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Looking Back...There Is a Direction Home

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Abstract: The article offers a rereading of Scorsese's "No Direction Home" (2005, 2016,). The film replaces D. A. Pennebaker's famous cinema verité, observational documentary "Don't Look Back" (1967) about Dylan's 1965 tour in Great Britain, which has proved, as years have passed, to be insufficient to convey the full story of Dylan's personality behind his artistry. The article's purpose, however, is not to cross-analyze the latter two documentaries. Instead, it provides a closer analysis of "No Direction Home" and explains how and why Dylan appears more appropriately different in this 2005 to 2016 production, while revealing the Scorsese-Dylan connection and commenting on the film in two interrelated fields: cinematic and documentary. The focus is not on Dylan, but on Scorsese. Therefore, the article puts the spotlight back to the original source of the Dylan-Scorsese union in "No Direction Home" (2005, 2016) and on Scorsese's signature documentary and the re-authoring practices first conceived in Woodstock (1970), "The Last Waltz" (1978), and "The Blues" (2003).

Keywords: Short Film, Documentary, Filmmaking, Biopic, American Filmmaking

Introduction

In November 2016, to honor Bob Dylan's winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, Capitol Records released a tenth-anniversary edition of Martin Scorsese's documentary *No Direction Home*. I received this new edition as a Christmas present. The 2005 version had been the only documentary up to that date that had actual interviews with Dylan, and, to my surprise, there was nothing added from Dylan in the updated version.

In the 2016 version, there are some extended interviews with some of the best-known informants in the film: Dave Van Ronk, Allen Ginsberg, Joan Baez, Peter Seeger, Maria Maudler, Bruce Langhorn, Mark Spoletta, Susan Ritolo, Izzy Young, Tony Glover, Artie Mogul, and Harold Levinthal. In addition, something extra by Scorsese, namely the bonus track of the Blu-ray disc. The filmmaker basically acknowledges in this extra footage "the offer to direct this film and assemble the footage into a cohesive story was too much to refuse, even though he had other projects that were closer to him" (Holland 2016, 1). That alone revealed to me Scorsese's sensitivity when it concerns telling intimate stories about people—and not necessarily musicians. It created an invisible thread back to Scorsese's *Last Waltz* (1978) and urged me to want to investigate more into the intellectual connection between Dylan and Scorsese.

My title hints at a rereading of Scorsese's *No Direction Home* (2005). The film, in both its 2005 and 2016 versions, is still a biopic, or better yet, a "portrait documentary" (Nichols 2001, 163) about the singer-songwriter Bob Dylan that chronicles his life from adolescence to the

years between 1960, when he first appeared on the musical scene, and 1966, prior to his motorcycle accident that November. My title suggests that *No Direction Home* replaces D. A. Pennebaker's famous cinema verité, observational documentary *Don't Look Back* (1967) about Dylan's 1965 tour in Great Britain, which in my opinion has proved inadequate in recounting the full story of Dylan's personality behind his artistry. My purpose, however, is not to meticulously cross-analyze the two documentaries. Instead, I analyze *No Direction Home* and explain how Scorsese cinematically crafts a new Dylan persona beyond Pennebaker and why Dylan appears more appropriately different in this 2005 production, while revealing a Scorsese–Dylan, subliminal, connection. To do so, I examine the film in two interrelated fields: cinematic and documentary.

My analysis is based on critiques evoked by viewing the film thoroughly, relevant literature, and other valuable sources on Scorsese's documentary practices. In particular, using Nichols (2001) work, I address: the cinematography, the institutional framework the film derives from, the film's narrative structure, the documentary rhetorical tools employed by Scorsese in order to render the film persuasive, the chronology of scenes and editing, the ethical and sociopolitical issues inevitably attached to the film, and, finally, Scorsese's newly constructed persona of Dylan. Looking back to 2005 and 2016, I argue that Dylan and Scorsese silently collaborate (of course, without Dylan being aware of this) on establishing a framework, through mutual trust, which houses Dylan's views of his own life and in a way supports Dylan's reflections in *Chronicles*, Volume 1.

According to the story of this personal and intellectual collaboration between them, Scorsese would continue to re-author, once again, archival footage and related work by other filmmakers to create the latest Netflix documentary *Rolling Thunder Revue: A Bob Dylan Story* by Martin Scorsese, 2019. My effort does not touch on *Rolling Thunder Revue* at all, not even on Dylan himself as an artist, performer, Nobel Prize songwriter, or poet. My focus is on Scorsese and on the potential to contribute to the understanding of observational (portrait) documentary, mixed with (Scorsese's) "docufictional practices" (Donato and Scorsese 2007) and beyond Nichols (2001). Putting the spotlight back to the original source of the Dylan–Scorsese union in *No Direction Home* (2005), the subliminal alliance behind the scenes between two creative masterminds emerges (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021). This is manifested through Scorsese's signature documentary and re-authoring practices, full-fledged in *No Direction Home*, first conceived in *Woodstock* (1970) and *The Last Waltz* (1978), and later in *Made in Milan* (1990) and *The Blues* (2003).

Cinematography

The cinematographer of *No Direction Home*, on the credits of the DVD, is Mustapha Barat. He was known for his filmography up to that point by "Estátua de Lama (2004), Pátria Minha (1994) and Alien Space Avenger (1989)" (IMDB, n.d.). Barat shoots Dylan in what appears to be a Rembrandt light studio, set up with its necessary black background and harsh right-side

shadow (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021). What can be more appropriate for an American, musical arts master like Dylan? In my analysis, the director will be credited as the author of the film and, hence, for the shots used and for the editing. Scorsese has long been regarded as an *auteur* filmmaker “who tends to have a greater hands-on input throughout a film’s making” (Grist 2000, 7) dating back to his early years of filmmaking. Given the fact that the film is a documentary, which includes interviews, numerous still images, and archival footage, one would think that Scorsese would choose to avoid selecting emphatic camera shots, as an aesthetic tool. Nevertheless, the filmmaker has combined medium close-ups and close-up factual documentary shots interspersed with camera moves that are usually encountered in fictional films. To avoid stillness, Scorsese prefers showing still images, footage, or printed documents via eloquent panning shots. The 180-degree rule (shots taking place in the same line or axis of action applied) is preferred here except when the camera tracks and zooms, quite frequently, on Dylan in search of emphatic facial expressions (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021).

Scorsese breaks the 180-degree rule of camera positing and distance only once, uses which I discuss in the narrative structure section. During all the informants’ interviews (except Dylan’s) Scorsese begins with an establishing long or medium shot, which gives a clear view of who the persons interviewed are and the location behind them. Establishing shots and all the shots that follow are, in terms of filmmaker–camera–subject relationship, “no look shots.” This means that the camera is placed at a 45-degree angle from the person interviewed and almost never faces them directly. This way, Scorsese transforms the viewer into an eyewitness, enhancing their objectivity and making them a participant in Dylan’s recollection of the past.

After each establishing long or medium shot, the camera moves slightly, tracking in and out, depending on the sitter and the conversation, but it always remains in the angled “objective” position. Scorsese’s recipe here is different from his mastery of conversational shots in his fictional films. We never hear the interviewer voicing a question, as this would totally undermine Scorsese’s pretense that the audience are intelligent eyewitnesses. When scenes advance to instances of emotional importance, the filmmaker abandons the “objective” camera position. The camera moves to capture extreme close-ups of the informants, but remains in the same line of axis position, allowing the viewer to follow the lines of the witness’s face and decipher the validity of the testimony. Extreme close-ups require telephoto lenses and shallow space that result in a more complex cinematic effect: Actors’ faces appear detailed in front and very close to the viewer, while the background is diffused and embedded in a narrow depth of field. Scorsese’s choice of lenses and soft focusing align with the filmmaker’s attempt to revive the past and deem the film as a vision or a revelation. Moreover, the zoom-in and macro shots, preferred by Scorsese when showing archival pictures, create the effect of “kinesis in stillness” and highlight certain details, whose photographic realism supports the narration.

The types of camera shots Scorsese uses are not the only factors that establish the filmmaker–camera–subject relationship in this film, but the type of interaction Scorsese has

with his informants, in the style of a “psychiatric session” is influential as well. In this personal portrait documentary as redrawn by Scorsese, the protagonist, firsthand informant, Dylan is interviewed by an “invisible” interviewer, as he unravels past thoughts, events, and actions of his life and career in music.

Because the interviewer is neither seen nor heard, the conversation becomes a confessional monologue. Apart from Dylan, the filmmaker interviews friends, colleagues, and ex-lovers who serve as firsthand eyewitnesses emphasizing their own testimonies and thoughts about Dylan. In addition, the filmmaker himself acts as a vicarious witness to Dylan’s confessions as an interrogator when voicing the inaudible questionnaire that generates these confessions, and as an investigator while gathering facts to support Dylan’s confessions.

Above and beyond these functions, Scorsese is a participant in Dylan’s journey and the re-author of an updated version of Dylan’s persona, which is quite different from the one shown in D. A. Pennebaker’s *cinema vérité*, observational documentary *Don’t Look Back* (1967) as I stated elsewhere (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021). Dylan, as the main informant of *No Direction Home*, responds collaboratively, now comfortably tolerating the interview process he most hated back in the days of his youth, as eloquently shown by Scorsese in *No Direction Home*. Just once in *No Direction Home*, Dylan is seen in profile view against the same black background, and we even see the “ghost of a smile” (Ebert 2005, 1). The camera–subject–filmmaker relationship is constructed upon mutual trust (usually, if Scorsese does not fully adopt Dylan’s testimony, he gently contradicts him). This condition of mutual trust shows the accordance between Scorsese and Dylan on the story being told, which also reveals their intellectual relationship.

Corpus of Texts-Institutional Framework-Documentary Mode

No Direction Home is a person portrait documentary. The “corpus of texts” (Nichols 2001, 99) the film derives from includes biography, American history, cultural heritage, history of folk music, and so on (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021). Although Martin Scorsese has been named as the director of *No Direction Home*, the documentary was filmed by Michael Borofsky and was produced by Jeff Rosen, Dylan’s manager, who conducted the Dylan interviews. Elaborating on the relationship between the director and his subject, I argue that Scorsese as “the invisible filmmaker” in *No Direction Home* acts as the protagonist’s off-site “collaborator” (Nichols 2001, 115), a vicarious witness in the spirit of Stott.

Scorsese is perhaps the perfect candidate for the task because of his experience with *Woodstock* (1970), *The Last Waltz* (1978), and *The Blues* (2003) and because a new impression of Dylan’s persona, different than that depicted in D. A. Pennebaker’s observational documentary *Don’t Look Back*, was needed for many well-worthy reasons, of debate. One reason is clearly educational, since this 2005 documentary was viewed in two parts on September 26–27, 2005, on PBS1 (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021) as part of their *American Masters* series (Scorsese 2006). By then, Dylan was already an American

master, poet, and musician, and a wealth of articles/papers had been written about his life and art (see Miller 1981; Shelton 2003; Bauldie 1992; Gray 1988, 2000; Dylan 2019).

Person portrait documentaries, however, are not only characterized by the context of reading in which they are placed, such as PBS, but also by the readings that music fans, viewers of any kind, and art critics ascribe to them. *No Direction Home* has had different reactions from different audiences. Apart from the many books and articles cited here, there are numerous online commentaries and external reviews by critics and diverse viewers. One of them that is valuable for our analysis comes from Jeffrey Anderson on his blog *Combustible Celluloid*: “For years Bob Dylan’s fans have wondered who the ‘real’ Bob Dylan is. Each time a new biography or a new CD comes out, writers and reviewers band together to decide whether or not it’s finally happened” (Anderson, n.d). This is the view of Dylan’s persona, not only in academic articles but also in popular culture.

Scorsese “attempts to answer the questions that continue to intrigue many Americans” (UWOSH 2020), as well as fans, critics, and diverse bystanders worldwide. It is no wonder that Coleman calls Scorsese “a documentarian of the counter-culture” (2007). If culture, with its fans, viewer, and critics, is the objective voice when it comes to stereotyping Dylan into something he “used to be” (i.e., the preacher of the era), then Scorsese’s practices counter that objectivity. Not to mention that they fully debunk D. A. Pennebaker’s fly-on-the-wall oeuvre of Dylan in *Don’t Look Back* (1967).

In *No Direction Home*, the confessional documentary mode employed by Dylan, while answering inaudible questions by Rossen, and Scorsese’s consent to the editing, demonstrate that subjectivity (unusually associated with documentaries) is Scorsese’s main driver. Hence, the film’s mode and framework flirt with being a personal narrative and not a documentary. Scorsese and Dylan are clearly rewriting Dylan’s early years as portrayed in *Don’t Look Back*. Scorsese, as will be seen while discussing the film’s narrative structure, becomes the precursor of Dylan’s *Chronicles*, Volume 1, as the latter’s New York years occupy center stage in the sequence of events portrayed in *No Direction Home*. It is also evident that Nichols’s categorizations of documentary modes in “poetic, expository, observational, reflexive, and performative” (2001, 99) are not cast in stone and do not apply as-is in this film. There are many variations and hybrids created by combinations of these modes, and, in the case of *No Direction Home*, the most accurate mode seems to be “docufiction” (Donato and Scorsese 2007). This subgenre obviously blends documentary with fictional elements, and this is what both Scorsese and Dylan do with *No Direction Home* and *Chronicles*, Volume 1, respectively. From the very lips of Martin Scorsese in the famous interview with Raffaele Donato with whom he has worked for twenty-two years in various films:

You can go back and stage the past. You want to record the battle of San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American war? Stage it. (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021)

And he continues...“It is a natural impulse and so is recording. They go hand in hand. That’s why for me there was never ever a difference between fiction and non-fiction.” (Donato and Scorsese 2007, 199–207)

In the paragraph addressing the sociopolitical issues the film raises, I make clear that the film presents historical events of social engagement, and, therefore, the film’s call for audience reflexivity is highly evident. To generate this audience reflexivity, Scorsese presents multiple archival footage and stills in a clear-cut (historical) documentary way, which provides a hint of legitimate historicity to the film. *No Direction Home* is indeed a documentary of hybrid modes. It is not just a person portrait documentary of the “participatory-non/interactive” (Nichols 2001, 138). However, the term participatory-non/interactive is quite brilliant and fits in very well with the Scorsese–Dylan cooperation. Not appearing as a voice-of-God narrator or filmed as an informant but working as a “vicarious witness” (Stott 1973, 26–45), Scorsese gains the role of a supreme intelligence, “voice of God narrator” (Nichols 2001, 13) authorized by Dylan (or Rosen) to organize evidence offered by various individuals close to Dylan and a vivid collaborator in reconstructing Dylan’s retelling of his own life.

Narrative Structure

Drawing from Nichols, I now closely explore the film’s narrative structure and the portions of photographic, psychological, and emotional realism used by Scorsese. The filmmaker gathers evidence—footage and data from Dylan’s archives—in order to reinstate Dylan’s persona of the time. Most of all, Scorsese provides narration by juxtaposing interviews of Dylan’s close friends and colleagues. Therefore, the questions, the answers these informants provide, and all audiovisual evidence—footage, still images, songs, poems, sounds, broadcasts, and passing subtitles—are assets that construct the film’s narrative structure. *No Direction Home*, although prearranged quasi-chronologically, could be unfolded in three narrative parts:

The first part has an historical yet fairytale-ish, once-upon-a-time in the “recent past” appeal. The film begins with a black screen and the title *No Direction Home* written in white letters in vertical orientation. The first scene shows archival color footage of Dylan’s live performance of the song *Like a Rolling Stone*. Because of the close-ups Scorsese uses, there is no clear way to understand where the performance takes place. As the film ends with the same performance, we assume that it is taking place amidst Dylan’s tour in Europe in 1966 and that the clip is from Dylan’s *Manchester Free Trade Hall* concert. The footage is interrupted by Dylan’s interview giving a statement about his life and comparing it with an Odyssey. Dylan refers here to the hardships one faces traveling to a destination or while journeying back and forth from an imaginary home.

Dylan’s metaphor, cliché or not, is to serve as a mark of a troublesome, dramatic life and career, and it is happily used by Scorsese to unfold the personality behind them. He departed

for his journey from Hibbing, Minnesota, an iron mining and steel making town. It is quite certain, given the limitations of the place, that the young Bob Dylan, and a good number of peers had an interest in leaving Hibbing, many of them joining the hordes of students entering America's colleges and universities.

But Dylan's Odyssey (Figure 1) is certainly not about going back to Minnesota where he grew up but finding a "home in music" elsewhere. This does not exclude, however, going back to the roots of his most cherished folk music. His journey is more like a circumnavigation that provides attachment to any home rather than a Homeric destination. Therefore, Scorsese uses Homer's *Odyssey* and the song *Like a Rolling Stone* as metaphors of Dylan's noble globular quest in life and music.



Figure 1: Dylan's Odyssey

Source: *No Direction Home* 2005, Paramount Pictures

In the absence of voiced questions in this first part, Dylan acts as a commentator drawing without doubt from his *Chronicles*, Volume 1, which had not yet been released. Only three of the twenty-three informants will give testimony on Dylan's early years: Kangas, Nelson, and Clancy. Dylan's narration revolves around his homeland, his early childhood, surroundings, first love, education, stimuli from the arts of the period, first contacts with the musical world, first amateur performances, changing his name after the poet Dylan Thomas, and so on. Because this is about the realization of one man's journey-odyssey in the musical world just as much as the retelling of Dylan's life, Scorsese deems it necessary to show Dylan's original songs such as "*When I Got Troubles*, recorded in 1959 when he was 17" (Williamson 2005) and early performances at the 1965 *Newport Folk Festival*. Showing original Dylan recordings, characterized as folk music, the filmmaker educates (apart from Dylan's story) viewers about the history of folk music, its origins, its definitions, and its connection to the American society of the time. The global political conditions of the atomic, Cold War era are spoken of by Dylan and supported by Scorsese with footage and still photos. Most important in this sequence is Dylan's comment—"We grew up with all that, so it created a sense of paranoia."

This fear is eloquently illustrated by Scorsese with footage showing propaganda material of the time instructing students how to behave in the event of an atomic attack on their schools (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Atomic Attack Footage

Source: *No Direction Home* 2005, Paramount Pictures

This conveys the notion that the everyday life in the atomic era was permeated by fear. This sociopolitical framework is intrinsic here. It reflects Dylan's idiosyncrasy and, in turn, explains why Dylan's lyrical work may have been associated with the folk and Civil Rights songwriting movements widely advocating for world peace at the time. Scorsese finds this as an opportunity to cast doubt on whether Dylan was active in this movement or not.

Scorsese's attempt to reveal Dylan's folk inclinations (his metaphorical home) is evident in the link Scorsese makes between Dylan and Jack Kerouac's works, in which bohemian lifestyles, beggars, and rambler were the protagonists. Dylan mentions in *No Direction Home* he felt he belonged in this group of beggars and rambler. A beggar, a rambler, or a would-be rambler is, of course, the type of person in constant search of a home or a person never wanting to identify with one home. Scorsese underlines Kerouac as one of Dylan's influences, drawing a direct line between Dylan's early years and Kerouac's novels *On the Road* (1957) and *The Subterraneans* (1958). In this sequence, Scorsese guides the narration by using a pseudo-voiceover sound bridge, and, Dylan, as the commentator, "calls" the shots. This means that everything Dylan replies will appear on screen paired with evidence. This pattern will be disrupted after fourteen minutes of film time, with a flash-forward, which is thematically joined with the end of the film, Dylan's performances in 1966. Then Scorsese will cut back to *No Direction Home* or, in other words, to the present of the documented past. This whole first part ends with Dylan's coming to New York, to the crossroads of Greenwich Village.

The second part of the film begins with an archival-associated (seemingly unrelated) feature, a tracking shot from what seems to be an amateur video taken from a car passing over Brooklyn Bridge and entering New York City. The viewer hears the famous, in the original words of, John Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." This docufictional, cinematic pastiche (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021) using an asynchronous sound bridge is more symbolic than actual (Kennedy delivered the speech in Washington, DC, not in New York). It signals Dylan's arrival in a center of sociopolitical and artistic expression of the era: Greenwich Village in New York.

Scorsese radically changes his narrative strategy in this part. The number of people interviewed increases from three of the first part, to fourteen; Glover, Ginsberg, Van Ronk, Cohen, Maudler, Langhorn, Spolestra, Ritolo, Young, Miller, Seeger, Mogul, Levinthal, and

Baez are now Scorsese's informants. Dylan's New York story is in the forefront, and Scorsese extracts it by a process that resembles a witness cross-interrogation. Aggregating witness testimonies and masterfully editing them show how Scorsese creates a collective narrative space. This strategy contrasts with having Dylan's mono-semantic narration paired to archival footage and only three informants contributing opinions of the first narrative part. The invisible filmmaker-interviewer now raises a topic question, which is answered by Dylan and then affirmed or contested almost religiously by the group of informants. This in turn makes Scorsese a silent head panelist, whose voice emerges from the "weave of contributing voices" (Nichols 2001, 122).

At the beginning of each interview, we (the viewers) learn by use of subtitling the informant's name. Scorsese shows archival material to demonstrate Dylan's relationship with each speaker, their common experiences, and the era in which they crossed paths.

The main topics in Scorsese's collective narrative space are as follows: (1) the arts in Greenwich Village, folksingers and their haunts, Dylan's first performances, how he fitted in, and his musical competences at the time; (2) artistic styles Dylan acquired by association with the city's folk scene, his first attempts in discography with Columbia, and the story behind this cooperation; (3) the impact of Dylan's material that seemed to coincide with the sociopolitical expression of the era and thus was "mistakenly" characterized as topical; (4) Dylan's refusal to be labeled as a topical songwriter; his apolitical stance toward the left expression of the folk movement, his refusal to be characterized as a protest singer despite the fact that social activists' of the time wished to enroll him as their partisan and present him with awards (e.g., the Tom Paine award and the story behind it); (5) Dylan's decision to move away from the folk style, changing his sound and lyrics to a more rock commercial style; (6) Dylan's relationship with Joan Baez. This second narrative part is where Scorsese makes the initial appeal for an urgent rereading of Dylan's association with the folk scene of the time and their political agenda.

The third part begins as we hear the invisible filmmaker-interviewer voicing a question and participating for the first and last time in the film. "What about the scene?" "What had you had it with?" (Figure 3). Meaning, what was the problem with fitting into the music scene of the era? Why were you refusing to adopt a partisan approach to music and serve let's say as an ambassador of the folk or Civil Rights movement of your time? This is an important segment of the film and the first time that the 180-degree (line-of-axis) rule of camera distancing will be broken.

For the first time, Dylan is filmed from a left angle (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021).

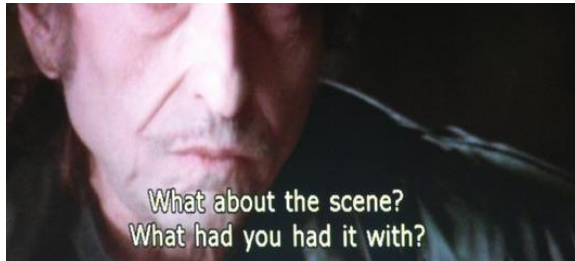


Figure 3: Dylan's Left Shot

Source: *No Direction Home* 2005, Paramount Pictures

This choice cinematically signals Dylan's crossing to the other side of the folk movement. The camera appears to roll from the left side to observing Dylan's right profile. We almost feel Scorsese shouting at a distance that Dylan crossed to the other side.

In this third part, interviews are diminished, and the narration revolves around Dylan's relationship with the press. Scorsese shows formerly unrevealed archival footage of Dylan's interviews to convey, beyond what was suggested in *Don't Look Back*, the continuous pressure Dylan was undergoing from the media. They, as Scorsese maintains with cut-in videos, he insists on making Dylan admit that subtle rebellious meanings existed in his songs. Scorsese proceeds one step further to show Dylan's troubled relationship with his audience. They, as Scorsese shows, were disappointed by Dylan's musical explorations when for example he incorporated electric guitars in his songs abandoning the acoustic folk sound. Scorsese is not stopping there, of course, as this third narrative part is very crucial to make his argument clear for an exigent revisiting of Dylan's persona.

After illustrating a very dark and "hostile" environment, Scorsese pushes forward by showing Dylan's breakdown. Scorsese uses unique footage, supplied by Dylan's associates, showing Dylan's fatigue from his long tours. There is a hovering assumption that Dylan was constantly abusing drugs to overcome stress and that he was constantly "crying out" to return home. These factors are portrayed as the main causes of Dylan's 1966 motorcycle crash, with which the film ends. As interviews and Dylan's confessional statements are craftily edited in this third part, the filmmaker will again "call and guide the narration," this time using more introspective questions, and Dylan, as the "confessing witness," will call the shots.

In all three narrative parts, Scorsese employs "photographic, psychological, and emotional realism" (Nichols 2001, 5) to sustain a cohesive and, most of all, persuasive narrative structure. Photographic realism is dominant for the obvious reason that still photographs are used extensively to support speech, audio tracks, and interviews. The basic rule is that everything spoken emphatically becomes a visual index, every thought becomes an image, and that image is backed by historical data or coincidences. Photographic realism coupled with a shrewd mise-en-scene based on pose and objects is also conspicuous in all interview scenes. Regarding pose, the strategy Scorsese follows is to construct an "anti-pose," a fake pose, which means that all the sitters are seemingly ignoring the camera's presence. This strategy is used to position the viewer in the middle of the conversations. Two times in

the film this tactic is forgone, once by Dylan and once, ironically, by D. A. Pennebaker, who during his interview in total disregard of this convention faces the camera directly. Moreover, with eloquent use of subtle camera movement and the telephoto lens, Scorsese makes sure that the viewers enjoy intimacy with all social actors interviewed. He provides the luxury of being able to see through the interviewees' facial expressions in order to decipher the validity of their accounts on Dylan's life.

Regarding objects, a deliberate arrangement toward an emphatic mise-en-scene is predominant and is clearly borrowed from Scorsese's fictional cinema tactics. Their use here produces connoted narratives. Interviewed social actors appear in places related to their stories and are juxtaposed with the evidence they put forth. Objects around and on them convey the "air" of their identities, thoughts, and experiences. Some examples include the following: In the Liam Clancy interview, the Irish folk singer is seen talking in an Irish pub in New York. NEW AMSTERDAM is written on a sign at his right shoulder. In the background we can distinguish a mural of the poet Dylan Thomas, who is mentioned by Clancy in his monologue, as the reason why Bob Zimmerman changed his name to Bob Dylan.

Dylan's friend the poet Allen Ginsberg (also Kerouac's friend and one of the Beats) appears in what is supposed to be an empty loft apartment in New York. This location signals the Ginsberg-Dylan connection and their bohemian lifestyles. During the interview, we can see a pen and a small notebook emerging from the left pocket of Ginsberg's shirt. And again, we almost feel that we hear Scorsese shouting, "this is what great poets do...they are always ready to capture that fleeting inspiration." Izzy Young, producer, and owner of the *Folklore Center*, appears, talking in a basement crammed with archives, textbooks, and other evidence of its past. After all, as Scorsese knows well, the folklore center is the place that Dylan has regarded as the "citadel of Americana Folk Music" (Petrus and Cohen 2015, 266) and just needed to look like this vault of evidence on screen, conveniently for Scorsese. Harold Levinthal, one of Dylan's producer-managers of the time, is shot in his house or in his office. During one of Scorsese's close-ups, a CD cover picturing the face of Woody Guthrie, who was Dylan's major influence, becomes visible in the background.

Psychological realism, which is central in Scorsese's "docufictional strategies" (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021), appears in the confessional-style interviews, Dylan's confessional monologues (meant to restore what Dylan's psychological profile "spoken out" in *Don't Look Back*), and by the content of the interview questionnaire. Being interviewed by default entails that one is expected to talk freely and willingly. This, of course, is not the case for this film, as informants seem to be guided by a pre-patterned questionnaire. Specific types of questions are being asked as specific answerers are anticipated. In some cases, in the manner of a cross-examination, the interviewed social actors are being told how each informant replied to a specific question. This, of course, goes beyond any impartial strategy of gathering facts. Knowing other people's side of the story is like priming the informant to give you the answer you desire. On such occasions in the film, the interviewees become defensive of their arguments. "This is not my side of the story," Cohen would say on the incidents of

the 1965 Newport folk festival when outrage broke out when Dylan played *Maggie's Farm* and *Like a Rolling Stone* on an electric guitar.

Emotional realism may be discernible when replies deriving from contrasted monologues pressure viewers for immediate emotional response. Scorsese shows a plethora of unrevealed footage, resembling little of what was shown in *Don't Look Back*, conveying Dylan's psychological fluctuations and revealing his disappointment and frustration when the audience does not accept his electric music. Scorsese uses this strategy to transform the viewers from observers to witnesses and provides them with the benefit of judgment.

Furthermore, Scorsese juxtaposes archival footage, dramatically depicting the sociopolitical climate of the time (e.g., the Civil Rights movement, the atomic era, segregation, Kennedy's assassination) with Dylan's songs. In a representative scene, Scorsese shows footage and sound from the Oswald assassination clipped over Dylan's song *A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall* (1963). Scorsese's associative editing practice creates suspense in the present tense, based on his research of Dylan's speech at the Tom Paine awards, and leaves the viewer in a state of shock.

One other example of Scorsese's composing to evoke emotional response is the portrayal of the Dylan-Baez love story. As lovers and colleagues, Baez invited Dylan onto the stage during the 1964 Newport Folk festival. Dylan returns the favor when he was touring in London. Antagonism, rejection, pathos, love, and affection are at play in this sequence. Baez admits that she stole a song from Dylan, which became a great success. Scorsese acknowledges that Baez is probably the most accurate witness and is persuasive enough to voice his argument about Dylan's human side. Therefore, the invisible interviewer asks Baez to sing that song. In that moment, Scorsese makes another metaphor. The song's title is *Love Is Just a Four-Letter Word* (Figure 4), which highlights the Dylan-Baez unspoken love story.

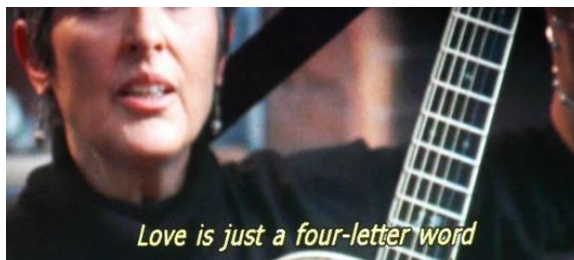


Figure 4: *Love Is Just a Four-Letter Word*
 Source: *No Direction Home* 2005, Paramount Pictures

Footage of the song's history appears in *Don't Look Back*. D. A. Pennebaker shows Baez in one of Dylan's London tour scenes performing a part of the then-still-incomplete song and telling Dylan that if he finishes it, she will record it. Incomplete as their love for one another seems to be Scorsese's subtext, who is also apparently interested in taking up the story where Pennebaker left it. At this very point, the Baez interview becomes a performance for the camera and the viewer; the informant becomes a performer "playing herself" not in the past,

not even in the film's present, but in the viewers' present. Bittersweet animosity is what Scorsese conveys, while one of his selected close-ups reveals Baez's slightly watery but still beautiful eyes. Needless to say, Scorsese's choice to frame Baez's performance this way shows a strategy widely used in fictional film disguised in an observational approach. A transitory emotion seems to reach the viewer. The sequence reaches its peak when Baez faces the camera appearing sweet and heartbroken, while finishing the song.

Chronology, Editing, Viewer Reflexivity

Scorsese's choice to start with the end of the film, and end with the beginning, creates a chronicle that initiates and ends in the past. It sets the ground for a stylistic, nontraditional narrative development one could see in fictional spine-movies. The song *Like a Rolling Stone* itself is also a meaningful signifier because the title of the movie derives from its lyrics. Along with other narrative tools I previously presented, this is one of the director's favorite metaphors. It is used to redraw Dylan's psychological profile in the early years of his career, which, in turn, is contrary to what we experienced in D. A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back*. That is, Dylan as an egocentric genius. A whole sequence is dedicated to the history and the importance of this song, and that works in many ways in the film:

1. It signals Dylan's music transition from the folk/protest/leftist genre to the pop-liberal and apolitical one.
2. It repositions Dylan's interest in music rather than the politics of the folk movement.
3. It mirrors the negativity of Dylan's audience and his refusal to accept genre labeling, which, according to Scorsese's arguments, heavily affected Dylan's mental and physical health.

Regarding editing, Scorsese uses a semi-continuous editing technique including a plethora of associative footage and short-term jump cuts. This method does justice to his cherished docufictional approach. According to Peter Donaldson's *Film Lexicon*, the continuity system of editing matches spatial and temporal relations from shot to shot, to maintain continuous and clear narrative action. It aims to present a scene so that the editing is invisible. It achieves a smooth and "seamless style of narration, both because of its conventionality and because it employs several powerful techniques designed to maximize a sense of spatial and temporal continuity" (Donaldson, n.d., 1). Scorsese's acute editing and narration through informants are almost mathematical. Every fourteen to fifteen minutes of running time, narration continuity will be disrupted by a flash-forward to Dylan's performances in England in 1966. Every clip will be accompanied by one to two minutes of archival film of spectators' interviews outside Dylan's concerts. Scorsese's jump cuts are timed and placed within short intervals, which makes spatial inconsistency (if any) smooth and comprehensible. With the flash-forward-flash-back pattern, within the documented past,

Scorsese manages to suspend that past in the consciousness of the viewer. Although Scorsese retells a very short story within Dylan's carrier, spanning only five years from Dylan's arrival in New York in 1961 to his motorcycle accident in 1966, the viewer feels they are learning more about Dylan from childhood onward. This effect turns the focus more on the social, political, and psychological contexts surrounding Dylan at that period and helps Scorsese to redefine Dylan's persona.

Through Scorsese's interviews of Dylan's friends and close colleagues, the viewer gains exclusive access to a "hearing" about Dylan's identity in the present. The cross-interrogation of witnesses via editing is a highly dynamic dialectic process for which Scorsese deserves credit. This is because it provides the illusion that the viewer holds all the power in deciding who Dylan is beyond what he knew from *Don't Look Back*. After absorbing new facts about Dylan's life, viewers will zap into the future and help (us all) complete Dylan's identity puzzle. This means Scorsese provides his viewers with the privilege of witnessing effect before cause, of experiencing feelings enacted by not fully developed evidence, as in fictional films.

These in turn create new, under-construction memories of Dylan, which the viewers never had. The viewers participate actively in Dylan's rise to fame and fall from the motorcycle (another Scorsesian symbol of youth and recklessness) for which (rise and fall) they were certain of, after witnessing Dylan's arrogance in *Don't Look Back*. By employing tragic irony in these two texts, Scorsese propels viewers to seek an "intertextual method" to arrive at a meaning by themselves. After watching *No Direction Home*, viewers will be challenged to reorganize causes and effects in Dylan's early years. This new order will redefine Dylan's persona, and it will develop a wider historical importance—greater than music or greater than one man's odyssey. Scorsese's viewers are prompt to adopt sociopolitical reflexivity, although within selected overemphasized but significant events. Scorsese and Dylan grew up in this agile social and political context, so, Scorsese is interested in entangling the viewer in an ideological discussion that transcends music and compares generations.

To compare recent American history to their own social and political present is a tantalizing endeavor for the viewer. As the film implies, freedom of speech was a utopian claim in that recent history, and one should never forget how grateful we must be to be living in the present. In that sense, Scorsese raises crucial ethical issues: Is ideology so important in our day? In those times, it justified the killings, the press, and the social unrest. Is one man's ideology still or a group's ideology so powerful that it endangers political balance? Is ideology in line with unspoiled inspiration, or is it just a radical, "demonic" impetus that aims to institutionalize the unethical? If unethical means betraying a musical genre, a cultural and political movement that acted for a "common" cause, and if unethical means manipulating audiences with the ambiguity of poems and lyrics and then claiming to have no intention to do so. All these accusations made against Dylan are overruled by Scorsese's rhetoric. What the director offers, which is literally unspoken in the film, is that the one thing that stands, impartially and perpetually, beyond any collective activism, is the individual's choice to stay out of everything.

Grandiose bipolar dilemmas—such as good and bad, war and peace, and heaven and hell—exist on the periphery of Scorsese’s arguments, and he addresses no solutions.

The New Persona

Choice, without generating pathos or deliverance, is, according to Scorsese, what Dylan may have measured above all. A lot is said about Dylan’s persona during the film. Colleagues and friends regard him as a talented individual, a receiver, a hungry man, shape changer, a dynamic performer, a political activist, and a naïf, all at the same time. The viewer’s impression by now should be that if Dylan was asked to comment on these new “labels” all these informants bestow on him, he would probably be uncomfortable with every single one of them. Labels are certainly not his style.

Yet Scorsese has a simple label for Dylan. Whether we like it or not, Dylan is just “human.” Neither Dylan nor the viewer can debate this kind of labeling. This is the new home Scorsese finds for Dylan. Being human stands not only for being a unique or an exceptional artist but also for collapsing under unwanted social pressure and feeling homesick as well. So, when Dylan says, “I could not relate to this ideology” or “Had it with [this] scene” or “It was enough to make anybody sick really” or when he speaks about the press, “Don’t like being pressed” or “I had no answers to these questions,” Scorsese feels we should forgive him for his arrogance, now that all these years have passed. Dylan confesses his true feelings about these early years using the authority of truth as felt, and Scorsese plays along. As the correct flow of things is, Scorsese re-exposes Dylan’s persona by saying to the viewer, “How would you feel if you were on your own,” paraphrasing Dylan’s lyrics in *Like a Rolling Stone*, and Dylan collaborates.

There is a milestone in the way Scorsese redefines Dylan’s persona. In the Joan Baez interview, Dylan can love, hate, hurt, deceive, and be deceived by love. How human is that? He is no longer the distant, self-centered, egocentric, talking-back genius as portrayed in *Don’t Look Back*. This transformation is not just the result of Baez’s testimony: Dylan himself, in the interviews specifically recorded for the film, “is candid, lucid, although certainly more wary than the caricature of youthful brilliance he presented to D. A. Pennebaker in *Don’t Look Back*” (Coleman 2007, 91). Baez is considered the most qualified witness in favor of the Scorsese’s point of view on Dylan’s incarnation. Apart from exposing Dylan’s human side, and retaining the emotion of their incomplete affair, Baez underpins Dylan’s nonpartisan idiosyncrasy. She testifies that “he wanted to do his music and I wanted to do all this other stuff [being an activist]...and he didn’t want all that other stuff” (Figures 5 and 6). Dylan was notably absent from the demonstration against the Vietnam War that took place at the Trafalgar Square in London in 1965. In an incisive essay in the inaugural issue of *East Village Other*, Izzy Young decried Dylan’s transformation from a topical songwriter—“he has intensified his voice. His voice now tells the true story of Bob Dylan....It is no longer in the open arena of life’s possibilities, and we mourn for it” (Petrus and Cohen 2015, 245).

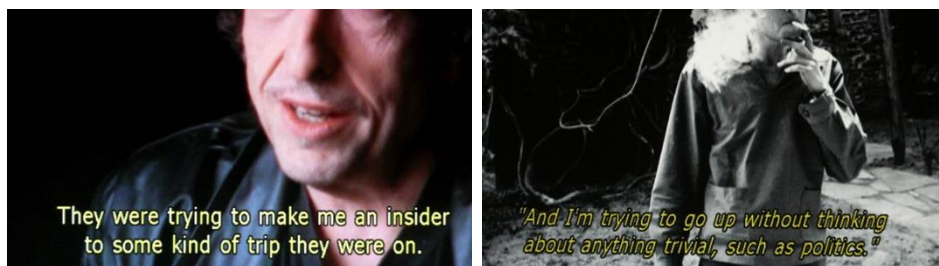


Figures 5 and 6: Baez Underpins Dylan's Nonpartisan Idiosyncrasy

Source: *No Direction Home* 2005, Paramount Pictures

A key, rhetorical, question orchestrated by Scorsese now hunts us from Baez's interview and Dylan's own accounts previously presented: Is Dylan the conscious prophet-preacher of his generation, or is he just a young, flagrant, neo-bohemian, yet an inspirational experimental poet/musician, who found himself in the wrong era? Ironically, Dylan seems to have answered this question before Scorsese's *No Direction Home*, through his script for the film *Masked and Anonymous* (2003). For many, a stylish piece of fiction featuring acclaimed actors, such as Jessica Lange, John Goodman, and Jeff Bridges, among others. Dylan believes through *Masked and Anonymous* and his answers in *No Direction Home* that a false interpretation on Dylan was basically manufactured by the then media and that sometimes things/events about one's life do not always mean something poignant. More particularly, Dylan, through his writing on *Masked and Anonymous* and especially through his portrayal of Jack Fate, voices out loud from the trailer of the movie that "sometimes it is not enough to know the meaning of things, sometimes we have to know what things don't mean as well" ("Masked and Anonymous" 2003). An empty meaning can only be produced by a consciously unconscious mind, an introspective artist weary of the world, but whose artwork—songs, poems, films, and so on—are deliberately surreal, personal, abstract. But we come to these realizations only now, long after the events of Dylan's life in 1961 to 1966, and after the incessant bibliography about Dylan's life and art and his acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016—not to mention a further "twelve honorific public awards he has received including Grammys, Academy Awards, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012" (Greene 2016).

In *No Direction Home*, however, Scorsese answers the question he presents to the viewer: whether Dylan was the spokesman of a generation or just a scapegoat. Scorsese does so by reciting part of Dylan's speech at the *Tom Paine Bill of Rights* dinner award in 1963, voicing-over still photos of Dylan's youth. Scorsese has Dylan interrupt his voice-over, answering yet again an inaudible question from his sited interviews with Rosen. "They were trying to make me an insider to what kind of trip they were on," says Dylan, and Scorsese seconds the statements with snapping two lines of the speech and a still photo of youthful Dylan playfully smoking: "And I am trying to go up without thinking about anything trivial such as politics," says Dylan (Figures 7 and 8).



Figures 7 and 8: Dylan and Politics

Source: *No Direction Home* 2005, Paramount Pictures

Scorsese's perception of Dylan's psychological, emotional, and spiritual state of being is not based on literal conventions that could be deduced from that speech (e.g., Dylan is booed in that speech showing contempt for negroes in suits, and at the same time trying to be egalitarian finding common personality traits with Lee Harvey Oswald, JFK's assassin). At best, he appears to be a hallucinating young man trying to ramble his way out of the responsibility of accepting the award, nor is Scorsese's perception based on observational (*verité*) style footage and evidence.

Scorsese is basically retelling the story, juxtaposing his own thoughts about that speech with the actual speech itself. Copying and pasting fragmented texts, Scorsese conveys his own account of the event acting as Dylan's mediator. This is not the only such instance in the film as I have previously shown. Scorsese therefore defends Dylan since he apparently appreciates him intellectually and as peer. In this Dylan–Scorsese intellectual pact, Scorsese's contribution is to present this visual and audiovisual evidence to propagandize in favor of Dylan's human side.

Dylan appears from the interviews as someone to take the backseat at things, while being very much entangled in them. He's a genius songwriter who doesn't have much to say about politics. Scorsese's Dylan is a rare case of a bohemian or a rambler to the very bone, a persona with which the latter identifies. Scorsese avoids instilling a literal, conventional, or even vague view on Dylan's identity which would mean a weak rhetoric and a detour to *Don't Look Back*. Therefore, Scorsese is very much hands-on about the content and guides the narration with his narrative tools, editing, and docufictional practices. Toward the finale, Scorsese presents archival stock photos and footage showing Dylan feeling awkward, disgusted, and annoyed, when quarrelling with the press. He dutifully replies to their annoying questions. Scorsese uses this stock footage to show how psychologically unstable Dylan was from the aforementioned causes and how this situation took a toll on his health.

Formerly unrevealed, backstage footage from Dylan's Manchester 1966 concert is displayed as evidence, while the word JUDAS appears in white sans serif text on the screen against a black background. Scorsese uses this funerary calling card along with a man's voice screaming, "Judas," and footage showing Dylan stepping onto the scene, to teleport the viewers to "the present of that past" and place them in the front row of Dylan's UK swan song concert performance. We hear Dylan replying, "I don't believe you," while instructing his band to play

the song tremendously loud. In that instance, Scorsese is taking a one-sided view of Dylan's career. It is true that Dylan was upset when he was decried for going electric, but that did not stop him from continuing to use the electric guitar. In other words, the jeering was no more than just a glitch in his career. He has also continued to sing and write folk songs.

In the summit scene of scenes sprung from this previously unreleased archival footage, Dylan breaks up emotionally before our eyes. He does not want to sing, talk to reporters, or tour anymore. His only wish is to return home. This might seem unjustified for an arrogant sophisticated wanderer like D. A. Pennebaker's Dylan, but completely justified for the fragile young man who Scorsese portrays. In a close-up showing Dylan touching his cheeks with his index fingers and completely train-wrecked by yet another one of these annoying interviews he so much hated, we see Dylan saying, "I don't know. I just want to go home." Behold the man you considered the voice of a generation; Scorsese seems to shout at us from the background.

The ending of the *Like a Rolling Stone* performance has no afterword footage and no booing but features Dylan's indignant fans speaking volumes about his betrayal of the folk-activist agenda and of the acoustic guitar and harmonica. The final scene, poetically executed by Scorsese, is a tracking shot. It is an associative clip, fictional rather than based on real events and slowed in speed. Scorsese shows a close shot of a motorcycle driving away from a theater in London where Dylan was giving one of his performances.

What we see after Scorsese cuts to a point-of-view shot coupled with the groan of the motorcycle, is a line of people extending for more than four blocks to enter the theater and attend Dylan's concert. This is again a metaphor: Dylan is no longer there. The same way he checked out from the folk activist movement, the same way he is checking out now from fandom, labeling, and everything tormenting his soul. Through visuals, acute editing, and asynchronous sound, Scorsese makes his point about Dylan's emotional state, constructing a veil of empathy that is indiscernible in *Don't Look Back*. He "creates a portrait that is deep, sympathetic, perceptive and yet finally leaves Dylan shrouded in mystery, which is where he properly lives" (Ebert 2005). Yet Scorsese's *what-do-you-think-of-Dylan-now* question has deeply touched us through what we have learned about the era, from evidence and the first-hand informants Scorsese presents, and all strategies he deploys. Clearly, the silent will-to-re-author-one's-life endorsed by the two main collaborators in the film is the source from which this Dylan biopic derives.

To this extent, Scorsese takes the liberty of voicing-over poignant evidence, overtly backing Dylan's confessions. Even in moments when Dylan is being sarcastic or obnoxious to the press and the public who want to know more about him and his identity, Scorsese transforms the Pennebakerian arrogance into a youthful charm. "Well, I sort of label myself as well under 30. And my role is to, you know, to just stay here as long as I can," says Dylan. That is both the tragedy and beauty of being young and televised at that age. They provide the guts to being foolish, non-accountable to his own sayings, and getting away with everything. Only those who were too old at the time, as old as the institutions that wanted to draft Dylan into their own agendas, could be critical about Dylan's behavior. But Scorsese,

who is conveniently just two years younger than Dylan, knows this very well, as they both represent the same age group.

In addition, Dylan and Scorsese through his filmography seem to share the same sympathy for ramblers and outsiders and their human weaknesses and seem to have had an intellectual pact since Scorsese filmed *The Last Waltz* (1978) (Hambuch and Galanopoulos Papavasileiou 2021). Scorsese's hands-on docufictional visual storytelling offered in a persuasive manner—not panegyric, yet acutely crafted—manages to transform Dylan's persona in *No Direction Home* into a metaphor. A metaphor of human strengths and weaknesses. Scorsese establishes that Dylan should no longer be considered as an arrogant genius or a political activist or even an industrious musician. But as a symbol of flagrant “ferocious” youth. An altar on which human ambitions and daydreams—of being on the front stage of art, society, and music but away from politics—are never sacrificed to become extinct but are glorified.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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