against the purist conventions of observational filmmaking. Early in *GERI* (1999), for example, there is a debate about who controls the documentary that neatly encapsulates the potential importance of voiceovers. Geri Halliwell (who has just split from *The Spice Girls*) is shown on camera on the phone to her lawyer, reassuring him that she retains <complete control> over the film Dineen is making. The way this sequence is edited is, however, revealing as Halliwell's assumptions about being in control are from the outset undermined as, immediately prior to this telephone conversation, Dineen had said in voiceover: «I should have realised there'd be complications, though. Geri got on the phone to her lawyer, to tell him that I was taking over the film.»



HEART OF THE ANGEL, 1989

In this instance, voiceover is not merely informative, but is being deployed as an interventionist tool for emphasising who precisely has control over the documentary – and it is not the pop star. The very fact that Dineen prefaces it by telling us what to expect, ensures that the sequence is illustrative of Geri's lack of control over the film. So, Geri's performance of herself and her obsession with how others perceive her becomes more a manifestation of fragility than of strength. This is deeply ironic, considering Dineen's own preoccupation with how the men in her films view her.

Dineen's self-reflexive references to herself as director, her wispy and persistent middle-class voice, her increased presence as the narrator of her films and the fact that she will never (as the cameraperson) appear on screen, have, as indicated before, specific gender connotations. Dineen remains an absent, fetishised body constantly evoked by her on-screen (usually male) subjects – which is what makes *GERI* especially interesting; she makes use of the camera to forge an intimacy with people, but also to preclude closeness; her subjects are always seen through her eyes and her apparatus, whilst Dineen is represented only by her voice.

The films of Nick Broomfield and Molly Dineen have not, to date, been autobiographical although, through their directors' presence and use of voice, they manage to convey a lot about their attitudes and their personalities. A significant element in both directors' films is their performative method, that they make specific use of performative unpredictability and feature notably unscripted situations. Ultimately in both cases, it is through the increased use of voiceover that Broomfield and Dineen's auteur status, their sense of self (and self-importance?) comes to be imposed on their films, and so, in the end, making these ostensibly observation-driven documentaries more personal and more about their directors than might initially appear. <Z

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Footnotes

- 1) Cf. especially Chapter Six of *New Documentary* (2000 and 2006, Routledge).
- 2) Cf., though, the mention of Austin in Susan Scheibler, 'Constantly performing the documentary: the seductive promise of *Lightning Over Water*' in Renov (1993:135–50), and Caryl Flinn, 'Containing fire: performance in *Paris is Burning*' in Grant and Sloniowski (1998:429–45).

Still-images are quoted from the following films:

DRIVING ME CRAZY (Nick Broomfield, 1988) HEIDI FLEISS: HOLLYWOOD MADAM (Nick Broomfield, 1995) THE LEADER, HIS DRIVER AND THE DRIVER'S WIFE, (Nick Broomfield, 1991) AILEEN: LIFE AND DEATH OF A SERIAL KILLER (Nick Broomfield, 2002) HOME FROM THE HILL (Molly Dineen, 1987) IN THE COMPANY OF MEN (Molly Dineen, 1995) HEART OF THE ANGEL (Molly Dineen, 1989)

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