



The Danger Is Seduction: An Interview with Haskell Wexler
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ERNEST CALLENBACH AND
ALBERT JOHNSON

The Danger Is Seduction: An Interview with Haskell Wexler

Haskell Wexler, who has photographed Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, In the Heat of the Night, America, America, and other films, is one of the most talented cameramen of the postwar years in Hollywood.

His career, moreover, opened somewhat unusually for an American feature film photographer, and his work with natural lighting, dating back to Irvin Kershner's Stakeout on Dope Street and Hoodlum Priest, has been an important sign of changing attitudes in the American film.

EC: Could you tell us how you first became interested in films?

HW: Well, if you want me to be logical—

EC: No, no!

HW: Most logic, most intellectualizing is, I think, rationalizing; so to answer that question I will now invent how I *think* I got into it . . . My father used to have an old Bell & Howell camera. We traveled around the world, he was a good fisherman. I used to take the family home movies. I was always very competitive with my father and always at the losing end of the competition; but with the movies I took, I got a great deal of approval at home. That probably had something to do with it, if you want to be Freudian.

I went to sea during the war for about 4½ years as a merchant seaman, had a few adventures, and after the war, Barney Rosset—a friend of mine, who later went into the publishing business—he and I decided we wanted to make movies. We both came from Chicago where we went to school together; only he wanted to live in New York. His girl friend was in New York, mine was in Chicago; that is how we decided where we lived.

He made a film called *Strange Victory*, after WW II, which was a rather prophetic film now that I think back on it. He had a lot of actual war footage, and the idea of the film was: this was the war, and what kind of victory will it be, will it be a strange victory or will we do all the things we said we would after winning the war. He had a lot of trouble making the film. He had an editor who took too long and he ran out of money. I loaned him some, which he paid back. Around then I decided I wanted to be in films. There was a cartoon in the *New Yorker*, showing a guy sitting with his father at a desk, saying “Pop, I want \$25,000 to make my own film,” and I did something like that. I decided to be a film-maker and in order to be a film-maker you had to have a studio, so I told my father I wanted a studio. He bought for me, or rather we rebuilt, an armory in Desplaines, Illinois.

I didn't know anything. I got all kinds of misinformation as to what kind of electricity to install; I looked at catalogues and I bought lights without knowing their specific purpose. I had a fancy office designed by an avant-garde artist friend of mine, Alfonse Ianelli—great offices

with glass things, and I was concentrating on that, and finally when I considered myself set, I announced to the world that I was ready to make a film. And nothing happened. Then I became a little desperate, if only because my father told me I *should* be desperate.

Anyway, a friend of my father's owned a cotton mill in Opelika, Alabama, so my father sold him the goods. It was the 50th anniversary of the Opelika Cotton Mills and my father explained to him how tax-wise it would cost him nothing for me to make a \$25,000 film. So I went to Alabama for a month, took notes, met all the guys, and prepared to make the kind of documentary that I had envisioned. I wrote a very short treatment for the mill owner. He didn't even read it; and I proceeded to make the film. It was a damn good film because I knew the people. I didn't doublecross the mill, but I did show how the life of the whole town, a cotton-mill town, revolved around the mill. Families were working around the clock. The father would come home from night shift and have breakfast with the kids; the kids would go to school and the mother would go to the mill. It was that kind of a family arrangement. The houses were small, clean, and lined up like a cotton-mill town.

AJ: What was it called?

HW: *A Half Century with Cotton*. I had the owner of the mill come to New York to see the completed film. He saw it and said, "What's all this shit about the kids in school and the breakfast stuff? I want to see my mill. I've got 52 carding machines that cost \$4,800 apiece and I want to see them!"

For the processes of the mill I had done everything sort of abstract, with the cotton coming off the carding machine, all close shots, just the beginning and the end, the raw cotton and the finished product.

I didn't know what to do and I talked with my father who said I had to square things away. So I went back down there, shooting long shots. That was before Tri-X stock. Each day cost me \$1,000; I had to get a union crew because the unions were onto me, and I shot four long shots on each floor of the mill. Then the mill owner

didn't like the narration, and I had to get a real selling narration. I was getting chopped down, and going way over my budget. Anyway, that was my commercial experience. The hardest thing was to realize how much I didn't know. So I closed the studio and went to work as an assistant cameraman.

EC: In Chicago?

HW: Yes, I worked as an assistant cameraman for a while on documentaries, and made a number of documentaries with John Barnes directing, one with Gordon Weisenborn. He was at EBF, where he did *People Along the Mississippi*. We made a film called *The Living City*, which was nominated for an Academy Award. I shot that. Urban renewal was the subject. Then I made films on the Packing House Workers strike on my own. Got some great stuff.

After that I just kept making documentaries, many in the South—one with the Highlander Folk School. Then I wanted to make features. While I was in California, in Los Angeles, visiting friends, watching television, I saw a show called *Confidential File*. There was some fantastic photography in it, you know, hand held, great stuff. My friend told me he knew the photographer, so I met Irv Kershner, who was shooting these for Paul Coates. Very good, very cinematic. We talked about life, and it turned out that both of us wanted to make features.

AJ: You worked with Kershner on his first film?

HW: Yes, my brother acted in it and we also invested money.

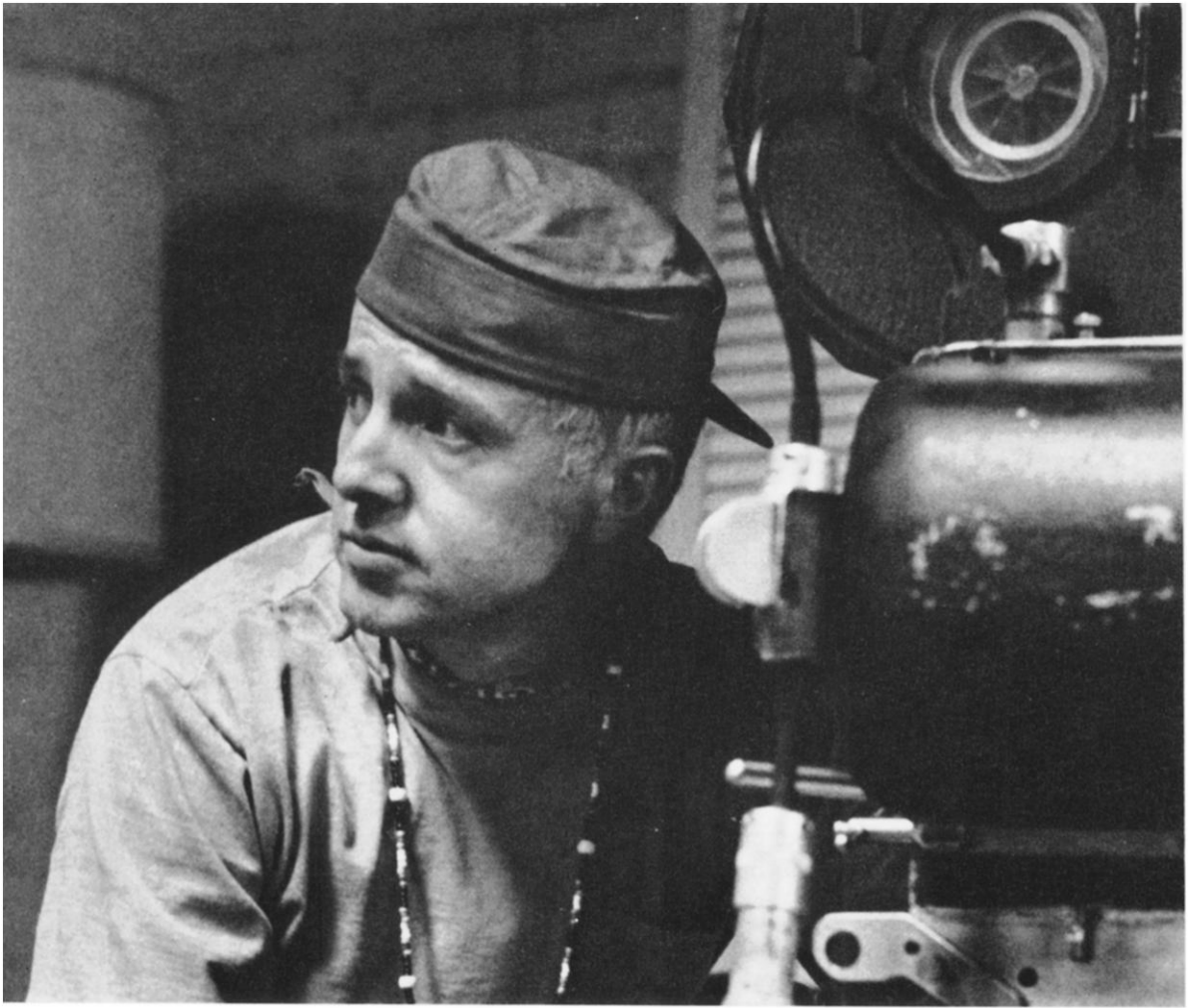
AJ: What about *The Young Captives*?

HW: I didn't do that because that's when they went straight. I was not in the union, my identity was not known; in fact when the union men would come around I would hide under the scenery.

AJ: *Stakeout on Dope Street* is interesting. It seems to be one of the first of a new wave of American films in terms of photography and also subject matter—drugs, and the first use of garbage dumps as a place of action, which has since come up many times. Also the lighting of the film is very interesting.

EC: What were your ideas on lighting?

HW: All I knew was reality, the documentary.



So my ignorance of the other way sort of helped. In the garbage dump all we did was tell the kids what to do and I ran in there with my Eclair and shot it. We had to do it fast because we were not supposed to be there. Then I did *The Savage Eye*, for about a year and a half. Joe Strick would call on Thursday and say that on Friday we were going out to the wrestling matches.

EC: Was a lot of that shot off-the-cuff without knowing what they were going to do with it?

HW: It was very badly planned. There is a point where impromptu improvisation is good, and a point where it begins to hurt; and in that film it hurt. Originally it was supposed to be

Hogarth Looks at Los Angeles and we had all kinds of Hogarth sketches on the board, and then it got changed and all the stuff of Barbara Baxley was sort of superimposed.

EC: It had that feel, that it had been tacked on.

HW: It was. As I speak now I remember my excitement and enthusiasm. It was a good time, better in some ways than being "successful," which I am beginning to resent!

EC: What was the role of the union in all this? I guess after a while you couldn't work that way any more.

HW: Well, I could. You see I was a member of the Chicago union, where I had served a

long apprenticeship. That was IATSE, only a different local, and I wanted to transfer. Since I was able to work in the Midwest, I put in some time as an assistant on the West Coast where they had no one available, no one competent, and that helped build up some time. But then I worked in St. Louis, which is Chicago union territory, and I shot a film called *Angel Baby*, in Florida. Then I went to Greece to shoot *America, America*. By that time, with my producer going to bat for me, I was able to shoot *The Best Man*. This was my first legal-connected film.

AJ: Were you a member of the American Society of Cinematographers?

HW: The ASC is something of an elite club, into which you are invited and for which you pay \$1,000. You sit around with cocktails and talk about the old days.

AJ: Were there any cinematographers whom you had admired, in your early days?

HW: I always liked Jimmy Howe's work, and of course Gregg Toland. In fact I shot the second unit on *Picnic* and I met Jimmy Howe. I shot the helicopter scene at the end and some of the game sequences, and I remember sitting in on the dailies with Josh Logan and Jimmy Howe, and after he saw what I had shot, he said "Very good, very good." To me at that time, that was *it!* I think he's 68, in perfect physical shape, still trying new things. People say he is ornery and mean, but he's had to fight all the way—and wait to see his *Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. A fabulous man!

EC: Do you ever do your own camera operating?

HW: Very often, but I'm told it's against the union rules. I have ignored that and get brought up on charges, but nothing bad has happened yet.

EC: As long as you actually have an operator on the crew, why can they really complain?

HW: I asked them that. You see there is a certain internal union logic for it. If producers see a first-man operating all the time, they can say "What the hell do we need an operator for?", and actually an operator *is* an aid. It is sort of fashionable to knock the Hollywood unions. But

if you talk to some of the old-timers and find out how they used to work, the hours and conditions, then you can see why the rules came into being.

AJ: What other films did you do with Kershner?

HW: We did *The Hoodlum Priest* and we did a film in Italy called *Face in the Rain*. On *Hoodlum Priest*, there again we could use documentary because we shot 95% of it on real locations. It seems to help.

AJ: How much freedom do you have in creating a visual style? Do you sit down with Kershner and discuss the visual side, or does he have it definitely set in his mind?

HW: Well, you have put your finger on it. A lot depends on the director. But usually, for what I think of as good directors, the visual things are not specific; we'll talk about emotional and psychological things, maybe a generalized idea of a look for a scene. But, particularly when you work on location, there are so many decisions you make on the spot. You may decide to shoot a certain sequence on a certain day and it rains, or there are suddenly a lot of trucks going by. Well, you might decide to use the trucks—go across the street, use the long lens and see the people through the holes in the traffic. Usually the story you are telling determines the form or the look.

EC: Do you always look at the script beforehand?

HW: Always! Always have and always will. I don't just *look* at it, I actually rewrite it because it makes me understand what is there; I have trouble reading them.

EC: Are you concerned with detailed problems or—

HW: Well for example, take *Heat of the Night* which had a mediocre script—a fake sociological script, with little understanding of today's South. I resent films that talk about subjects that I'm interested in and pretend to be on the good side but are superficial. I had met Norman Jewison and knew his heart was in the right place, I liked him, and he encouraged me to contribute what I could to the script. The Sidney Poitier character, he was just a plain smart-

ass—unsympathetic, one-dimensional Mr. Negro. It's like having a flag; if you like the flag then you salute it. Well that's not drama. It has to be a man, and he was certainly capable as an actor of being more than just a symbol. I wrote the opening, just the visual. A little plastic Jesus on the dashboard, a transistor radio playing country-and-western music.

EC: Do you work on the dialogue?

HW: I stick my nose in everywhere; but a lot depends on the director. He is the boss.

AJ: All those little touches in *The Heat of the Night*, the little diner, the fly under the cake cover, things like that—were those in the script?

HW: No, the fly under the cake cover—you should have seen the fly wranglers when we had to do that shot! We had the fly for the calendar, it was actually on top of the cake so we tried to get him inside. It was funny, 25 grown men trying to get a fly. When we finally succeeded, the guy jammed down the cover and yelled "OK, let's get rolling."

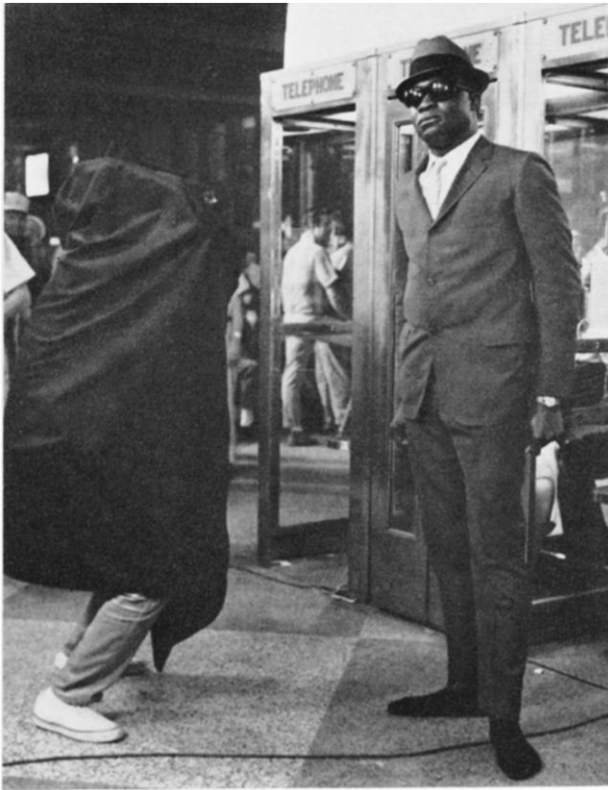
There are many films I have worked on, where the making of the film was far more interesting than the film itself, more complex, more revealing about characters. I shot a film once called *Five Bold Women* down in Texas. There were five fantastic-looking broads and the story was about a ranger who had to bring these women from one prison to another, as prisoners. Well, the activity at the hotels at night, and the intrigue between the crew and the girls and the husbands, from different parts of the country, was incredible. Also when you go on location in a small town—like on *In the Heat of the Night*, we were in Sparta, Illinois, which is supposed to be Sparta, Mississippi. Nothing ever happens in a town like that. It's a center of about 125 people. In come guys with loud sport shirts and Hollywood weather-beaten faces, baseball hats; you know the whole routine, the honey wagons, coffee and doughnuts, and it changes the whole metabolism of the town, particularly the young guys of the crew were all dating girls. Actually it is terrific film material. Movies are sort of instant business. A movie will go into a place and spend in eight weeks a million dollars—they will spend in

eight weeks what a factory in the town will perhaps turn over in a lifetime. And of course that kind of invasion pretty obviously changes the lives of the people in the town. But at the same time it has some effect on the film-makers and to that extent sometimes reflects itself in the film they are making, if the film has to do with that actual locale. I think it would be fantastic to make a film about the relationship between a film company in a specific place and the interaction between the two.

EC: I remember on Carl Foreman's *The Victors*, Dennis Mitchell made a 16mm film about making it, and I thought that the little film, offhand and impromptu, was much better than the big one.

HW: Well, they talk about what the new techniques can do. A friend of mine, Fred Wiseman, made a film called *Titticut Follies*, for which I arranged to get distribution with Barney Rosset, who now owns the Grove Press. Barney is going into 16mm stuff big. It's a fantastic film, it makes you see what *cinéma-vérité* can do. John Marshall was the cameraman—I hadn't heard of him before.* You see, the problems of shooting *cinéma-vérité* are so different. Not just the shooting but the cutting too. Ordinarily when you are shooting, when things stop happening you cut the camera. Even when a green *cinéma-vérité* camera man is working, he knows he has just so much film and doesn't want to reload. So when people, things seem to get cooled off, you cut and either reload or talk to the soundman or get yourself set for the next thing that happens. Well, what really good *cinéma-vérité* guys do—or learn to sense—what John Marshall does—is when things seem to have stopped, you keep rolling, and move in a little on a face, and about four or five times in the film everything would stop, he would move in on a face and then you would *see* the change happening, and then something would start again. When you get that moment, I don't think there is anything in films that I have ever seen, that can match it. Also there's the physi-

* Marshall previously made an outstanding ethnographic film, *The Hunters*.



Haskell Wexler (in bag, to kill reflections in phone booth and on Yaphet Kotto's shades).

HASKELL WEXLER

It seems to me as if this would be very hard. Are there legal problems?

HW: Well, they thought the legal problems were resolved, but before it was shown (this was last week) they had restraining orders from the state of Massachusetts, they had all kinds of injunctions put against them.*

I was involved in a similar problem a long time ago, with *The Savage Eye*—it was an early documentary. There was a scene in a temple, where people were faith-healed. Women were going into paroxysms, screaming and yelling in tongues, with the guy saying “Heal!” The deal that Joe Strick had made with the people of the Angelus temple was that after we had photographed, we would give them a 16mm print and they would sign a release, and we were worried about it, but they saw the print and thought it was marvelous, wonderful.

EC: They saw the finished film?

HW: No, they saw the rough footage, and I think that must have been the case with Fred Wiseman, who is a lawyer, incidentally.

EC: That would probably be a better way to do it, I suppose, on the whole, then you don't get involved in the question of point of view, you get purely what is *there* on the film.

HW: Well, it's always best to be as honest as possible, because your interpretation—as for example when Ricky Leacock made the film on the Quints. I am sure that the people associated with that film don't look upon it as social satire. They just think there is mother, and she is just

cal factor, because you're hand-holding and when things stop happening your arm is a little tired, so you want to cut too. . . .

It's interesting that films like *Warrendale* and *Titticut Follies*, which seem to cause some stir, are institution films. One of the things that intrigues me about *Titticut Follies* is that if you analyze our institutions carefully, they are in a way microcosms—they show the bones of our society in sort of naked ways, which you can't see if you are out there amongst them. And to me, *Titticut Follies* is not just about that particular institution for the criminally insane; it's like us. The guards are not just like cops, but like authorities. And the inmates, just the fact that men are walking around naked—it strips society into the relationships of forces.

EC: How did they get permission to make it?

* Since this interview was recorded, the state of Massachusetts has stopped the distribution of the film, and it is not known whether it will ever get exhibited. Opponents of the film charge it invades the privacy of inmates, defenders of the film reply that the institution had already destroyed their privacy. The film was also apparently caught in a state political struggle between those who recognize the inhumanity of the prison and wish to reform it (which includes some of its officials) and the forces in the state which have made the prison what it is. It is not yet clear what lessons, if any, the case offers for film-makers who attempt to use film to convey the reality of our institutions.

buying all those clothes for these kids. In other words, what is satire to one group is just fact to another.

EC: I have noticed that with a lot of those films—I think it's one of the most wonderful things about them. You know that film on Hugh Hefner, *The Most?* Apparently Hefner thought the film was perfectly all right when he saw it and it wasn't until reports began to come back to him that some people thought it made him look ridiculous, that he began to worry about it, and I think he took steps to keep it from being distributed. It seems to be out now. When I saw it at the Festival here a couple of years ago, half the audience was laughing its head off and the other half was trying to hush them because they thought it was a serious document of an important philosophical stance. Have you seen that very early one that Leacock did (called sometimes *Eddy Sachs*), *On the Pole*?

HW: Oh yes, I saw that, it was good. Unfortunately it was made so partially because Eddy Sachs died, he was killed in a car accident. Most of those films are really dependent on the subject. For instance, the Maysles made one on Joe Levine. It was a lousy film, not because they were not talented, but because if you pick your major subject, the subject writes your script. So if they are interesting and exciting, you have a film. If not, you are in trouble.

EC: What kind of a ratio do you have to have in order to feel easy in your mind about not skimping on film? A lot of these ratios are very high?

HW: You never feel easy in your mind. You just have to work instinctively. You don't know who is interesting, nor do you know when you put the camera on someone whether he is going to sit there and do absolutely nothing, or whether he will start throwing bombs or making radical speeches. You never know what is going to happen. So by the nature of it, you shoot a lot and hope that your instincts take you to the right places. That is why much of the creativity is in the editing; also many of the hang-ups.

For instance, when you cut in a normal film, you cut on dramatic movement. Someone will

say something like "I'm going to leave this room and rip out every book in it." Cut to something else. In *cinéma-vérité* if you cut on the dramatic, it loses its *vérité* because the character really will say "I am going to leave this room and rip out every book in it" and then there will be some tapering off. It will taper off and maybe go into something else that dovetails back into it. In other words, it's a little more complex, so that sometimes much *cinéma-vérité* seems long or loosely cut, but it's partly that which gives it its veracity. When you see a film cut on the dramatic—when you see cut, cut—subconsciously you feel the hand of the filmmaker; and in good *cinéma-vérité* it is a constant battle to keep it so that it has some pace and some dramatic construction—because it still has to be dramatic.

EC: On *Virginia Woolf*, what were the advance preparations like.

HW: Well, I didn't get enough preparation. Harry Stradling was supposed to do the film. I was going to do *A Fine Madness* with Kershner and we were in a screening room to see 8½. Harry Stradling was with Mike Nichols and I was with Kershner, and when we left Mike was in tears, affected by the film and probably empathizing with the task ahead of him: the director not sure! I think Mike had a few words with Harry Stradling, apparently the culmination of some disagreement, nothing specific, but on how to look at the world, so to speak, and Harry said "I think Guido's a shit." That bothered Mike, particularly since he was in tears. Shortly after that Mike asked me to shoot the film; they were to start the following week. I said that I couldn't because I was supposed to do the film with Kershner. He said "Don't worry, I'll take care of that." Then Jack Warner called me up and said "You have to do this film." I told him I'm doing one with Kershner and he said "I'll take care of it. You must do the film, the director wants you," all that kind of crap. To make a long story short, I had a couple of meetings with Kershner and Jerry Helman, the producer, which on the surface were very pleasant, but for a while Kershner did not talk to me.

Well anyway, I watched rehearsals on the set with Richard, Elizabeth, and Mike for four days, and we shot some tests.

One of the problems was that Mike felt Harry Stradling was making Elizabeth look too good. So my job was to make Elizabeth look bad. It was difficult because she couldn't be made up so that you could see the make-up. So much of it depended on her facial expressions. Very quickly I discovered also that her profile couldn't be disguised; in profile shots she *always* looked good, so I worked out in my mind rather quickly how I could uglify her.

EC: Did she get in on the discussions on this?

HW: Yes, she did. As a matter of fact, early, when the discussion was out in the open about making her look ugly, she whispered to me "Don't do too good a job." But she was very serious about the part. (I think she enjoyed gaining the weight!)

But in answer to your first question, I did not get a chance to prepare properly and I was a little in awe of the situation; not at first, but when I saw all the deference to Richard and Elizabeth, which they personally did not demand, but which seemed just to come by their existence, I felt a little uncomfortable. I was not really too used to studio pictures. Of course at Warners I had all of Harry Stradling's crew, who were nice old cockers, and every time I tried something they would look around as if to say "What the hell is he doing!" It was always difficult. And it was difficult with Mike too, because photography is a difficult thing to discuss. The only way to discuss it is for the cameraman and the director to see a lot of films together. Then they have a frame of reference and can say remember the film with Bette Davis, etc. But when they start talking about contrasts and don't know what contrasts mean, or talk about blacks and don't know where the blacks should be—it's very subjective. So Mike and I didn't have that. During the film, though, I had an idea about the over-all pattern, which always worked out like a graph, some ideas of whiteness and dark and how to respond to it. But often in the dailies Mike would complain

and gripe. He was not used to seeing one-light prints and one day the lab would print things one way and the next day some other way. He knew that in his mind, but he is such a perfectionist. When he saw a shot on the screen that didn't seem to look like the shot of three days ago. . . .

Also we shot completely in sequence. So I would light one corner of the room, shoot the scene, then tear that down, pull a wall down and shoot in the opposite direction—knowing that three days later I had to shoot back in the same corner of the room. This meant I had to match everything precisely, so that I would have to know how many footcandles were on the corner of the bookcase, that I had a baby with a double open end, and a stick going through—I knew all the books in the bookcase. It was complicated, and I wasn't used to complications, of that kind.

EC: Did you go back and reshoot when there was something he didn't like?

HW: Once or twice, but mostly because of performance. But Mike has an uncanny understanding, since he understood the play so well, of when he wanted to be how close, which is awfully important for a director. Many new directors seem to want to gobble down the person's throat—close-ups of eye balls, noses. Mike knew he had to save certain things, which was very perceptive for a man who had never seen anyone make a film, let alone made one.

EC: There is one thing that I'm curious about because it struck me as being out of tone, and that is where she picks up the lighter and there is quite a close-up.

HW: Oh yeah. I know that shot *very* well! You see I was getting bored looking at their faces all the time, and since she was sort of making up to George Segal at the time, lighting the cigarette, we started the shot as a close-up of the lighter, the lighter comes up right in front of the face and bang! the light goes on, there is a movement with the lighter which is blurred. And if it didn't work, I will definitely take full blame for it. In fact Mike disagreed with me on it. But I felt the need for something cinematic.

HASKELL WEXLER

I think it probably showed itself off too much because there was very little else like that in the film.

On a film many things happen which you could call accidents, and that's one of the things that bugs me about film criticism, it's hard to say who does what in a film. It really is hard to say. I don't think it's that important, but it bugs a lot of people that somebody else gets credit for some of their work, or the wrong people get blamed. I don't know how to get around that. EC: The film has a nice balance of space in it. In fact, I would have thought that you had shot a great deal of it with your own hand because it has that kind of feel.

HW: Actually when I work with a director, I have a finder and I do it as if I were doing it with my 16mm Eclair, and then we go in with the regular camera and do it that way.

AJ: I would like to ask you some questions about *The Bus*. What attracted you to do that film and what were the problems in actually shooting it in that bus, in terms of keeping the spectator interested? Obviously everybody knew that the film was being made, what the purpose of the film was. Did they tense up? Did they talk naturally? How did you get them to relax in that situation?

HW: I think my experience is probably characteristic of most people who make that kind of film, *cinéma-vérité* films. I was interested in the civil rights movement, I had worked in the South a long time ago when there was no civil rights movement, and I had not done anything except follow the box score, so to speak. I thought the best way for me to re-acquaint myself with what the young people were doing, what was going on, was to make this film.

Actually they didn't know who I was and some people are shy at the idea of being photographed. Frederika, the young lady who in the beginning told them where they were going to go, told them who I, Mike Butler, and Nell Cox were. But for the first half day they *were* self-conscious; and we left some self-conscious scenes in because we thought it might show the change. One of the things, I think, that allowed



WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

them to free up is that I never stopped working—I never sat down, I didn't sleep at night, and after a while they probably figured that I was either a nut or so dedicated that the only thing to do was to ignore me. Also when you have the camera up there all the time it just becomes a part of you, like a guy with two heads. I would have the camera rolling even while talking to someone, so they figured he is that kind of freak.

I didn't sleep at all. To me it was a good experience. Actually that's one of the things I miss in making regular films. They're like washing your feet with your socks on or making love with all your clothes on. There is a certain detachment; no matter how good—it's such a machine. In a film like *The Bus* there is just you and your sound man and whatever else there is going on, there is a terrific sexual feeling of just getting in here, you know.

EC: Do you feel you could go back and make another film like that?

HW: I'm going to. That's the only way. The problem is that when you make them you may have to eat them, and even a cheap one means \$40,000 to \$50,000.

AJ: Do you have a project in mind?

HW: Well, I have been talking to Peter Watkins about a project. Actually I have divided feelings because I would like to make features, go out and see the people, and I would like to

find some wedding between features and *cinéma-vérité*. I have very strong opinions about us and the world, and I don't know how in hell to put them all in one basket.

I was thinking about making a film about the draft. But I feel all documentaries have to be dramatic, have to have a dramatic construction; the days of just filling out a documentary from A to Z were just too boring.

EC: I'm interested in the idea about the draft because what really needs to be done is show what the war is doing to *this* country, in everyday life, and the draft is certainly central to that.

AJ: It could be done perhaps in the way Rouch approaches it. He did a series of films about Negroes studying in Paris or in Canada—you had two or three people, they were the hero or heroine, and you followed them around, but it was documentary and the dialogue was very natural; but by arranging, editing and juxtaposing time you do get a story.

HW: There was one called *Chronicle of a Summer* and another one called *The Human Pyramid*. The whole idea of films within films, or even if you showed some guy who is about to go into the army, a segment of a film about a guy who is to be drafted, or refused to be drafted, and had him comment on that guy—sort of chasing each other's tails around, that could be interesting.

AJ: What was it like to work with Kazan on *America, America*, which is really so much a part of his life, a magnum opus; how much freedom did you have, what kind of experience was it?

HW: That was one of the toughest experiences of my life.

EC: He has very precise ideas about what he wants to do?

HW: He was precise but he gave me quite a bit of freedom—that's not the right word because it assumes that I have my ideas, he has his, and one wins and one loses. I did not feel visually restrained in working with him and I learned a great deal from him. One of the difficulties was that the film was so personal to him and he was so intense and intent. Also it

was just plain physically difficult—a rather primitive situation, a rather low budget for us at the time. Of course Warners came in with money later on. But I greatly enjoyed it—all-Italian crew, I learned to speak Italian. Good spirits, fabulous spirits. Deedee Allan was the cutter, I spent some time in the cutting room with her. She can even make bad photography look good. EC: Do you like to have a look at the cutting? HW: Oh yes, I do all the time. Partly, I think, it's a selfish thing because I'm interested in a shot or a couple of the scenes—always afraid, almost like narcissistic actors whose best performance ends up on the cutting-room floor! I would like to say that it's my interest in the film but I think it begins with the other. . . .

To tell the truth, nothing photographically is too difficult. I think the hard thing for me now is not to show off. I've got a good bag of tricks and I am always developing them. What I have to do now is use restraint, trying to concentrate on the story and make sure that what I am doing with the camera is not exhibitionism. You see I would like to make my own film. I want to direct. Everybody wants to direct. But I haven't found a script. Recently I've seen about five scripts, all about hippies, but they are all written by people who don't know anything about them.

AJ: Do you feel there is something in Hollywood film-making that tries to prevent the rise of the cameraman-director?

HW: Do I feel there's a conspiracy against me?

AJ: No, I have talked to a number of cameramen who say, "Well, you know they don't want a cameraman to get too big." As if the cameraman who can write and direct, and maybe act, would be too much.

HW: I can answer in this way. In Hollywood they like to put labels on people; so-and-so is an editor, so-and-so is a cameraman, and particularly if you have a certain position in that skill, there is a certain comfort in leaving it that way; why be something else? Often guys who have not directed anything, or one TV show, or one stage play, can get a job in Hollywood directing a film before I could, for that very reason.

What I consider the *big* problem, which is not strictly a Hollywood problem, rather it's a communication problem (it happens in films, in TV), is that we are ignoring the world as it is. Occasionally they salute the superficial changes that take place in the world, like making films on the hippies, or allusions to war or to racial issues, but only as a way of stating that they know it exists. It is characteristic of our whole society that we live one life as it is, and we create our dream world in our films and in TV, not even as we think it should be but in another way.

AJ: We want to be entertained.

HW: But you see there *is* entertainment! Just as a stupid statement I'll say, what film have you seen in the last ten years about an American guy who works for a living, really works, doesn't go to the office, or whose kids go upstairs to bed when he comes home. Or take the kitchen, the kitchen in most American films (and certainly in TV) has that same kind of refrigerator, the same sink, even the look of the wife has a certain sameness; there is a certain ordinariness, a presentation as though we were presenting ourselves to the outside world. I think we are ignoring ourselves.

You mention entertainment. I think it is possible to make just as entertaining a film about a guy who works on building the Golden Gate Bridge. The problem is that the producer sitting by the pool in Beverly Hills is not going to know about that guy. He is going to know about agents, about big-business people, about playboys, about Tony Curtises, or at best he will be a guy who used to live in New York and he will know what it was like in the thirties in New York, which is as far away as you could get.

EC: Do you think the *cinéma-vérité* impulse is strong enough to crack some of that?

HW: Possibly, but it's a double-edged problem. Guys get seduced. Someone makes a terrific *cinéma-vérité* film like *Titticut Follies*, so some big company in Hollywood says, "He's got it! Let's give him a rough story with the actors improvised; we'll only give him a million bucks, what the hell, he can't hurt us, we can't

lose anything." (A million dollars in Hollywood is nothing.) The problem is that in a sense they're saying, "We want the new wave but we want it in our Beverly Hills swimming pool." Somehow what happens is that the waves get polluted. And it isn't censorship in the sense that the Hollywood producer says you *must* do this or that—it's sort of self-censorship that happens. It's an unwritten, felt response to the fact that now I'm in the big time, now it must be slick, now I can't step on that guy's toes. When the film-maker who might have been anti-establishment is accepted, this acceptance is often loaded with a misguided gratitude. The danger, to me, is not so much censorship, it's *seduction*. I feel it myself, in my own work, and you have to resist it.

EC: Do you think making a film of your own, from time to time, will be a big part of fighting it?

HW: Sure, but it's terrifying because to make a film of your own you have to put yourself on the line as far as your own money, your own resources are concerned. When I go to work now I get paid a lot of money, for working on a film which I'll talk myself into believing is a better film than it really is. If I go in myself it means taking some money I saved and getting rid of one of my houses or selling one of my race cars—or some unimportant object which seems important.

It's not a simple problem. In the first place, a guy has to have a passion to want to say or do something. Often you find producers or directors in Hollywood who have a passion to assert themselves, but that's ordinary ego or power assertion. But to have independence to assert yourself because you believe in something is not as much a part of our culture, at least not up till now, as it is in European culture. So that it's not just the outside pressing on the creative artist, it's the lethargy of the creative artist. It's also the seduction which I mentioned before; you can't underestimate that because it's not just in movies, it's in everything. The guy starts thinking of his boat or his vacation, you know the whole idea of TGIF, thank God it's Friday. We should *love* films, should want to work even

on Saturday and Sunday because we are making something great! Well, that's what we don't have. And it's not just the guys who work on film, it's part of our whole system.

EC: I wanted to ask about your attitude toward the use of candid or concealed cameras—some *cinéma-vérité* people seem to think it's almost voyeuristic.

HW: Well I'm not against voyeurism. I think that part of the basic attraction of movies, good movies, is that feeling of a voyeur, looking from a darkened room. For example, in *Blow-Up*, the scene where Hemmings works in the darkroom. You see a guy involved in what he knows, you watch him do it, you feel like you are eavesdropping, you are peeking in on him. So I'm not against it. The Steve McQueen picture, a bank robbery which I just did, I shot it with concealed cameras. We had the guys rob a bank. There was a big Negro with sunglasses on, waving a gun, and a pack of money in his hand, loading a station wagon. This is on the streets and people did things you wouldn't believe. A lady walked by, she looked, and you could see her perplexed—should I get involved, should I say something? Then she shrugged her shoulders and walked on. This was shot in Boston. Many times I used three or four cameras, concealed them in trucks, in windows. I see nothing wrong in this. The Maysles are purists—they say if it's real, it belongs to the film, it's true. I don't think anything is true, because when you decide to make a film, the fact that you choose a certain subject is an aesthetic decision, and whom you point the camera at, when you turn it off, everything. Even before you reach the point of cutting. So it's still art, it's still control, manipulation.

AJ: Have you ever been attracted to working on a super epic like *Spartacus*, or *The Greatest Story Ever Told*?

HW: No, I don't think so. That goes back to what I was saying. We photograph and depict a charade of our life, of our society. Underneath that thin crust, if I can mix metaphors, is a fantastic, dramatic world, which is totally ignored by film-makers, by TV, by writers, by everybody. And it's going to take some real gutsy re-

porters to get out and meet the people and really know what is going on, not just look at the surface, and try to put that on film.

I feel terribly frustrated because, well for example, my Academy Award really bothers me. The people whom I respect and who are interested in me, the young people, the college students I know and have talked with, they think of me as if I've arrived. They call me "Mister." I don't want to feel that way, I don't think that way. I feel that I've just got to start to do something, and it really bugs me, annoys me. And also the invitations to make a lot of money, big pictures. There are guys on the set just to shove chairs under you, and that's my only concession to try to keep my independence—I'll never sit down!

EC: Maybe independent work would be more feasible if it's done not entirely individually—one guy is the promoter, raises money, the other concentrates on the films.

HW: That's a tough combination, it presupposes a community of interests not usually present when one man is business-oriented and the other is not. It's a question of attitude. I have friends who have been seduced. They talk great films, but don't have the feeling about their own work that someone I would look up to would have. A good film-maker, if he can't make films the way he wants to, should want to write pamphlets, or write a book, should want to get on a damn TV program and *say* something. He has to have something burning. In the end that's the only defense against what we're all afraid of. The seduction. Everybody wants approval, the proper places to give you approval.

