

INTERVIEW LOOKING FOR MYSELF WHEREVER I AM

FREDERICK WISEMAN IN CONVERSATION WITH WILL ENO



Above: Frederick Wiseman. Next page: Will Eno.

*Fred Wiseman, Oscar-winning film director and TFANA board member, is currently editing his forty-fifth feature film, a look at Boston's City Hall. Over the past few years, he has been working with Will Eno on *Juste les Jones*, a French translation (by Daniel Loayza) of Will's play *The Realistic Joneses*, which will premiere on a Paris stage soon. Will asked Fred some questions via email.*

WILL ENO Which is more complex, reality, or the representation of reality? Which is better?

FRED WISEMAN I am hesitant to even try to answer this question. Reality is infinitely more complex but is formless. The representation of reality is a fiction enclosed in a form and only at its most successful does it begin to suggest the reality from which it was extracted.

WILL ENO Do you approach a subject differently or feel a different responsibility when you are working with something "historical," such as the *Comedie Française*? How about something that is specifically American versus a foreign subject?

FRED WISEMAN I approach all subjects foreign or domestic the same way. No research. The filming is the research. Shoot a lot of film, usually around 150 hours. Start with no themes or point of view other than the gamble that if I am lucky enough, I will find enough material from which I can construct a film. The film emerges from the editing. I have to study and make selections from the rushes and finally invent a structure which imposes a form on the chaotic world of my thoughts in relation to the formless world of the rushes.

WILL ENO Who is your favorite Red Sox player?

FRED WISEMAN Jimmy Foxx.

WILL ENO Are we happier, or somehow more comfortable, judging the "reality" of a piece of art than we are defining and even living in the actual reality that the piece of art is meant to imitate?

FRED WISEMAN Always easier for me to make a judgement about "a work of art" (whatever that might be or however it is defined) than dealing with daily life.

WILL ENO To stick with a problematic word for another moment: all artists are realists, but some of them are much slyer and better at it than others. Is that true?

FRED WISEMAN Yes. Beckett's *Happy Days* is a great example.

WILL ENO Do you recognize the quote "you shall know the answer by the order of the questions"? I thought maybe it was a Talmudic scholar but I'm not finding anything. Regardless of who said it, and I don't think it was me, does it mean anything to you?

FRED WISEMAN Yes, the meaning is contained in the question posed by the great Talmudic scholar Rabbi Gnosh of Lvov who asked, "If you had a sister would she like soup?"

WILL ENO Have you ever been to Ikea?

FRED WISEMAN Yes.

WILL ENO Robert Bresson said that there is "nothing more inelegant and ineffective than an art conceived in another art's form," and that makes me think of *Peer Gynt*, which Ibsen originally wrote as a dramatic poem. Bresson also said, "All husbands



are ugly." And, it's hard to stop, "The sight of movement gives happiness: horse, athlete, bird." Do you feel like saying anything about any of these?

FRED WISEMAN No. Too deep for me, who is always scratching the surface.

WILL ENO Do you feel your Americanness to any greater degree when you're working in another country? Or maybe, to say that in other words, do you feel more yourself when you're away from home?

FRED WISEMAN Am too busy looking for myself wherever I am to answer question.

WILL ENO I have been thinking about "the self" as I've been working on and revising *Gnit*. It sometimes seems that, just in saying the word "self," we suddenly take a half-step away from anything real and findable and alive. Almost in that way that you can't measure certain particles without altering them. I wonder if "finding the self" is a by-product of another project altogether, one that is much more engaged with other people and the world?

FRED WISEMAN See answer above.

WILL ENO Another question, that I forgot to ask, though I think I can imagine the twinkle in Fred's eye as he declined answering: In adapting *Peer Gynt*, one character/element I spent a lot of time and thought on was the *Button-moulder*, who appears late in the original play and threatens to melt down Peer's soul in a common cauldron with other unimpressive souls. The eternal repose of my soul is not something that I or people I know think a lot about.

So, this character has been replaced with a reporter, to whom Peter pitches some story ideas. My thought is that the modern version of Peer's anxiety might be that we wonder, "Will I get an Obituary in the newspaper, or, just a little death notice? Will I be singled out, or just thrown into the common lot of birth, death, and wedding announcements?" The question would have been some version of, "Do you think about your soul?" Or, "What do we mean when we use the word 'soul?'"

Or, maybe, "Can the soul, if it exists, change?" •