THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DOCUMENTARY IN AMERICA By Jim Lane

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# *David Holzman's Diary*

## An Unlikely Beginning

Released in 1967, *David Holzman's Diary* is a fictional film that paradoxically anticipates an entire group of autobiographical films and videos, especially those made by men, that I call the journal entry documentary. Jim McBride and L. M. Kit Carson foresaw the themes and form of the yet-to-be-produced journal entry documentaries that first appeared in the early seventies.[1] By *journal entry* I mean a type of autobiographical documentary that involves the shooting of everyday events for a sustained period of time and the subsequent editing of these events into a chronological autobiographical narrative. Events appear along a diachronic chain as if they are occurring for the first time in present tense. For the most part these events show people, including the documentarist, interacting with each other instead of speaking about those events in the past tense, for instance, in formal interviews.[2] Organized in this way, the telling of one's life story relies on themes and characters whose transformations occur during an identifiable period of time.

In *David Holzman's Diary* the narrative encompasses one week of a filmmaker's life. L. M. Kit Carson plays the role of David Holzman, a filmmaker who is making a documentary about his life. He obsesses about his deteriorating relationship with his girlfriend, Penny, and uses the escalation of the Vietnam War, racial uprisings in U.S. cities, and the early stages of the

politicization of gender roles as his historical backdrop. The director, Jim McBride; the main actor, Carson; and the mock autobiographical subject, David Holzman, create a fake autobiographical pact by directly addressing the camera and establishing an intimate world that appears to be authentic. Despite such appearances, the fictional mise-en-scène challenges the authenticity of the documentary. The end credits, which explicitly reveal the film's scripted and acted status, will reveal the fiction to most viewers. This dynamic, involving two ostensibly opposing modes of discourse, creates a complex filmic hybrid. Of this interrelation, the film theorist David James observes, "Once instigated, this interpenetration of the two ontologies destabilizes all moments in the film; the instances when autobiographical honesty is called into question by implications of fictitiousness are matched by the immediacy with which the artificiality of what the medium presents is redeemed by the actuality of the presentation."[3] The tension between actuality and artifice, or what the literary theorist Susanna Egan has called in another context the "relationship between experience and art," underpins both the formal and historical importance of *David Holzman's Diary*.[4] The "lie" of *Diary* reveals the tenuous nature of truth in autobiography and documentary. Yet these lies appear to be, as Egan has observed of Hemingway's autobiographical writing, "crucial to the process of narrative!"[5] Lying and truth play equal roles in the telling of an autobiographical story.

Furthermore, the film's appearance in the late sixties reflects the increased interest in experimentation with autobiography and the suspicion of direct cinema. Combining a mock autobiography with a heretofore unestablished autodocumentary style, McBride and his fictional surrogate, Carson/Holzman, fashion a critical text that reflects on U.S. direct cinema's claim to objective truth and its aesthetic rule of erasing the presence of the camera and filmmaker. The film invokes the realist conventions of direct cinema by using familiar stylistic gestures such as spontaneous action (simulated), synch-sound footage, an abundance of hand-held shots, and grainy black-and-white imagery. Yet by presenting the life story of the filmmaker and acknowledging the presence of the camera, the film puts into play a set of reflexive self-referential signifiers. These signifiers initially suggest a more ideologically aware orientation of reality than that of direct cinema. Conversely, the film's fictional status undermines the autodocumentary promise of reference and truth. Through these discursive entanglements *Diary* bridges direct cinema and autobiographical documentaries. By imposing autobiographical impulses on the tradition of direct cinema, the film opens up new possibilities for documentary and autobiography. In the years that followed the release of *David Holzman's Diary*, U.S. documentarists who considered themselves to be working squarely within nonfiction traditions systematically explored these new possibilities.

Carson reveals his critical perspective toward direct cinema when he





writes that as he was "walking out after a *Diary* screening, Pennebaker said to me: 'You killed cinema-verité [direct cinema]. No more truthmovies. No.'" Carson responds, "Truthmovies are just beginning."[6] Carson's statement provides clear evidence that the makers of *David Holzman's Diary* viewed their project as an iconoclastic transition from direct cinema to a new phase of documentary production. The implicit assumption, that "truthmovies" have not been made but are about to begin, suggests that their reflexive self-referential mode is more truthful. The new mode of filmmaking purports that once the other side of the camera is exposed and the filmmaker implicated, the documentary can more truthfully depict reality. Carson's statement can also be seen as tongue in cheek, because the entire truth-value to *David Holzman's Diary* is always challenged by its fictional simulation of an autobiographical narrative.[7]

The choice of mock autobiography is of central importance to the critique of contemporaneous states of affairs in documentary and is double edged. In retrospective fashion *Diary* brings "truthmovies" to their logical conclusion by deploying autobiography and the other side of the camera. By bringing the filmmaker into the film, *Diary* opposes direct cinema's conventions of realism. In prospective fashion the film anticipates the autobiographical path taken by certain documentarists. By fictionalizing autobiography, *Diary* exposes the thorny issue of truth telling in autobiographical discourse and suggests that autobiography as a model of truth may be as problematic as the conventions of direct cinema. In these ways *David Holzman's Diary* resembles what the literary critic Timothy Dow Adams describes as the deliberate blurring of "the distinctions between history and fiction" in which "the basic definition of autobiography" is disrupted.[8] Moreover, as Adams has pointed out in another sense of literary mock autobiographical texts, *Diary* derides the conventions of both the realism of direct cinema and the promise of truth in autobiographical impulses.[9] By collapsing fiction and nonfiction, *David Holzman's Diary* iconoclastically ridicules the truth-telling patina so prominent in U.S. documentary in the late 1960s.

A closer analysis of how *David Holzman's Diary* negotiates subjectivity, reference, and autodocumentary form provides a more detailed set of entry points to the critical problems that the film raises. Moreover, a fleshing out of issues raised by the film will deepen its historical connection to the journal entry autobiographical documentaries that followed. *Diary* inaugurates a variety of topics seen later, in varying degrees, in the work of Pincus, Rance, McElwee, Williams, Joslin/Friedman, and others.

### Subjectivity: The Personal Crisis Plot

The literary critic Martha Lifson has observed that "a major effort of autobiographers in particular is to define themselves against a fragmented and

shapeless world, or against a personal sense of formlessness, failure and guilt."[10] Lifson's characterization of the purpose and motivation of some autobiographers is directly applicable to the plot of *David Holzman's Diary*. In this film and in the later journal entry documentaries, the autobiographer struggles with a selfhood in relation to an often intractable world.[11] The autobiographical subject that emerges in these documentaries is constantly in the process of shaping and reshaping. The activity of making the documentary is part of this shaping process and hinges on the success or failure of the autobiographical subject to secure a position in the world.

At the beginning of the film, David announces that he has just lost his job. Moreover, he has just been reclassified by the draft board as "A-1. Perfectly American." In light of these dilemmas David proposes to make a film about his life. "My life," David says, directly addressing the camera, "though ordinary enough, seems to haunt me—in uncommon ways. It seems to come to me from somewhere else. Someone. And I've been trying to understand it; but it seems that I can't get it. . . . So I thought that if I put it all down on film, and I put my thumb on it and I run it back and forth. . . . And I stop it when I want to, then I got everything. I got it all."

David immediately assigns an empiricist teleology to his autobiographical impulse. He strives for knowledge, assumed to be made possible by the documentary process, which will lead to control of his world and a certainty of identity. This process, a process in part defined by the filming of everyday events, will redeem his life and make sense of it. In keeping with the playful position toward documentary, fiction, and autobiography, the film's conclusion presents the ultimate inability to control events when David is robbed of his filmmaking equipment. This event brings the film to an abrupt end. In general the film can be viewed as a series of increasingly serious crises. These crises include an "upgrading" of David's draft status, the loss of his job, the breakup with his girlfriend, and the final insult of being robbed of all his film equipment. Emplotment revolves around a compulsive repetition of attempts to control the world and subsequent loss of control.

This personal crisis scenario parallels the crisis plot structure of the direct cinema documentaries of Drew Associates, the noted documentary company of the 1960s. The film historian Stephen Mamber writes, "We have noted many examples of stories whose forward movement was propelled by an anticipated crisis moment. The basic organizing principle behind a Drew film can usually be stated in the form of a success-or-failure question."[12] Unlike the earlier direct cinema plots, the personal crisis plot of *David Holzman's Diary* (and the journal entry documentaries that followed) pertains to the documentarist himself. Resolution in the journal entry autobiographical documentary typically requires action by the filming subject as opposed to those who are being filmed.

Such personal crises have been used to form the plots of many other





journal entry autobiographical documentaries. Ross McElwee begins *Sherman's March* in a New York apartment, announcing in voice-over that he has just broken up with his girlfriend. Ed Pincus begins *Diaries* with the death of his uncle and marital problems.[13] Peter Friedman begins *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* with the announcement of codirector Tom Joslin's death and the impending death of Tom's lover, Mark. In the opening sequence of *Death and the Singing Telegram*, Mark Rance's mother proclaims that she wants to leave her family and move to Europe. Joel DeMott abruptly concludes *Demon Lover Diary* when she believes she is about to be shot by an angry acquaintance.[14]

The personal crisis can turn on an attempt to resolve the problem or, as in the case of *David Holzman's Diary* and DeMott's *Demon Lover Diary*, serves to complete the film by leaving resolution more open ended. Resolutions, or attempted resolutions, can take on myriad forms but occur most often in the emotional, personal, and psychological registers. Depending on the film and the role of the documentarist, the crisis can exhaust the narrative movement or be reordered, overcome, and subsumed into the discursive weaving and replaced by other concerns.

In this way the central concern of personal crisis constructs an autobiographical subject with constantly shifting relations to the world. The promise of the referential capacity of the documentary apparatus underpins this pliable subjectivity. This promise can, at first, be deceptive. As *David Holzman's Diary* unfolds, the ability of the documentary camera to capture the truth weakens, and with this weakening a new subject emerges that is less dependent on the controlling fix of the documentary. David's personal fall and eventual disillusionment with his documentary play out this scenario.

### Reference: Political/Ethical Consequences of the Autobiographical Project

Because David Holzman proclaims an initial faith in the camera's ability to frame and understand the world, the referential potentialities of both documentary and autobiography are collateral concerns. These concerns are manifested in the autobiographer's close association with the recording apparatus. In many of the journal entry documentaries the process of recording the filmmaker's private world has both political and ethical consequences.

Complicated relationships between the autobiographer and the camera frequently appear in these documentaries. Holzman introduces his filming apparatus to the audience by showing the owner's manual photographs of his Eclair camera, Nagra sound recorder, and lavalier microphone. These objects assume a fetish status closely connected to David's girlfriend, Penny. Penny first appears in a photograph, which suggests a controlling relation between the camera and Penny. David even goes so far as to refer to his Eclair camera as "she."

David's pursuit of Penny and his pathological surveillance of other women in the film become the overt dramatic content. As David James observes, of all the political subjects on which the film could focus, sexual politics emerges as the film's main concern.[15] In light of this, Holzman's relation to the camera and the overall autobiographical project are sites of conflict between him and Penny. David therefore occupies a point of affect, the autobiographical subject with whom the film invites deeply problematic identification. David assumes a "right to know" position by initially granting an uncontested authority to his autobiographical enterprise and the "truthful" gaze of his documentary camera.

An understandable conflict erupts when David's autobiographical project opposes Penny's right to control images of her body. Penny's resistance exposes the politicized power relations between men and women.[16] This conflict reaches perverse levels. Penny's objection to being filmed—she shouts at one point, "Put it away, David"—suggests a phallic relationship between David and his camera. On one level David's project solipsistically reflects his sexual potency/impotency. Penny also reveals the fundamental ethical issues involved in the invasion of privacy that often occur in the autobiographical documentary. Moreover, these issues reveal more complicated ideological problems imbued in the documentary camera. By confronting David's project, Penny not only reveals ethical problems of invasion of privacy but also eschews the disingenuous authority granted David's autobiographical impulse and the documentary camera. David's documentary camera, as presented in this fictional film, betrays a gaze interested in controlling the world as much as truthfully recording it.

David's identification with the camera emerges in many sequences in which he is alone with the camera, speaking to it, or filming himself in a mirror. Others often call this relationship into question. For instance, Pepe, one of David's neighborhood friends, stands confidently in front of a visually prominent wall mural and criticizes David's film. Pepe articulately exposes the weaknesses of David's utopian ideal of filming truth. His criticism hinges on a questioning of David's relationship to the camera and suggests that David's life simply makes a "bad movie." Another neighborhood denizen, the Thunderbird Lady, colorfully critiques this perverse relationship when she confronts David about his filming and determines that David would rather film than "get laid." During these moments *David Holzman's Diary* reaches a critical mass. The narrative verges on collapse because of these pointed critiques.

Similar moments occur in later autobiographical documentaries. In *Sherman's March* Ross McElwee's longtime confidant Charleen badgers him and calls into question his entire film project. She insists that there is a difference between life and art and urges McElwee to do more living and less filmmaking. At the conclusion of her opening diatribe in *Death and the*





*Singing Telegram,* Mark Rance's mother sardonically curses, "I hope you got all that goddamn technical stuff. Run it and laugh!" scathingly questioning her son's cinematic/autobiographical intentions.

In *Diaries* David Neuman undermines Ed Pincus's role as a filmmaker. Neuman even takes the camera, films Pincus as he drives, and prods him about his former girlfriend, making Pincus uncomfortable. The tables are turned, offering Pincus and the film an opportunity to reflect on his relationship with the camera and the effect it might have on other people. Neuman's role in the film is so potentially threatening that he appears mainly in a protracted segment called "South by Southwest." This film within the film forms a metacritical relation to the text in which it is embedded. Also, the reference to Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959) must not go unnoticed because in many of these documentaries the ethical and political problems of male voyeurism, a Hitchcockian obsession, eventually come to the surface.

*David Holzman's Diary* also contains an apt Hitchcock reference. During an uneasy encounter with Penny in his apartment, David frames a poster of Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941) in the background of a shot of Penny. The camera's rapport with Penny assumes threatening overtones. Penny's subsequent rejection of David and his camera enables him to retreat further into onanistic isolation. He revels in voyeuristic surveillance of other women, most notably the neighbor S. Schwartz and the woman on the subway. David's Hitchcockian voyeuristic compulsion culminates in his final attempt to film Penny. Walking along the sidewalk at night, he passes by several apartment windows, filming people presumably unaware of his presence. David is finally interrupted by Hitchcock's greatest and well-known fear—a police officer.

This voyeuristic detachment from the world figures strongly in later journal entry documentaries made by men. For instance, *Sherman's March* presents a series of potential love relationships that fail more often than not. At some point the issue of the male filmmaker's relation to the camera emerges and becomes a deterrent to the potential love affair. This obsessive-compulsive behavior reaches its logical conclusion when Ross McElwee films the rock musician in the parking lot. Detached from the events, McElwee anonymously observes the woman as she performs. A genuine relationship develops from this initially voyeuristic, if not scopophilic, act.

Ed Pincus's *Diaries* also presents a number of similar scenarios. Early in the film, Ed's wife, Jane, seriously doubts his intentions of making a philosophical film about his life. She accuses him of not having such noble aspirations. The film progresses from this moment of voyeuristic crisis to a series of other relationships with women in which the scenario is again played out. Pincus's other lovers, especially Ann, consciously realize their position in this voyeuristic construction and, instead of submitting to such a role, overturn or subvert this position.

*David Holzman's Diary* exposes political and ethical problems that

emerge from the attempt to autobiographically record the world with a camera and tape recorder. Acting as a bridge between direct cinema and the autobiographical documentary, McBride and Carson simultaneously critique the political and ethical dimensions of documentary, autobiography, and the promise of truth in these enterprises. The referential claims of both documentary and autobiography implicitly lie within this critique. While most journal entry documentarists do not deny the referential capacity of their projects, they also do not see their documentaries as simply accurate windows on a world. To do so is both naive and philosophically suspect. That these issues have never dissipated in the journal entry mode further argues for the uncanny perspicuity of *David Holzman's Diary*.

### Autodocumentary Form: Temporality and Narration

My initial interest in the use of temporality and, later, narration is a formal one. This discussion delineates the ways in which *David Holzman's Diary* established conventions in terms of narrative structure and performance that were later developed by actual journal entry documentarists. A closer look at these issues reveals the early stages of form in the journal entry documentary.

The diachronic structuring of time plays a crucial role in the journal entry documentaries that *David Holzman's Diary* anticipates. As a mock journal entry film, *David Holzman's Diary* appears to be a project in which the documentarist shoots everyday events for an extended period. In the opening sequence David Holzman tells the viewer that he wants to film everyday life and, quoting Jean-Luc Godard, adds, "Film is truth twenty-four times a second." The existing footage is then edited, structured, and organized sometime after the shooting. In the completed film the events appear in chronological order. David identifies days and dates. As time unfolds, the sense of time passing dramatically charges events. For instance, David's breakup with Penny and his attempt to reconcile build in intensity as the days progress. As he loses faith in his project to record and understand his reality, he begins to break down. His emotional confrontation with the camera toward the end of the film in which he screams, "What do you want from me?" marks a significant change in perspective. By the end David seriously questions his initial faith in the camera's abilities to reveal his immediate world. This shift is made possible through the narrative effect of time passing.

In her observations about the literary diary the literary critic Rebecca Hogan writes:

> Formally, diaries seem to be both collections of fragments and models of continuity; day after day is recorded, but each entry is discreet and self-sufficient. Transitions are usually marked by a new date, not by an articulated link (there are of course exceptions to this, particularly with diarists who re-read their last entry before writing a new one, or who, like Boswell or Pepys, write up several entries at a time from rough notes). Continuity and stability are represented by the habit of *keeping* a diary, while each entry captures only some "moments of being" as Virginia Woolf called them.[17]





In *David Holzman's Diary* and in the journal entry documentaries that followed, the creation of entries manifests itself in the routine of filming everyday events. The literary critic H. Porter Abbott notes that the diary promises a special immediacy to the event.[18] Indeed, when we compare the diary to other literary forms, Abbot is correct. However, literary diaristic immediacy still embodies a delay between event and its initial entry in a journal, whereas the journal entry documentary displays no lag time between the event and its recording. At the moment of its happening the filmed event becomes an entry. These recorded events constitute fragments of a discontinuous present, later organized into a narrative where continuities are imposed by identified days, dates, times, and locations. After long periods of editing in which many entries remain in the editing room, the journal entry documentary emerges. Moments originally not necessarily thought of as having narrative importance now interact in autobiographical narrative discourse. Like the literary diary in which the author maintains coherence by continually recording events, these documentaries maintain narrative cohesion through the impression of a documentarist who continues to film the immediate world. This activity shows the possibility of a focalizing position that the literary theorist Elizabeth Bruss claims is lacking in film autobiography.

Later journal entry documentaries similarly rely on the chronological entry format. Ed Pincus's *Diaries* spans five years of his life, allowing for actual changes in him and his friends to develop. Mark Rance's *Death and the Singing Telegram* (1983) also encompasses five years and relies on time passing as a way to represent the changes that occur in his family. *Sherman's March* (1986) uses the chronological passage of time as a way to structure McElwee's travels through various places in the South, while the history of General Sherman's march as metanarrative structures McElwee's film. In *In Search of Our Fathers* (1992) the delay in Marco Williams's meeting with his father covers about ten years that are filmically condensed and presented chronologically. In *Silverlake Life* (1993) Tom Joslin's gradual deterioration occurs through the structuring of scenes in a chronological pattern. In all cases the documentarist relies on the habitual recording of the everyday and the identification of time and place. With such a practice overtly acknowledged in the documentaries, these filmmakers create what Hogan refers to as "continuity" and "stability" for a viewer.

The practice of keeping a cinematic journal also constitutes the autobiographical documentarist's position as narrator. David Holzman's position as narrator fixes our understanding of temporal organization. The film's

plot structure is assertively cause-and-effect. This plotting is the outcome of the chronological ordering of scenes. With each passing sequence a certain logic emerges that binds previous sequences to the on-screen moment. This logic to the chain of events subtends the film's overall discursive effect.[19] David, as the focalizing character, narrates on and off screen. This narration acts in the service of the progression of time.

The collapsing of the roles of author/narrator/main character form a tripartite relation in *David Holzman's Diary* that requires detailed examination. The narration can be examined at various levels. David narrates by speaking directly to the camera. His introduction of Penny and his subsequent summary updates of what is going on in his life are typical examples. David also narrates off screen. These moments have several permutations. Sometimes David narrates as if the sound is completely synchronous with image, denoting a speaking individual who is operating the camera and sound recorder and is commenting on what he is filming as it is occurring. The introduction of S. Schwartz typifies this mode in which David remarks on various details in her windows and speculates about a television show that she might be watching at that very moment. Other times, the narration evokes a type of recent past. Specifically, David will comment on certain shots or sequences as if from an editing table. Typical moments are David pointing out Schwartz's gesture at the garbage can or the police officer slugging David as he is filming. These moments refer to a narrative source that has examined the footage and is interpreting after the event has occurred.

By seamlessly intermingling all these various tenses of narration, the film forgoes calling attention to these narrative variations. In its place is a controlling narrator who is also the main character and author. On one level David Holzman becomes a transcendental filmic enunciator who is able to occupy virtually any space, implied or not. This position in the film lends a certain mastery to the persona of Holzman, which in turn comes under scrutiny. On the one hand, the attention drawn to enunciation itself—the reflexive acknowledgment of the filming apparatus—and, on the other, the covering up of enunciative levels constitute a contradictory relation. David's speech-acts constitute the film's affective site, which denies the very aspect of the text that the reflexive discourse ostensibly claims to be acknowledging, namely, its mode of production. Yet the film ultimately mitigates this controlling position, calling into question the autobiographical desire to master and resolve. David, as master of the world in which he lives and films, is inevitably undone. The more he attempts to control, the less he understands. A closer look at the film's opening sequence will help to substantiate this discursive sleight-of-hand at the level of narration.

The published script of *David Holzman's Diary* provides a useful account of the opening images and sounds.





*Fade-up*:

David stands in a mirrored alcove, his camera on his shoulder.

DAVID

(*Voice gradually gets louder.*) Test, test, test, test. (Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap.)

He's shooting a picture of himself in one of the full-length mirrors.

DAVID

Test (*Tap.*) Test. Okay. This is the story, this is a very important . . .

A few people pass behind him.

He pans around the alcove, swiveling quickly to catch his image in the closed-circuit Sony TV that now faces him.

DAVID

This is a fairy tale.

Now he slowly steps out of frame in the Sony TV.

*Fade to black.*

DAVID

This—

*Fade-up*:

David slowly steps sideways, shooting a picture of himself in a horizontal mirror in his apartment.

DAVID

Please pay attention.

*Cut to black.*

*Cut to*:

David's face out of focus.

DAVID

You've had your chance.

David's face comes into focus, grinning crazily.

DAVID

You've had your chance, lad. It's now time to stop your laboring, stop-your-laboring-in-vain. Bring your life into focus. That's right.

He bobs up, twisting the exposure gauge on the camera so that the screen now blacks out from underexposure.

*Black.*

DAVID

And expose yourself. Yeah: EXPOSE YOURSELF—

David readjusts the exposure, correcting it, and zooms the picture back away from his face so that now one side of his room is included (behind him) in the frame.

DAVID

To yourself.

David sticks out his tongue.[20]

In this exchange of images and sounds two distinct spaces are represented: the outdoors and David's work area in his apartment, which includes his editing table where he eventually sits and begins the introduction to his state of mind and affairs. The sound, however, is ambiguous in relation to its source (its originating space). The initial impression is that David is speaking outdoors as he is filming himself in the mirror and on TV. However, the narration runs over the disparate images, from represented spaces to black leader, and the film eventually reveals that the narration actually comes from David at his editing table. When David appears in front of the camera and continues speaking, the direct address takes on further import because of his looking into the camera. This transition from voice-over narration to on-screen monologue serves as a seamless, continuous sound track. David's words can easily move from cinematic narration proper—omniscient off-screen voice-over—to a type of performance that can function not only at the level of speech-act and story but also at the level of narration. In other words, it serves an organizing and structuring function. When this on-screen narration occurs in actual journal entry documentaries, it can reveal an awareness on the part of the autobiographical documentarists of other entries that they had recorded earlier. Such moments echo Rebecca Hogan's examples of literary diarists who reread their entries before they inscribed a new one.

When David begins to explain his Selective Service and employment status, the dual function of his directly addressing the camera develops further. He not only sets the story in motion in terms of a problem but also presents himself as a character at his editing table—a place that will become





a significant motif as he spirals into hysteria. The diegetic place, that is, the world of the film, and the narrative space conflate. Moreover, David pays constant attention to the camera and tape recorder as authentic objects in his world. Frequently, the turning off of the camera serves as a dramatically significant event.

The variations in the levels of narration and their overlaps, caused by the conflation of author, narrator, and main character, also play an important role in subsequent journal entry films. For Ed Pincus narration can serve a reflective as well as plot-driven function. Ross McElwee's narration develops a sense of irony and humor that significantly qualifies his on-screen and off-screen persona. One of the most determining of narrations is Joel DeMott's. In *Demon Lover Diary* her narration serves a multiplicity of functions, including narrative development, humorous and ironic commentary, and exaggeration of the events.

In many cases the documentarist comes out from behind the camera to pay close attention to the recording apparatus, as David Holzman often does. McElwee speaks directly into the camera one night after a costume party as the threat of his father looms just outside the frame. A corollary to this is the use of the mirror as a way to represent the filmmaker. During a harrowing mescaline trip, for instance, Ed Pincus uses the mirror to dramatize his plight of isolation from his wife and family. The camera takes on existential import in the narrative. These various permutations of appearance on the part of the documentarists and camera establish the author/narrator/main character and allow for a highly operative narration. These narrative moments may direct attention toward the enunciation as uncomplicated narration or as a performance that operates at the level of affect and psychological states of mind. Yet, as in the case of *David Holzman's Diary,* many of these films resist this transcendent position by placing limits on the autobiographical project's claim to self-knowledge and history. This duality underpins many tensions inherent in these documentaries where the autobiographer desires self-knowledge while confronting the problems inherent in such a desire.

By intermingling recorded moments, albeit scripted and acted for the camera, with the larger narrative frame of the autobiographer, *David Holzman's Diary* established a narrative model for the journal entry documentary. Despite its fictional status, *David Holzman's Diary* created a simulated, intimate mode of narration that proved viable for actual autobiographical documentarists. The crucial use of chronological ordering also turned out to be an important strategy for future journal entry autobiographical documentaries to which I will return in the chapters that follow.[21] In these ways *David Holzman's Diary* had a profound influence on the ways in which the autodocumentary form developed in U.S. nonfiction film and video.

L. M. Kit Carson as the confrontational David Holzman, ca. 1967 (Courtesy Direct Cinema)

### *David*'s Legacy

That Jim McBride and Kit Carson were able to simulate the journal entry documentaries produced after *David Holzman's Diary* suggests something deeper about the relation between fiction and nonfiction, autobiography and documentary. *David Holzman's Diary* shows how the autobiographical impulse can encompass both nonfiction and fiction discourses. Despite its fictional status, the film still engages in the themes and modes of production widely shared by later nonfiction filmmakers.

While not truthful in the traditional way that documentary is commonly expected to be, *David Holzman's Diary,* through its fiction, reveals actual conditions about the United States in the late 1960s. This is especially the case at the level of sexual politics, masculinity, and the role of documentary itself. These features later became important in many of the journal entry works. At the formal level *David Holzman's Diary* invokes the conventions of the literary journal, marked by entries identified by dates, times, and/or locations, to structure its fictional narrative. The chronological organization of these entries in combination with first-person narration dynamizes narrative unfolding.

In addition to providing these thematic and formal influences, *David Holzman's Diary* reveals how autobiography can touch both fiction and non-





fiction. The film is an example of what Timothy Dow Adams has called, in a literary context, "metaphorically authentic."[22] As a metaphor, the film critiques the changing role of the documentary by simulating autobiography. And, as a metaphor, the film critiques autobiography by simulating documentary. *David Holzman's Diary* exposes the boundaries and conditions from which the autobiographical documentary movement was to emerge.

The literary critic Louis A. Renza states that autobiography is a "mode of self-referential expression, one that allows, then inhibits, its ostensible project of self representation."[23] Here Renza echoes the tension seen in *David Holzman's Diary*. The more David's life turns in ways he does not plan, the more he becomes increasingly disillusioned with his autobiographical project. Yet the more the project collapses, the more it appears to be authentic. Renza writes that "the autobiographer's life appears as a daydream that first seems recordable, but then, when the attempt is made to record it, eludes the word."[24] Holzman's attempt to record his life in cinematic form is thus a scene of tension between desire and authenticity in which both hold equal import.

Abbott sees truth emerging in "the mixture of sincerity and self-deception" in the diary.[25] The "lie" of *David Holzman's Diary* exposes the fragility of autobiographical documentary discourse. Despite the film's violation of the autobiographical pact, its lie is of an extraordinarily perspicacious order. While the film presents us with the fictional life of someone named David Holzman, it nonetheless establishes a model for many of the themes and modes of representation taken up later by nonfiction autobiographical documentarists.

*David Holzman's Diary* engages two ostensibly divergent modes, fiction and nonfiction, for apparent paradoxical effect. At first glance this may seem like an insurmountable contradiction for those genuinely interested in representing their life story. Yet, by looking beyond the true/false binary, it is possible to read these contradictions in less paradoxical fashion. The film suggests that fiction and nonfiction modes are equally capable of apprehending autobiography. Moreover, the use of narrative, especially chronological narrative, proves viable in both modes. McBride and Carson, fiction filmmakers who simulated autobiographical documentary, and later journal entry documentarists all turned to narrative discourse to tell their life stories. Narrating a life story proved the most potent form of self-representation for this group of documentarists in the journal entry approach.

That narrative should be more associated with fiction than nonfiction is more a reflection of critical shortsightedness than a corruption of autobiography in nonfiction documentary.[26] Shortly after the release of *David Holzman's Diary,* the U.S. documentary scene shifted to actual modes of autobiography inspired by a fictional prototype. The imaginary experiment inspired some documentarists to begin to explore the relation between the nonfiction camera and their own private world.